INTRODUCTION

On the Historical Formation of "China" and the Dilemma of Chinese Identity

In this chapter, I want to discuss with readers a few historical problems, some of which may involve (1) "Asia" and "China"; (2) scholarship, politics, and identity; and (3) global history, national history, and regional history.

As a professional historian, I originally had no desire to discuss these problems. In recent years, however, I have felt more and more that the study of Chinese history cannot avoid these problems, just as we cannot avoid them when we observe China's reality today. Recently, as China continues to expand (I dislike the word "rise" or *jueqi*), one of the problems it faces is how China will get along with Asia and the rest of the world in terms of culture, politics, and economics. I recognize that China has already run into a number of difficulties, including questions related to the Goguryeo Kingdom, the East China Sea and Diaoyu Island, the South China Sea and the Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands, Outer Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, the Eastern Turkestan movement in Xinjiang and issues concerning Islam, problems in Tibet and with Tibetan Buddhism, problems with the borders between China and India, the Taiwan

question, the Hong Kong question, and even the question of the Ryukyu Islands, which might catch fire once again.

Undoubtedly, political difficulties should be resolved by politicians according to international political norms, but there also exist certain historical questions that have not been fully addressed by historians themselves. As a result, some political figures are not only unable to separate questions of historical lands and territorial domains and actual territory but are also unable to apply a knowledge of history to arrive at common ground with their neighbors on their borders. A number of scholars have sensed the importance of these questions, but if they simply jump into the discussion without having obtained sufficient historical knowledge, then, on the one hand, they fall into debates that have predetermined positions and are loaded down with political ideology and engage in discussions that are neither rational nor scholarly, or, on the other hand, they jump into patterns laid out by fashionable Western theories and engage in empty talk about huge theoretical terms and concepts such as empires, nation-states, or the postmodern or the postcolonial.

Topics such as territory, nation, religion, the state, and identity have already received substantial attention from scholars in China. As a historian, then, I want to ask readers: From a historical perspective, what is "China," after all? I also took up the question in my book *Here in "China" I Dwell* (*Zhai zi Zhongguo*), which was published in Beijing and Taipei in 2011. This little book I have prepared here not only revisits many of the same questions from *Here in "China" I Dwell* but also presents new ideas I have developed as I continue to think through the "China" question.[1]

How Did the Interpretation of "China" Become Open to Question? What Dilemmas Are Found There?

What is "China"? Many difficult historical problems lie behind what looks to be a commonsense question.

On the one hand, from 1895 on, the Great Qing Empire (*Da Qing diguo*) was brought into the world and into Asia and forced to take on challenges posed by Western culture and new elements in East Asian

culture. During this time, traditional Chinese ideas about All-under-Heaven (*Tianxia*) and the tribute system were challenged by the modern world order, while the traditional Chinese political system came under attack from Western democratic systems, resulting in changes not seen in the previous two thousand years.[2] The change within tradition so commonly seen in ancient China was forced to become change *without* tradition. When we discuss China from a historical perspective, then, we must also include Asia or even the entire world, because from this point forward "China" is no longer a self-contained historical world, and all discussions of history must involve the world or Asia; at the very least, they must be set against the backdrop of Asia.

On the other hand, these changes that occurred in the early modern world and in Asia have worked with ever greater force to stimulate the writing of global histories and regional histories that emphasize interconnection and mutual influence. In the past few decades, postmodern theories of history have gained popularity as they have called for critiques of historical narratives of the nation-state. As scholars have warmed to the idea of Asian history or global history, they have also promoted a new trend in the international scholarly domain that questions whether "China" really exists as a political state or as a state with a high degree of cultural unity. Some people ask, Why is it acceptable for "China" to be treated as a historical world that can be narrated and with which one can identify? This type of question has made its way into domestic discussions in China and has gained influence in a number of scholarly fields.

We should be grateful for this sharp questioning. It is only because of this questioning that we can discuss and consider anew the question of "what is China." I believe that these historical problems concerning "China" have both resulted in a number of political and cultural dilemmas for China and have given the scholarly world—especially historians—an area of research with global significance. Why? Because, as a state, the true nature of China can be understood neither through a simple application of the European concept of empire nor through the use of definitions or theories of the early modern European nation-state. Questions concerning China's territories, nations and peoples, faiths, territorial boundaries, and identities are far more complicated than for any other country in the world.

If we look back on the history of "China," we can, putting it simply, say that a China with political and cultural continuity was established very early. From the third century BCE, when the Qin Shi Huangdi established a unified empire and used its official power to ensure that "all weights and measures were standardized, the gauge of wheeled vehicles was made uniform, and the writing system was standardized,"[3] down to the second century BCE, when the Han dynasty "admired nothing other than Confucianism" in its philosophy but, in terms of its institutions, "took variously from the ways of the Lords Protector and the [ideal] Kings"[4] in its political system, a Chinese empire (*Zhonghua diguo*), relatively unified in terms of politics, culture, and language, had formed. Over the long medieval period, China underwent numerous wars and territorial divisions, was the site of the intermingling of different national groups, and was ruled by a long line of leaders from various clans and national groups. Nonetheless, all the way down to the times of the Sui and Tang dynasties, China still maintained an empire that reached across much of East Asia and exercised a substantial degree of control over the various peoples within its territories. We should remember that, from the Han dynasty through the Tang dynasty, the world of ideas did not really have a sense of foreign lands (*waiguo*) or of an international order (*guoji zhixu*). Even if a number of foreign peoples across history, such as the Xiongnu, the Xianbei, the Turkic peoples, or the Tubo, was able to put up strong resistance to this empire, generally speaking the world of ideas also did not really recognize enemy states of equal status, much less foreign countries of such status.[5]

It was not until the Song dynasty (that is, the tenth century through the fourteenth century) that major changes occurred in China's relations with its neighbors.[6] Song-dynasty China found itself in a multistate, international environment and began to produce a sense of the "Middle Kingdom" that has extended to the present day. One needs only a basic knowledge of Chinese history to realize that this era was indeed quite different from those that came before it. In modern scholarship, why do so many people agree with the thesis of the Tang-Song transformation, which emphasizes that the Tang dynasty is an era of tradition, while the Song dynasty marks the beginning of the early modern period for China? Japanese scholars such as Naitō Konan (1866–1934) and Miyazaki Ichisada

