CHAPTER 1

NARRATING "THE HAN"

The premodern or imperial period in Chinese history, which ended in the late nineteenth century, and the modern, nationalist period that succeeded it needed and created different forms of "the Han" and different meanings of Han-ness. Despite some continuities, these two historical eras differ significantly with regard to how the Han category was imagined and how it functioned on local and statewide levels, highlighting its temporal variability and instability. In addition to variability in time, Han-ness has also been spatially fragmented. In the imperial era as well as today, various local communities have uniquely created their own Han markers and creatively explored the capacities of this identity. This variability, instability, and fragmentation contrasts with teleological attempts to narrate the Han as an evolutionarily developed category and with the linear narrations of national history (compare Duara 1995; Harrell 1996a, 4–5).

The contemporary category of Han *minzu* is not a product of an evolutionary development but an invention of the genealogization and nationalization processes initiated in the nineteenth century. However, Han identity—intertwined to be sure with Hua, Huaxia, and Zhongguoren identities—existed long before the rise of Han and Chinese nationalisms and is not a modern invention. The entangled nature of Han-ness has yielded diametrically opposed conceptualizations within and outside China. Organic, teleological, and diachronic representations have been

suggested, most prominently by Fei Xiaotong (1989) and Xu Jieshun in his monumental 1999 work *Snowball: An Anthropological Analysis of Han Nationality* (Xueqiu: Hanzu de renleixue fenxi).[1] At the same time, Han-ness has been discussed in Western scholarship as an "invented tradition," an "empty" identity existing solely as an "other" to so many "minority nationalities" represented as particular, colorful, backward, and sexually exotic (Gladney 1991, 1994; Schein 2000).

This book proposes that Han-ness is neither an outcome of a consistent linear process of organic evolution nor solely an "other" of the minor *minzu*.[2] While contrasting with minority "others" is essential to the negotiation of Han identity at the scale of inter-*minzu* interactions, my data demonstrate that Han-ness means more to Han individuals than "being ordinary" or simply "not being a minority." Individual Han in their fragmented identity negotiations perpetuate this collective identity by investing it with locally significant meanings. The fictionality of a linear history of "the Han" does not make Han-ness less meaningful to Han individuals, nor to non-Han "others." In China's multiethnic borderlands, Han-ness is an identity that clearly matters in daily inter-*minzu* interactions. Although Han-ness loses some of its strength and becomes fragmented by other identification paradigms at the scale of Han-to-Han interactions, it is definitely not an "empty" identity.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the major historical shifts in the framing of Han-ness. The identity has been historically contingent, and administrative regimes have tried, with varying success, to determine its meaning and its scope. The Han signifier has obviously referred to different categories of people in different dynastic periods. The historical analysis in the present study focuses principally on the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynastic periods, when the scope of Han denomination began to resemble that of today. In stark contrast to the preceding Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), the Ming meaning of the Han signifier included both southern and northern Chinese.[3] Beyond the historical instability of the Han category, major differences in the narration and "density" of Han-ness/Chinese-ness between the premodern and modern temporalities merit consideration. Significant differences in technologies of rule and claims to—but also capacity to—control the population resulted in different efficacies of the imperial and modern political regimes to control the boundaries of the Han category. Parallel to such administrative efforts,

decentralized and localized attempts to determine the content and roles of Han-ness have occurred too and have had major influence on articulations of Han-ness.

HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY OF THE HAN CATEGORY AND HAN IDENTITY

The Han category derives its name from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), which gained power over the unified Chinese empire after the short Qin rule (221–206 BCE). In the imperial tradition, the Han denomination applied not only to the dynasty itself but also to its subjects and did not vanish after the demise of the dynasty. The name continued to be used in some contexts for and by the subjects of later dynasties, along with earlier names such as Xia and Hua and subsequent dynastic names such as Sui, Tang, or Song. The Han identifier was unstable between the sixth and fifteenth centuries (Elliott 2012); at times and in some areas it was used in similar contexts like Zhongguoren (People of Central Lands, Chinese), and at other times it referred to categories of people divided by administrative borders of competing kingdoms. In the history of "Han-becoming," nomadic and seminomadic peoples north of the Central Plains played a key role in the fourth century in initiating the shift in the meaning of Han away from a dynastic designation to something of an ethnonym (Elliott 2012). Under the Mongols, the Han identifier was used to refer to one of the four classes of people into which Mongol rulers divided their subjects. Including the Mongols, who occupied the highest place in this hierarchy, these were Semuren (People of Various Categories, including other Central Asians, Europeans, and Muslims), Hanren (Han People, including northern Han/Chinese, Koreans, Khitan/Qidan, and Jurchen/Nüzhen), and Nanren (Southerners, referring to Han/Chinese and non-Han groups in southern China) (Gladney 1991, 18; Weng 2001).[4]

In contrast, the Ming employed "Han" as an inclusive designation for inhabitants of both northern and southern Chinese provinces, areas divided for two to three hundred years prior between different political regimes. The Ming are thus largely responsible for the popularization of Han as an empirewide identifier (Elliott 2012). Still, although the purview of the Han identifier came to resemble that of today, "Han" held a very different meaning, devoid of the racial overtones it acquired in the late

