Part I

Orientations: definitions and disciplinary discussions

Introduction: concepts and frameworks

This book is rooted in a great irony of Chinese history: what was once considered the dreaded ends of the earth during the classical and early imperial periods over time came to represent the epitome of Chinese culture. The ancient Yue 越, with its associated peoples, cultures, and lands, was transformed in the Chinese South from other to self, foreign to familiar, theirs to ours, and non-Central States to "China." Cantonese, the language spoken in modern Hong Kong and Guangdong Province, as well as other neighboring areas, is referred to as the "Yue language," even though it is primarily a Sinitic language and not what the natives of the region would have spoken in early times.[1] Chinatowns throughout the world attest to the far-flung influence of the Sinitic Yue legacy. Even the identification of the Han Chinese as Tang ren (唐人 people of the Tang Dynasty), used mainly by overseas Cantonese and some overseas Min-nan and Hakka peoples and referring to all Chinese as a whole, is linked to the South. Lastly, many renowned scholars of the second millennium CE either came from the South or lived much of their lives there. In addition to the exodus of elites during certain major periods of northern turmoil or conquest, extensive migrations to south China, along with the unending trickle of northern migrants seeking political refuge, farmland, and business opportunities throughout the first and second millennia CE, helped transform the entire Southland from native Yue to Sinitic Yue and, hence, to what could be understood in some contexts as quintessentially Chinese.

Meanwhile, in Vietnam – or "South of Yue" – people see themselves as descendants of the Yue and use Yue history and identification as a means of distinguishing themselves from the Han or Chinese people and state. The story of the naming of the state of Vietnam during the early 1800s reflects the ways in which the identification of "Yue" was contested and

[1] Its links to the native, non-Sinitic languages of the region remain largely unrecognized and understudied.

negotiated on both sides of the Sino-Viet border to make claims to Han and non-Han legacies.[2] Most histories of Vietnam include a dedicated section to the ancient kingdom of Southern Yue (during Han imperial times) as a critical part of early Vietnamese history.[3] Vietnam's strategic co-optation of the culture and history associated with ancient Yue provides an alternative example of how the term has been altered and reused in a different guise to support identity and nationalism.

Both Chinese and Vietnamese cultures share the valuable history of the Yue. Peoples from both regions and later eras interacted with the various meanings of Yue from the ancient tradition to help decide on important matters of identity and politics. But what was this ancient tradition of Yue that they interacted with? What were the various meanings associated with the term, its peoples, and cultures? This book sheds light on how, even in ancient times, people fashioned and refashioned their own identity and that of the Yue, long before the rise of either concepts of "China" or "Vietnam." It describes the contours of a relationship – that between the Hua-xia 華夏 (the blossoming, or efflorescent Xia [of the Xia Dynasty]) self and the descriptions of their alien Yue counterparts to the far southeast and south.

Given the nature of the ancient accounts I will be looking at, all of which derive from texts and were recorded in Chinese, we will not be able to garner very much about how Yue people self-identified or expressed themselves. This raises an important question: How does a historian of texts go about investigating a group that left no written record but nonetheless helped deeply shape the dominant group's self-identity and historical trajectory? The answer, I believe, lies in the stated goals of my inquiry and narration of the past. Instead of providing a straightforward, factual account of who the Yue were and how they thought of and grouped themselves, I aim to show how early Chinese texts reveal a different reality about the Yue. Such a reality describes not who they were exactly or how they identified or grouped themselves (although this is sometimes hinted at), and not even what they said or thought about themselves. Rather, such a reality contains a substantial degree of imagination – by viewing the foreign other through the warping lens and

[2] See Kate Baldanza, *The Ambiguous Border: Debate and Negotiation in Sino-Viet Relations in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, forthcoming, for a thorough retelling of how Vietnam got its name. As Baldanza narrates, the reigning Emperor of the Nguyễn Dynasty of Vietnam, Nguyễn Phúc Anh, proposed the name "Nanyue [Southern Yue]" to the Jiaqing Emperor of the Qing, requesting the latter's acceptance and formal recognition of it. This name was summarily rejected by the Qing because it might have been perceived as laying claims to the then-Qing provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi.

[3] See Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

perspectives of an ever-changing self, we reveal important aspects about how a certain culture wished to see, build up, and maintain its own self-image.

