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## THE BEIJING OLYMPICS AND CHINA'S CONFLICTED NATIONAL FORM

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The unprecedented media coverage of the Beijing Olympics—China's global “coming out party”—warrants consideration of who and what were on display. In staging the Games, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) promised to “organize diversified cultural and educational programs to cater to the needs of the *people*”, while encouraging “the widest participation of the *people* in the preparation of the Games” in order to “increase the cohesion and pride of the Chinese *nation*”.<sup>1</sup> However, a closer look at the preparations and staging of the Games reveals deep strains in the very fabric of the Chinese nation, not only the fraying threads of class, place and gender, but also those of ethnicity and of national identity itself. Just who are the people of this nation? Whose image did the organizers hope to project to the world's probing gaze?

Academics often depict Chinese nationalism as “inchoate”, “conflicted” and “amorphous”.<sup>2</sup> David Shambaugh discusses “China's competing nationalisms”,<sup>3</sup> while Allen Carlson argues that the study of Chinese nationalism has become dominated by “exclusionary dichotomies”,<sup>4</sup> which not only attempt to identify the boundaries between those who are inside and outside the national divide but also seek to classify the types of nationalism at play. Scholars have sought to

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<sup>1</sup> BOCOG, “Concepts of the Beijing Olympic Games: Green Olympics, Hi-tech Olympics, People's Olympics”, *The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, 5 August 2004, at <http://en.beijing2008.cn/32/87/article211928732.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009 (emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> Lucian Pye, “How China's Nationalism was Shanghaied”, in Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), p. 87; Allen Carlson, “China's Conflicted Olympic Moment”, *Current History*, Vol. 107, No. 701 (September 2007), pp. 252-56.

<sup>3</sup> David Shambaugh, “China's Competing Nationalisms”, *International Herald Tribune*, 7 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Allen Carlson, “A Flawed Perspective: The Limitations Inherent Within the Study of Chinese Nationalism”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2009), p. 29.

distinguish between state-led and spontaneous nationalism; civic and ethnic nationalism; aggrieved and confident nationalism; and defensive and cosmopolitan nationalism, to name but a few. This emphasis on the Janus-faced nature of nationalism, “jubilant victor and humiliated victim”,<sup>5</sup> belies the viscosity of the very idea and sentiment of national identity. The power and appeal of nationalism as a concept lies in its unique promiscuity—its ability to change shapes rapidly and to form perfect marriages with a range of independent identities, from those based on ideology, class and place to those based on ethnicity, race and religion, among others. This sort of fluidity renders neat dichotomies problematic and, as a result, much of the scholarship seems to have become bogged down in a sort of discursive gymnastics with a string of adjectives used to qualify an increasingly illusory Chinese nationalism.

My focus here is specifically limited to the role of the concept of *minzu* (民族) in Olympic-related nationalism. This concept is fraught with its own ambiguity, indexing a “surplus of meanings” related to group identity: nation, nationality, ethnic group, race and even people.<sup>6</sup> In the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the term is used to reference both the 56 officially recognized nationalities (*wushiliuge minzu* 五十六个民族) and the composite unity of the Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu* 中华民族). The idiom’s numeric imprecision—capable of both plural and singular inflections—has caused some to suggest the use of *zuqun* (族群 ethnicity) to refer to the nation’s internal diversity while reserving *minzu* for the collective unity of the Chinese nation.<sup>7</sup> I would like to suggest that the chameleon-like nature of *minzu* reflects a larger, still unresolved, tension concerning the ethnic composition of the Chinese nation-state. Unlike Europe, state- and nation-building in modern China occurred alongside one another, with an increasingly powerful state élite experimenting with different ethnic formulae for the nation: who was to be included, in what proportions, and under what terms/categories. The demographic mix of the new Chinese nation-state increased both the complexity and importance of these questions, with a single dominant majority—whose more than one billion people are also beset by numerous linguistic, cultural, class and place divisions—sharing the same national space with scores of small and highly scattered minorities living along the state’s massive frontier regions.

This article explores how different modes of ethnic inclusion were reflected on the stage and behind the scenes of China’s Olympic moment. In particular, it examines three distinct yet overlapping narratives—Leninist-style multiculturalism,

<sup>5</sup> Xu Wu, *Chinese Cyber Nationalism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 8-9; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 36, fn. 10; Jonathan Lipman, “How Many *Minzu* in a Nation?”, *Inner Asia*, No. 4 (2002), pp. 113-30.

<sup>7</sup> Ma Rong, “Lijie minzu guanxi de xinsilu” (New Perspectives on Understanding Ethnic Relations), *Beijing daxue xuebao (Zhaxue shehui kexue ban)* (Journal of Peking University [Philosophy and Social Sciences]), Vol. 41, No. 6 (November 2004), p. 321.

Han ethnocentrism and Confucian ecumenism—and how Olympic-related discourse, symbols and practice oscillated uncomfortably between these three positions. Focusing on Chinese- and English-language texts and performances in Mainland China, my analysis does not include minority or diasporic narratives that explicitly challenge the spatial boundedness of the national imaginary. I do not mean to suggest that these three formulations represent the only modes of ethnic belonging in modern China, but rather that China remains a state with a conflicted national form.

### Leninist-style Multiculturalism

In hosting the Olympic Games, the Chinese state hoped to project the harmonious and colorful diversity of China to the world. In 2007, the Vice President of the Central Nationalities University and President of the Institute of Tibetan Studies, Professor Sherab Nyima (Chinese, Guo Weiping), argued that the Olympics provided an unprecedented opportunity for China to improve its image abroad while strengthening its domestic propaganda on the “national question” (*minzu wenti* 民族问题). According to Guo, BOCOG and other relevant government departments should use the impending arrival of thousands of journalists and international tourists to publicize the “quantum leap” (*zhongda tupo* 重大突破) achieved in nationality work, thereby strengthening among “foreign friends” the understanding of the country’s policies of unity and equality among all nationalities. Some of Guo’s specific suggestions included the publication of a small booklet publicizing Beijing minority cultures; the production of more specialized print, radio and television programming in Chinese and English; the use of roadside billboards and public video screens in the Olympic village and throughout Beijing to display images of minority cultures; the establishment of ethnic restaurants and curio shops and the staging of colorful minority performances within the Olympic Cultural Square; the recruitment of Olympic volunteers among the minorities so that they could help with culturally sensitive issues among foreign visitors; and the development of special tourist packages to promote visits to ethnic sites in Beijing and minority regions throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

One of these ethnic sites was the recently refurbished and extended “Chinese Ethnic Culture Park” (*Beijing zhonghua minzu bowuguan* 北京中华民族博物馆 or *zhonghua minzu yuan* 中华民族园), a 50-hectare “anthropological museum” located just south of the Olympic Green, where visitors can experience real, live “ethnic gatherings”, and learn more about the “behavior, genius, liability, aesthetics and cultural essence” of the minorities, while wandering through the different “ethnic villages” that have been authentically preserved by the Chinese state.<sup>9</sup> In the lead-up

<sup>8</sup> Guo Weiping, “Wo wei Ao Yun jinyinyan: chuan zhuazhu Ao Yun jiyun zuohao Beijing minzu gongzuo de xuanchuan” (A Word of Advice Concerning the Olympics: Seize the Olympic Opportunity to Complete Our Propaganda on Beijing’s Nationality Work), *Beijing guancha* (Beijing Observation), Vol. 11 (2007), pp. 14–16.

<sup>9</sup> “Chinese Ethnic Culture Park—Chinese Nationalities Museum” (nd), at <http://www.emuseum.org.cn/eindex.htm>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

to the Olympics, the state also earmarked over US\$81 million for the preservation of 22 historical and cultural relics, including some displayed as a part of an exhibition of Tibetan Thangka paintings at the “Cultural Palace for Nationalities” (*minzu wenhuagong dajuyuan* 民族文化宫大剧院) in Beijing which was formally opened by the CCP’s officially sanctioned 11th Panchen Lama as part of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Cultural Festival.<sup>10</sup> While minority athletes were preparing to do battle in the Olympic stadia, 225 minority pilots representing 16 different minority groups were “enduring great hardships”, according to the *People’s Daily*, as they ferried millions of foreign and domestic tourists to Beijing,<sup>11</sup> and minority students in remote schools in Tibet and Xinjiang were learning about the Olympic spirit and movement in specially produced Olympic readers in their own languages.<sup>12</sup>

As a Leninist Party-state, the PRC has sought to solve the “national question” in accordance with the “scientific laws” of historical materialism. Material progress is viewed as a linear path; but not all peoples are capable of progressing at the same pace, leaving the state to resolve the problem of “backward and feudal national minorities”. Lenin’s solution, “the right of self-determination for all nations comprising the State”, was first outlined in the 1903 program of the Russian Communist Party, but was only given practical political meaning and institutional structure in the course of building the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>13</sup> To guard against Great Russian chauvinism and actively promote equality and socialist fraternity among the various nationalities (*natsional’nost’* or *narodnost’*) of the former Tsarist Empire, the Bolsheviks afforded strategic recognition and protection of individual nationalities’ identities and interests within a multi-ethnic, federated state structure. Seeking to disarm what was thought to be transitory ethnic sentiment, the state created forms of nationhood (national territories, national languages, national élites and national cultures) for the non-Russian minorities, ultimately creating what Terry Martin has termed the world’s first “Affirmative Action Empire”.<sup>14</sup>

While Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were quick to rule out the possibility of territorial secession for China’s minorities, they inherited

<sup>10</sup> Xinhua, “11th Panchen Lama Visits Tibetan Thangka Painting Show”, *People’s Daily Online*, 14 August 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/6475150.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Lin Hongmei and Wan Yi, “Zhongguo minhang shaoshu minzu feixingyuan huoyue zai Ao Yun feixing yixian” (Minority Pilots for China Civil Aviation Are Actively Flying the Olympic Routes), *Renmin ribao* (21 August 2008).