(1901–1995) have put forward this argument, and Chinese scholars such as Fu Sinian, Chen Yinke, Qian Mu, and Fu Lecheng have all reached similar conclusions. I believe that the Song dynasty can be seen as "early modern" for a number of reasons: in addition to a number of aspects of the Song dynasty that have been discussed by previous scholars—such as urbanization and the rise of urban populations, the decline of aristocratic clans and the centralization of imperial power, the formation of the examination system, gentry elites, and rural culture, and changes in literary and artistic styles—the gradual development of a self-conscious nation (*minzu*) and state (*guojia*) is also an important marker of the "early modern." For these reasons, I emphasize that the Song dynasty was an essential period in the formation of a consciousness of "China."[7]

It must be pointed out, however, that once the prototype for this state had been formed, the political borders of the state and the international environment were still in a constant state of change. Even a diminished China continued to subscribe to the traditional view of an expansive, limitless All-under-Heaven and a "self-centered" tribute system. From the Song dynasty onward this "China," which gradually gained cultural unity and political unification, encountered even more difficulties. Aside from the cases of the Mongol Yuan dynasty and the Manchu Qing dynasty, which resulted in rule by foreign peoples and the creation of an expansive empire, China also encountered three very particular types of dilemmas that rendered "China" as a state unable to resolve problems of recognition and identity associated with the inner or domestic (*nei*) and the outer or foreign (*wai*). These problems eventually evolved into dilemmas faced by modern China, and I believe that they will extend into the future.

What are the three dilemmas?

The first concerns an orientation toward one's native state that appeared in neighboring states (including Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and so on) since the Song dynasty. From the time that China lost the cultural attractiveness and radiance of the Han dynasty and Tang dynasty, these neighboring countries were, at the very least, no longer willing to be culturally dependent or subordinate to China and were no longer willing in political terms to recognize the idea that barbarians from the north, south, east, and west surrounded the "central state" of "China" (*Zhongguo*). For

example, since at least the times of the Sui and Tang dynasties, Japan has had a consciousness of itself as occupying a position of parity with China, but it would probably not be until the Yuan dynasty,[8] when the military forces of the Mongols, Jiangnan China, and the Goryeo dynasty of Korea joined together to attack Japan (which saw itself as a "divine land" [*shinkoku*]), that a true orientation toward one's own state began to develop in political, economic, and cultural terms. From this time on, Japan began to see itself as a divine land and devoted conscious effort to developing its own culture, eventually giving rise to a Japanese version of the "order of relations between Chinese and the barbarian."[9] Even though Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408) attempted to relax this posture at the beginning of the fifteenth century (1401) by joining the tribute system of the Ming dynasty,[10] most of the subsequent Ashikaga, Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa samurai did not identify with his actions and even looked down on the tribute system centered around China.

A series of political changes occurred in East Asia following the collapse of the Mongol Yuan dynasty: Yi Seong-gye (1335–1408) established the Joseon dynasty, claiming the mantle of the Goryeo dynasty. Even though the new state still fell within the Ming-dynasty tribute system, it still exhibited a clear orientation toward one's own native state. In 1392, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), the founder of the Ming dynasty, gave a warning to ambassadors from Korea not to attempt to form an independent kingdom: "No matter where it rises or where it sets, there is only one sun above All-under-Heaven. This fact cannot be concealed."[11] Bowing one's head to the political hierarchy, however, is not the same as admitting to subservience in the cultural realm. Korea under the Joseon dynasty gradually made its way down the path of building its own cultural center, creating its own myths of origins, substituting the mythical Jizi (Gija) with Dangun, and adopting a strategy of feigned compliance and subservience while, in the arena of culture, instilling a sense of self-confidence through its education of gentry elites. Interestingly, the main support that they used for this cultural self-confidence was the neo-Confucian thought of Zhu Xi (1130–1200), which was derived from China.

Another neighboring state, Annam (or Đại Việt), did not identify with the Yuan dynasty from the very beginning, and neither the Song nor the Yuan were able to take territorial control of this state. The Trần dynasty

defeated the forces of the Mongol Yuan three times, most notably when they turned back an invasion attempt in 1257. The two sides reached an agreement by which Annam would pay tribute once every three years, but in fact, according to a historical commentary by Pan Hui, it was "difficult to summon emissaries or conduct ceremonies for conferring titles of nobility, and after the fall of the Yuan, these tributes were not revived." Trần Thánh Tông (1240–1290) adopted a new name for his reign, Thiệu Long, and set himself in opposition to the authority of the Yuan dynasty. By the time of the Ming dynasty, the situation went unchanged as the Ming admitted that Annam was "set apart by seas and mountains, by the design of Heaven and Earth." Although the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424) attempted to bring them under the Ming's system of centralized administration (a move similar to the conversion of peripheral territories into regular administrative regions [*gaitu guiliu*] under the Qing), they were not successful, especially when the Later Lê dynasty established itself in 1428 and defeated the Ming armies yet again. Following these events, trends leading to an orientation toward one's own state grew ever stronger in Annam.[12]

Generally speaking, when the nation and the state become unified, the sense of self and self-worth will grow strong. When countries on China's borders such as Annam, Ryukyu, Korea, and Japan formed a sense of separate statehood, they gradually reached political independence and began to assert a cultural status that was separate from China. These developments resulted in an international scene that was different from the East Asia of the Han dynasty and Tang dynasty, enough so that a China-centered international order established on the worldview of All-under-Heaven and ritual order had to change. China, in turn, was forced to gradually accept the new political and cultural state of affairs brought about by these changes.

This is the first type of challenge that came from the periphery: those states that previously had been under China's influence gradually began to stand up as China's equals.

