Introduction

During the eleventh century, men at the court of Song Dynasty China came to imagine in a new way the political entity to which they belonged. They started to articulate with far greater precision its spatial extent – which they now saw as bounded by natural topographic features as well as by the historical Great Wall – while simultaneously de-emphasizing an older theory of sovereignty premised on the idea of universal empire. They began to speak of a homogeneous cultural and ecological zone whose boundaries did not necessarily coincide with the political boundaries of the state. And they came to expect the allegiance of the people of this cultural zone – the "Han people" – including those living in neighboring states. These beliefs fueled the sentiment that the Song had the moral right to seize "former" territory that lay beyond the limits of its political control. Setting the stage for these new ideas was an East Asian inter-state system that reached a new degree of maturity under the Northern Song (960–1127). During an unprecedented one hundred years of peaceful coexistence with its northeastern neighbor, this dynasty became the first Chinese regime to interact with a steppe-based state according to the principles of diplomatic parity. For the first time in its history, China also embarked on a massive project to systematically demarcate its borders along multiple frontiers. The present study seeks to explore, contextualize, and explain these remarkable developments.

In fact, at the turn of the second millennium, China was in the midst of great changes affecting nearly all aspects of its society. In the period spanned by the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties, a "medieval economic revolution" spurred expansions of the monetary system and of trade networks, as well as rapid commercialization and

urbanization in several regions of the empire.[1] Simultaneously, the powerful aristocracy that had dominated society for much of the previous millennium vanished from the scene, replaced by a new elite defined on the basis of merit rather than blood.[2] In conjunction with these changes were innovations in Confucian thought – which now provided an ethical validation for this new elite – and in popular religion.[3] The period also saw the emergence of commercial printing, a concomitant enlargement of the literate population, and the expansion of the civil service examination system.[4] All of these transformations have been extensively studied by scholars. But whereas past scholarship has elucidated in substantial detail the economic, social, and cultural transition, little attention has been devoted to an equally remarkable change involving China's evolving sense of identity, changes set in motion in the context of an evolving inter-state system that would dominate East Asia until the nineteenth century.

In speaking of developments that amount, in essence, to the emergence of a "national consciousness" among Chinese sociopolitical elites, and in speaking of clearly demarcated borders and other phenomena typically associated with the post-Westphalian European state system, this book proposes to complicate entrenched narratives of modernity. The goal is not, however, to deny the significance of the Western/non-Western and modern/premodern dichotomies. Clearly, the globalization of the European state system in the nineteenth century transformed East Asia in radical ways. But it is important not to essentialize traditional Chinese society by treating it as static and unchanging. The emergence of a multi-state system in East Asia in the eleventh century had an equally profound impact on Chinese political culture. It spurred new ideas and a new worldview that together demonstrated that there has existed in world history a viable alternative to the modern system of nation-states, an alternative consisting of what I refer to as the "Chinese nation" and the "East Asian world order."

[1] Elvin, *Pattern of the Chinese Past*; Shiba, "Urbanization and the Development of Markets"; Shiba, *Commerce and Society*; Twitchett, "T'ang Market System"; Twitchett, "Merchant, Trade, and Government"; Skinner, "Introduction."
[2] Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*; Johnson, "Last Years of a Great Clan"; Ebrey, *Aristocratic Families*; Tackett, *Destruction*; Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations," 405–25; Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen*; Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 32–75; Bossler, *Powerful Relations*.
[3] Bol, *This Culture of Ours*; Hansen, *Changing Gods*.
[4] Cherniack, "Book Culture"; Chaffee, *Thorny Gates*.

Premodern Nationalism and National Consciousness

Writing in 1887, the Qing poet and reformer Huang Zunxian (1848–1905) expressed a profound anxiety about how his country was known to others:

> Each country on earth, including England and France, is known to all by a single name. Only the Middle Kingdom lacks one. Tribesmen in the northwest refer to us as "Han"; islanders in the southeast refer to us as "Tang"; Japanese either call us "Tang" or "Nanjing," where "Nanjing" refers to the [capital of the] Ming Dynasty. But these all make use of a single dynasty's name; they are insufficient to encompass all of our history. Indians refer to us as "*Cīna*" or "*Shina*"; Japanese also refer to us as "*Shina*"; Englishmen refer to us as "*China*"; and French refer to us as "*Chine*." But these are all other countries' transliterations; they are not names we have used ourselves. Recently, when addressing foreigners, we have come to use the name *Zhonghua* ["Central Illustriousness"]. But our neighbors have denounced us for this, pointing out that all countries on earth see themselves as situated in the center, and, moreover, that treating ourselves as "illustrious" and others as "barbaric" constitutes no more than glorifying oneself in order to demean others.