<sup>12</sup> “Minzu chubanshe xiang minzu diqu zhongxiaoxue zengsong minwenban Ao Yun duben” (The Nationality Publishing Company Will Publish Minority Language Olympic Readers for Primary and Middle School Pupils in Minority Regions), *Zhongguo minzu* (China Ethnicity), Vol. 7 (2008), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 451 *et passim*.

much of the Bolshevik discourse and strategy on the national question. On the eve of the PRC's establishment in 1949, Premier Zhou Enlai argued that the unique size of the Han majority, which comprised over 90 per cent of the new state's population, made Soviet-style federalism inappropriate for China; at the same time, however, he stressed the importance of implementing a series of policy initiatives aimed at actively safeguarding national minority rights, preserving their distinct cultures and promoting equality among all of China's nationalities (*minzu*).<sup>15</sup> This regime of protection included three interlinking policy elements: 1) the identification and classification of nationalities (*minzu shibie* 民族识别); 2) the right of regional autonomy (*quyu zizhi quan* 区域自治权); and 3) a series of preferential treatment policies (*youhui zhengce* 优惠政策). For most of the CCP's 60-year-long rule over the Chinese mainland, these three policies have guided the way ethnic diversity is formally discussed and handled.

In implementing its nationality policies, the Chinese Party-state first needed to determine the number of nationalities in China. During the early 1950s, they dispatched teams of ethnologists across the nation to identify, classify and chronicle the new nation-state's ethnic diversity. Drawing rather loosely on Stalin's four-part definition of nationality—common language, common territory, common economic life and common culture—Chinese officials identified 41 nationalities by the time of the first national census in 1953, a number that increased to 53 in 1964 before stabilizing at 56 in 1982. While not all of these categories originally represented unified, self-ascribed communities, their institutionalization over the course of CCP rule has strengthened the importance of these labels in the daily lives and psychology of PRC citizens. Today, all citizens of the PRC have their nationality clearly marked on their personal identification cards (*shenfenzheng* 身份证) and must include this information on all official documents.<sup>16</sup>

Those minority nationalities that live together in concentrated numbers are entitled to the right of regional autonomy. This right was first enshrined in the PRC's 1954 constitution and became part of state law in 1984 with the passage of the "Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy" (*minzu quyu zizhifa* 民族区域自治法). Depending on the size and density of a minority community, the state has created autonomous units at the provincial, prefecture, county or township levels. These units of self-government are permitted to interpret, adapt and implement state policies "in light of

<sup>15</sup> Zhou Enlai, "Guanyu renmin zhengxie de jige wenti" (On a Few Question About the Peoples' Political Consultative Committee), in Zhonggong zhongyang tongzhanbu (ed.), *Minzu wenti wenxian huibian: 7/1921-9/1949* (Collection of Documents on the National Question, July 1921 to September 1949) (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 1265-68.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Mullaney, "Coming to Terms with the Nation" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2006); Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), pp. 6-13; Xiaotong Fei, *Towards a People's Anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press, 1981), pp. 60-77; Baogang He, "Minority Rights with Chinese Characteristics", in Will Kymlicka and Baogang He (eds), *Multiculturalism in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 60-68.

specific local conditions”, which include the extension of special political, economic, educational, religious and cultural provisions aimed at preserving diversity and promoting equality. By 2005, more than 71 per cent of China’s minority population lived within one of the over 1,328 autonomous regions, prefectures, townships or villages covering 64 per cent of PRC territory.<sup>17</sup>

Other than during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the CCP has also extended special rights and preferences to the non-Han population regardless of where they live. Today, these “preferential treatment policies” (*youhui zhengce*) provide those registered as minorities with easier access to education, employment and political office, certain exceptions from family planning, special tax breaks and other economic incentives, and the right to use and protect their own language, culture and religion.<sup>18</sup> In the area of education, for example, nearly 10,000 minority students were enrolled in special university preparatory courses between 1980 and 1998, and since 1950 disadvantaged minority students have received extra points on the national university entrance exam, while also receiving tuition waivers and living expense stipends once enrolled at university.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, when the Party-state altered the rules on ethnic registration to allow mixed-marriage and previously “misclassified” nationalities to re-apply, the minority population swelled, nearly doubling from 67 million in 1982 to 123 million in 2005.<sup>20</sup> In sum, the Chinese Party-state followed the Soviet Union in institutionalizing a vast network of *minzu*-based interests groups that guides, at least officially, the way ethnicity is lived and performed in China today.

<sup>17</sup> Yang Houdi, Wang Ping and Sui Qing, *Pingdeng zizhi fazhan* (Equality, Autonomy, Development) (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 1998), pp. 37-51; Huang Yuanshan and Zhang Wenshan, “Minzu quyu zizhiquan de xianzheng jieshi” (Explaining the Right of Regional Ethnic Regional Autonomy in the Constitution), *Guangxi minzu yanjiu* (Study of Ethnicity in Guangxi), Vol. 1 (2007), pp. 12-18; Information Office of the State Council, *White Paper: Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China* (Beijing: State Council of the PRC, 2005), at <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20050301/index.htm>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Yuchao Zhu and Dongyan Blachford, “China’s Fate as a Multinational State”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 15 (2006), pp. 329-48; Colin Mackerras, *China’s Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 37-55; Barry Sautman, “Preferential Politics for Ethnic Minorities in China”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 4, Nos. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 1998), pp. 86-118.

<sup>19</sup> Teng Xing and Ma Xiaoyi, “Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu de shaoshu minzu youhui zhengce yu jiaoyu pingdeng” (Educational Equality and China’s Minority Preferential Treatment Policies in Higher Education), *Minzu yanjiu* (Ethno-National Studies), Vol. 5 (2005), pp. 10-18; Wang Tiezhi, “Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minority Students in China’s College University Admission”, *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (June 2007), pp. 149-63.

<sup>20</sup> Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China*, pp. 20-21; National Bureau of Statistics of China, “2005 nian quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha zhuyao shuju gongbao” (Gazette of the Principal Data from the 1% Sampling of the 2005 National Census), *The National Bureau of Statistics of China*, 16 March 2006, at [http://www.stats.gov.cn/TJGB/RKPCGB/qgrkpcgb/t20060316\\_402310923.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/TJGB/RKPCGB/qgrkpcgb/t20060316_402310923.htm), last accessed 8 December 2009.

Reflecting the strict quotas that are central to China's affirmative action policies, 42 of China's 639 Olympic athletes at the Beijing Games were non-Han competitors who represented ten different minority groups and competed in eighteen events. These athletes and another 15,000 minority competitors who participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> National Minority Nationalities Traditional Sports Games (*Zhongguo shaoshu minzu chuantong tiyu yundonghui* 中国少数民族传统体育运动会) held in Guangzhou in November 2007 were provided with special training and support from the National Academy of Sports. Claiming that they "made the Olympics even more magnificent" while "gaining gigantic glory for the fatherland", China's ethnic press provided extensive coverage of the three gold metals (two in weightlifting and one in boxing) and two bronze metals (archery and boxing) won by minority athletes at the Beijing Olympics, while also promoting the traditional expertise of the national minorities in wrestling, equestrian and other Olympic sports.<sup>21</sup>

The efforts of Free Tibet activists to disrupt the international leg of the Olympic torch relay received extensive coverage in the international media; less attention, however, was paid to the way the torch literally stitched the Chinese geo-body together during its three-month domestic journey, weaving its way throughout each Chinese province and region. At its ceremonial launch on the doorstep to the Forbidden City, President Hu Jintao lit a specially-designed cauldron with 56 "lucky clouds" carved on it, representing the good wishes of all China's nationalities for a successful torch relay,<sup>22</sup> while BOCOG President Liu Qi claimed that the five Olympic mascots (including the controversial Tibetan antelope Yingying) that would accompany the torch on its journey "reflect[ed] the cultural diversity of China as a multi-ethnic country".<sup>23</sup> Despite the tightly controlled nature of minority participation in the lead-up to the Games, the official policy of multiculturalism required a degree of visibility and active participation from the minorities, including literally hundreds of torchbearers. During the torch's three-day journey through Yunnan Province, for example, 231 minority torchbearers representing 20 different nationalities (38 per cent of the total torchbearers in the province) carried the sacred Olympic flame through the regions of Kunming, Lijiang and Xamgyi'nyilha (Shangri-La).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wei Ao Yun hui zengtian yimo liangse" (China's Minority Nationalities Add a New Layer of Luster to the Olympics), *Ningbo Municipal Government*, 27 August 2008, at <http://www.nbmzj.gov.cn/12class/dtxx.jsp?aid=1035>, last accessed 8 December 2009; Liang Wenmin and Zhao Suzhe, "Zhonghua minzu chuantong tiyun de fazhan fangxiang" (Developing Trend of Chinese Traditional Sports), *Tiyu xuekan* (Journal of Physical Education), Vol. 10, No. 5 (September 2003), pp. 54-56.