The second dilemma took shape only after Westerners came to East Asia during the middle part of the Ming dynasty.[13] Although Chinese territory was reduced after the founding of the Ming dynasty and China returned to being an empire established on the traditional basis of Han

territory, ethnic groups, and culture, in the eleventh year of the reign of Ming emperor Wuzong (1516), a Portuguese man named Rafael Perestrello arrived by boat to China, opening the curtain on the long drama of the Western world's journey to the East. From this point on, the Great Ming Empire was drawn into an even greater world order, and the writing of Chinese history became a part of the writing of global history. Chinese culture, too, began to face the challenges posed by Western civilization. Even if this challenge was not particularly obvious in the middle and late periods the Ming dynasty, this historical trend of so-called early globalization grew ever stronger. From the Opium Wars to the late Qing dynasty, Westerners used ships and cannons to force their way in and demand that China agree to all varieties of unequal treaties. These developments caused All-under-Heaven to gradually become an "international" view of the world: a huge part of the world that, in terms of geography, history, and culture, had never had much contact with China suddenly became significant. Whose values, then, would come to dominate this world? Whose version of order would be able to guide this international world?

This is the second predicament faced by China: the challenge posed by the culture and political order of another world.

The third dilemma lies in the domestic questions that gradually arose from the expansion of the territory of Great Qing Empire. Many people have noted that the territory of Ming-dynasty China was basically the same as the fifteen provinces of so-called China proper.[14] The majority of people from that time recognized that Jiuquan was "an important defensive post on China's frontier" and that "those lands beyond Jiayu Pass (Jiayuguan) do not belong to us."[15] In this territory, which traditionally had belonged to the Han ethnic group, few prominent questions arose concerning ethnic groups or territorial regions. By the Qing dynasty, however, the situation was quite different. In 1635, before the Manchus had entered the territory of the Ming dynasty, the Mongol Eight Banners had already been established, and the Han Chinese Eight Banners were established in 1642. We should say, then, that before its forces entered Ming territory, the Later Jin dynasty was already a hybrid empire made up of Manchu, Mongol, and Han peoples. In 1644, the first year of the reign of Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644–1661), the Manchus entered the borders of the Ming and established the Great Qing dynasty

(*Da Qing wangchao*); in 1683, the twenty-second year of the reign of Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722), the Qing reclaimed Taiwan; and Khalkha Mongols of the northern Gobi came back under Qing control in 1688. After these events, the "Middle Kingdom" that was largely made up of the Han ethnicity during the Ming dynasty became an empire that held the territories of the Mongols, Manchu, and Han. In 1759, the twenty-fourth year of the reign of Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796), the Dzungar region and the area south of Tian Shan was pacified, and thus with the addition of Xinjiang (or the "Hui Region," or *Hui bu*), China became a super-empire that brought together the Mongols, Manchus, Han, and Hui peoples.[16] From the beginning of the Great Ming dynasty until the conversion of peripheral territories into regular administrative regions (*gaitu guiliu*) during the Yongzheng era of the Qing dynasty (r. 1722–1735), the Miao people and the Yi people in the southeast saw their territories converted from areas controlled by local chieftains to provinces, prefectures, counties, and subprefectures, all controlled by the central state. By this time China had become an empire collectively made up of the Manchu, Mongol, Han, Hui, Uighur, and Miao peoples. From the time of the Shunzhi reign (1644–1661) to the Qianlong reign (1735–1796), titles of nobility were conferred upon the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama went to Chengde for an audience with the emperor, and in 1792, the fifty-seventh year of the Qianlong reign, the Qing court dispatched Fuk'anggan (1753–1796) to Tibet, establishing the "Golden Urn" system of choosing Tibetan lamas, after which China became a country of either "five nations" (Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, and Han) or "six nations" (Manchu, Mongol, Hui, Tibetan, Han, and Miao). China could no longer be said to be a single people (the Han) overlapping with a single state (China).

Although a massive empire is certainly something to be proud of—an empire that stretched from Sakhalin in the east to Shule County (in Xinjiang) to the west and from the Stanovoy mountain range in the north and to Hainan Island in the south[17]—serious problems related to identity came along with this empire. At the time of the 1911 revolution that overthrew the Qing court, the China that had existed under the imperial system became a state modeled after the republican system. Although revolutionaries like Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936), Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), Chen

Tianhua (1875–1905), and others mobilized the people with nationalist revolutionary slogans that promised to "drive out the barbarians and restore China,"[18] the revolution that started under the banner of a so-called anti-Manchu restoration of Han political power was eventually forced to compromise, because no one was willing to be blamed for dividing the territory of the state. These anti-Manchu revolutionaries were forced to compromise and to accept ideas about nation and ethnicity advocated by Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and assent to the idea of "Five Nations under One Union" that was described in the imperial edict with which the final Qing emperor abdicated the throne. However, the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China, which both inherited the legacy of the Qing dynasty, also inherited the problems that came along with the vast numbers of ethnic groups and massive territorial regions within it. In other words, the successors to the Qing dynasty faced the problem of how the Manchu, Mongol, Han, Hui, Tibetan, and Miao could reach consensus over having just one state and how each could understand its cultural identity.

These issues constitute the third dilemma for "China": How to manage each ethnic group's identification with the state?

Modern China inherited the Song dynasty's shifting relations with the periphery, the international environment that had existed since the Ming dynasty, and also the complex internal relations between nations and state that had been reached by the Qing dynasty. In *Here in "China" I Dwell,* I emphasize that across history, "China" is a shifting "China." Even if China continued to think of itself as a great, unified celestial kingdom, it would continue to face the three complicated historical questions of what constitutes the domestic, the periphery, and the outer.[19] For these reasons, "China" is a special kind of "state." It is essential that now we understand that this China "did not evolve into a nation-state [as in Europe]. While the idea of a limited state was contained within the notion of the empire without borders, this limited state also continued to imagine an empire without borders. The modern nation-state is the product of the traditional centralized empire, preserving remnants of the ideology of empire, from which we can see that the histories of both were intertwined."[20]

For these reasons, then, the European idea of the early modern nation-state is perhaps not all that well suited to China, while China, this particular state, can only be understood by going back into history.