After some further discussion of possible terminologies, Huang settled on the compound word *Huaxia* as the best name for his country. Although this term included the character for "illustrious" (*hua*), it made no explicit reference to centrality. Moreover, as Huang noted, it was a term that had long been used to refer to China as a transdynastic entity.[5]

This rather extensive linguistic exposition was not out of place in the context of the politics and intellectual climate of China at the turn of the twentieth century. Following a series of humiliating "unequal" treaties and a lopsided military defeat in 1895 at the hands of the Japanese Meiji state, many came to believe that only radical reform could save China. It was precisely in these years that an East Asian inter-state system long centered on China was finally abandoned to make way for the new world order based on a hegemonic Western European state system. Rather than sitting atop a hierarchy of subordinate political entities, China became, in the minds of educated elites, only one nation-state among many.[6] In the process, it embarked on a largely successful nation-building effort that would span much of the subsequent century, and would culminate

[5] Huang Zunxian, *Riben guozhi*, 49. Translation adapted from Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 76.
[6] Lydia Liu describes this transformation as "the invention of China"; Ge Zhaoguang writes of a shift from a world where China ruled "all under Heaven" (*tianxia*) to a world where China was only one of "a myriad states" (*wanguo*). See Liu, *Clash of Empires*; Ge Zhaoguang, *Zhongguo sixiang shi*, 2:440.

in the transformation of its massive population into a modern citizenry. Simultaneously, the Chinese state set out to define the component parts of its ethnically complex nation, classifying nearly every citizen into one of a fixed number of defined ethnic groups. By doing so, it unambiguously delineated who was part of the "Han" Chinese majority and who was not.[7]

Of course, modern national and ethnic identities necessarily emerge from a "negotiation" between the concerns of nation-builders and the "remembered historical narratives of community."[8] Indeed, Huang Zunxian's reflections were not without precedent. Eight centuries earlier, in the final years of the Northern Song, the writer and statesman Zhu Yu made similar observations:

> During the Han Dynasty [207 BCE – 221 CE], power and authority were extended to the northwest, so northwesterners refer to the Middle Kingdom as "Han." During the Tang Dynasty, power and authority were extended to the southeast, so the Man barbarians [living there] refer to the Middle Kingdom as "Tang." In the Chongning era [1102–07], various officials advised the throne that borderlanders customarily refer to the Middle Kingdom as "Tang" or "Han," that [these customs] have taken form in official documents, and that all such references should be changed to "Song," including cases like "Tang fashion" and "Han law." An imperial edict approved this measure. I personally think this was not appropriate; better to change such references to the word *Hua*. On all corners of the earth, there are none who do not submit to us; [the term *Hua*] maintains the distinction between the center [i.e., the Middle Kingdom] and the exterior world.[9]

Unlike Huang, Zhu was not anxious about the predicament of his country. He also embraced the notion of China's central position atop a hierarchy of states. But these differences aside, one sees striking similarities in the basic structures of their expositions. Like Huang, Zhu recognized that something called the "Middle Kingdom" had a history that transcended its component dynasties, yet, like Huang, Zhu also apparently felt a need for a different term to refer to this transdynastic entity. Zhu was also aware that his country was known by different names, and his references to northwesterners and southeasterners are nearly identical to those in Huang's comments. And both men ultimately settled on very similar names for China involving the character *hua*. Given that Zhu's

[7] Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation*.
[8] Duara, *Rescuing History*, 71.
[9] Zhu Yu, *Pingzhou ketan*, 35.

remarks survive in a well-known collection of observations and anecdotes, it is very likely that Huang had read them, and that he had them in mind when writing his own thoughts on the topic centuries later.