<sup>22</sup> Xinhua, "Chinese President Announces Official Start of Olympic Torch Relay", *Xinhua Net*, 31 March 2008, at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/31/content\\_7890166.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/31/content_7890166.htm), last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Guoqi Xu, *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895-2008* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 261.

<sup>24</sup> Buraoyilu, "Shenghuo xia: minzu jingshen yu Ao Yun jingsheng jiaoxiang huiying (Under the Torch: The Olympic Spirit and Ethnic Spirit Set Each Other Off), *Jinri minzu* (Ethnic Today), Vol. 6 (2008), pp. 25-30.

On the torch's historic journey up the slopes of Mt Qomolangma (Mt Everest), which was broadcast live on CCTV on the morning of 8 May, a 36-strong "Chinese Mountaineering Team" that included 24 Tibetans, ten Han, one Tu and one Tujia ethnic member each carried a specially designed torch up the mountain. A 22-year-old female Tibetan climber, Tsering Wangmo, was selected as the final torchbearer, carrying the Olympic flame to the world's highest point, and "writing a new page of human history, producing a new first in Olympic history, and a magnificent and mighty first for the Chinese nation".<sup>25</sup> "The Olympic torch relay", the magazine *Jinri minzu* (今日民族 *Ethnic Groups Today*) declared in a special Olympic issue, "has become an ethnic pow-wow, a great gathering of grand ethnic unity".<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics provided a vivid representation of Leninist-style multiculturalism. In addition to the colorful display of minority costumes, singing and dancing on the sidelines of the ceremonies directed by Zhang Yimou, China's ethnic diversity took centre stage at the start of the Opening Ceremony with the visually arresting parade of 56 children dressed in traditional ethnic costumes carrying the PRC flag across the Bird's Nest stadium before handing it to goose-stepping People's Liberation Army soldiers. As the fluttering, fan-swept flag was raised, these "minority children" joined the CCP leadership and the thousands of spectators in singing the Chinese national anthem: left hand raised in salute, each of the children sang in their own voice the common refrain: "Arise! Arise! Arise! Millions of hearts with one mind".<sup>27</sup> Like a "multi-petaled flower", the PRC's official discourse of multiculturalism conveys the sort of unity in diversity that eminent sociologist Fei Xiaotong described as China's unique *duoyuan yiti* (many sources, one body 多元一体) national form.<sup>28</sup>

### Han Ethnocentrism

Yet behind this orderly façade of Chinese multiculturalism lie deep fissures of ethnocentrism. In the days following the carefully orchestrated Opening Ceremony, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* broke the story that the "minority children" on display were actually professional Han actors from the Galaxy Children's

<sup>25</sup> Xinhua, "Team Announced for Olympic Flame's Ascent of Mt. Qomolangma", *People's Daily Online* (6 May 2008), at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90779/6405335.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009; Xinhua, "Ciren Wangmu, Last Torchbearer on World's Highest Peak", *Official Website of the Torch Relay* (20 May 2008), at <http://torchrelay.beijing2008.cn/en/ceremonies/qomolangma/news/n214369366.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009; Zeng Lin, "Shenghuo jianzheng zhonghua minzu de Ao Yun qinghuai" (The Torch is a Testament to the Chinese Nation's Olympic Spirit), *Zhongguo minzu* (China Ethnicity), Vol. 7 (2008), at <http://www.56-china.com.cn/china08-12/08-7q/08-7mz17.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Buraoyilu, "Shenghuo xia", p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> CCTV International, *The 2008 Beijing Olympics: Complete Olympic Opening Ceremony* (2 Disc DVD).

<sup>28</sup> Fei Xiaotong, *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* (The Plurality and Organic Unity of the Chinese Nation) (Beijing: Zhongyang Renmin Xueyuan Chubanshe, 1989).



Art Troupe.<sup>29</sup> The organization's deputy director, Yuan Zhifeng, claimed that the "kids were very natural-looking and nice", while BOCOG vice-president Wang Wei dismissed foreign media criticism, asserting that the incident was "not worth mentioning" and "completely normal" in Chinese tradition.<sup>30</sup> While this act of "fakery" reflects the staged performance of minority culture in contemporary China and the utopian orderliness of modernity more generally,<sup>31</sup> it also highlights some of the untidy strains within Beijing's vision of a harmonious, multi-ethnic society.

For most Chinese viewers, neither this bit of playacting nor the controversy that arose from Lin Miaoke's lip-synching would have detracted from the powerful symbolism of the red-clad, nine-year-old Han youngster singing the emotive "Ode to the Motherland" (*gechang zuguo* 歌唱祖国) from an elevated stage as the colorful "native" children paraded before her and the exclusively Han male leadership of BOCOG and the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo. Yet not all Han netizens were happy with this portrayal of Chinese patriotism. Several complained about Lin's western-style dress, while others argued that the Han girl among "the 56 nationalities" was actually wearing Manchu rather than Han couture. These foreign styles, it was claimed, dilute the traditional essence of Chinese (*zhonghua* 中华) culture embodied in the long silk robes worn prior to the Qing dynasty.<sup>32</sup> Zhang Yimou and BOCOG, others claimed, were actually Han traitors (*hanjian* 汉奸), more interested in pleasing foreign audiences than representing the glorious past of the Han majority.<sup>33</sup>

While Leninist-style multiculturalism creates genuine spaces for minority agency, it also engenders resentment and even hatred. As Frank Dikötter has demonstrated, racism has deep roots in China, driven by a strand of cultural xenophobia that labeled non-sedentary neighbors as "barbarians" and sought their

<sup>29</sup> Loretta Chao and Jason Leow, "Chinese Children in Ethnic Costume Came From Han Majority", *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 14 August 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121866988423738751.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Shane McLeod, "China Faked Ethnic Minority Children at Opening Ceremony", *ABC News*, 15 August 2008, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/08/15/2336697.htm>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Timothy Oakes, "Faking Heaven", *The China Beat* (4 Sept 2008), at <http://thechinabeat.blogspot.com/2008/09/faking-heaven-utopian-will-to-order-in.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009; AFT, "Ethnic Unity in China, with the Han on Top", 15 August 2008, at <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5glvG0F-5krFX-55GFd81dFpoig2A>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Jia Lin, "Beijing Ao Yun hui kaimushi guan hou gan" (My Reaction After Watching the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games), *Lin boke* (Lin's Blog), 8 August 2008, at <http://linboke.cn/index.php/beijing-olympics-2008-opening-ceremony>, last accessed 10 November 2008 (no longer available).

<sup>33</sup> Beilanduo, "Zhang Yimou shi hanjian, weishenme chuan riben de hefu" (Zhang Yimou is a Han Traitor: Why Did He Allow Performers to Wear Japanese Kimonos?), *Tianya shequ* (Tianya Community), 31 August 08, at <http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/no04/1/730384.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

exclusion from Chinese political life.<sup>34</sup> This sort of ethnocentrism was perhaps most clearly articulated in opposition to the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty, when Han revolutionaries, like 18-year-old Zou Rong, called for the “annihilation of the five million and more of the furry and horned Manchu race, cleansing ourselves of 260 years of harsh and unrelenting pain, so that the soil of the Chinese subcontinent is made immaculate, and the descendants of the Yellow Emperor will all become Washingtons”.<sup>35</sup>

Like the category of whiteness in the United States, Han is historically contingent—constructed and performed within the cultural framework of ethnic difference in China. While one cannot speak of the Han as a distinct nationality, ethnicity or race prior to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>36</sup> the modern ethnonym builds on a much older historical formulation, one that informs much of the “cultural stuff” which defines the boundaries, symbols and sentiment of Han today. As Mark Elliott has demonstrated, the ethnonym emerged through a complex process of interaction and distinction between the sedentary dwellers of the Central Plains, who commonly referred to themselves as *zhongguo* (中国), *hua* (华), *zhonghua* (中华), *xia* (夏) or *huaxia* (华夏) and the nomadic pastoralist communities of the Northern steppes, who were originally termed *hu* (胡) in the Chinese language but also came to be known as the *fan* (蕃), *yi* (夷) and *lu* (虏).<sup>37</sup> The inherent fluidity of Han as an ethnic and cultural marker reflects the tension between two competing ideologies of political community which spans the history of imperial China: an inclusive representation of cultural universalism that identifies all those abiding by sedentary Confucian rites as Chinese (*zhongguoren* 中国人, *huaxia* or *huaren* 华人) or Han (*hanren* 汉人) and an exclusive representation of ethnocentrism that stresses the fundamental and unbridgeable gap between the natures (*xing* 性, *zhi* 质 or *qi* 气) of the *xia* (Chinese) and *yi* (barbarian), or what the 17<sup>th</sup>-century intellectual Wang Fuzhi described as the difference between man and horse or snow and jade.<sup>38</sup>