This retelling of the Yue suggests that the making of Yue as an identity or concept in ancient texts is akin to an activity – a process – of comparing oneself to the other, of gazing into what were perceived as the depths of otherness so as to reveal, maintain, mitigate, or strengthen some perceived aspect of the Hua-xia self. Indeed, the relative absence of the Yue voice and perspective in the texts of ancient China makes it impossible to answer, let alone ask, certain questions. But this does not render the texts themselves useless. By focusing our inquiry on perceptions and representations of identity, I hope to let the texts tell us what they can about the ancient past. Rather than test what the Hua-xia said about the Yue as people or cultures in terms of an objective reality, or assume that what they said about the other was true in fact, I examine how the term "Yue" was meaningful as a label, which in turn says much about what the ancient Chinese thought about both themselves and the alien others to their South.

Coming to terms with how the 'Yue' in ancient accounts were described helps us piece together the ways in which the Hua-xia people constructed their own identities vis-à-vis southern difference. Such an inquiry should help us understand how southern peoples and cultures were perceived in ways unique to the southern frontier and its special environments. It is by elucidating characteristics of the southern other – and asking why such characteristics were chosen to be worthy of mention or discussion in the first place – that the representations of the self emerge in sharper focus. We thus begin to fathom the limits of the presentation of both self and southern other in the ancient textual tradition.

Changing concepts of Yue and Hua-xia identity would have played a large role in shaping real, concrete political actions and policy. Thus, the study of Yue identity not only provides a deeper understanding of the intellectual history of North–South cultures and encounters. It can also serve as a backdrop to the history of human action and the eventual transformation of the ancient South into something both quintessentially Chinese and Vietnamese.

Ethnicity plays a key role in our inquiry. Most frequently, the type of identity that casts Yue as a foil to Hua-xia is ethnicity. Even though the term "Hua-xia" (sometimes also "Zhu-xia," or, "the varied Xia") ostensibly has political connotations by pointing to the many descendants of a so-called Xia polity (c. 2000–c. 1600 BCE), authors of Warring States times (c. fifth–third century BCE) did not use such a term for its political value. Instead, they invoked Hua-xia as an identity that transcended

contemporary, political, or state groupings.[4] Similarly, even though the term "Yue" is also related to a prominent political state in later Zhou times (sixth–fourth centuries CE), such a term also comes to transcend political boundaries as it develops in the literature as a southern foil to the Hua-xia.

Viewing Hua-xia and Yue primarily through the concept of ethnicity will center our discussion around cultures and a sense of their inherited or acquired group identities, rather than any and all forms of identity. To be sure, we will have to address political identity to a certain extent, especially when exploring the multifaceted ways in which terms associated with the Yue are used in the literature. But by searching for Hua-xia and Yue as ethnonyms, or analyzing them in terms of what we would call "ethnicity," we can formulate a more precise theory concerning the origins of Chineseness as an ethnic concept. We can also better observe how ethnicity was maintained and preserved in the early history of China.

Jonathan Hall, a scholar of ancient Hellenistic identity, has proposed a useful definition of ethnicity that is grounded in the notion that ethnicities, while there might be a strong biological component, are at base constructed categories. Ethnicity, for Hall, grounds identity in a shared myth of descent and a shared association with a specific territory.[5] As thus conceived, ethnicity is an open, malleable social construction capable of changing with time and place. Such a definition is general enough to allow for varying claims on ethnicity but specific enough to distinguish ethnicity from other forms of identification such as nationality, kinship, and culture. It is important to note that one's sense of shared, ethnic territory is often not separate from one's sense of shared descent, as original ancestors are necessarily locatable to a specific place and time. In this book, I expand upon Hall's concept of ethnicity to include the following three criteria: a shared myth of descent, a shared association with a specific territory, and a shared sense of culture. This way of understanding ethnicity renders problematic any conception of Chineseness as a primordial, essential, and, indeed, biological marker of much significance.

[4] The traditional understandings of Chinese history start with the Xia Dynasty, followed by the Shang and then the Zhou. While the existence of the latter two have been confirmed through archaeological and textual data, the existence of the Xia as a polity or dynasty is still much contested by scholars. K. C. Chang believes that there is good reason to think that the Xia corresponds to an archaeological culture called the Erlitou 而里頭, which dates to 1900–1350 BCE. See K. C. Chang, "China on the Eve of the Historical Period," in Edward Shaughnessy and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 71–73.

[5] Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 32.