Questioning "China": The Inspiration and Challenge of New Theories and Methods in the Study of History

How, then, should we understand this vast and complicated "China" or "Middle Kingdom"?[21] Without a doubt, we will no longer be bound by arguments that hold that the political territory of the People's Republic of China should equal "historical China."[22] Should we then, however, follow some of those early Japanese historians of China who argued that "*Shina* [China] had no borders"[23] or that "China is not a state," and conclude that China should be limited to the area south of the Great Wall and become a purely Han state? Or should we follow the modern scholarly model borrowed from the standards of the European nation-state, and see China as an empire without any real unity? Or should we follow postmodern theory and see "China" as a community that is not only without unity but also is established by being "imagined"?

These are not groundless concerns. In the international field of "China" studies, the following theories and methods have come to challenge and question the traditional narrative of "China" as a historical world.

1. *Regional Studies.* Since 1982, when the American scholar Robert Hartwell published an article on "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformation of China, 750–1150,"[24] an emphasis on researching geographic regions has stimulated and influenced scholarship on the Song dynasty in the United States. This emphasis is found in work by Robert Hymes, Richard Davis, Paul Smith, and Peter Bol on regions such as Fuzhou, Sichuan, Mingzhou, and Wuzhou. Of course, scholarship on regional studies or local history did not begin here; it had already begun by 1977, with William Skinner's scholarship on cities in early modern China.[25] The work of Hartwell and those who followed him, however, contributed to the growth of regional studies on China in the United States and in Japan. From 1990 on, the China studies field in Japan

developed a notable new trend in scholarship on regions. This regional perspective in research in many ways constituted a narrowing of very broad studies on "China." It is fair to say that these works constituted a deepening of historical research and scholarship, as China studies had in fact overlooked regional differences and emphasized unity and completeness for quite some time. To a significant degree, however, the methods of regional studies unexpectedly raised the question of whether a single or unified Chinese history, Chinese civilization, or Chinese thought ever existed. Some scholars even believe that it is impossible to discuss a historical world called "China" in broad terms, and argue that China should be broken down and researched separately as different localities or regions.

2. *Asian Studies or East Asian Studies.* On the one hand, research models that take Asia or East Asia as a historical world were influenced by Europe and North American world geography and ideas about world civilizations that take Asia (or East Asia) as a discrete whole. On the other hand, they are also related to discourses about Asia and so-called oriental studies (*Tōyōgaku*) that appeared in Meiji-era Japan—a complicated period of history. Simply put, the questioning that took place about whether "China" could be a nation-state or historical world had begun during the Meiji era, and Meiji-era oriental studies, following Western ideas about the nation-state and trends in Western studies of China, gradually developed into an oriental studies that paid outsized attention to Korea, Mongolia, Manchuria, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Scholars who worked in this vein no longer considered "China" to be a unified whole that extended over large swaths of territory and a variety of peoples. What had originally been a new trend in scholarly research, however, gradually became politicized, turning into ideas about how to understand China and even becoming policies directed toward China. Even after World War II, these issues gained wide attention in the academic study of history in Japan.

I have discussed this issue of Japanese historiography of China in an essay titled "Where Are the Borders?"[26] Beginning in the Meiji period, and especially after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894), Japan made ever stronger demands on China and on the territory in its own periphery. Some Japanese scholars no longer saw the "Qing Empire" as one "China," and instead misapplied new ideas about the nation-state that were popular

in Europe to interpret what in the past was called "China" as different "dynasties" (*wangchao*). These dynasties, in turn, are merely seen to be traditional empires, while the real "China" should only be understood as a state that is majority Han, located to the south of the Great Wall and to the east of Tibet and Xinjiang. At the same time, according to this line of argument, the national groups on the peripheries constituted different communities, all with different cultures, politics, and ethnicities. Moreover, Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Korea were merely part of the "periphery" outside China. If these ideas were put forward from a historical or scholarly perspective, then there would be no problem discussing them, but they became both an intellectual trend and part of foreign policy, resulting in arguments being made in the Japanese cultural and political sphere that "China should strengthen its geographically central areas and relinquish control over the 'Four Barbarians,' while Japan should join together with Western powers to seize China's right to exercise control over its periphery."[27] This trend also resulted in sentiments in Japan that held that Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Korea were like part of their own country. In 1923, before the beginning of World War II, the renowned Japanese scholar Yano Jin'ichi argued that China could not be considered a so-called nation-state, and that Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, and other places originally were never part of Chinese territory. In 1943, he argued in a series of talks at Hiroshima University for a theory of historical narrative that went beyond China and focused on Asia as a single unit.[28]

Of course, these events are far in the past. In recent years, however, as a result of a sense of cautiousness toward "Western" (that is, European and American) discourses, scholars in Japan, Korea, and China have often been open to influence from postcolonial theory and theories of Orientalism. With the hope of avoiding universal history based on the European and American experience, this discourse on Asia has gained more attention, with its supporters arguing for East Asian history,[29] "thinking through Asia,"[30] and "Asian communities of knowledge" as ways to allow Asia or East Asia to be considered as a historical world. We should recognize that the revival of the idea of Asia is a significant way of moving beyond the political borders of individual nation-states so as to construct an imagined political space that dispels state-centered

biases from within and resists "Western hegemony" from without. From a historical perspective, however, some questions still need clarification. First, how did Asia become or when will it be able to become a community of culture, knowledge, history, and even politics that makes a claim to a shared identity, shared historical origins, and a shared "Other" (Europe and America or the West)? Second, if or when Asia becomes a "history," when it strengthens and emphasizes the connectedness and unity of this space of East Asia, will that then also consciously or unconsciously weaken the centrifugal forces and the sense of differences between China, Japan, and Korea? Third, from the perspective of Chinese researchers, will an excessive emphasis on "beginning by thinking through Asia" dilute the role of "China" within Asia?