nineteenth century with the introduction of the terms *zu* (racial lineage) and *minzu* (nation). Moreover, apparently even under the Qing, the Han identity was not the most often evoked one, not even in the multiethnic borderlands of Yunnan where the presence of "barbarian others" would seem to favor such identification (Giersch 2012, 191–209). On the contrary, until the nineteenth century, home-place identities were evoked most often for the purpose of identification. Only in the nineteenth century, in an interplay of empirewide and local developments, did the relationship between the unifying notion of Han-ness and home-place identities begin to reshuffle. The Manchu's increasing reliance on genealogies to differentiate themselves from Han subjects was one important impetus to this process. Growing connectivity, circulation, and mobility throughout the empire made up another.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a critical time in the transformation of Chinese culturalism into racialized nationalism, resulting in the formulation of a racially exclusionary understanding of the Han/Chinese nation (Dikötter 1996). Numerous studies demonstrate that Han-ness/Chinese-ness were meaningful in premodern China; to be identified as such was particularly advantageous in local power struggles.[5] Yet these identities were not compatible with the notion of the Han/Chinese nation put forth by Sun Yat-sen and other nationalism-motivated revolutionaries.[6] In his lectures, Sun repeatedly complained that the Han/Chinese lacked a national identity, that they were a "sheet of loose sand."[7] Reformulation and reinforcement of the Han/Chinese identity thus became a primary task for the revolutionaries. They set out to achieve this aim through inventing a legendary common ancestor of "the Han" (the Yellow Emperor), as well as by creating new national symbols and a national history.[8] In order to morally construct the revolution against the Manchu Qing, who had continued to cultivate many traditions associated with Chinese-ness, the revolutionary party strived to create a clear boundary between the Han and Manchu through constructing a racial distinction between the unitary Han race (*zhongzu*, *renzhong*, *zhong*, *zu*) and the race of the oppressive Manchu (Mullaney 2011, 23–24). By contrasting "the Han" with this powerful "other," especially in the pre-1912 period, the revolutionaries hoped that Han/Chinese, fragmented along strong kin and place identities, would begin to imagine themselves as one national community bound by a unitary national identity. However,

despite the determination of the revolutionaries, and the later Communist Minzu Classification Project that further naturalized the Han *minzu* as a unitary national majority, Han-ness remains intertwined with other collective attachments related to, among other things, place, livelihood, occupation, and nation.[9]

Because Han-ness has been framed differently in various historical settings, has been fragmented and intertwined with other identities, and has been claimed by or denied to various groups, it is not possible to talk about "the Han" as a product of one continuous historical tide. Nonetheless, such linear histories thrive in Chinese governmental publications and in academic discourse. Xu Jieshun (2012, 118) offers an example of this narrative, arguing, "Like all concrete objects in the universe, all of which have origins followed by histories of formation, evolution, and development, the Han nationality underwent a similar process of formation, evolution, and development, during which its plurality gradually coagulated into a unity." Although the present study and other related scholarship posit that Han-ness is not a product of a consistent historical growth, Han-ness continues to be imagined as such by contemporary Han. Though de facto constructed and fragmented, it is today a primordially framed identity, just as it was in the communities that identified with it in the past. In this sense, Han-ness is both a new and an old identity. As a collective identifier, it has a long history; yet who was Han and what it meant to be Han has drastically differed from one historical frame to another, and from one location to another. Given, then, that its scope, meaning, and roles continue to shift, Han-ness is also a new and continuously reinvented identity.

The tools, instruments, narratives, functions, institutional backing, distribution mechanisms, and mechanisms controlling the meaning and boundaries of Han-ness changed dramatically in the twentieth century. Once conceptualized as a borderless "all under heaven" (*tianxia*), ruled by a moral ruler who was expected to follow his "way" (*dao*), the empire was much less omnipresent and pervasive than the modern state. The relatively fragmented nature of imperial control can be attributed to several factors, including slow communication channels, isolation from power centers, a heterogeneous administrative system (with vast non-Han regions of the empire ruled indirectly by ethnic chiefs), and the nonexistence of mass media. The empire did not possess the same penetrating power that modern states, and the modern Chinese state in particular, exercise over their

citizens. Moreover, in the premodern period, Han-ness was only tenuously linked to a territory understood as a concretely delineated place.[10] This differs clearly from late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century China, when the link between Han-ness and the territorial state (*guo*) began to be massively promoted. Han-ness in the premodern and the modern periods must thus by definition be different. Without the pervasive power of the modern state, the unifying power of state institutions, and modern communication and governing technologies, Han-ness in imperial times could never achieve the degree of "density" and internal connectivity that it has today. An examination of these temporal lines of differentiation will help provide a foundation for the analysis of contemporary Han-ness.

PREMODERN HAN-NESS

What constituted Han-ness was subject to much change and contestation in the prenational period, including what the Han identifier implied and how it functioned locally—who self-identified as Han, who was identified as Han by others, who was denied Han-ness and for what reasons. Alternating between intertwined and distinct, Han-ness and Chinese-ness (represented by historical identifiers such as Zhongguoren, Xia, Hua, Huaxia, and the contemporary *Zhonghua minzu*, the "Chinese nation") continue to complicate historical analysis (Elliott 2012).[11] Moreover, when compared with the present day, premodern Han-ness appears to be a much more open identity category (Harrell 2001, 320).[12] Indeed, Han-ness historically could be acquired by assuming behaviors associated with this identity and by "documenting" descent from Han ancestors.[13] Hence, who identified as Han was rather flexible, even if identity choices were restricted by the recognition of these identities as socially plausible by both other "us" and other "them." The institutions that today create the impression of neat *minzu* identity boundaries in Communist China were missing from the premodern era; as such it is virtually impossible to draw a clear semantic boundary between the notions of Han-ness and Chinese-ness. This is compounded by the fact that these two English terms disintegrate into numerous designations in the Chinese language, designations that never had institutions to guard their consistent usage. These terms and these identities wander through history, at times united and at others times and locations distinct. Thus, in the analysis below, I do

not artificially separate them; rather, I use Han-ness and Chinese-ness in an intertwined way to reflect their interpenetrations. When other scholars are quoted, I employ the identifiers they use. Observing how scientific naming conventions shift over time adds yet another critical dimension to this terminological complexity.

Markers of Premodern Han-ness

Much like contemporary Han-ness, premodern Han-ness/Chinese-ness was characterized by concurrent coherence and fragmentation. Through channels of imperial bureaucracy, as well as by population mobility motivated by sojourning, pilgrimage, and trade (Duara 1993, 7), some markers of Han-ness/Chinese-ness were distributed across the empire (e.g., the sequence of mortuary rituals [Watson 1993], or adherence to Confucian morality). At the same time, those who identified themselves as Han were divided by the boundaries of home place, lineage, occupation, family names, settlement patterns, migration histories, purported ancestors, language, and more. Each of these elements may have at one time been framed as more or less Han and thus more or less "cultured." Eventually, the most powerful groups usually determined locally what Han-ness was and then claimed the identity for themselves.[14] Similar to today, Han-ness in premodern China was an object of social bargaining. Through its intrinsic link to institutionalized power,[15] Han-ness/Chinese-ness offered resources to draw upon in struggles for social positioning and was thus an important stake in many local settings.[16] Belonging to the Han/Chinese world was made socially attractive through the category's claimed cultural superiority over the "uncultured" ones who lived beyond the boundaries of civilization. Given its advantages, some not-yet Han attempted to acquire Han identity in order to access the material and symbolic resources it offered (Brown 2004). In other situations, some Han/Chinese found it equally advantageous to assume non-Han identities, particularly when living in imperial borderlands under ethnic chiefs.[17] That identity switches in premodern China were much less restricted than today, however, does not mean that boundaries between the Han/Chinese and their "others" were insignificant in identification and categorization processes. Rather, premodern Chinese-ness emerged from an inherent tension. On the one hand, it was an inclusionary identity acquired by assuming