The criterion of a shared sense of descent helps clarify that ethnicity can be dependent "not so much on real descent as on the symbols of descent and the individual's belief in them."[6] It also helps distinguish ethnicity from other identifications such as nationality and culture, more strictly understood. Nationalities can be based solely on geography (territory) and politics, but ethnicities are different because they incorporate a group consciousness, mythic or not, of one's origins and ancestors. Similarly, ethnicities can be distinguished from culture insofar as they include a notion of shared descent. Many people can share the same culture, defined as the shared habits and practices of people living in similar environments, without having to share the same myth of descent.[7] But when a people shares a myth of descent, a geographic location, as well as a sense of culture, it is fair to refer to them in terms of ethnicity.

Inscribing difference: identity as an ascribed taxonomic landscape

Judith Butler has famously referred to identity as performance, or stylized acts.[8] Identity can indeed be fruitfully discussed in such constructivist terms, and in this book I subscribe to a thoroughly constructivist way of approaching the concepts of identity and ethnicity. But rather than focus on formulations about performance and the dramatic act of expressing the self and other, I wish to draw our attention to larger social, cultural, and political processes of labeling, inscribing, classifying, and delimiting others. For example, of the ancient Yue peoples and cultures we know very little about the performative, stylized acts of identity enacted by the Yue themselves, especially with regards to the active construction of their own self-identity. We are mostly only privy to descriptions written by Hua-xia elite outsiders about the Yue, or to the act of ascribing identity to someone outside the self. Even though "performance" is a perfectly acceptable way of understanding such a manner of constituting the Hua-xia self through the Yue other, I am not convinced that it

[6] Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 17.

[7] Culture and ethnicity can be deeply related, thus making it difficult to distinguish between the two. Sow-theng Leong points to competition with others as a factor that helps carve an ethnicity out of people with a shared culture. While she does not give a definition of ethnicity, she provides us with a possible source or reason for its emergence, along with its clear connection to culture. Sow-theng Leong, *Migration and Ethnicity in Chinese History: Hakkas, Pengmin, and Their Neighbors*, Tim Wright, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 19–20.

[8] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

appropriately encapsulates the more cerebral act of inscribing and mapping that characterizes the written, cognitive forms of creating taxonomic schemes of self and other. For this reason, while I acknowledge the power associated with viewing identity as performance, I prefer in this book – especially given the types of sources we have for analyzing identity construction in ancient Chinese texts – to use metaphors of inscribing, mapping, categorizing, and delimiting that seem to be more relevant to the written nature of our sources.

There seems to be an inherent tension and interaction between the performance of one's own self-identity in real-life time and the inscriptional ossifying of the self and non-self in written genres. In the former, there is an assumption of the multiplicity of the self; it is opaque and fluid, uncertain until the moment at which it is expressed outwardly as an act and performance. Yet even in its crystallization in the moment, there is always an assumption that, just as time inevitably progresses forth, so too the self will change and move with it.

In the case of constructing the self and other through certain written genres, one's intention is often to create a myth of something that transcends the momentariness of time, to record and create a lasting impression in time-as-duration and time-eternal, not ephemeral or moving time. The objective here is to carve out an image with definite spatial attributes in indefinite time, minimizing the temporary nature of the self by transforming momentary and liquid performance into a solid incarnation of difference. Thus, when a self ascribes traits to another through writing, it etches out an entire landscape of distinctions between self and other, sometimes without fully realizing the extent to which the very inscription of self or other implies both that which is carved out and that which fills the background and, indeed, the entire canvass. This concept of identity as a "still life," or essentialized and congealed self couched in an ascribed, taxonomic landscape of other, is what I will explore when trying to express the contours of ancient tropes, arguments, or other types of formulations of the Hua-xia and Yue.

Habits of nomenclature

While the bulk of my analysis revolves around terms such as "Hua-xia" and "Yue," there are other ways of referring to the self and southern other that will no doubt give rise to a bit of confusion. Let us first discuss the problems associated with references to the "Hua-xia" self and how such a term links to current conceptions of Han or Chinese identity. During the time frame examined here, the Chinese self is conceived of in a variety of ways. Politically, the people representing the Central States voice usually

saw themselves as belonging to the "Zhou" sphere of ritualized interaction. Even early empires such as the Qin and Han based their shared sense of history in the Zhou and its predecessors, and so there is little need to debate the existence of such a political and cultural identification.

