

## THE ORIGINS OF THE CHINESE NATION

In this major new study, Nicolas Tackett proposes that the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) witnessed both the maturation of an East Asian inter-state system and the emergence of a new worldview and sense of Chinese identity among educated elites. These developments together had sweeping repercussions for the course of Chinese history, while also demonstrating that there has existed in world history a viable alternative to the modern system of nation-states. Utilizing a wide array of historical, literary, and archaeological sources, chapters focus on diplomatic sociability, cosmopolitan travel, military strategy, border demarcation, ethnic consciousness, and the cultural geography of Northeast Asia. In this groundbreaking new approach to the history of the East Asian inter-state system, Tackett argues for a concrete example of a premodern nationalism, explores the development of this nationalism, and treats modern nationalism as just one iteration of a phenomenon with a much longer history.

NICOLAS TACKETT earned his BS from Stanford University (1998) and his PhD from Columbia University (2006). He has been at the University of California, Berkeley, since 2009, where he has taught undergraduate and graduate courses on a variety of topics, including “Imperial China and the World,” “Precursors of Modern Nationalism,” “Frontier History,” and “History of Nationalism in Asia.” Tackett’s first book, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, received the American Historical Association’s John Henry Breasted Prize in 2015. He was also the recipient of post-doctoral fellowships at Stanford University and the Getty Research Institute, and of an ACLS Digital Innovation Fellowship. He has given talks on four continents and in three languages on topics related to Tang-Song China.

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*Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*

NICOLAS TACKETT

*University of California, Berkeley*



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*pour Zoe*

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## *Preface*

It is hard to deny the formidable power of nationalism in modern times to shape the course of history. Historians and political theorists have responded with a proliferation of sophisticated studies exploring its development around the world since the nineteenth century. Fewer have addressed the question of nationalism's earlier history – a topic unfortunately tainted by partisans' own misleading claims about their nations' pasts. The present book is concerned with a form of Chinese nationalism that materialized at the court of Northern Song (960–1127) China. It seeks to describe this phenomenon and to explain its emergence, largely on the basis of the new inter-state dynamics of eleventh-century Northeast Asia. Many readers will strenuously object to my use of the terms “nation,” “nationalism,” and “national consciousness” when talking about the premodern period. Indeed, for those whose interests lie in the distinctiveness of Chinese society a millennium in the past, it may seem odd and unnecessary to seek out similarities with the modern world. But my approach is that of a comparative historian and social scientist. As such, while I strive to understand the unique cultural framework in which ideas circulated in eleventh-century China, I am simultaneously interested in recognizing commonalities shared by diverse human societies. Thus, in the chapters that follow, I will argue that modern nationalism and the complex of ideas that I refer to as Song “nationalism” are alternative iterations of a single phenomenon. Under what circumstances did this phenomenon emerge at certain times and in certain places? Why did a nationalism take form in the Song but not in the Tang? The present study attempts to answer just such questions.

*The Origin of the Chinese Nation* began as a seminar paper written in late 2002 on the subject of the Great Wall in the Song imaginary. I am greatly indebted to Bob Hymes for suggesting the topic. Since then, I have worked on the project in fits and starts. Between 2007 and 2009, during my tenures as postdoc at the Getty Research Institute (where

I benefited from workshops organized by Erich Gruen) and Stanford University, I wrote the core portions of Chapters 6 and 5 (in that order). I subsequently composed Chapter 3 during my first semester at Berkeley. Then, after a lengthy hiatus to complete a different book, I returned to the project in 2014. Much of Chapter 1 was written late that summer, during evenings spent on a leather couch encircled by jovial crowds of drinkers at the Berkeley Free House. The more methodical Chapter 4 was the product of structured time spent the following spring in cafes near Meizha Hutong, time made possible by an ACLS Fellowship, as well as by my mother-in-law Liu Bamei, who generously came to stay with us in Beijing to look after our infant daughter.

In the decade and a half spent on this project, my ideas were put to the test at conferences and talks held at the National University of Singapore, Stanford University, Minzu University, Leiden University, and Princeton University. In addition, I had a first opportunity to present the book in its entirety at the Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, in a series of four lectures delivered in spring 2015. For their invitations to present my research and for stimulating subsequent conversations, I heartily thank Al Dien, Huang Yijun, Hilde De Weerd, Anna Shields, and Christian Lamouroux. I also benefited enormously from colleagues in the field and at Berkeley who took time to read and critique draft chapters, colleagues including Kerwin Klein, Yuri Slezkine, Tom Mullaney, Paul Smith, Maureen Miller, Peter Sahlins, Shao-yun Yang, and, most of all, Bob Hymes and Peter Bol, both of whom provided very extensive written commentaries to my entire manuscript. Over the years, I have had many, many inspiring conversations on the subject of my book, far too many to mention here. I recall particularly engaging and helpful discussions with David Johnson, Wen-hsin Yeh, Peter Zinoman (with whom I co-taught a graduate seminar on Asian nationalism), Geoff Koziol, Miranda Brown, my cousin (and a Roman historian) Jean-Jacques Aubert, Ye Wa, Victoria Frede-Montemayor, Carlos Noreña, Sarah Schneewind, James Vernon, Christian de Pee, Lu Yang, François Louis (my benchmate on a week-long Silkroad Foundation bus trip through Inner Mongolia), Naomi Standen, Li Hongbin, Nancy Steinhardt (with whom I quite fortuitously split a cab from Chaoyang, Liaoning, to Chaoyang, Beijing – roughly speaking, Xu Kangzong's route), Pierre Marsonne, Mark Strange, and Jonathan Sheehan and Tom Laqueur (who offered their thoughts as I struggled on a bicycle up South Park and other steep hills). I extend my thanks as well to Lucy Rhymer,

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my editor at Cambridge University Press, who has enthusiastically supported this project, and to Robert Judkins.

Finally, I am infinitely grateful to my father (and a French historian) Timothy Tackett for taking the time on innumerable occasions and at moment's notice (often, moreover, as he was traveling in obscure corners of the world) to read and critique chapter drafts; to my wife Liu Kan for putting up with me and for sharing with me the invaluable intuition and insight of a rice farmer turned assembly-line worker turned cultural geographer; and to my daughter Zoe, who, with boundless energy, "strives to fly and stir, bringing light to old and tired eyes."

## *Notes on Supplementary Materials*

- 1 Chinese characters were eliminated from this book to save on publication costs. For the reader's reference, the index includes Chinese characters for most person names. In addition, a PDF with the Chinese version of all translated text and a PDF of the original bibliography (containing Chinese characters) are both available on the author's website ([www.ntackett.com](http://www.ntackett.com)).
- 2 Tangential comments in the footnotes were also eliminated to save on publication costs. Complete original footnotes (with Chinese characters, more detailed citation information, and additional random and extraneous observations) are also available on the author's website.
- 3 Also available on the author's website are the two databases described in Appendix B (a database of eleventh-century Northeast Asian tombs and a database of Northern Song diplomats and policymakers).

Map



Map of Northern Song China