certain markers. On the other hand, it derived from an intrinsic distinction between the "cultured" Han (or Huaxia, Hua, Zhongguoren) and the "barbarian" Yi (Leibold 2007, 22).

Drawing on studies conducted by historians, it appears that some Han markers were more universal and widely practiced, while others were local and meaningful only in specific communities. To accurately contrast contemporary markers of Han-ness with imperial-era markers of Han-ness/Chinese-ness, I turn now to some of these earlier markers. This discussion is not meant as a complete list of Han-ness/Chinese-ness boundaries in the premodern period. Rather, the discussion signals the complexity and multidimensionality of this identity that combined elements of descent with ideas of culturally negotiated belonging. The primary objective of identity markers was to draw the boundary between the Han/Chinese, who were imagined as cultured, and "others," who were imagined as exactly opposite. This practice of juxtaposition is at the heart of all ethnic and national boundary-making processes. While ethnicity in the premodern period was not affected by the institutions and penetrating presence characteristic of the modern Chinese state, the very processes of boundary making and maintenance were basically the same. Any "us" requires "them" for the purpose of identification; thus, the active reproduction of boundaries between "the Han" and their "others" has been a universal process, one not limited to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist transformations. Still, the identifiers, vocabulary, and images framing the Han/Chinese identity do differ.

At the heart of premodern notions of Han-ness was Confucianism-influenced imagery, which contrasted culture and refinement—associated with Han-ness/Chinese-ness—with wildness and primitiveness, or everything beyond the limits of Han/Chinese culture (Dikötter 1992, 2–3). This differentiation is vividly reflected in the designation of the Han dynasty's policy toward the non-Han as the "policy of reins and bridle" (*jimi zhengce*). Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* (Shiji) reports that "four kinds of savages are governed by reins and bridle like the cattle" (Zhi si Yi ru niuma zhi shou jimi) (Gong 1992, 1).[18] Although not bound to any strictly delineated territory, the Chinese understanding of culture was inherently spatial by the late Zhou/early Han dynastic periods and imagined as a series of concentric squares.[19] The central square was occupied by the imperial domain (the so-called Jiuzhou, or "Nine Prefectures"), and

territories further from this imaginary center were believed to be inhabited by uncultured "savages." These "savages" were distinguished by the Han/Chinese according to criteria of distance from "the center," cardinal directions based around the center, and degree of civilization as judged in relation to the center. The most distant populations were referred to as *wai* (outside), while those living closer to the center were *nei* (inside). The savages in the inside zone were further divided into *sheng* (raw, unfamiliar, uncultured) and *shu* (cooked, familiar, more cultured), depending on their perceived degree of integration to Han life ways, as discussed below. The "barbarians" were further divided as compass points into the Di (northern), Man (southern), Rong (western) and Yi (eastern) (Eberhard 1942; Müller 1980, 54–61; Heberer 1989, 17–18). Already by Sima Qian's time, however, the term Yi was applied as a more general label referring to non-Han/Chinese at the southwestern borders of the empire. It was also used as a broader identifier similar in meaning to the later term Fan, and sometimes it was combined with Fan, as in Fanyi.

Although the external wild space was believed to be populated by semi-human "savages," these were nevertheless viewed by some Han as potentially civilizable. This civilizing process was referred to as either *laihua* (transformation by proximity), Hanhua (Hanification), or *yong Xia bian Yi* (lit., "transformation of Yi savages by the ways of the Xia"). While scholars rightly argue that the theory of sinicization is largely a myth—one as willingly transmitted by the Han as by Western sinologists—the broad differentiation into cultured versus wild space, the contrasting of Han (or Hua, Huaxia, Zhongguoren) and Yi, and the belief in the transforming power of Han culture all offered handy tools for redrawing the boundaries around Han-ness/Chinese-ness and for constructing the ideas of cultural and political superiority.[20] In localized communities, this juxtaposition of culture and wildness was rendered graspable through mundane markers that directly referenced the lives of those who zealously communicated this identification.

Family names (*xing*) constituted a powerful marker of Chinese-ness and culture long before the Ming era (Ebrey 1996). Access to family names, especially monosyllabic family names, was limited by imperial law.[21] Theoretically, only the inhabitants of the imperial domain had family names, while the "uncultured" were referred to using general terms for whole groups or were given names that reflected the sound of their foreign

self-denominations. Such general terms comprised character components such as "grass" and "dog" to emphasize these people's nonsedentary lifestyles and purported wildness (Müller 1980, 60–61; Thierry 1989, 78).[22] However, family names could also be acquired. One way to do so was through military service to the emperor. Many non-Han leaders accepted Han family names on the strength of imperial decrees. Such "convert" families would seek out alliances with Han/Chinese lineages that shared the same family name, thereby reinforcing their newly acquired identity (Eberhard 1962, 199–200). Clearly, then, the boundary drawn by limited access to family names was not very rigid. Also, the Han were never endogamous; as such, intermarriage was a popular means of entering the Han family-name groups (Yuan and Zhang 2002, 6–7).[23] Manipulations of genealogies, changes in the form of family names (from double to monosyllabic), and the invention of Han/Chinese ancestors were additional ways by which non-Han entered the Han family-name system.