The notion that there were important developments in the Song regarding how Chinese came to view the political entity to which they belonged has been raised in past scholarship. Some decades ago, Hoyt Tillman and Rolf Trauzettel spoke of a "proto-nationalism" emerging in the twelfth century that constituted the "first step towards Chinese nationalism" and that resembled in many ways "German-inspired romantic nationalism."[10] In a more recent study, Ge Zhaoguang described the initial appearance in the Song of a "China consciousness," which he saw as a "distant precursor of contemporary nationalist thinking."[11] He took note of the increased use of the term *Zhongguo* (the modern name for "China") in Song-era texts, arguing that, whereas Tang political elites believed they ruled over "all under Heaven," the Song saw itself as ruling over a mere "state." A similar position has been taken by Deng Xiaonan, who has asserted that there was a new tendency in Song political ideology to "see ethnic, cultural, and political boundaries as one and the same."[12] But despite the growing appreciation that radical new ideas about the nature of China emerged during the Song, there has been little attempt to synthesize these varied and – at times – impressionistic observations into a coherent picture, nor to reflect on the possible origins of such ideas.

In speaking of "nationalism" or a "national consciousness" in the Song Dynasty, it is important to distinguish clearly the situation existing in Song China from the nationalist movements of the modern world. First, the ideas under consideration here circulated essentially only among Song intellectuals. By contrast, the new modes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century consciousness affected large elements of the general citizenry. Indeed, the mass movements of the twentieth century and the mobilization of great armies of willing recruits would have been inconceivable until large segments of modern China's enormous population came to see themselves as part of a single nation – through the expansion of mass media and near universal education, and through concerted efforts of propaganda. Even if literate elites in earlier times did conceive of such

[10] Tillman, "Proto-Nationalism"; Trauzettel, "Sung Patriotism."
[11] Ge Zhaoguang, "Zhongguo yishi."
[12] Deng Xiaonan, "Lun Wudai Songchu 'huhan.'" Dardess, "Did the Mongols Matter," 120–21, argues that both the Song and the Ming sought only to rule over ethnic Chinese, having become "uninterested in the conquest of frontier territory unless it already had a Chinese population or appeared capable of sustaining one." See also Seo, "Toshi no seikatsu to bunka," 411–16.

a community – and there is ample indication that by the Song Dynasty they did – there is no evidence that the vast majority of the population concurred. This book, then, is not about mass consciousness, nor about state attempts to rally popular support, but rather about political ideals and notions of identity circulating among educated Chinese.

Second, the Song did not turn to principles of civic or ethnic nationalism in formulating a theory of government. There was no equivalent in Song China to the French Revolutionary idea of popular sovereignty, whereby a government existed legitimately only through the will of its people. Peter Bol has explored in some detail the impact of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Northeast Asian multi-state system on Chinese conceptions of empire.[13] During the Tang, imperial authority was thought to be universal, extending to the frontier tribal zone and beyond. By Song times, political universalism of this sort no longer seemed tenable. The solution, however, was not to reconceptualize the emperor as the ruler of a particular people – in the vein of modern nationalist thinking – but rather to envision his authority as now limited to the non-tribal "civilized" center. In other words, it was culture rather than ethnicity that defined the proper boundaries of the polity. To be sure, ethnic distinctions did exist in Song times, but, as Bol observes, they were not used as an "ideological foundation of state building."[14] From this perspective, the emperor was not the emperor of the Chinese. Armed with a mandate from Heaven, he was the ruler of the entire civilized world, including non-ethnic Chinese populations who may have migrated into imperial territory and become assimilated.

But if Song political ideals differed from those of contemporary times in critical ways, educated elites nevertheless shared something fundamental with people of the present day, something that lies more in the realm of intuition and sentiment than of carefully reasoned ideology. Though popular sovereignty constitutes the ideological justification for twentieth-century nation-states, the cohesion of these nation-states ultimately depends less on a theory of governance than on the widely held *feeling* that the community and territory of the nation are "natural" and objectively real, with a history extending deep into the past. Thus, throughout recent times, nationalism has often been fueled by a crude nativism lurking beneath the surface of the carefully crafted ideals of nationalist intellectuals. It is for this reason that influential theorists of

