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## The construction of nation-state in China in the 20th century

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**Abstract.** At the transition of the new century and the old, China faced the gunboat diplomacy of Western powers. The traditional Chinese «Tianxia» (天下) order was destroyed and disintegrated. China began to realize the existence of an international political order composed of nation states. In the face of imperialism devouring the land of China, Chinese intellectuals realized that the reason why China was invaded is because China had not completed its modernization, and political modernization was the establishment of a nation-state system to participate in the fierce national competition in modern times. Only the establishment of a nation-state could maintain China's independence and territorial integrity. In this context, Liang Qichao, as a representative of constitutional monarchy, proposed the notion of «the Chinese Nation» (中华民族), with the effort to unite all ethnic groups in China against imperialist aggression and save Qing Dynasty from peril. Sun Yatsen put forward the idea of «Five Races Under One Union» (五族共和), and under this calling, the political forces of the North and South reached a consensus and finally a multi-ethnic bourgeois republic of China was established in 1912. Fei Xiaotong's concept of «The Pattern of the Chinese Nation's Pluralistic Unity» (中华民族多元一体格局) was proposed after the founding of the People's Republic of China, emphasized national diversity, unity and equality. This article takes these three political activists' national theories as analysis objects to sort out the process of how China transitioned from the old empire into a modern nation-state. Through this analysis, I hope to understand the emergence and nature of modern China as an independent subject in international relations.

**Key words:** China, nation-state, the Chinese Nation, Five Races Under One Union, pluralistic unity.

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## Конструирование национального государства в Китае в XX веке

**Аннотация.** В переходный период между новым и старым веками Китай столкнулся с «дипломатией канонеров» западных держав. Традиционный китайский порядок в «Поднебесной» (天下) был разрушен и распался. Китай начал осознавать, что международная политическая система, строится на основе существования национальных государств. Наблюдая за экспансионистской политикой западных держав, китайские интеллектуалы осознали, что причина вторжения западных держав в Китай заключается в том, что Китай не завершил свою модернизацию. При этом политическая модернизация понималась ими как создание национальных государств для участия в жесткой международной конкуренции. Только создание нацио-

нального государства могло сохранить независимость и территориальную целостность Китая. В этом контексте лидер либерального реформаторского движения, сторонник конституционной монархии Лян Цичао предложил использовать понятие «Китайская Нация» (中华民族), полагая, что оно сможет объединить все этнические группы Китая против империалистической агрессии и спасти династию Цин. Известный китайский революционер, основатель партии Гоминьдан Сунь Ятсен выдвинул идею «Союз пяти народов» (五族共和). В соответствии с этим лозунгом враждовавшие политические силы Севера и Юга страны смогли достичь консенсуса, в результате которого в 1912 г. была основана многоэтническая буржуазная Китайская Республика. Концепция известного китайского социолога, антрополога и политического деятеля Фэй Сяотуна «Модель плюралистического единства китайской нации» (中华民族多元一体格局) была предложена после создания Китайской Народной Республики и подчеркивала национальное разнообразие, единство и равенство. В статье анализируются идейно-теоретические воззрения этих трех политических активистов, показывающие процесс перехода Китая от старой империи к современному национальному государству. Авторы статьи стремились показать посредством этого анализа специфику Китая как самостоятельного субъекта современных международных отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, национальное государство, китайская нация, союз пяти народов, плюралистическое единство.

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## INTRODUCTION

The basic unit of communication in contemporary international relations is the nation-state. The People's Republic of China is a unified multi-ethnic nation-state composed of 56 ethnic groups newly established in the 20th century. Two basic questions have to be raised here: What is a nation? How was the nation-state constructed?

For a long time, there have been two different propositions in the study of nation and nationalism: essentialism and constructivism. The first view is that nationality is a kind of natural original thing that can be measured based on race, language, Culture, gathering place and other «objective standards». Constructivists believe that nation is a social and historical construction and has a strong subjective view. This article mainly observes the development process of Chinese national identity in the 20th century from the perspective of constructivism. Benedict Anderson as a typical constructivist emphasized that when studying national movement, ideology should be the key point of national construction. Nation and nation-state are the products of modernization. Focus on the reading ability of people outside of formal education and the interaction of this ability with the nation and nation-state. In any society, in addition to face-to-face interaction, people also need a certain amount of imagination. Nation «is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.»[1: 6]. Anthony Smith's guiding definition of nationalism is «an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'»[2: 9]. From a practical point of view, on the one hand, it can help colonies resist foreign invasion; on the other hand, it can also provide emerging countries with ideologies and slogans that integrate various ethnic groups within their borders.