3. *"Concentric" Theory from Taiwan.* Political questions constitute a great difficulty when discussing the history of Taiwan. Here I want to make every effort to engage in the scholarly discussion and not a judgment based on political values. Scholars in Taiwan have always been relatively cautious concerning the "China" question, putting forward many criticisms of attempts to use the current political territory of China to define a historical China. They avoid definitions of "China" that include Taiwan and avoid a discourse of Chinese history that includes Taiwan. Instead, some scholars attempt to go beyond the political territory of contemporary China and redefine Taiwan's position.

Borrowing the style of regional and area studies that go beyond the nation-state, these scholars reexamine the scope of Chinese history. Some Taiwan scholars put forward the "concentric circle" theory, the most representative of which is, of course, from Tu Cheng-sheng.[31] In one essay that sums up many of his arguments he said, "By the 1990s . . . our ideas about a history based on concentric circles reversed a mode of understanding that could be called 'China as the principal body, and Taiwan as the auxiliary dependent.' "[32] Tu argued that this was a way to combat cultural hegemony, and thus he attempted to break apart traditional discourses of "China," arguing that this new "concentric circle" takes Taiwan as the center. As it expands outward, the first circle includes local and rural history, the second circle is Taiwan history, the third circle is Chinese history, the fourth circle is Asian history, while the fifth expands outward toward world history. The narrative he puts forward is based on

aspirations to rescue "Taiwan" from "Chinese" identity. Tu argues that, in the past, Taiwan has been forcibly written into discussions about China, and if one wants to strengthen a Taiwan group identity, then, of course, one must smash the myth of Chinese cultural unity, because this so-called unity is realized only through the "coercion" made possible by political hegemony.

In terms of historical narrative, the prominence of Taiwan highlights a sense of China's incompleteness. When such "centrifugal" force is attributed to China, ways of describing China that once went unquestioned can be seen as quite problematic. At a ceremony held in late 2003 to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica, Tu Cheng-sheng called both for a "history of China that goes beyond China" and for a "historical perspective that examines All-under-Heaven (*Tianxia*) from Taiwan's point of view." Here we can mention a well-known example of a fiery debate that took place in the same year. When designing a new map, Tu Cheng-sheng suggested giving less weight to the old vertical and horizontal lines of longitude and latitude and instead shifting the map counterclockwise by ninety degrees, so that Taiwan would be at the center of the map. This way, Taiwan would no longer be on China's southeastern "frontier"; instead, China's coast would be on the top of the map where Taiwan is in the center, while the Ryukyu Islands and Japan are on the side to the right of Taiwan and the Philippines are on the left.

In this narrative of history and space, then, has "China" been removed? These same types of narratives and problems seem to have the potential to emerge in historical discourses concerning regions such as Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Northeastern China, and even Yunnan.

4. *"History of the Mongol Era" and "The New Qing History."* In earlier common narratives about the history of "China," what was most difficult to include in "Chinese history" in an orderly way was the two empires of the Mongol Yuan dynasty and the Manchu Qing dynasty. The difficulty that these two great empires brought to the historiography of "China" was that they demanded that historians go beyond history centered on Han China and collect a richer set of documents and materials, many of which came from different perspectives and different languages, and work to describe a much broader geographical space, a greater number of nations

and ethnicities, and more complicated sets of international relations. These practices made it impossible for a traditional "Chinese history" based solely on Han-ethnicity dynasties to address these dynasties that stretched beyond the Yin Mountains in the north, the arid regions in the west, Liaodong in the east, and Lingnan in the south. For these reasons, the Japanese historians Honda Minobu and Sugiyama Masaki put forward the idea of the "history of the Mongol era," which argued that it was this framework, and not the history of the Yuan dynasty (*Yuan shi*), that altered the writing of both world history and of Chinese history, because this version of history belongs neither to "Chinese history" nor to "world history." This model, they argued, went beyond narratives of Chinese history that were centered on the Yuan dynasty and instead viewed history from a larger, global space. Their approach gained the support of many scholars.

A similar example can be found in the history of the Qing dynasty, where in recent years a new trend, called the New Qing History, has developed in the United States. The New Qing History emphasizes that the Qing Empire was not the same as the dynasties found in the twenty-four canonical histories (*Ershisi shi*). The Manchu Qing ruler was a Khan whose subjects included Manchus, Mongols, Uighurs, Tibetans, Han Chinese, and central Asian ethnic groups, and was not a Chinese emperor in the traditional sense. The Manchus made use of parts of Confucianism, but, in essence, preserved unique aspects of Manchu culture and cultural identity. The Manchu Qing Empire, therefore, is not a synonym for "China," but rather as an empire that exceeded what we consider to be "China."[33] The current fashion in so-called New Qing studies in Europe, North America, and Japan has extended this emphasis on the independent nature of Manchuria or of Manchu culture.[34] Scholars working in this vein all emphasize that the history of the Qing is not the history of Qing-dynasty China, especially not of Han China. We can say that their discussions, on the one hand, extend debates that took place in the past among Japanese scholars about "foreign rulers" in China or "conquest dynasties"; on the other hand, they also show the influence of contemporary theoretical interest in going beyond the nation-state and emphasizing identities of marginal ethnic groups. This scholarship has deep significance: First, it preserves a historical narrative of dual or plural national

identities. Second, it emphasizes the historical processes by which minority or foreign ethnic groups influenced Han peoples. Third, it refuses to use a notion of "China" that is based on contemporary borders or on the Han ethnicity to look at the past. This is because, from the perspective of the New Qing History, to look at the past through the lens of China's territory, peoples, and culture as they are now would mean making history subservient to "China."

Both the perspective of the "history of the Mongol era" and the methods of the New Qing History have real scholarly value. The problem they share lies in whether, in their rejection of "Sinification" or of "China," they might also go to another extreme, one that ignores the continuing significance and influence of Han culture during the Mongol era and during the Manchu Qing dynasty and fails to address whether or not Han culture still had major significance for the entire Great Qing Empire.