Following the collapse of the Qing, this sort of racial vilification was swept under the rug of the new Republic and its idealized “Union of Five Races” (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan and Hui), and was later attacked as “Han chauvinism” (*dahanzu zhuyi* 大汉族主义) by the CCP,<sup>39</sup> but the Party-state has struggled to stamp it out completely.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst & Company, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Tsou Jung [Zou Rong], *The Revolutionary Army: A Chinese Nationalist Tract of 1903*, translated by John Lust (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), p. 1. See also Wang Chunxia, “*Pai man*” *yu minzu zhuyi* (“Anti-Manchu” Wave and Nationalism in the Late Qing Dynasty) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Mark C. Elliott, “*Hushuo*: The Northern Other and Han Ethnogenesis”, paper presented at the Critical Han Studies Conference, Stanford University, 25–29 April 2008.

<sup>38</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, pp. 19–29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–47 *et passim*.

If anything, the collapse of ideology and the rise of new communication technologies in reform-era China have provided alternative platforms for its articulation. Take, for example, the Internet-based, urban youth community centered around the website *Hanwang* (Han Network at [www.hanminzu.com](http://www.hanminzu.com)), established in January 2003 with the stated aim of reviving traditional Han culture and identity. The current leadership of the website also promotes a racist agenda. The group's constitution declares that the Han are "one of the purest blooded races in the world", and stresses "the paramount importance of the principle of race (*minzu*) and the upholding of the Han race's position by defending and promoting the legitimate interests and struggles of the Chinese (*huaxia*)".<sup>40</sup>

In its moderate form, Han ethnocentrism identifies the Han people as the cultural and racial backbone of the nation, mandating the Han man's burden of civilizing the "backward" and "feudal" minorities or, at the very least, calling for the public recognition of the Han as the "core race" (*zhuti minzu* 主体民族). In its more virulent articulation, Han ethnocentrism advocates the forced assimilation or even extermination of all non-Han elements in China, an ideology that one online blogger termed "Chinazi" (China + Nazi = Chinazi) in admiration of Nazi-style racism; like Hitler, some Hanists call for the preservation of superior Han blood from barbarian contamination.<sup>41</sup>

In the rampant consumerism and social atomization that has accompanied the post-Mao era, some largely urban youth have sought meaning, identity and community in an idealized and essentialized reading of their own cultural heritage. Seeking an alternative to Western-defined modernity, this root-seeking (*xungen* 寻根) movement has seen a revival of interest in traditional philosophies, arts and history. The production, promotion and consumption of premodern material culture, particularly clothing, has become a particular craze. In the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics, however, a debate broke out in China over the authentic form and style of traditional "Han clothing" (*hanfu* 汉服).

Around the time of the millennium, the *qipao* (旗袍 "banner gown") re-emerged as a fashionable, transnational symbol of Chineseness, with cultural élites and celebrities like Maggie Cheung and Nicole Kidman helping to repackage it for a variety of modern forms of consumption. The Chinese state, on the other hand, promoted a more masculine and conservative alternative to the *qipao* at the 2001

<sup>40</sup> Li Li [pseud. Li Minhui], "Hanwang zhangcheng" (Hanwang Constitution), *Hanwang*, 27 April 2006, at <http://www.hanminzu.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=97901&extra=page%3D1>, last accessed 8 December 2009. On the history and development of Hanwang, see James Leibold, "More than a Category: Han Racial Nationalism on the Chinese Internet", *The China Quarterly* (forthcoming 2010).

<sup>41</sup> "Chinazis: Who and What Are They?", *Asia Finest Discussion Forum*, 1 November 2005, at [www.asiafinest.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=49733&hl=Chinazi](http://www.asiafinest.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=49733&hl=Chinazi), last accessed 8 December 2009; HolySinoEm, "Huang Han minzu shi xuetong xiangdui chuzheng de minzu" (The Imperial Han Race is a Relatively Pure Race), *Hanzu wang* (Han Race Network), 11 July 2007, at <http://www.han5000.com/viewthread.php?tid=828&extra=page%3D1>, last accessed 12 March 2009 (no longer available).

APEC summit in Shanghai: a colorful button-up tunic that was dubbed “Tang-style clothing” (*tangzhuang* 唐装) by the official state media.<sup>42</sup> Yet Han racial nationalists argue that both of these styles represent the barbaric and alien culture of the Manchu Qing dynasty, rather than authentic Han clothing. By donning the “horse-riding jacket” (*magua* 马褂) or *qipao* of the Manchus, the once-mighty Han people were actually “putting back on the braids of racial enslavement”.<sup>43</sup>

When Fu Lujang, a Hebei-based scholar and head of the Mingde Confucian Academy, learned about a competition to design the clothing to be worn by Chinese athletes at the Beijing Olympics in 2006, he began putting together a proposal for the adoption of traditional clothing. His proposal was eventually submitted to BOCOG on 4 April 2007 and simultaneously published on twenty different websites (including Hanwang), with a list of 100 scholars from Beijing University and other leading academic institutions attaching their names in support. Referring to clothing as the soul of the nation and central to the maintenance of self-esteem and self-confidence, the proposal called for the adoption of *shenyi* (深衣 “the deep robe”) for all Chinese athletes during the opening and closing ceremonies, and requested that all Han competitors wear *hanfu* when minority performers and athletes donned their own ethnic costumes. The *shenyi*, it was claimed, represented the original clothing of the Huaxia race, an ancient people who gave birth to all of China’s current citizens, and dated back to the times of the Yellow Emperor. It was the only clothing style capable of representing 5,000 years of Chinese culture and the Huaxia race in its entirety.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, *hanfu*, which originated with and evolved from the *shenyi*, should be used as the ceremonial clothing of the Han people:

Our country has 56 nationalities, and up until now 55 of these nationalities have maintained their own ethnic clothing. It’s a pity that only the Han nationality, who comprise over 90 per cent of the Huaxia race’s population, have lost their own ethnic clothing—this is really inconceivable! It is not that the Han don’t have their own ethnic costume, but rather, as everyone knows, because Han clothing was outlawed for 300 years from the start of the Qing dynasty. In light of this, we sincerely request that in order to resolve this

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Chew, “Contemporary Re-emergence of the Qipao”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 189 (March 2007), pp. 144–61.

<sup>43</sup> Satsuki Shizuka [pseudonym Juni Yeung], “A Brief of Actual Results from Chinese Culture Renaissance Movement”, *Accounts of the ‘Lutenist’ from Beaver Creek @ U of T*, 1 October 2008, at <http://torguqin.wordpress.com/2008/10/01/a-brief-of-actual-results-from-chinese-culture-renaissance-mvt-major-events/>, last accessed 8 December 2009. See also Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 289–90.

<sup>44</sup> Xinwen zaobao, “Baiming xuezhe changyi hanfu wei Ao Yun liyi fuzhuang” (100 Scholars Propose the Adoption of Han Clothing as the Ceremonial Clothing for the Olympics), Xinhua Net, 5 April 2007, at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2007-04/05/content\\_5935780.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2007-04/05/content_5935780.htm), last accessed 8 December 2009.

problem the Olympic Committee encourage Han nationality compatriots to wear Han clothing during this extremely rare opportunity.<sup>45</sup>

Some online bloggers went much further, claiming that the adoption of *hanfu* was central to restoring the Han people to their natural position of supremacy within the nation. A blogger writing under the net-name Sky asked what people fear in adopting Han clothing:

You say, what about the culture of the national minorities, but in reality when one compares their culture to that of the Han, only one word can be used to describe it: rubbish (*laji* 垃圾). Inferior quality should be eliminated through selection. As a result of natural selection, we need not feel sorry for casting aside the bastards. With regards to “national division”, I take this issue to heart. But allowing the Han to have only one child while providing the national minorities with preferential treatment policies—this is real national division, which has caused many people to abandon their own Han identity in search of benefits. I’m not sure how much better it would be to provide aid to economically backward regions or two children to those with a middle school or higher education. But I do know that the Han were once mighty, and if we now don’t have the courage and self-confidence to make *hanfu* the national clothing and allow our Olympic athletes to wear *hanfu*, this will certainly bring about our own destruction.<sup>46</sup>