The ideology of the Chinese nation-state was born in the process of resisting foreign imperialist invasions in the 19th and 20th centuries, and then continuously developed and improved by the integration of the ideologies of various ethnic groups in the territory after the founding of People's Republic of China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, China was facing unprecedented internal and external troubles. After the First Opium

War (1840 - 1842), the great powers of various countries forced the Qing government to sign a series of unequal treaties, which turned China into a public colony of Western powers. Facing the cruel historical situation, Chinese intellectuals began to seek a plan for China's modernization in order to maintain the unity of the whole country. The most important thing was to find a way to transform China from a traditional country to a modern nation-state. A classic metaphor is that «China stands among the nations of the world.»

The representatives of the patriots of the Chinese reformers and revolutionaries are Liang Qichao and Sun Yatsen, both strongly advocated nationalism to save China, and tried to use national spirit to promote the awakening of the people throughout the country. That is, resolute social reform must be used as a means to create a modern nation-state when it comes to the fight against imperialist aggression and save the nation from peril. The imperialist aggression and the decline of the feudal central government have caused the people of all ethnic groups in China to face the common destiny of national destruction. This requires all ethnic groups to unite and maintain national unity.

## LIANG QICHAO'S «THE CHINESE NATION» (中华民族)

Liang Qichao (1873–1929) lived during the late Qing dynasty and the early Republic of China. In his youth, Liang Qichao worked with his teacher Kang Youwei (another famous Chinese reformer) to carry out the Hundred Days' Reform – a national, cultural, political, and educational reform movement from 11 June to 22 September 1898 in late Qing dynasty China. After his defeat, he fled to Japan and promoted constitutional monarchy overseas. He inspired Chinese scholars with his reform movements and his concern for the border crisis and the construction of modern China.

After the Gengzi National Revolution in 1900, China's border crisis became even more widespread and severe, and the Qing Dynasty came to life and death. Liang Qichao's overseas experience after his exile in Japan enabled him to form a nationalist ideology centered on the nation-state and conduct extensive publicity. Liang Qichao understood this situation from the perspective of the general trend of the world that the frontier crisis

had penetrated into the inland from coastal areas. The colonial forces of the great powers gradually moved from the borders of the mainland along the railways and rivers to the inland. China was trapped in an invisible partition. The border crisis was intensifying and the danger of national subjugation was approaching. How to mobilize the people and build a new country became Liang Qichao's primary concern. Liang Qichao began to re-examine the relationship between «China» and the «world» from the international perspective of nation-states, his idea of establishing nation as a nation-state became increasingly firm, and he paid more attention to how to confirm the legitimacy of China's identity as a nation-state in the world civilization system. Liang Qichao finally came to the conclusion: «Therefore, if we want to save China today, there is no other way but to build a nationalist country first»[4: 35]. Liang Qichao's strategy of saving China from peril is to build a nation-state.

When answering the question of what kind of nation-state should be established, Liang Qichao objected the idea of «Only Anti-Manchism can build a nation»(排满方能建国) put forward by the Revolutionary Party at that time: «When China speaks of nationalism, it should advocate grand nationalism in addition to petty nationalism. What about petty nationalists? Comparing the Han to other ethnic groups in the country. What are the grand nationalists? Uniting all ethnic groups in the country» [5: 75-76]. He pointed out that if China wants to build a nation-state, it must adopt the national theory of grand nationalism. In addition, Liang Qichao formally put forward the concept of «the Chinese Nation» in his article «On the General Trend of Changes in Chinese Academic Thought» in the 28th year of Guangxu (1902), which embodies the stage of the modern «Chinese Nation» awakening. In other words, the nationalism advocated by Liang Qichao is not that the Han alliance excludes other ethnic groups living in the vast territory of China, but rather that all ethnic groups in China unite against foreign invading powers and imperialist aggression.