Today, the majority of Chinese identify themselves as being of Han ethnicity. This ethnonym has a complicated history, although its origins as something that describes the Hua-xia peoples is relatively recent, perhaps dating from Tang times and proliferating only during the Mongol-ruled Yuan Empire (1271–1368 CE).[9] In fact, throughout much of Chinese history, peoples inhabiting what is now the Chinese mainland were sometimes referred to by their dynastic identities such as the "Han," "Tang," "Song," "Yuan," "Ming," and "Da Qing." But the use of such dynastic labels usually referred to a person's political or official relationship to the state, not their ethnic identity. In later periods, some of these identities were picked up by people in China and elsewhere to refer to the Chinese as an ethnicity (e.g., "Han" was a label used later in both China and Japan, and "Tang" was used in Japan to refer to the Chinese).

During the Han Empire, the term "Han" came into use by outsiders such as the Xiongnu to refer to people of that dynasty – people who worked for or who came under the fold of the Han regime. It was therefore not an ethnic identity. While the compound, *Han ren* 漢人 (Han person) appears several times in Sima Qian's *Shi ji* (c. 100 BCE, *Records of the Office of the Grand Historian*), the use of "Han" to designate an ethnic or cultural group, as in *Han zu* 漢族, rather than political officials affiliated with the Han Empire does not appear until around the sixth and seventh centuries CE, in texts such as the *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Commentary on the Classic of Waterways) and the *Beiqi shu* 北齊書 (History of the Northern Qi, completed in 636).[10]

More relevant for the ancient time period in question is the ethnonym, "Hua-xia," which later in history became subsumed under many different kinds of ethnic identities associated with Chinese culture and people, such as the "people of the Tang (唐人)," "people of the Han (漢人)," the "Chinese (中國人)," etc. Most of the Hua-xia people were situated in what were known as the Central States (*zhongguo* 中國) or Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原) region – that is, in the region surrounding the Wei and

[9] See Endymion Wilkinson's *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), pp. 96–97, 682–688, 694–704, 722–725.

[10] Wolfgang Behr, "'To Translate' is 'To Exchange' 譯者言易也 – Linguistic Diversity and the Terms for Translation in Ancient China," in N. Vittinghoff and M. Lackner, eds., *Mapping Meanings: The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), p. 178.

Yellow River valleys in what is now north-central China.[11] Some intellectuals of these regions, notably the Ru ritual specialists (such as Confucius and his disciples), consistently invoked a shared myth of descent that transcended political boundaries within the above-mentioned region. In addition to Hua-xia, another term used during the Warring States period to refer to this ethnic group is "Zhu-xia" 諸夏 (the many, or various [descendants of] Xia), or "Zhou" (周, referring to the cultural legacy of this dynasty). That these three terms – "Hua-xia," "Zhu-xia," and "Zhou" – represent an ethnic and not merely a cultural or political category can be most clearly seen in the *Analects*, which we will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Another important point in this study concerns the false notion that "China" or the "Chinese" in ancient times stands for anything that is in conflict with or distinct from what is "southern." For example, when we assume a southern person was Chinese simply because he or she was not native to the region, we do a disservice to the hugely diverse array of cultures and peoples who inhabited the southern regions who were neither strictly Hua-xia nor native and whose mixed cultural identities were in a constant state of flux. Indeed, perhaps the term "local" is a better word for anyone who lived for a significant period of their life in the South, whereas "Hua-xia" and "Yue" are better at designating perceived cultural or ethnic identifications.

While the ancients often saw themselves in terms of the great Hua-xia versus Yue divide, our analysis of the situation need not always embrace or describe reality using such crude distinctions. I try in this work to emphasize hybridity and identities in flux. One way to gain a sense of the fine-grain and complexity of the situation is to break down such giant nomenclatures as Hua-xia and Yue into more specific names of groups and peoples, especially as they are reflected in the sources. I sometimes

[11] While I will usually refer to the Chinese as "Hua-xia" in this book, I will also make use of other terms provided us by the primary sources of the period, such as "Zhu-xia," or people of the Central States or Central Plains. I will try to be specific about semantic scope and context when invoking certain markers of identity, although such a goal is not always easy, given that the sources themselves are usually tremendously unclear on such matters.

The toponym "Central States" can be defined during Warring States times as a vague reference to those states that occupied the regions around the Zhou heartland in the Wei and Yellow River Valleys. General usage of the "Central States" also suggests that these states were full-fledged members of the Zhou political sphere, and, intriguingly, it does not include interstitial states of the same geographic region in which large portions of ethnic groups resided, such as those associated with the four directions –the Rong, Di, Man, Yi. The position of Chu as a Central State appears to be indeterminate, although my sense is that it is usually considered an outlier because of its high population of southern Man-yi peoples.