Although there appears to have been strong online support for the adoption of the *shenyi*, with one Soho poll showing that 64 per cent supported its adoption during the Olympics, the mainstream media focused on the more controversial proposal for Han athletes to wear *hanfu*. Here, according to one straw poll conducted on the streets of Shanghai, 75 per cent of people disagreed with the adoption of Han clothing for the Olympics; 60 per cent thought that *tangzhuang* represented the traditional clothing of the Han people, while another 20 per cent thought that either the Sun Yat-sen suit (*zhongshan zhuang* 中山装) or the *qipao* were more representative.<sup>47</sup> In the weeks following the proposal’s posting, the official Chinese media reported on the rejection of Han clothing by leading fashion designers in Shanghai, arguing instead for a merger of traditional motifs and modern styles, and the assertion by Yu Qiuyu, arguably one of contemporary China’s most influential cultural and literary critics, that the adoption of *hanfu*

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Sky, “Ni xiwang 2008 Ao Yun hui shi zhongguo hanzu yundong yuan chuan hanfu ruchang ma?” (Do You Think That the Han Nationality’s Athletes Should Wear Han Clothing When They Enter the Stadium for the 2008 Olympic Games?), *Jieyangren luntan* (Jieyang People’s Forum), 12 April 2007, at <http://bbs.jieyangren.com/dispbbs.asp?BoardID=19&ID=16868>, last accessed via the Baidu cache on 29 November 2008 (no longer available).

<sup>47</sup> Xinhua, “Aozuwei shouci huying hanfu changyishu: zheng sheji zhongguo yuansu fushi” (The Olympic Committee Responds for the First Time to the Proposal for Han Clothing: The Correct Design Should Incorporate Chinese Elements), Xinhua Net, 5 April 2007, at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2007-04/05/content\\_5938805.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2007-04/05/content_5938805.htm), last accessed 8 December 2009.

was not only unnecessary for the restoration of Chinese national dignity but could also cause national division and psychological harm.<sup>48</sup>

On 26 April, the state-owned media declared the 100 scholars' proposal dead on arrival, with government officials revealing for the first time that *hanfu* would not be adopted for the Beijing Olympics; rather, the design concept for Olympic clothing would include traditional elements, modern creativity and future concepts. At the same time, BOCOG called on ordinary citizens to put forward their own designs for the ceremonial clothing at the Beijing Olympics, with the regulations for the competition clearly stating that proposals must not only embody "Chinese flavor" but also incorporate modern design and future ideas.<sup>49</sup> Finally, on 25 May, the then Minister for Culture, Sun Jiazheng, was quoted as mocking supporters of *hanfu* during a State Council press conference, when he stated that he had no idea what counted as authentic Han clothing: "In general, my view is that, if one eats well, then the restaurant is good; if one wears something nice, they will always get a bit of love. When one lets a hundred flowers bloom, there's bound to be these sorts of people [who advocate *hanfu*]"<sup>50</sup>

This sarcasm was pushed even further in the May issue of *Ketang neiwai* (课堂内外 *Inside and Outside the Classroom*), a highly influential youth magazine sponsored by the Ministry of Education. In an article on the Olympic clothing debate, Wang Zhi argued that Han clothing was an inappropriate vehicle for providing foreign visitors with a comprehensive impression of the pluralistic nature of the 56 nationalities and the wide-ranging and dynamic nature of Chinese culture:

Do we need to cover ourselves with leaves like primitive people and eat uncooked game to express our brave and fierce nature? Do we need to build another Great Wall along the frontier like the first Emperor of Qin to express our nation's great achievements? Do we need to abandon today's creature comforts and instead chew grass and gnaw bark like those in primitive times to express our diligent ways in the face of adversity?<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Yu Qiuyu, "Wei huifu minzu zunyan jiu yao chuan 'hanfu'" (Must We Wear Han Clothing to Restore the Nation's Dignity?), *Beijing ribao* (Beijing News), 16 April 2007, at [http://epaper.bjd.com.cn/rb/20070416/200704/t20070416\\_253404.htm](http://epaper.bjd.com.cn/rb/20070416/200704/t20070416_253404.htm), last accessed 16 May 2009 (no longer available).

<sup>49</sup> Wu Ying, "Guanfang shouci biaotai Beijing Ao Yun lifu buyong hanfu" (Government Declares for the First Time That It Will Not Use Hanfu as the Ceremonial Clothing for the Beijing Olympics), *Eastday*, 26 April 2007, at <http://news.eastday.com/c/20070426/u1a2794706.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Wu Yueming, "Sun Jiazheng xiaotan zhongguo chuantong hanfu yundong" (Sun Jiazheng Laughs at the Movement for Chinese Traditional Han Clothing), *China Net*, 25 May 2007, at <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/2006/May/1219088.htm>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Wang Zhi, "Ao Yun: zhen de you biyao chuan hanfu ma?" (The Olympics: Do We Really Need to Wear Han Clothing?), *Ketang neiwai* (Inside and Outside the Classroom), Vol. 5 (2000), p. 13.

The riots of 14 March 2008 in Lhasa, which killed 18 and injured over 500 mostly Han migrants, stoked the flames of more virulent expressions of Han ethnocentrism and hate-speak on the Internet. The violence, which started in Lhasa and spread throughout other frontier regions in the wake of the Olympic torch's incident-prone international leg, was widely perceived as a foreign-backed attack on not only the Chinese nation but its Han core. The Lhasa riots, a blogger writing under the pseudonym "Mighty Han Army" wrote, was an "alarm bell" (*jingzhong* 警钟) for the Han race and required firm suppression, in keeping with "the arduous determination of our ancestors".<sup>52</sup> "Being Han", another Hanwang blogger wrote, "means more than wearing Han clothing but must also be in one's heart and soul".<sup>53</sup>

On 22 April, a blogger writing under the name "Chinese Civilization" asserted that the Lhasa riots and the torch relay proved that the Party's nationality policies were "an utter and shameless failure". The vast sums of money and support that the state lavishes on the frontier minorities has not only failed to bridge the gap between Han and non-Han but has actually made the problem worse by encouraging the minorities to become more arrogant and aggressive. Rather than continuing to nurture the crying Tibetan baby on the Han race's own breast milk, the state should recall the words of the Classics: "if he is not of our race, then he will not be of the same mind" and "when it comes to the barbarians, birds and beast, fear and might are better than solace and virtue".<sup>54</sup> The author continued:

I've often thought that China could be faced with a dangerous situation in a heartbeat. This group of parasites could certainly allow the first-class [Tibetan] nationality to be kidnapped while the Beijing authorities and the ordinary, humiliated and second-class [Han] citizens can only look on in embarrassment, even to the point of betraying one's own country through division ... more evidence that when it comes to the barbarians, birds and beasts, the best method isn't assimilation, but rather to allow them to vanish in the smoke and dust of history.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hanjun wuwei, "Zhuyi! Women Huaxia weida de lingdao! Qing xikan!" (Pay Attention! Leaders of Our Mighty Huaxia! Please Read This Carefully!), *Hanwang*, 24 October 2008, at <http://www.hanminzu.com/bbs/dispbbs.asp?boardid=9&ID=235130>, last accessed 23 March 2009 (no longer available).

<sup>53</sup> Huaishu han liu, "Guanjian shike, Hanwang diao lianzi" (Moment of Truth, Hanwang Drops the Ball), *Hanwang*, 22 March 2008, at <http://www.hanminzu.com/bbs/dispbbs.asp?boardid=124&id=205438>, last accessed 23 March 2009 (no longer available).

<sup>54</sup> Zhonghua wenming, "Cong Qingyi zai ci dizhi jia lefu shijian zhong de chenmao kandao de" (Silently Looking at Situations Where Groups Have Boycotted the Pleasure and Happiness of the Family Since the Qing), *Hanwang*, 22 April 2008, at <http://www.hanminzu.com/bbs/dispbbs.asp?boardid=8&id=210183>, last accessed 30 April 2009 (no longer available).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

Another blogger, writing on 19 March as news of the Lhasa riots began to filter through the Internet, claimed that the “debased and barbaric” Tibetans lack the racial quality to rule themselves and could only wait either to be enslaved by another foreign country or face the retaliation of the entire Han race. “When the time comes”, this author concluded, “there will be racial genocide (*miezu* 灭族) ...”<sup>56</sup>

### Confucian Ecumenism

Across the long sweep of its history, racial exclusionism has been a distinct yet largely heterodox tradition within China. During times of strength and unity, the Chinese state stressed the ability of its culture literally to absorb neighboring “barbarians” through a peaceful process of *laihua* (来化 “come and be transformed”), incorporating uncivilized elements into the Confucian *datong* (大同 “ecumene”) which was also rendered as *tianxia* (天下 “all under heaven”).<sup>57</sup> “The King”, the *Gongyang Commentary* on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu gongyang* 春秋公羊) states, “leaves nothing and nobody outside his realm” (*wangzhe wuwai* 王者无外), while the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语) declares that “all those within the four seas are brothers” (*sihai zhi nei, jie xiongdi ye* 四海之内, 皆兄弟也).<sup>58</sup>

Many commentators have highlighted the prominent role of tradition, in particular what was described as “Confucianism”, during the Opening Ceremony in Beijing. The event, Australian journalist Rowan Callick noted, “amounted to a coming-out for Confucius”.<sup>59</sup> The eminent 98-year-old scholar Ji Xianlian, among others, suggested that Confucius should “raise the curtain” on the Opening Ceremony. As a cultural advisor to Zhang Yimou, this now-deceased “Master of National Learning” and former Vice President of Beijing University asserted that the Confucian concept of harmony is “the Chinese race’s great gift to the world”, and the Beijing Olympics provided an excellent opportunity to expand its influence

<sup>56</sup> Edle, “Jingwen shangzhou wu Xizang baoluan” (Startled to Hear About Last Friday’s Tibetan Riot), *Houhai BBS* (Houhai Bulletin Board), 19 March 2008, last accessed via Baidu cache on 25 December 2008 (no longer available).