Patrilineal descent from Han/Chinese ancestors as demonstrated through genealogies was a key claim to belonging to the cultured world. Even more than family names, this marker was clearly prone to reinvention. For instance, in genealogies from the Song period (960–1279), hardly anyone admitted descent from non-Han people in China's South (Ebrey 1996, 23), though such descent was highly probable. The altar with ancestral tablets—"evidence" of patrilineal descent from Han/Chinese ancestors—served to claim a legitimate place within the sphere of culture.[24] It was desirable for a lineage to have an ancestral home place within the Central Plains of northern China, where the first dynastic states came into being. A home place in the North made for an important stake in power negotiations, especially in southern China. Thus, powerful southern lineages deliberately traced their origins "back" to the northern plains in their genealogies, whether the connection was invented, actual, or both.

Rituals and beliefs were other markers that signaled belonging to the Han/Chinese world. It has been argued that in the late imperial and early modern eras, orthopraxy, or the form of rituals practiced, was shared by Chinese throughout the empire (Watson 1993, 87–89; Cohen 1994, 93). For instance, the funerary rites of Chinese elites and commoners were identical in basic structure, implying that the proper sequence of rites, or "anxiety over the practice of rituals," was central to people's validity as Chinese (Watson 1993, 87–89).[25] This arguably allowed for the creation of a basic

unitary ritual system across the empire that at the same time retained local elements. In a similar vein, some scholars have argued that observing "forms" was always of central importance in the patriarchal and strongly hierarchical society of imperial China (Fei 1992, 132). As it was not morally permitted to rise against tradition and superiors in the social hierarchy, the only way for those within the hierarchy to subvert it was to continue in the forms while changing the content. The importance of forms or rituals (*li*), also translated as "propriety," "etiquette," or "proper behavior," extended far beyond funerary or life-cycle rites; indeed, rituals regulated virtually the whole world of social relationships.[26] The *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu* 1994), compiled by the disciples of Confucius around the fourth century BCE, repeatedly refer to the superiority of ritual, propriety, and etiquette over personal expression.[27]

Beginning in the second century BCE, the dynastic governments issued instructions for how to conduct rituals properly. With the help of other popular books such as *Family Rituals*, written by Zhu Xi in the twelfth century, the scholarly and bureaucratic elite successfully shaped popular practice (Harrison 2001, 24–25). Still, although properly performed rites were integral to late imperial Chinese-ness, the Chinese also shared common beliefs (Rawski 1988, 23–32). These included a belief in the absence of radical dualism of body and soul, characteristic of Chinese culture from at least the Bronze Age, and a belief in multiple souls, registered at least since the Han dynastic period. Moreover, imperial-era Chinese shared beliefs about the continuity of kinship links between the living and dead. Ancestors were believed to be capable of mediating with deities on behalf of their descendants. This translated into a broadly practiced cult of ancestors, despite the imperial ban on ancestral cults among commoners until the Song era (Rawski 1988, 29–30; Zheng 2001, 270–77).

The boundary between "culture" and "wildness," and thus between Han/Chinese and non-Han/Chinese, was also constructed and maintained through customs such as foot binding. In Taiwan, by the twentieth century, foot binding was "the most salient marker" that distinguished Han and aboriginal women (Brown 1996, 62). Other aspects of easier to attain Han-ness/Chinese-ness were also adopted on the island from Han/Chinese migrants and officials. Huang Shujing, a Chinese official who visited Taiwan in 1722, observed that some Chinese clothing, especially embroidered robes, had become popular among village headmen

as a status symbol (Harrison 2001, 26). Fashion was also extensively used by mainland Han/Chinese in identity negotiations in the Ming, Qing, and Republican eras, as well as in Communist China (Finnane 2008). For instance, revision of Han fashions was an important element of Zhu Yuanzhang's (1328–98) attempts to rid the Ming empire of the "barbarian ways" of the preceding Mongol Yuan dynasty. These efforts included the campaign to abandon close-fitting tunics favored by the Mongols and return to the style of the Tang. Although the campaign was partially successful, the influence of northern peoples on clothing worn by the Han/Chinese proved difficult to eliminate (Finnane 2008, 44–48).

Wedding customs were additional opportunities to perform the distinction between Han and non-Han. For example, wealthy eighteenth-century Cantonese families often delayed the transfer of the bride to the groom's house. This custom was used to emphasize their Han-ness, in contrast to Boat People, who practiced an immediate transfer of the bride. At the same time, this "Han custom" would have been a shocking example of barbarism to the Han/Chinese in the North, who practiced the transfer of the bride as an integral part of the wedding ceremony (Harrison 2001, 31). Interestingly, the delayed transfer of the bride has a striking resemblance to the marriage practices of the contemporary Yao and She in Guangdong. Some southwestern non-Han peoples, including some Yi, also practice a delayed bride transfer (Stevan Harrell, personal communication, 2014; Harrison 2001). Thus, in an ironic twist, what was likely a non-Han/Chinese custom was adopted by those who claimed to be Han/Chinese and used as a marker of this identity. As evidenced by this example, while some customs and rituals were relatively universal and adhered to by Han from various social groups and geographical locations, others were invented and made meaningful only locally. In this sense, Han-ness was and remains both a local identity that has to be made locally meaningful through salient symbols and associations, and an identity that extends beyond the local community through its link to bureaucratic power.

The Confucianism-driven emphasis on writing and literature (*wen*) as central elements of Han culture (*wenhua*, lit., "process of becoming transformed into a literate being") also exercised fundamental influence on the idea of Han-ness. Non-Han/Chinese could assume some central markers of Han-ness by learning to write Chinese characters, read, compose poetry and essays, and recite Confucian classics. Although literacy alone

did not make them Han/Chinese, it did facilitate links to Han/Chinese families and further socialization into this identity. From the perspective of twentieth-century nationalism-inspired intellectuals, the Han/Chinese script (Hanzi, Zhongwen) and its extensive body of literature were critical to the constructing of an unbroken continuum of "the Han," beginning with the first mythical ancestors and leading to the contemporary Han *minzu*.[28] In one scholar's account, the Chinese writing system "has bridged the past, present, and future of the Han, enabling this nationality to systematically record their entire history in documents written in Chinese characters" (Xu 2012, 120). Practices of glossing, citations, and "appropriation" of earlier terms by later commentators have been crucial in constructing this history (Chin 2012). Such efforts have helped create an impression of a historical movement as "produced only by antecedent causes rather than by complex transactions between the past and the present" (Duara 1995, 4).