Liang Qichao further revealed the spatial mechanism of the integration of various ethnic groups in China's history. «The barbarians in the northwest invaded our cultural center, naturally being nurtured by our inherent culture, and gradually changing its quality. On the other hand, people in our cultural center several times traveled to the south with the inherent culture to infuse the southeast, so the whole territory can be developed by the same amount»[6: 33]. The northwest-southeast frontier axis passes through the center of the national space and people living on both sides of the axis continuously interact to form a long-term ethnic integration. As many ethnic minorities such as the Manchus, the Mongols, the Tibetans, the Miao, the Hui and the Tibetans mainly live in the border of China, how to deal with the relationship between the border and the nationalist China? In the era when nationalism prevailed, Liang Qichao by promoting grand nationalism constructed a multi-ethnic mixed «the Chinese Nation» based on historical facts and incorporated the border areas into the nation-state «New China». Liang Qichao's concept of «the Chinese Nation» is the forerunner of the overall historical understanding of Fei Xiaotong's proposal of «the pattern of pluralistic integration of the Chinese nation» in the 1980s. But one thing needs to be pointed out the concept of «the Chinese Nation» in Liang Qichao's work sometimes refers to all ethnic groups in China, and sometimes refers specifically to the Han, there is still ambiguity in his theory.

### SUN YATSEN: FROM «ANTI-MANNCHUIISM» (排□) TO «FIVE RACES UNDER ONE UNION» (五族共和)

Sun Yatsen (1866 – 1925) served as the provisional first president of the Republic of China and the first leader of the Nationalist Party of China. He is referred as the «Father of the Nation» in the Republic of China for his instrumental role in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty during the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. Sun's chief legacy is his political philosophy known as the Three Principles of the People(三民主义): nationalism (民族主义), independence from foreign imperialist domination ; rights of the people ((民权主义), sometimes translated as «democracy» and people's livelihood(民生主义). In this article we mainly focus on the nationalism.

In November 1894, Sun Yatsen established the Xingzhonghui, an early revolutionary group of the capitalist class. He put forward the slogan «Expel the Tartars, restore China, and establish a united government (驱逐鞑虏, 恢复中华, 创立合众政府)», which represent the nationalist ideology of opposing the rule of the Manchu nobility and establish the Han government. Since then, Sun Yatsen's nationalism has emerged as the opposite of the Qing dynasty. «China is still on the eve of a great national movement. As long as a single spark can create a prairie fire in politics, it will expel the Manchurian Tartar from our country»[7: 62]. During this period, Sun Yatsen's nationalism was still in a narrow state of «Anti-Manchism», and he emphasized the use of revolutionary violence to overthrow the Qing government and establish a country dominated by the Han.

The idea of «Five Races Under One Union» was first formed in the debate between the bourgeois constitutionalists represented by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao and the bourgeois revolutionaries represented by Sun Yatsen before the Revolution of 1911. From 1906 to 1907, while the Tongmenghui's official publication «Min Bao» was the main focus, and the «Xin Min Cong Bao» edited by Liang Qichao was simultaneously under the spotlight as well. There was a tit-for-tat debate between the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists. The bourgeois democratic revolutionaries represented by Sun Yatsen have followed the trend of history and seized the opportunity to put forward the new nationalist connotation of the «Five Races Under One Union», advocating the realization of national republic and the integration of all ethnic groups, and on this basis, the realization of the nation Republic. «As the United States is a combination of dozens of black and white people, and American nationalism, which is the crown of the world, has a positive purpose»[8: 188]. To be more specific, the basic principles of the «Five Races Under One Union» advocated by the bourgeois revolutionaries are neither ethnic revenge or exclusion against the Manchus, nor the Han allowed to enjoy privileges, but a combination of civil rights, democracy and nationalism. The Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui(ethnic groups of Islamic faith in Northwest China), and the Tibetans were considered as major ethnic groups in China, seeking to achieve equality between all ethnic groups and together be the master of the country.

During the Revolution of 1911, the idea of «Five Races Under One Union» was put forward and widely publicized, which represented the most universal concept at that time, was accepted by most people, and united all forces that could be united. For example, the bourgeois constitutionalists, under the banner of «Five Races Under One Union», gave up their efforts to save the Qing Dynasty and turned to support the revolution; a large num-

ber of local officials with real power in the Qing Dynasty also turned to the revolution; the people of all ethnic groups in the border areas also actively responded to the revolution under the call of the «Five Races Under One Union», which weakened and destroyed the ruling power and foundation of the Qing Dynasty to the greatest extent, accelerated its demise, and at the same time, strengthened the power of the democratic revolution. Under the banner of the «Five Races Under One Union», the political forces of the North and South reached a consensus, that was, national unity and territorial integrity. As a result, a multi-ethnic, bourgeois republic of China was established in 1912. In January 1912, when Sun Yatsen was newly appointed as the interim president of the Republic of China, he declared: «The foundation of the country lies in the people. The Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Tibetans are all in one country, namely, the Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Tibetans are one person, which is the unity of the nation»[9: 2].