<sup>57</sup> Q. Edward Wang, “History, Space, and Ethnicity”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1999), pp. 285-305; François Thierry, “Empire and Minority in China”, in Gérard Ghaliani (ed.), *Minority Peoples in the Age of Nation-states* (Paris: Pluto, 1989), pp. 76-99; Tsung-I Dow, “The Confucian Concept of a Nation and Its Historical Practice”, *Asian Profile*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1982), pp. 347-62; Mu-chou Poo, *Enemies of Civilization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Cited in Lien-sheng Yang, “Historical Notes on the Chinese World Order”, in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 26; James Legge (trans.), *Confucian Analects* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> Rowan Callick, “Confucius Says: Let the Games Begin”, *The Australian*, 9 August 2008, at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/confucius-says-let-the-games-begin/story-e6frg7e6-1111117148183>, last accessed 8 December 2009.



across the globe.<sup>60</sup> While the Opening Ceremony began with the beating of traditional drums and the explosion of fireworks, 3000 Confucian disciples did welcome guests with the opening lines of *The Analects*: “Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?” which was followed by other aphorisms including the communitarian theme of “all those within the four seas are brothers”.<sup>61</sup>

In theory at least, Confucian ecumenism takes no notice of differences in physical nature or ecology between the sedentary Chinese (*xia*) of the central plains and the nomadic barbarians (*yi*) of the steppe. As long as the barbarians adopted Chinese ritual behavior (*li* 礼), morality (*de* 德 and *ren* 仁) and surnames (*xing* 姓), they were not only accepted as a part of the *datong* but could also rule over it, as the Mongol Yuan, Manchu Qing and other nomadic, conquest dynasties had done. At the core of this inclusivist tradition was a belief in the inherent superiority of Chinese culture and its ability to “absorb” (*xishou* 吸收) and “sinicize” (*hanhua* 汉华) inferior cultural systems and peoples. As Mencius wrote: “I have heard of people using the Chinese (*xia*) way to transform the barbarians, but I have never heard of any (Chinese) being transformed by the barbarians”.<sup>62</sup> Transformation was both inevitable and unidirectional. Yet this communitarian ideal represents only one interpretation of the rich and dynamic Confucian tradition. As He Baogang has argued, Confucianism offers a complex and contradictory legacy when it comes to the issue of ethnocultural diversity, legitimizing both minority autonomy and cultural assimilation.<sup>63</sup>

In dealing with the problem of the non-Han minorities following the collapse of the imperial system, the Republic state sought to marry Confucian ecumenism with the Western discourse of Social Darwinism, asserting the inevitability of the non-Han people's incorporation into a new national collective.<sup>64</sup> In particular, a group of cultural conservatives within the Nationalist Party called for the abolition of *minzu* as a political category in Republican China, instead arguing that all citizens of the Chinese state “were either descendants of a common ancestor or interrelated through marriage”.<sup>65</sup> As “lineage branches” (*zongzhi* 宗支) of a single, unified *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation/race), the so-called minority nationals (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族) had already been absorbed into the main wellspring of Chinese civilization. In short, as both Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen noted,

<sup>60</sup> Xinhua, “Ji Xianlin xiang Zhang Yimou xiance jianyi kaimushi jiang kongzi ‘taichulai’” (Ji Xianlin Suggests to Zhang Yimou That Confucius “Raise the Curtain” on the Opening Ceremony), *Sohu*, 28 July 2007, at <http://2008.sohu.com/20070728/n251287978.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>61</sup> James Legge (trans.), *Confucian Analects*, pp. 13 and 253.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Mu-chou Poo, *Enemies of Civilization*, 121.

<sup>63</sup> Baogang He, “Minority Rights with Chinese Characteristics”, pp. 57-60.

<sup>64</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, pp. 113-75.

<sup>65</sup> Chiang Kai-shek, *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* (China's Destiny), 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Reprint Taipei: Zhongzheng Shuju, 1986), p. 2.

China's various peoples had already "fused together in a single furnace" (*rong er ru yu yi lu* 融入于一炉).<sup>66</sup>

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 removed an important barrier for the resurrection of Confucius and his thought in Mainland China. Where Confucius was once demonized as "a reactionary who doggedly defended slavery",<sup>67</sup> he is now widely praised as the fountainhead of Chinese culture and identity, with his notion of "harmony" serving as the cornerstone of the "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) championed by the current administration of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. In the recent explosion of books, conferences, television programs and academic study centers dedicated to new Confucian thought (*xin ruxue* 新儒学), "a neoconservative philosophical movement with religious overtones",<sup>68</sup> many have sought refuge, meaning and therapeutic solace from the moral void left by the collapse of Communist ideology and the dizzying pace of social change in reform-era China.<sup>69</sup> The Confucian classics are now studied by over ten million students in mainland China, and one cannot enter a bookstore without encountering Professor Yu Dan's depoliticized, self-help musings on *The Analects*, which has sold ten million legitimate and another six million pirated copies, inviting comparisons with Mao's little red book.<sup>70</sup> Seeking to export the master's vision abroad, the Chinese state has established 241 "Confucian Classrooms" in 87 countries and regions across the globe.<sup>71</sup> Given a bit of time, some have even provocatively suggested, the PRC might be re-branded the "Confucian Socialist Republic of China" and the CCP as the "Chinese Confucian Party",<sup>72</sup> while others contend that "ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalism" is largely an academic exercise which seeks either to challenge state-defined nationalism or to promote a transnational "Chinese" alternative to Western-defined culture.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhi xuejia Bo-lun-zhi-li zhi xueshuo" (The Theories of Political Scientist Bluntschli), *Yinbingshi wenji* (Collected Works from the Ice-Drinker's Studio) (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), Vol. 13, p. 76; Sun Yat-sen, "Sanminzhuyi" (Three Principles of the People), *Sun Zhongshan quanji* (Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981-86), Vol. 9, p. 187.

<sup>67</sup> Foreign Languages Press, *A Collection of Articles: Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), p. i.

<sup>68</sup> John Makeham, "Guest Editor's Introduction", *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter 2004-05), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism*, pp. 3-18.

<sup>71</sup> "Quanjie kongzi xueyuan" (Confucius Institutes in the World), *Confucius Institute Online*, nd, at [http://www.confuciusinstitute.net/ky\\_zh/ky\\_info.html](http://www.confuciusinstitute.net/ky_zh/ky_info.html), last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism*, pp. xvi, 12 *et passim*.

<sup>73</sup> Guo Yingjie, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity Under Reform* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 72-90; John Makeham, *Lost Soul*, pp. 333-41 *et passim*.

This renewed interest in Confucius has led some scholars to explore what they see as a uniquely Confucian approach to *minzu*. In a 2008 article, for example, Li Kejian of the Southwest Nationalities University explores the recent proliferation of scholarship on the place of ethnic diversity in traditional Chinese thought and society. Despite the confusing array of terms employed, she argues that the evolution and development of traditional attitudes towards *minzu* can best be described as Confucian (*rujia* 儒家). Only the Confucian approach was truly influential and inherited from generation to generation, making its principles of “all under heaven” and “ecumene” the “distinctive essence” of premodern China’s approach to diversity.<sup>74</sup> Li Kejian and others argue that, in sharp contrast to modern, Western methods, the adoption of cultural rites (*li*) and humanity (*ren*) rather than physical, ethnic or religious differences mark the boundaries of the ecumene.