From yet another angle, Han/Chinese script and literature contributed greatly to the constructing of "the Han" as a linguistic community, in spite of the extreme diversity of spoken languages. Since the Qin-era unification of script in the third century BCE, the Chinese script has arguably been one of the "most efficient instruments of political unification" (Gernet 1988, 37–39). A common written language certainly played a unifying role, especially among the Han bureaucratic elites recruited through the system of imperial examinations and appointed to positions in the centralized bureaucracy (Harrison 2001, 11).[29] Even if they were likely at first a class marker and not a universal marker of Han-ness, characters and written language as important Han/Chinese signifiers increased as the number of literate people grew. Currently, as my research data demonstrate, the script is one of the most often evoked symbols of Han-ness. Yuan and Zhang (2002, 7) argue that "without Chinese/Han script [Hanzi] there would be no Han." At the very least, it would be much more difficult to construct the Han category's temporal continuity.

Occupation was also a marker of premodern Han-ness/Chinese-ness. Occupations could be classified as more or less cultured and, accordingly, more or less Han/Chinese. The cultured way to live and work was to become a learned official, peasant, or artisan (Eberhard 1962). Pastoral and nomadic ways of living were disrespected; indeed, pastoralism as a lifeway was generally ascribed to "barbarians" (Thierry 1989, 76–78), likely

due to its incompatibility with the Han/Chinese ideas of filial piety, territorial lineages, burial, and ancestral worship. Sea-bound occupations were also viewed negatively, for these jobs occurred in the liminal space between land and the sea, imagined as the realm of evil spirits. Han who engaged in pastoral and sea-bound occupations were regarded as "less Han," less human, and more barbarian. The Boat People (Danmin) of Guangdong, Fujian, and Guangxi are among the best studied of these categories. Although nominally Han, the Boat People—the majority of whom relied on the sea as their main source of income[30]—were excluded from imperial examinations and ascribed a much lower social status by Hakka, Hokkien, and Punti who inhabited the same areas.[31] The degree of separateness between Boat People and other groups in southern China's coastal areas was sufficient for some Boat People to apply for status as a distinct *minzu* in the 1950s. Following a 1954 field study conducted by a group of Chinese ethnologists, however, their application was rejected. Boat People then became "reconfirmed" in their Han-ness, together with the Punti, Hakka, and Hokkien, who had discriminated against them (Wang, Zhang, and Hu 1998, 120–21).

The Boat People were one of the groups involved in the empirewide division of dynastic subjects into the categories of *jianmin* (demeaned people, déclassé) and *liangmin* (commoners, decent people), categories to a great degree based on occupational specialization. "Decent people" consisted of landlords, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants. "Demeaned people," on the other hand, were associated with low or despised occupations; at least some of them were former slaves (Eberhard 1962). The déclassé, though Han, were legally excluded from participation in imperial exams and were registered as distinct from decent people. Even after they were emancipated from legal discrimination by a decree of Emperor Yongzheng in 1723, the demeaned people were socially discriminated against as "barbarian" well into the twentieth century.[32] Regarded as improper, their ways of earning a living excluded them from Han-ness by those who had the power to claim Han-ness for themselves and were in a need of an "other" to make their claims viable.

The premodern and modern periods have been characterized by significant differences in technologies of rule and capacity to control the boundaries of Han-ness/Chinese-ness. Although the imperial Han/Chinese marked the boundaries of their identity through family names,

rituals, occupations, patrilineal descent, and certain customs, access to this identity group was institutionally restricted to a much lesser extent than in contemporary China. "Others" could typically try to assume some of the markers of Han-ness and strive to be recognized in this new identity by other Han. Clearly, then, before today's institutionalized Han-ness, membership in the category was more negotiable. Moreover, it appears that locality bonds, occupation, and territorial lineage identities were not only much more powerful but also much more salient than Han-ness as organizing principles among the Han/Chinese in the premodern period (Fei 1980, 1992; Lin 1998). Even into the Republican period (1912–49), for instance, home-place identities had a tremendous impact on the self-organization of Han migrants in larger cities (Naquin and Rawski 1987; Goodman 1992; Cole 1996). Hence, while Han-ness/Chinese-ness was certainly a meaningful identity that played an important role in processes of social and ethnic inclusion and exclusion, it coexisted with other powerful collective identities, including territorial and kin identities that were arguably more immediate and overwhelming. Also, because the reach of imperial control was limited, the boundaries of Han-ness could not be set and guarded by state institutions to the extent they are today, where almost every Chinese citizen has a personal ID that states her or his *minzu*. Imperial Han-ness was not only less regulated, total, and institutionalized than contemporary Han-ness; it also had a much smaller capacity as a paradigm of mobilization.

In the early twentieth century, the rise of the idea of a modern Chinese state effected a differentiation between the previously intertwined identity labels of Han and Chinese (Zhongguoren). With the formation of the first republic, the two categories began drifting apart in official political discourse but were never completely untangled. The Han category became one of the five major racial lineages (*zu*) that were expected to join their territories to form the first Republic of China. Besides the Han, these were the Manchu, Tibetans, Mongols, and the various Muslim groups subsumed under the term Hui. The term Zhongguoren (Chinese), on the other hand, gradually expanded in scope and, similar to *Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation), came to signify the national community of Chinese citizens.[33] This came to include the five major races as well as other non-Han groups who inhabited the extensive territory of the new Republican state.

MODERN HAN-NESS

The shift from culturalism to racialized nationalism, a shift that transformed the Han category from relatively open and inclusive to more exclusive, began gathering momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century. The change followed the increasing reification of genealogies as the central element of Manchu identity by the ruling Manchu dynasty. While genealogies and ancestry as significant markers of Manchu identity were already being explored by the Manchu in the mid-eighteenth century, in the second half of the nineteenth century, and paralleling the rise of Han nationalism, the notion of genealogical descent expanded to include the Manchu as a group, not as individual lineages (Crossley 1987, 1999).[34] Collective descent became the central component of a process that contrasted the Han and the Manchu for the sake of identity building in each of these two categories.[35] It was during the Taiping War (1851–64) that the term *zu* (lineage) was introduced by the Taiping to refer to the umbrella categories of Manchu, Han, and Mongols (Crossley 1997, 189; Lipman 1996, 108–9). Still, in the reformist writings from the pre-1898 period, the social Darwinism–inspired rhetoric of the racial war between the white and yellow races—with the Han and Manchu struggling jointly as the yellow race against the white imperial powers—dominated how the need for political change was articulated. The differentiation between the Han and "Manchu oppressors" blamed for bringing about the demise of "China" emerged more clearly only after the 1898 Hundred Days Reform. In the wake of the failed reform, the rhetoric of the yellow and white races was abandoned by the revolutionaries in favor of a more specific descent-based distinction between the Han and Manchu (Chow 2001, 55).