[13] Bol, *Neo-Confucianism*, 10–15; Bol, "Geography and Culture."
[14] Bol, "Geography and Culture," 92.

nationalism like Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson have largely ignored ideology as a causative factor in the emergence of modern nationalism.[15] In the Song, though state ideology defined the empire on the basis of culture, policymakers invoked ethnicity as well, as we shall see in a later chapter. In dealing with the messy reality of frontier territories – for example, when struggling with how to make sense of an unwieldy mix of people of different cultures – they turned to ethnic categories that made intuitive sense to them as a practical tool of differentiation. It was the notion in these contexts that ethnic, cultural, and political boundaries ought to align that justifies referring to the Song worldview as a form of "nationalism," albeit one very different from its modern incarnation.

Scholars of nationalism have proposed two useful ways of relating the modern nation to the premodern world. One theory, represented by the writings of Anthony Smith, recognizes the modern nation-state as reflecting a radical break from the past, while also insisting that it was built upon pre-existing "ethnies." It was only by making use of ethnic categories already recognized by the masses of the population that it was possible to convince them to join the nationalist project.[16] Indeed, even historians who root the emergence of nationalism entirely within a narrative of modernity recognize pre-existing "potential nationalism" or "proto-nationalism" as historically significant.[17] But by emphasizing long-term continuities in "ethnies" and, simultaneously, radical distinctions between the modern and the premodern, Smith's approach says little about the fluidity of ethnic categories and how these categories evolved over time, nor does it do full justice to the complexity of the ideas circulating among educated elites in premodern times.

A second theory, proposed by social psychologists, argues that aggregation into groups constitutes a basic human survival mechanism, which provides security and safety, while simultaneously offering poorer members of lower status a means of basking in the prestige of their wealthier and more famous brethren. A natural human propensity toward group loyalties is said to explain national loyalties, but also other diverse social phenomena, from tribal aggregation on the Eurasian steppe to

[15] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[16] E.g., A. D. Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*.
[17] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 42–48; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, esp. 75–77. Gellner notes that, as a result of its bureaucracy, premodern China "did display a certain kind of nationalism" (*Nations and Nationalism*, 16).

contemporary sports fandom.[18] Such a sociopolitical explanation, fundamentally ahistorical in its essence, may well explain why Chinese educated elites as early as the eleventh century were attracted to the idea of belonging to a vast empire-wide community. But it does not explain how the boundaries of the community came to be determined (both in terms of constituent people and constituent territories), nor why a new "national" consciousness emerged at a particular moment in time, nor how premodern group loyalties relate to the sorts of feelings of solidarity that one encounters in the contemporary world.

An alternative way of dealing with the premodern past and its relationship to the present, I propose, is to treat certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomena as particular cultural manifestations of ideas and structures that might potentially emerge in any complex human society under the right conditions.[19] In reality, two factors often tied to the emergence of nationalism in the early modern West, general education (as distinct from specialized training) and commercial printing, already existed in China by the eleventh century.[20] Under such circumstances, one might expect the appearance of a new form of collective consciousness in Northern Song China as well. The relationship between the Song nation and the modern Chinese nation is, however, complex. Besides adhering to a very different ideology of political legitimacy, Northern Song Chinese differed from modern nationalists in how they defined the boundaries of their state. Contemporary China is conceived today to be a multiethnic state composed of fifty-six

[18] Druckman, "Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty." Because national loyalties give prestige to people of low status, they can be far more alluring than class or other group solidarities. Unlike some social psychological theories of nationalism, Druckman's approach does not rely upon principles of evolutionary genetics. Cf. Gat, *Nations*, esp. 27–43.

[19] This approach to nationalism is similar to what Anthony Smith refers to as "recurrent perennialism" (see A. D. Smith, *Nation in History*, 40–41), though, like Reynolds, "Idea of the Nation," I see the nation as constructed and fluid, not rooted in pre-existing and unchanging "ethnies." Each new manifestation of a national consciousness involves a redefinition of the nation on new terms. Because nationalism is a recurrent phenomenon, it is meaningless to seek out a "prototype" nation upon which all other nations were modeled. Cf. Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*; Greenfeld, *Nationalism*.