Others have employed the memory of Confucius to advance an even more explicit critique of the Party-state’s nationality policies. Ma Rong, the US-educated former Head of Sociology at Beijing University, calls for the “de-politicization” of ethnic relations in China, a departure from European-style liberalism and Soviet-style multiculturalism and a return to a traditional “culture-centered” approach to diversity that is fundamental to his reading of Confucianism. Rather than promoting ethnic integration, the “institutionalization of ethnic groups” under Mao Zedong promoted ethnic stratification and tension, and the preferential treatment policies of the last three decades have created “tribal collectives” (*buzu jiheti* 部族集合体), which form new barriers and obstacles to genuine equality and unity. In response to Western criticism, China should “learn from their ancestors and their experience for thousands of years in guiding ethnic relations”, and return to the bedrock of Confucian culturalism, where culture rather than ethnicity serves as the key marker of civilization, and public policy focuses on promoting a universal culture and identity through acculturation rather than the protection of individual minority rights and benefits.<sup>75</sup>

Yet both the nature of Confucian thought and the role of diversity within Chinese society remain highly contentious issues. The Party-state rejects Ma Rong’s criticism, arguing that its current policies not only reflect the “mainstream choice” (*zhuliu xuanzhe* 主流选择) of most multicultural countries like the United States, Sweden, Canada and England but are also in keeping with the Confucian tradition of “allowing people to rule according to their own customs” (*yin su er zhi* 因俗而治) and “using education to transform” (*jiao er hua zi* 教而化子). Professor Hou Shiyuan,

<sup>74</sup> Li Kejian, “Rujia minzu guan sixiang jichu tanyuan” (Thorough Investigation Into the Ideological Basis of the Confucian View of Nationality), *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao* (Journal of Southwest University of Nationalities), Vol. 207 (November 2008), p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ma Rong, “A New Perspective in Guiding Ethnic Relations in the Twenty-First Century”, *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (October 2007), pp. 199-217; Ma Rong, “Lijie minzu guangxi de xinsilu”; Shen Wenyn and Ma Rong, “Cong wenhua jiaodu duidai zhongguo minzu wenti” (Handling China’s National Question from the Angle of Culture), *Lingdao zhe* (Leader), Vol. 6 (2008), as posted at <http://www.sociologyol.org/yanjiubankuai/fenleisuoyin/fenzhishehuixue/zhengzhishehuixue/2008-12-22/6862.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

the Director of the Nationalities and Anthropology Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the editor of the prestigious journal *Ethno-National Studies* (*Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究), suggested in a widely read and cited 2005 article that Ma Rong's controversial ideas were antithetical to the construction of a socialist harmonious society. Hou argued that the preservation of cultural diversity is central to the building of a harmonious society, and the resolution of ethnic tensions and cultural differences was a long-term, protracted problem that could only be resolved through an incremental and natural process.<sup>76</sup> Another researcher at Hou's Institute asserts that Ma Rong's form of "nihilism" (*xuwu zhuyi* 虚无主义) fundamentally violates the Party-state's current policy of "mutual flourishing" (*gongtong fanrong* 共同繁荣) which requires the political "regulation and control" (*tiaokong* 调控) rather than the cultural "fusion" (*ronghe* 融合) of diversity within Chinese society.<sup>77</sup> In short, Chinese scholars have sought and found evidence both in favor of and against the Party-state's nationality policies from both Chinese tradition and the contemporary Western discourse on multiculturalism.<sup>78</sup>

During the Beijing Olympics, this ambiguity between past and present, as well as between East and West, became entangled in the concept of a People's Olympics (*renwen Ao Yun* 人文奥运). Originally intended as a foil for Western criticism of China's human rights record, the concept was first translated as the "Humanistic Olympics", and then after some debate, the "People's Olympics". As the term lacked any self-evident meaning, Liu Qi called on Chinese academics to flesh out the meanings and implications of the term for the Beijing Olympics, resulting in literally thousands of pages of exegesis and even the establishment of the "Humanistic Olympics Studies Center" at People's University in Beijing.<sup>79</sup> A number of scholars sought to fill the concept of *renwen* with Confucian meaning, arguing that the

<sup>76</sup> Hou Shiyuan, "Goujian shehuizhuyi hexie shehui yu minzu guanxi" (The Relationship Between Nationality and Building a Socialist Harmonious Society), *Minzu yanjiu*, Vol. 3 (2005), pp. 1-12.

<sup>77</sup> Wang Xien, "Yetan zai woguo minzu wenti shang de 'fansi' he 'shishi qiushi'" (More Talk About "Rethinking" and "Seeking Truth from Facts" With Regard to Our Country's National Question), *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao*, Vol. 209 (January 2009), pp. 1-17.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, the comprehensive three-part survey of Chinese nationality policies conducted by Guan Kai, "Minzu guanxi de shehui zhenghe yu minzu zhengce de leixing" (The Social Integration of Ethnic Relations and the Type of Ethnic Politics), *Xibei minzu yanjiu* (Xibei Ethno-National Studies), Vol. 37 (2003), pp. 116-39; Guan Kai, "Minzu zhengce de chuantong moshi yu minzu wenti de xiandaixing jie jue fang'an" (The Traditional Mode of Ethnic Policies and the Modern Schemes to Solve Ethnic Problems), *Xibei minzu yanjiu*, Vol. 40 (2004), pp. 77-91; Guan Kai, "Duoyuan wenhua zhuyi yu minzu quyu zizhi" (Multiculturalism and Regional National Autonomy), *Xibei minzu yanjiu*, Vol. 41 (2004), pp. 40-54.

<sup>79</sup> Susan Brownell, *Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 189-95; Susan Brownell, "Was There a Master Plan to Use the Olympic Games to Promote a Positive Image of China to the World?", *The China Beat* (2 January 2009), at <http://thechinabeat.blogspot.com/2009/02/faq8-was-there-master-plan-to-use.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

Confucian concepts of “cosmopolitan ecumenism” (*shijie datong* 世界大同), “striving for continual improvement” (*ziquang buxi* 自强不息) and the “harmony between man and nature” (*tianren heyi* 天人合一) were in keeping with the Olympic movement’s “spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play” and its motto “faster, higher, stronger”.<sup>80</sup> The rich Confucian tradition of humanism, assert Xu Yunlong and Liu Weiguo, has a unique role to play, not only in promoting traditional Chinese culture but also in reviving the modern Olympic movement and rescuing it from the increased politicization and commercialization that threatens to destroy the movement’s fundamental spirit and tradition.<sup>81</sup>

In some regards, the idealized ethnic double-blind of Confucianism was on display at the Opening Ceremony, for here the evening’s two most prominent and “genuine” minority characters, the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Hui Muslim admiral Zheng He and the Zhuang-nationality gymnast Li Ning, were presented as symbols of a more cosmopolitan Chineseness. While the Great Wall made only a fleeting appearance during the ceremony, the Silk Route and the “Maritime Silk Route” of Zheng He’s famous sea voyages took center stage. As an armada of blue-robed performers swung massive wooden oars across the stadium floor, foreign television commentators waxed lyrical about the seven treasure fleets of this “*Chinese Columbus*”, who spread *Chinese* culture and goods as far as Africa and possibly beyond.<sup>82</sup> The celebrations of 8 August started with the lighting of the Olympic torch next to a bust of Peking Man at Zhoukoudian and ended when the Olympic cauldron was set ablaze by Li Ning. Without mentioning his ethnicity, the *People’s Daily* described him as a “*Chinese* gymnastic champion” and “national hero” who won six medals at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games and then went onto become a millionaire entrepreneur in reform-era China.<sup>83</sup> By setting the Olympic flame ablaze, Li Ning “transformed

<sup>80</sup> Wang Jianjun and Liu Hui, “Rujia chuanbo sixiang yu renwen Ao Yun guanxi de sikao” (Consideration of the Relationship Between the People’s Olympics and the Dissemination of Confucianism), *Ha’erbin gongye daxue xuebao* (Journal of Harbin Industry University), Vol. 9, No. 2 (March 2007), pp. 39-42; “Aolinpike jingshen yu rujia wenhua luntan zai Beijing juxing” (The “Confucian Culture and Olympic Spirit Forum” Opens in Beijing), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), 25 August 2007, at <http://2008.sohu.com/20070825/n251773616.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009; “Aolinpike jingshen yu rujia wenhua luntan’ longzhong juxing” (The Grand Opening of the “Confucian Culture and Olympic Spirit Forum”), *Renwen Ao Yun wang* (People’s Olympics Network), 4 September 2007, at [http://www.c2008.org/rendanews/news\\_detail.asp?id=6604](http://www.c2008.org/rendanews/news_detail.asp?id=6604), last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Xu Yunlong and Liu Weiguo, “Cong Zhongguo chuantong de rujia wenhua tan 2008 nian Beijing de ‘renwen Ao Yun’” (Using China’s Traditional Confucian Culture to Discuss the 2008 Beijing “People’s Olympics”), *Shandong tiyu keji* (Shandong Sports and Technology), Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2002), pp. 58-59.

<sup>82</sup> Casey Barrett, “Games to Take Flight from the ‘Nest’”, *NBC Olympics*, 8 August 2008, at <http://www.nbcolympics.com/newscenter/news/newsid=178658.html>, last accessed 20 November 2008 (no longer available) (emphasis added).