In order to construct the "national" (Han) revolution against "foreign" powers (both Western imperialists and Manchu), diversified cultural Han-ness had to be channeled into a more explicit and cohesive form. The bond of and with Han-ness needed to be reformulated and reinforced; accordingly, new terms, symbols, images, and rituals were invented to focus people's attention on this identity. Although Han identity underwent some transformations during the late Qing era, the Han were still far from the coherence that Sun Yat-sen and other revolutionaries deemed necessary to become qualified as a nation. Han-ness was meaningful in local settings, but it was not particularly compatible with the ideal of a

nation that Sun and others cherished, one defined in racial terms as a community of descent linked through common livelihood, spoken language, religion, customs, and habits.[36] To Sun, the existing attachment to Han-ness was insufficient for national mobilization. In many of his lectures, he complained about this unsatisfactory national unity: instead of a sense of a shared national past and future, the Han were fragmented by "clanism" and "native place sentiments."[37] Still, Sun viewed these territorial and kin attachments with possibility; they could constitute a useful foundation out of which a stable national community would grow quickly:

> If we are to recover our lost [*sic*] nationalism, we must have some kind of group unity, large group unity. An easy and successful way to bring about the unity of a large group is to build upon [the] foundation of small united groups, and the small units we can build upon in China are the clan groups and also the family groups. The "native place" sentiment of the Chinese is very deep-rooted too; it is especially easy to unite those who are from the same province, prefecture or village. . . . If we take these two fine sentiments as a foundation, it will be easy to bring together the people of the whole country. (Sun, n.d., 31–32)

The revolutionaries employed a variety of strategies to create a new, appropriate national identity for "the Han." Zhang Binglin was one of the first to recognize the need to establish the historicity of the Han in order to construct them successfully vis-à-vis the Manchu. In order to do this, Zhang elaborated the notion of Han as a racial lineage, expanding the concept of lineage to comprise all Han as constituting a descent group bound by blood and stemming from a common ancestor (Chow 1997). The invention of the Han as a blood-related group, the invention of a common ancestor for all Han (initially the Yellow Emperor, later Peking Man, and now Yuanmou Man),[38] and the creation of a linear Han/national history were among the key strategies for departing from culturalism (Chow 1997, 47). These nationalizing strategies also included the introduction of new chronologies, new national celebrations, a national anthem and flag, and the unifying cult of Sun Yat-sen himself as the "father of the nation" (*guofu*).[39] In addition to the existing written language, it was expected that the Han would also gradually adopt one spoken-language standard that would bridge existing linguistic divergences.[40] Though racialization of the

Han identity was partially a product of indigenous schools of thought and modes of representation, the rise of racialized Han/Chinese nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century must also be explored in the context of a larger international discourse on the evolution of human races. The articulation of Han/Chinese nationalism was particularly influenced by Thomas Huxley's *On Evolution*, translated into Chinese in 1898 (Dikötter 1997, 13–14; Chow 2001, 53–54). The introduction of this and other racial theories "provided the timely coloration of modernity to an anti-Manchu . . . ideology" (Chow 1997, 52).

The genealogization of the Han and Manchu as large descent groups, the nationalization of the Han/Chinese identity, the replacement of the category of imperial subjects with the Chinese nation, and the process by which these identities were racialized all occurred in quick succession. Hence, new terms loop and fall out of use during this period, used by intellectuals to render equally intertwined and wobbly notions of lineage, race, and nation. During the nationalizing of the Han, imperial notions of "all under heaven" and *datong* (great unity) were abandoned as incompatible with the new national symbolic order. They were replaced by imagery of a Han race/Chinese nation inhabiting a state territory with clearly demarcated borders. This territorial state ultimately had a determining role in the making of the Chinese nation: "In the Chinese revolution, the state was not just midwife at the birth of the nation but in fact its sire. . . . The state not only delivered the nation into the world but determined what form it should take" (Fitzgerald 1995, 77). As this state was extremely heterogeneous, during the establishment of the first republic the inherent tension in the pre-1912 revolutionary rhetoric that interchangeably employed the terms *Han racial lineage* (Hanzu) and *Chinese nation* (*Zhonghua minzu*) had to be addressed. Accordingly, the notions of a multiracial Chinese nation and the Republic of Five Races (Wuzu Gonghe) were conceived. Through the idea of five founding races, the government worked to ensure the integrity of the territory it claimed for the new Republican state.

Still, the five races were not conceived of as equally important; throughout, the Han were reified as both the backbone (*gugan*) and the core (*zhuti*) (Leibold 2012, 215), into which "the others" were expected to gradually assimilate. Sun posited that the dying out of singular races—the Manchu, Tibetans, Mongols, and Muslims—or rather, their melting with the "mass of the genuine Chinese," must be facilitated (Heberer 1984, 43).

Ten years after the establishment of the first republic, Liang Qichao continued to discuss the central role of the superior Hua culture and people in assimilating neighboring people to form an organically evolving Chinese nation (Leibold 2012, 226–27). Hence, even though the umbrella concept of a multiracial nation was developed, in a parallel rhetoric the role of the Han as the core of that nation was ensured.