5. *Postmodern Historiography.* Lastly, one other challenge to "China" can be found in postmodern theories of history, which also come from Europe and North America. The critique of modernity (*xiandaixing*) undertaken by postmodern historiography also involves a questioning of the legitimacy of the modern nation-state that emerged in the early modern period. In particular, since the arrival of theories about the nation as an "imagined community," attempts to question histories that are rooted in the perspective of the modern nation-state have revealed in profound ways how historical studies have misunderstood the nation and the state, and have pointed out the ways in which we customarily use the modern nation-state to imagine, understand, and tell the story of ancient states. These studies show that historical states often shift across time. The space they occupy grows or shrinks, and the peoples within them sometimes unite and sometimes separate from one another.

On the one hand, postmodern historiography's views on and ways of discussing the modern nation-state emerge from the colonial experience in places such as (in Asia) India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and from the peoples and states in the African Great Lakes region.[35] On the other hand, these perspectives also arise from early modern European history, during which time the reorganization of nations and states was a universal phenomenon. It should be pointed out, however, that, first of all, although China in ancient times went through periods of division, it was also

covered by a much larger "Han culture." Second, following the unification that took place under the Qin dynasty and the Han dynasty, people became accustomed to identifying with the early version of the geographic and cultural region of Hua-Xia, which they believed to be the civilized part of the world.[36] Third, because of the differences in size between the center and the margin and between Han and non-Han groups, Han politics, culture, and tradition enjoyed a high degree of continuity. For these reasons, then, neither a "Renaissance" nor a period in which the "empire" broke apart and reformed into a "nation-state" came to pass. Therefore, we must ask the following questions. First, should historians give consideration to those unique aspects of Chinese history that are different from European history? Second, can we say that the unity of Chinese and especially Han civilization, the overlap between where the Han people lived and the space of dynasties across history, the continuity of Han traditions, and the history of identification with Han political power are all coincidental and debatable? Third, is China a nation-state that only came to be established (according to Western divisions of history) in the early modern period?

We should recognize that local and regional narratives, Asian or East Asian narratives, Taiwan-centered narratives or "Great Khanate" narratives, or even narratives of bifurcated history all give us a new, multipoint perspective for researching Chinese history that leads us to recognize the complexity of the history of "China" and the real importance of those narratives.[37] These are theoretical issues that can be approached in an evenhanded way as scholars take up these challenges, move beyond these individual theories, and work to reestablish a narrative of Chinese history.

Historical China, Cultural China, and Political China: The Challenges "China" Poses to Western Theories of the Nation-State

The perspectives, theories, and methods in Chinese studies that were just discussed made for strong medicine for the Chinese scholarly world,

forcing us to reflect on whether "China" could serve as an unspoken, commonsense concept, and leading us to reconsider whether or not a culturally unified "China" actually exists.

As a Chinese historian, I want to explain again that this "China" did exist from the time of the Qin and Han dynasty onward, despite a variety of divisions and changes. I make this argument because:

1. Even though China's borders have often changed, the central region has been relatively stable, becoming very early on a place with commonly recognized territory and a unified politics, nationality, and culture; this region also comprised a historical world.
2. Even though there were periods of so-called conquest dynasties or foreign rule (for example, the Northern and Southern dynasties, the Five dynasties, the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the Manchu Qing dynasty, and so on), the cultures of foreign nationalities were continuously coming into and overlapping with China, just as the culture based largely on the Han ethnicity continuously melded with other cultures and underwent changes. The cultural tradition based on Han culture, however, extended across time in this region,[38] forming into a clear and distinct cultural identity and cultural mainstream. For these reasons, this culture also constitutes a civilization.
3. Regardless of how dynasties were established, they all believed that they were "China" or the "Middle Kingdom" and argued for the legitimacy of the dynasty in terms of the traditional Chinese world of ideas, such as the Five Elements or the use of a calendar based on imperial reigns. At the same time, the twenty-four dynastic histories and Chinese-language historical writings such as the *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (*Zizhi tongjian*) and the *Ten Comprehensive Encyclopedias* (*Shi tong*) also strengthened this idea of a state with cultural continuity.
4. The notion of All-under-Heaven, through which traditional culture imagined itself as the center of the world, and the tribute system, which depended on courtly ritual, also helped build up

> a consciousness of the Middle Kingdom (*Zhongguo*) among Chinese rulers, government ministers, the highly educated, and the common people.

Previously I mentioned the formation of a Chinese identity during the Song dynasty. What I would like to describe here is how the prosperous reigns of the Han and Tang dynasties were succeeded by a consciousness of the state that gradually emerged during the Song dynasty, not only in terms of culture but also in terms of politics and economics. For the following four key reasons, China formed a preliminary idea of "the state" in terms of its international environment, territorial borders, trade and economy, and national identity. First, with the continuous presence of the Liao dynasty, Xixia dynasty, Jin dynasty, and the Mongol Empire, a sense of the existence of countries equivalent to "enemy states" had already taken shape by the Song dynasty. The official *History of the Song* (*Song shi*) was the first such history to have separate chapters on "Biographies of Foreign States" (*Wai guo zhuan*) and "Biographies of Foreigners and Barbarians" (*Man Yi zhuan*), which shows evidence of ideas about international distinctions between inner and outer. Second, work undertaken at this time to "demarcate borders" (*kan jie*) demonstrated that clear ideas about borders and territory existed. Third, the emergence of designated centers of cross-border trade and the Maritime Trade Supervisorate (Shi bo si) demonstrate that ideas about borders had also come into the economy. Fourth, the Song dynasty's well-known ideas about the proper way of handling state affairs (*guo shi*), as well as their rejection of foreign peoples and cultures and attempts to strengthen their native culture, gradually formed into an early modern sense of the state and of identity. Despite our previous discussion of how "China" from the Song dynasty on faced three major dilemmas that caused it many problems, it nonetheless had a cultural identity, a shared history, a unified set of ideas about ethics, and highly organized state institutions and political systems, in addition to a space under its control whose location was basically clear. For these reasons, the formation of the early modern Chinese state is not necessarily related to European-style "early modernity."