[20] On general education and nationalism, see Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 29–34; on printing, see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, esp. 37–46. Although Anderson speaks of "print-capitalism" in sixteenth-century Europe, some historians of capitalism prefer the term "commercial printing." One can think of the civil service examination curriculum as a form of general education insofar as it came to define the fundamental knowledge that all educated men were expected to have. See Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen*, 32–33; Bol, "The Sung Examination System," 154–71. On the vitality of profit-driven commercial printing during the Northern Song, see Hymes, "Sung Society and Social Change," esp. 546–58.

"nationalities." Its "natural" territory extends deep into Central Asia. In its Song iteration, as will be clear in a later chapter, China was imagined to be a monoethnic nation that controlled neither Manchuria, nor the modern peripheral provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

Clearly, one must approach the idea of the premodern nation with care. The nationview of the world – which sees all nations as modular replications of each other, all individuals as citizens of one of these nations, and all territory on earth as belonging exclusively and fundamentally to one nation and its people – has become engrained in the contemporary psyche. In order to legitimate modern claims over peoples and territories, the states ruling such nations produce myths of their own history, projecting their nationhood back into an antique past.[21] During the twentieth century, these myths have recurrently inspired devastating violence and warfare. But by taking the premodern nation seriously, it is possible to *denaturalize* the modern nation. One does so not by treating the premodern mindset as a sort of "proto-national" consciousness in the primitive stages of a long formative process, a notion that in fact accords well with national mythmaking. One does so rather by treating modern and premodern nations as distinct incarnations of a common phenomenon, defined by an alternative set of boundaries, and driven by a distinct set of contingent circumstances. The idea of a monoethnic nation described by Song Chinese certainly helps explain the uneasy place of non-Han nationalities within the People's Republic of China today. But it does very little to account for or to legitimate the complexities of contemporary China's ethnic policies and the expansiveness of its territorial claims.

The *Shidafu* Class and the Eleventh-Century "Imagined Community"

Why did a new sense of Chinese self-identity first blossom in the Northern Song? Two factors seem to have been particularly important. The first, explored here, involved internal structural and institutional changes within the Song state that spurred the development of a feeling of community among educated elites empire-wide. The second, explored at greater length later in the book, concerned contingent developments in the eleventh-century inter-state system that impacted how those elites

[21] Geary, *Myth of Nations*.

envisioned cultural and geographic boundaries. In the discussion that follows, it is useful to bear in mind the distinction between "national consciousness" (the powerful feeling of belonging to an "imagined community" of compatriots), "nationalist ideology" (the political principle that the boundaries of the state ought to correspond to the geographic extent of this community), and "nationalist movements" (political mobilizations that seek to implement the nationalist agenda, for example through military action or mass education).

Benedict Anderson's influential account of the emergence of nationalism is particularly useful here for understanding eleventh-century China, even though it treats the phenomenon as inherently "modern" in nature.[22] Most importantly, the mechanisms Anderson describes account for the development de novo of a new "subjectivity" and "mode of consciousness." The first instances of national consciousness – which, in his model, emerged in the Americas – were a consequence of sociological processes that were both unselfconscious and entirely self-contained. It was only in a second stage of development that the modular nation-state was reproduced around the world, as regimes and political organizers recognized its potential as a tool of mass mobilization. What I propose below is that the process by which Northern Song political elites came to imagine an empire-wide community shared striking similarities with Anderson's account of emergent national consciousness. Although my discussion undermines some fundamental elements of Anderson's account – most notably his implicit claim that nationalism was invented only once – in fact, the appearance of an analogous consciousness in premodern China as the result of similar sorts of mechanisms provides strong corroborating evidence for the explanatory power of Anderson's approach.

Anderson focuses on tracing the emergence of a very particular sort of "imagined community." Unlike a "real" community – the inhabitants of a village or the members of a tribe – in which most individuals know each other by name or face, the national community is one in which the vast majority of its members are anonymous strangers, who have never met and never will. It differs from other older notions of community – the religious ecumene and the dynastic realm – insofar as it is non-hierarchical and closed. Whereas universalist religions readily incorporated unbelievers into the fold, and populations of dynastic subjects could be transferred from one realm to another following a military invasion or a strategic royal marriage, in the modern nationview, individuals are "natural"-born

[22] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.