The priority of nationalist intellectuals and revolutionaries was to create the notion of the Han as a racial community and to mobilize its resources against foreign invaders. But group boundaries cannot be established overnight; "boundaries must be underpinned by a suitable apparatus of myth and legend which cannot be generated spontaneously" (Horowitz 1985, 70). With regard to the Han, this meant that the category needed to be gradually reinvented to fit into the new historical order of nationalism. Although Han/Chinese shared some ideas of Han-ness/Chinese-ness before the arrival of nationalism, this attachment was not territorial in the sense of modern territorial states. The spatial opposition between culture and wildness on which Han-ness/Chinese-ness was founded had come to be powerfully challenged, especially since the nineteenth century. Several factors, among them defeat in the war with Japan (1894–95), the severing of Vietnam and Korea from the sphere of symbolic allegiance to the Qing throne, and the encroachment of foreign powers onto the Chinese territory, demonstrated the incompatibility of the Confucian idea of world order with the contemporary system of increasingly powerful nation-states. The nationalism-motivated revolutionaries believed that the only way for China to survive was to thoroughly redefine both "China" and "Han" using a vocabulary compatible with Western notions of state, nation, sovereignty, territory, borders, and government. Accordingly, the new framing of the Han was put forth, as a huge lineage stemming from a common ancestor and bound to a concrete state territory within which their interests could be secured and realized. This notion then needed to be distributed and popularized as broadly as possible to mobilize the "masses" for the national revolution. New media such as newspapers played a critical role in the mobilization process.[41] Yet because the Republican state was relatively weak, the implementation of nation- and state-making projects encountered significant institutional limitations. This changed in the aftermath of the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, which was followed by

the establishment of the new Communist state and its successfully constructed mechanisms of control.

The Communist state approached nation- and state-making projects with unprecedented zeal. Exhausted by decades of war, the millions of farmers and workers through whom Mao built the Communist base longed for a government that promised stabilization. With the substantial assistance of Soviet advisors, the new regime quickly expanded its power, including into the non-Han areas of southern, western, and northern China. Government and party officials traveled through distant borderlands, trying to draw non-Han leaders to the Communist side, either through negotiation or by force, and to gradually integrate their territories in a unitary administrative system. In areas inhabited by the Han, Land Reform was introduced during the 1950s; landlords were deposed and land was gradually collectivized between 1953 and 1956. In 1958 collectives were consolidated into People's Communes by the increasingly totalitarian regime. In the cities, economic relations were redefined and urban enterprises were nationalized in 1956. While the establishment of a national language had not achieved substantial progress under the Nationalists, it was relatively quickly carried out by the Communists; in 1954 the national language standard, Putonghua, was introduced to unite the Han and prospectively the non-Han. The Communist government tackled other nation-making and Han-making projects with similar energy.

Like Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong regarded the Han as the core of the Chinese nation. In fact, in his writings he refers to the Han as embodying the Chinese nation itself (Mao 1968–69, 354–55). In contrast to the Republican government—which only officially acknowledged the existence and importance of the territorially crucial Mongols, Manchu, Tibetans, and Muslims—the Communists were determined to get a better idea of China's ethnic complexity, including granting state recognition and the nominal right to equality to other ethnic groups in China. Accordingly, in the 1950s the Communist government launched the Minzu Classification Project, which aimed to identify what *minzu* inhabited the territory of the new Chinese state.[42] Official recognition of these *minzu* would help the government extend its control over the multiethnic "borderlands", areas that in fact constituted about 60 percent of the new state's territory. The principle of the Minzu Classification Project was inspired by and partially modeled after the nationalities policy implemented in the Soviet Union

under Stalin during the 1920s (Hirsch 2005). However, by emphasizing the primary role of language in the classification of non-Han peoples, the categorizations this project produced in fact closely followed the Republican-era taxonomies (Mullaney 2011).

Beyond systematizing knowledge about multiethnic areas, teams of ethnographers, anthropologists, historians, and linguists aimed to classify the prospective *minzu* "scientifically"; this was done with respect to their historical, social, and material "advancement" on evolutionist scales borrowed from Josef Stalin and Lewis H. Morgan. That the project was carried out by social scientists lent a scientific aura of reason to what was in fact a political undertaking to enforce the leading role of the Han in the national community and to systematize society in order to expand the spaces of state control. In the aftermath of the project, the government officially recognized fifty-six *minzu* as living within the Chinese state territory.[43] The Han were recognized as the largest *minzu* and were officially confirmed as the leading national majority. The other *minzu* in China were expected to "catch up" with the Han in socioeconomic terms, eventually forming with them a proletarian class devoid of nationalist sentiments. Until this happened, the Han were to be, in Stalin's words, the "unifier of nationalities."

Stalin argued that while in Western Europe, nations developed into independent nation-states (*samostoiatelnye natsionalnye gosudarstva*), in Eastern Europe inter-national states, or multi-national states (*mezhdunatsionalnye gosudarstva*) were the dominant state form, the Soviet Union being one of them. In these states, the most politically advanced nation (*natsiia*) played the role of a unifier of nationalities (*obedinitel natsionalnosteĭ*) (Stalin 1948, 13–14). Nationalities, Stalin (1950, 278) posited, were "underdeveloped nations" in the precapitalist stage of historical development.[44] As such, they had to accept that leading posts in the nationalities states were already occupied by the leading nations that had "awakened" to political awareness earlier and advanced at a faster pace. This idea of state and nation was flexibly adopted by Mao for China.[45] As were Russians in the Soviet Union, so were Han in China "shouldered" with the role of the "unifiers." The fifty-five minority *minzu* were to assume the role of the underdeveloped "nationalities."

The position of the Han *minzu* as the leading actor was further "scientifically" reinforced with the help of the Stalinist and Morganian models

of social development. Stalin proposed that all societies follow the same path of historical development, from primitive commune to slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and finally, to socialism.[46] Morgan's model, which complemented Stalin's in the Minzu Classification Project, was similarly linear and evolutionary.[47] Morgan argued that all societies must pass through three main stages of development, from savagery to barbarism to civilization. He framed these periods in terms of material change and changes in marital form (Morgan 1976, 33–34).[48] Though the labels of savagery, barbarism, and civilization were not explicitly implemented in the project of Minzu Classification, Morgan's evolutionary classification of marital forms did significantly inform how researchers discussed the marriage and family structure of the ethnic groups they studied. In a prominent example of this evolutionary discourse, the partially matrilineal Na (Mosuo) from the Lugu Lake region in Yunnan and Sichuan were labeled a "living fossil." [49] Further, the form of sexual union (*tisese* in Na and *zouhun* in Chinese) practiced by some of the Na was in this evolutionary framework labeled a "backward group marriage" to be overcome by a more "hygienic" and "civilized" monogamous marriage (Yan 1982, 1989). The Minzu Classification Project compartmentalized the population of China with the help of Stalin's and Morgan's schemes and assigned the Han *minzu* to the most advanced, socialist stage of historical development. This effectively made "the Han" a model for other *minzu* to imitate. While in premodern China the notion of Han cultural superiority was spatial and largely based on the distinction between a cultured center and the wild space beyond it, modern notions of Han superiority were constructed linearly and temporally.