This last point is especially true in terms of culture. The state territory centered around Han areas and a consciousness of the state led the

Chinese "state" to mature relatively early. Neo-Confucianism (*lixue*) achieved a high level of systemization, popularization, and acceptance as common sense because of support from the state, elites at the center, and the landed gentry. As a result, the sense of civilization that came from Confucian ethics expanded during the Song dynasty from urban to rural areas, from the center to the margin, and from the upper strata of society to the lower strata. These developments led China to have a civilizational unity at an early time. For these reasons, this virtually unspoken "state" became the Han Chinese people's basis for their historical memory, discursive space, and identification with their nation and state.

It is also for these reasons that the path taken in the formation of the Chinese nation is quite particular—or, put another way, the formation of the early modern nation-state in Europe is quite particular. I believe that there are problems with using European concepts and definitions such as empire or the nation-state directly and in a simple way to define and explain China in history. At least since the Song dynasty, "China" has had both the characteristics of a traditional imperial state and aspects that resemble early modern nation-states; it has resembled *both* a modern nation-state and a traditional civilizational community. For these reasons, theories that argue that traditional empires and modern nation-states belong to different historical eras not only do not accord with Chinese history but also do not fit with China's consciousness of itself as a state and its formation as a state. These same theories offer even fewer means to understand aspects of modern China such its territory, its peoples, and the state.

Many people treat theory like fashion—the newer, the better—and thus, as Western theories of moving beyond the nation-state gain ever more influence, scholars wrongly look down on national histories in the belief that it is backward and even nationalist to insist on writing national histories in this day and age. I ask in response: Can European history be understood this way, and can the history of Asia or China be understood this way? Why must we "rescue history from the nation" and not understand the nation within history?

Is East Asian History Possible? Do National Histories Still Have Meaning?

For European scholars, the writing of national histories may be related to the rise of the modern nation-states and attempts to use history to manufacture national identities. For them, therefore, "writing history beyond modernity" against the backdrop of a postmodern, globalized world has revolutionary significance. For countries in Asia and Africa that have experienced the history of colonization, the writing of national history undoubtedly confirms the idea of the state left over from the colonial era. For them, too, historical writing that goes beyond the nation-state is, of course, of great significance. For East Asian states, and especially for China, however, it still seems necessary to emphasize national histories even while recognizing the importance of global history.

Why is this the case? The reason is simple: history is not simply a history of civilizations but should also be the history of politics. Across history, the mutual connections and influences between civilizations exist at the same time as actions taken between states to exercise political control and divide territories. Whether in terms of the process of state formation or the influence of the state on culture, the history of nations and states in East Asia may in fact be different from Europe.

First, East Asia lacks a universal religion (like Catholicism) that exceeds the boundaries of the state or of the emperor's rule and functions as a platform or medium for communication and self-identification within communities. The various peoples spread across different states, therefore, lack a basis for communication and mutual identification through culture or faith.

Second, although the blending of different national groups occurred in China during such times as the Wei-Jin dynasties, Northern and Southern dynasties, the Mongol era, and the Qing dynasty, because there was not a great deal of mobility and movement of populations or overlap of political powers between Japan, Korea, and China, the divisions of territory, national groups, and culture between the three countries are largely stable and clear. Moreover, those major historical events that influenced politics, created culture, and formed identity in these three countries were guided in large part by the state or ruling

dynasty, and the state played a major role in shaping politics, religion, and culture.

Third, before the nineteenth century, this region lacked an educated elite whose influence transcended individual states and national groups. As a result, the lines between national perspectives are sharply drawn, as are ideas about differences between these countries.

Fourth, although China across history has occupied the position of a metropolitan state with a powerful emperor, in fact China did not have the ability to achieve absolute dominance over all states on its periphery. Ideas about the differences between Chinese and foreigner (racial differences) existed between these states, and since the early modern period each has gradually established a sense of agency based on its own intellectual traditions (as in "National Learning" [*Kokugaku*] in Japan and neo-Confucian learning [*Jujahak*] in Korea); each country has gradually strengthened its linguistic independence (as in the development of Japanese and Korean syllabaries and glossing systems); and, even more so each country has established a sense of its own independent history (as, in Japan's case, the writing of histories of the age of the gods and the focus on an uninterrupted line of succession, and, in Korea's case, legends of Dangun).

For these reasons, I believe that, at least in the near term, it would be very difficult for East Asia simply to become a "community" that would go beyond individual states, and thus national distinctions are still important for the way we think about history. This is because we must always remember that, in East Asian history after the Song and Yuan dynasties, China, Japan, and Korea had in fact already drifted in different directions. In particular, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, the differences between the three countries grew ever larger as they took varying paths and achieved differing results in politics, economics, and culture.[39] This is why, even with the growing popularity of narratives of global or East Asian history, I still emphasize the importance of national histories.

In fact, my argument is not an expansion of nationalist (or statist) historiography, but rather is a sign of caution toward nationalist (and statist) historiography. My agenda has a particular goal in mind: to achieve a sense of caution toward placing excessive emphasis on state (or governmental) power or placing excessive emphasis on national (or ethnic) consciousness

in the histories of East Asian countries, especially ancient China. Even if we say that the sense of caution is largely directed toward China today, the high level of centralization of power in China today and the excessive strength and size of the government also have their sources in history, and the sources in history must still be traced back to and clarified through the study of the history of ancient China.