<sup>83</sup> “For Li Ning, Anything is Possible”, *People’s Daily English*, 9 August 2008, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/94411/95075/6470171.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009 (emphasis added); Chen Zhao and Li Hongbing, “Ticao wangzi feitian dian shenghuo”

the 100-year dream of the *zhonghua minzu* into a reality”, and was later quoted as stating that the final torchbearer carried with him “the collective dreams of the ancients throughout 5,000 years of Chinese history; the collective futures of 1.3 billion Chinese people; and the collective passions of the entire *zhonghua minzu*”.<sup>84</sup> In representing both the traditional and modern faces of China, these two “Chinese” figures signified the great coalescing force of Confucianism and its ability to fuse different peoples (both inside and outside China) into a powerful, cohesive whole.

However, the Beijing Olympics were not only about promoting traditional Chinese culture but also about showcasing modern, global China: its efficient infrastructure, vibrant international economy, progressive, forward-looking civility and “vigorous modern culture”.<sup>85</sup> Just as Liu Qi claimed that Beijing was a “portal for fostering contacts involving Western culture and oriental civilization”,<sup>86</sup> the Director of the Humanistic Olympic Studies Center, Professor Jin Yuanpu, stated that “the Olympics is a gigantic carnival for the common people of the world which transcends race, culture, class and place—a genuine platform for the mutually beneficial melding of the world’s national cultures”.<sup>87</sup> At Beijing, Chinese and world culture would join hands in creating a new, pluralistic synthesis of the Olympic culture and spirit. As Susan Brownell notes, the Chinese Party-state sought to use the Beijing Olympics to prepare its citizens for a globalized world, while putting forward Chinese civilization as a responsible stakeholder in both the Olympic Movement and the international community more broadly.<sup>88</sup> In promoting a sort of cosmopolitan patriotism, Olympic organizers hoped to advance pride in Chinese national identity as an equal partner in the international community. However, by focusing attention at the level of China and other Olympic nations in much of its domestic and international propaganda, or even more abstract discussions of East and West, internal Chinese diversity largely faded from sight.

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(The King of Gymnastics Flies Through the Air to Light the Olympic Flame), *Renmin ribao*, 9 August 2009. Li Ning’s role as a “Chinese national hero” also played a central role in the Party-state’s domestic “Olympic education” program. Take, for example, his depiction in a middle-school Olympic reader as a “Chinese Olympic hero” and the only “Chinese athlete” in the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame, see Beijing shi jiaoyu weiyuanhui, *Beijing Ao Yun hui zhongxue xuesheng duben* (Middle School Student Beijing Olympic Reader) (Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 2006), available at <http://www.bjoe.org.cn/jeduao/y/1225824623086534656/20071221/35010.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Chen Zhao and Li Hongbing, “Ticao wangzi feitian dian shenghuo”.

<sup>85</sup> BOCOG, *Culture Guide Beijing 2008*, 25 July 2008, available at <http://en.beijing2008.cn/culture/headlines/n214478543.shtml>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Jin Yuanpu, “‘Renwen’ shi Beijing Ao Yun de linghun” (The “People” are the Beijing Olympic’s Soul), *Xinban* (Information), Vol. 5 (16 February 2004), at [http://www.c2008.org/rendanews/knowledge\\_detail.asp?id=1078](http://www.c2008.org/rendanews/knowledge_detail.asp?id=1078), last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Brownell, “Beijing’s Olympic Education Programme”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 197 (March 2009), pp. 44–63.

The director of the opening and closing ceremonies, Zhang Yimou, admitted that they were principally aimed at foreign audiences and, just as authentic Chinese food does not suit the palate of foreigners, so too would Chinese culture need to be adapted to suit foreign tastes.<sup>89</sup> Following the ceremony, Zhang was quoted as stating that the Beijing Olympics provided an excellent opportunity to give the world a taste of traditional Chinese romance, and thus Zhang and the other organizers carefully selected those symbols of Chinese culture that best suited its romantic and magnanimous character.<sup>90</sup> The *People's Daily* referred to the Opening Ceremony as “an exquisite cultural banquet”, which displayed the “endless charm” and “profound poetry” of Chinese culture, the sort of success that expressed the Chinese people’s common desire: “The world has given us 16 days, and we will give the world 5000 years”.<sup>91</sup>

At the same time, the artistic segment of the opening ceremony was divided into two equal halves, with the first segment, “Brilliant Civilization” (*sida faming* 四大发明), providing an eclectic sweep through imperial Chinese history, and the second, “Glorious Age” (*huihuang shidai* 辉煌时代), projecting Chinese modernity and its desire for a future, global ecumene with “Chinese characteristics”.<sup>92</sup> The second vision climaxed with 2,008 smiling faces of the world’s youth gathered on the Bird’s Nest floor as the Olympic theme, “You and Me”, echoed throughout the stadium and on radios and television sets around the globe. At this moment, the saccharine voices of the CCTV commentators exuded: “Regardless of skin color, race, nationality or language, a smile is our best expression. A single smile conveys our kindness to others, our friendliness to each other. Olympic Beijing is certainly a smiling Beijing. Olympic Beijing will use the most beautiful smile to narrate the warmest of athletic journeys”.<sup>93</sup>

### Symbols of a Conflicted Nation

In the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics, some of China’s leading media companies launched a massive online survey designed to identify the top 100 national symbols. Asking what symbols should be used to represent 5,000 years of Chinese history during the 16 days of the Beijing Olympics, netizens across China

<sup>89</sup> Yuankai Tang, “Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony”, *China Today*, 8 August 2008, at [www.chinatoday.com.cn/aoyun/en/c6/4.html](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/aoyun/en/c6/4.html), last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Li Hongbing and Chen Zhao, “Kewang chengxian yige langman Zhongguo” (I Longed to Present a Romantic China), *Renmin ribao*, 9 August 2008.

<sup>91</sup> Editorial, “Dianran jiqing, fangfei mengxiang” (Ignite the Passion, Live the Dream), *Renmin ribao*, 9 August 2008.

<sup>92</sup> Geremie Barmé, “China’s Flat Earth: History and 8 August 2008”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 197 (March 2009), p. 70; CCTV International, *The 2008 Beijing Olympics*.

<sup>93</sup> “2008 nian Ao Yun hui kaimushi jieshuoci” (Commentary for the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony), *Yuwenban* (Language Edition), 24 Aug 2008, at <http://www.yuwenban.com/Article/200808/6020.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

were asked to vote for their favorite icon of Chinese identity.<sup>94</sup> Over half a million valid votes were cast during the month-long survey, with voters only allowed to cast a single vote per day from a distinct IP address. The results, which were announced on 8 August 2007, mirror some of the diverse modes of ethnic belonging surveyed in this article: with the 56 nationalities (24), *qipao* (62), Potala Palace (75), Qinghai–Lhasa railway (82) and Genghis Khan (91) reflecting aspects of Leninist-style multiculturalism; Han characters (4), the Yellow Emperor (22), the Yellow Emperor’s tomb (86), the 100 surnames (92) and Han clothing (100) key symbols of Han ethnocentrism; and Confucian thought (7), Confucius (13), Mencius (81), the *Analects* (70) and Tang-clothing (77) all central ingredients in Confucian ecumenism.<sup>95</sup>

The poll’s top symbol, the Great Wall, reflects the inherent ambiguity among these three formulations. Throughout imperial history, the Wall stood as a literal and figurative bulwark against outside, barbarian pollution, while during the modern period it has been re-imagined as an international symbol of Chinese identity and national unity. During the Opening Ceremony, an image of the Great Wall quickly faded into a field of peach blossoms—a traditional symbol of openness, harmony and peace—as walls of any sort have no place within the utopian *datong* of Confucian cosmopolitanism. These symbols represent fungible yet evolving signifiers of the nation, ones that can be interpreted and mobilized in a variety of ways by different cultural producers over time.

The diversity of these icons and the larger tensions within Olympic discourse and practice leading up to the Beijing Games seem to suggest a conflicted national form, revealing several latent fissures in the very composition of the Chinese nation-state. Throughout its 60-year rule, the Chinese Communist Party has consistently referred to China as a “unitary, multi-ethnic state” (*tongyi de duo minzu guojia* 统一的多民族国家). Yet alternative modes of ethnic being can be found within both Chinese and Western tradition. The Internet revolution and the dramatic changes unleashed in reform-era Chinese society have opened up new spaces—some élitist, some populist and some largely obscured—for the articulation of alternative national imaginaries, ensuring that the Party-state no longer holds a monopoly on the symbols, categories and meanings associated with being “Chinese”.

<sup>94</sup> “Baijia meiti lianhe diaocha ‘Zhongguo 100 yuansu’” (Various Media Outlets Unite to Survey “Top 100 Chinese Symbols”), *NetEase*, 8 May 2007, at <http://news.163.com/07/0508/11/3DVEIKRI0001125P.html>, last accessed 8 December 2009.

<sup>95</sup> “Zhongguo 100 yuansu diaocha jieguo jixiao” (Results of the 100 Chinese Symbols Survey Are Announced), *QQ*, 8 August 2007, at <http://news.qq.com/a/20070808/002497.htm>, last accessed 8 December 2009.