The presumed a priori existence of "the Han" as one coherent *minzu* was not addressed in the classification project. The scientists in the field were expected to find "the Han" and their "others," and they surely did. The political underpinnings of the Minzu Classification rendered all challenges to the existence of a unitary Han *minzu* unwelcome. Moreover, the project "scientifically proved" that the Han *minzu* was historically and socially most advanced. But Mao did not stop there. He also ascribed to the Han rich revolutionary traditions, a devotion to class struggle, and an intrinsic resistance against the "dark forces of feudalism" (Mao 1968–69). In slight contrast to this revolutionary rhetoric, Mao simultaneously rep-

resented the Han as creators of a superior cultural tradition, an exquisite literary tradition, and the oldest and continuous civilization. Mao's narration of the Han was deliberate and selective:

> Developing along the same lines as many other nations of the world, the Chinese nation (chiefly the Han) first went through some tens of thousands of years of life in classless primitive communes. Up to now approximately 4,000 years have passed since the collapse of the primitive communes and the transition to class society. In the history of Chinese civilization, agriculture and handicraft have always been known as highly developed; many great thinkers, scientists, inventors, statesmen, military experts, men of letters and artists have flourished, and there is a rich store of classical works. . . . China, with a recorded history of almost 4,000 years, is therefore one of the oldest civilized countries in the world. The history of the Hans, for instance shows that the Chinese people [*sic*] would never submit to rule by the dark forces and that in every case they succeeded in overthrowing or changing such rule by revolutionary means. In thousands of years of the history of the Hans, there have been hundreds of peasant insurrections, great or small, against the regime of darkness imposed by the landlords and nobility. . . . All the nationalities of China have always rebelled against the foreign yoke. . . . In thousands of years of history of the Chinese nation many national heroes and revolutionary leaders have emerged. So the Chinese nation is also a nation with a glorious revolutionary tradition and a splendid cultural heritage.[50] (Mao 1954, 3:73–74)

In this new Communist framing, the blood kinship that the Nationalists promoted was overshadowed *in the political rhetoric* by an emphasis on unity in class struggle, both within the Chinese society and internationally. The Han were now framed as socially and historically progressive, as revolutionary and proletarian.[51] They became reified as a unified national majority and reinforced as such institutionally on an unprecedented scale. Still, Mao's semantic swapping of "Chinese people," "the Han," and "Chinese nation" in his speech demonstrates a perpetual tension. The Communists necessarily aimed to reinvent and strengthen the Han as a national majority, but they simultaneously had to reinforce an

even newer and completely unfamiliar construct of the multiethnic Chinese nation, one composed of fifty-six *minzu*. The question of whether it is possible to promote the two simultaneously, without making Chineseness appear too much like Han-ness, remains real and unresolved today. So, too, does a related problem: how to make Han-ness meaningful when many of the markers of Han-ness are at the same time "things Chinese."

Despite new elements in the Communist narration of the Han, in practice the government maintained the Nationalists' emphasis on blood kinship by reinforcing descent as the only channel for transmission of Han-ness. Through this the government further strengthened the "genealogical mentality" among the Hanzu and the link between kinship and nation (Pieke 2003). In the aftermath of the Minzu Classification Project, descent became the only officially viable criterion for the transmission of Han identity.[52] In official discourse and the enactment of *minzu* policy, Han identity, similar to other *minzu* identities, can only be inherited. It cannot be acquired. The acquisition of markers of Han-ness by a person of another *minzu* has no impact whatsoever on the official *minzu* status of that person. Through the classification project, the boundaries of Han-ness, like those of other *minzu*, were institutionalized and stiffened. The resulting classifications are either-or; the only options are to be Han or to be another *minzu*. The question of degree, compatible with the imperial notion of Han-ness as a cultural identity, was made irrelevant. After the Minzu Classification, almost all citizens of the People's Republic of China were issued an ID that states their *minzu* status.[53] The state machine has reproduced and reinforced these categories of identity ever since.[54]

Although the meaning and roles of Han identity extend far beyond the domain controllable by state agencies, the Minzu Classification Project contributed immensely to the reification and objectification of "the Han" as a coherent *minzu* (Gladney 1999, 48–50). By juxtaposing the progressive, revolutionary, and socially advanced Han majority with the fifty-five "nationalities," the leading role of the Han *minzu* became "scientifically" justified, rhetorically objectified, and enforced institutionally. In spite of, or rather, *because of* the numerous boundaries dividing those classified as Hanzu, the central government has since persistently promoted the Han as a powerful united national majority with a long-standing territorial bond to China.

CONCLUSION

Because we can observe distinct changes between the framing of Hanness in different historical periods, "the Han" should be understood as a narration. This understanding follows Ann Anagnost's (1997, 2) notion of nation as narration as well as Benedict Anderson's (1983, 15) idea of imagined community.[55] Ethnic groups, like nations, can be seen as narrations; they are generative narrations that adapt to tasks, challenges, and the "others" to whom they are exposed. While the notion of narration highlights the generative aspect of ethnic and national narratives, Anderson emphasizes the agency of those who "imagine," or, as Anagnost describes, "speak" those narrations. Drawing on this scholarship, we should understand "the Han" as a formative narration remolded by those who imagine. Every temporal and spatial frame generates its own national narrations (Anagnost 1997, 2). Likewise, every such frame generates its own Hanness, thereby producing a synchronic "series of moments" rather than a teleological history of unfolding.[56] And yet, although a scholar's job is often to deconstruct and de-teleologize, the actors tend to "speak" in continuities.[57] This schism, between deconstructive scholarship and actors comfortable with continuities and teleologies, is manifest in the material explored in the present study.