In the Chinese scholarly world, in recent years there have been a number of discussions of concepts such as "autocracy" (*zhuanzhi*), "sovereign power" (*wangquan*), and "enfeoffment" (*fengjian*).[40] The goal of these discussions is to understand how "China" and its dynasties in history may or may not have been different from other "states" in terms of politics, economics, and culture. Beginning with the debate between Qian Mu (also Ch'ien Mu 1895–1990) and K. C. Hsiao (also Xiao Gongquan, 1897–1981), these discussions have continued down to the present day. The problem, however, is that if we only continue to "rectify names" (*zheng ming*) at the level of concepts and investigate issues through theory, then we may never reach a real conclusion. I believe, then, that people should keep the following phenomena about Chinese history in mind:

1. *The relationship between religion and imperial power.* Ever since the debates that began in the Eastern Jin dynasty about whether it was acceptable to say that "monks do not pay obeisance to kings" ended in a victory for imperial power, Buddhist and local religions (*daojiao*) gradually came under the management of officials. Confucian ideas about loyalty and filial piety combined with Buddhist ideas about karma and retribution, and thus Chinese religions, regardless of whether it was Buddhism, local religions, or other religions, were basically under imperial control. This situation was different from the status of religion in Japan and Europe.
2. *Relationships between localities and the center.* From the Qin dynasty onward, the state transformed from a system of enfeoffment (*fengjian zhi*) to a system of centralized administration (*junxian zhi*); from the Tang dynasty onward, the military moved from the control of local commanders to the central government, and Chinese culture tended to move from regional and local differences toward unity. Although local areas at times pulled away

from the center, they largely remained within a unified state. This state of affairs was also different from the Japanese *Han* domain system and the various states of the European Middle Ages.

3. *China's international relations with the outside world.* China's sense of self-centeredness, which was influenced by ideas about the distinctions between Chinese and foreigner, along with its sense of excessive pride (which was shaped by the tribute system), led to the notion that the emperor was not only the Son of Heaven who ruled over the officials and commoners of the Middle Kingdom but also the ruler of all the peoples of the myriad states. This idea that "All-under-Heaven is ruled by one ruler" was strengthened and even made mythical by the forms of ritual sacrifices to heaven on Mount Tai and to earth at Fenyin. In the East, traditional ideas that "under the skies, no land is not ruled by the king" and "just as there are no two suns in the sky, the state cannot have two rulers," were more deeply rooted than in the West, and therefore China's "imperial state" exerted even greater control over territory, officials, and the common people than what was found in the West.[41]
4. *China's internal national or ethnic relations.* Across history, ethnic groups that had originally been distinct from one another gradually melded together, especially by the time of the Qing dynasty, which eventually brought the Manchus, Mongolians, Hui, Tibetans, and Miao into the same territory, resulting in a multiethnic empire. This empire extends down to the present, which makes the imperial memory of traditional China continue to exist within the nation-state of modern China.

Compared with the Japanese concept of uninterrupted imperial succession, on the surface it may appear that Chinese history cannot be cleanly linked together through each dynasty. We should see, however, that although since ancient times China has been through periods of dissolution or separation, this "state" seemingly has already been narrated by one "history," one that does not resemble a mere imagined community described by postmodern theory.[42] This history proceeds from the time that the formation of a strong, central political power was made possible by the unification achieved by the Qin and Han dynasties

to the cultural unity that was established from the Tang and Song dynasties onward, down to the unified dynasty based on the Han people that was reestablished by the Ming, and finally down through the Great Qing Empire, during which the Manchus entered China proper; brought Mongolia into the dynasty's territory; converted peripheral territories into regular administrative regions; established control over Xinjiang; stationed military forces in Tibet and established the Golden Urn process for selecting lamas; and brought together Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, Miao, and Han into one vast empire, thereby defining the territory of modern China. In China, then, we often hear statements that begin with, "From the time that Pangu created the earth and sky, down from the times of the Three Kings and Five Emperors of antiquity (*san huang wu di*), down to the present day" and "Where does one start reading in the twenty-five dynastic histories?" Of course we feel they are too linear and overemphasize Han Chinese dynasties, but should we not also consider why this "state" is always narrated by one "history"?

I support the writing of global history, but I see no need to throw the baby out with the bathwater and treat national histories as if they were modes of narrating history that are outdated, conservative, or useless, especially when rewriting the history of politics. Of course, I want to be careful to point out that, in narratives of Chinese history, although the narrative space occupied by "national history" is the "nation-state," it need not take the current borders, ethnic groups, and politics of the modern nation-state and read that back into "history." For these reasons, it does not necessarily resemble the situation that Prasenjit Duara has described in which we need to "rescue history from the nation."[43] This can be achieved if the "nation" described in this type of national history does not doggedly maintain a narrative with unchanging boundaries, and does not limit "history" so that it remains within boundaries and borders that are traced backward into the past from the modern nation. Regarding the "China" in Chinese history, for example, I have said many times that "China is a dynamic entity within history, dividing and recombining with various dynasties, and with borders changing even more often, set as they are by the central governments of successive dynasties."[44] More important, the dynasties, ethnic groups, and borders of this "China" were always shifting, overlapping, and blending together across history.

I believe that if those who write national histories recognize the historical changes that took place within the nation and the state themselves, then they will not fall into the trap of allowing the "nation" to kidnap "history" in its original form. In this way, the writing of national histories will continue to have significance in China.

Conclusion: Understanding "China" and Chinese History from Different Historical, Cultural, and Political Perspectives

In *Here in "China" I Dwell,* I argued that three points needed to be observed in the work of reestablishing historical narratives of "China." Allow me to repeat them here.

First, in terms of its historical significance, "China" is a shifting China, not only because of the many cases of dissolution and unifications that occurred across the dynasties but also because the territory and borders controlled by the central governments of the dynasties across history changed even more frequently. We absolutely must not make simple claims that a place "has been a part of Chinese territory across history."[45]

Second, in terms of its cultural significance, China is a relatively stable cultural community, one that forms the basis of the "nation" of "China," especially in the central territories of Han-ethnicity China. This is a relatively distinct and stable China, a civilization where "carriages all have wheels of the same size, all writing is in the same characters, for conduct there are the same rules," and that possesses a cultural unity.[46] It makes no sense to place excessive emphasis on deconstructing (the nation-state of) China.[47]

Third, in terms of its political significance, "China" often cannot be equated with a dynasty and also does not refer to a certain government. Can the government (that is, political power) be equated with the state? And can the state be directly equated with the "motherland" (*zuguo*)? These are concepts that still need to be clarified. Political identities often influence cultural identities, and they can even wipe out historical identities. Even today, some people still unthinkingly take the government to be the same as the state, or take the state that formed across history to be the motherland that must always be the object of their loyalty, creating, in turn, many misunderstandings, animosities, and biases.