In the fight against imperialist aggression, the common destiny and common responsibilities faced by the people of all ethnic groups have further strengthened their political, economic, and cultural ties, and promoted the process of national integration in China. The establishment of the «five ethnic republic» thought and the Republic of China have deepened the recognition of the people of all ethnic groups towards the modern nation-state; as the country is once again unified, the recognition of the country by the people of all ethnic groups will be easier to achieve, and the identity of the country and the identity of the nation are inseparable.

#### FEI XIAOTONG'S «THE PATTERN OF THE CHINESE NATION'S PLURALISTIC UNITY» (中国民族多元一体格局)

Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005) was a pioneering researcher and professor of sociology and anthropology, he was also noted for his studies in the study of China's ethnic groups as well as a social activist. One of China's finest sociologists and anthropologists, his works on these subjects were instrumental in laying a solid foundation for the development of sociological and anthropological studies in China, as well as in introducing social and cultural phenomena of China to the international community. In 1995, he went to Guizhou for ethnic identification and participated in the socio-historical survey of ethnic minorities.

Fei Xiaotong defined a nation from an essentialist standpoint, basically, on the basis of Joseph Stalin's national theory. Joseph Stalin stressed 'objective' factors: «a nation is an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture»[3: 61]. Fei Xiaotong at the same time began with the objection of constructivism «Nation is not a concept created apropos out of nothing by people for a certain need, but an objective existence. It is a social entity formed by many people in the collective life of generations and plays an important role in people's social life»[11, 1999: 5]. Moreover, Stalin's national theory acted as a catalyst for the fusion of the two national concepts of territorial nationalism and the Confucian empire's harmonious world. First of all Stalin's nationalism and territorial nationalism do not conflict fundamentally. They both recognize the power and borders of sovereign states. At the same time, Stalin's national

self-determination is understood as the pluralistic side of small communities. To some extent, the concept of national equality can be linked to the concept of harmony in the Confucian empire and can be transformed into an aspect that can be further transformed into Fei Xiaotong's theory of multiple unified nations. Fei Xiaotong's national theory affirmed that a nation is a community, and based on Stalin's theory, affirmed the equality of nations. Fei Xiaotong further defined the meaning of «the Chinese Nation» in his article «The Pattern of Chinese Nation's Pluralistic Unity»: «The term 'the Chinese Nation' is used to refer to the one billion people with national identity in China's territory. It includes more than fifty ethnic groups in China which are diverse, and the Chinese nation is one. Although they are all called «nations», they have different levels» [10]. More specifically, «Pluralistic»(多元) means that each fraternal nation has its own origin, formation, development history, culture, and society, and each has its own characteristics and is different from other nations; «Unity»(一体) means that the development of various ethnic groups is interrelated, complementary, interdependent, and inseparable from the whole and has an inseparable internal connection and common national interests[11: 309]. Moreover, «The Pattern of Pluralistic Unity»(多元一体格局) can be divided into three stages. First of all, the 56 ethnic groups are at the grassroots level, and «the Chinese Nation» is at the top level. Secondly, Fei Xiaotong considered the Han to be the «core of cohesion», and it continues to grow in the midst of great fusion and integration. The Han people gather strength and integrate multiples into one. At last, high-level identities do not necessarily replace low-level identities, and all levels of identities are parallel. The understanding of this notion involves the analysis of the reasons for the formation and development of the «the Chinese Nation», and many factors need to be taken into consideration, especially Chinese history.

Dividing the development of the notion of «the Chinese Nation» into two stages, «freedom» and «consciousness», is another great contribution of Fei Xiaotong to the elaboration of the «the Chinese Nation». «The Chinese nation» has a process of formation and development from «freedom» to «consciousness». The mainstream of its formation and development can be summarized as «Pluralistic Unity». As a conscious national entity, the Chinese nation emerged from the confrontation between China and Western powers in the past 100 years, but as a free national entity it was formed in the course of thousands of years of history» [11: 109]. «Its mainstream is composed of many scattered ethnic units, through contact, mixing, connection and integration, but also division and disappearance, forming a pluralistic unity with each individuality» [11: 109].

This elaboration is not only a theoretical summary of the «the Chinese Nation» at the stage of «freedom», in fact, it also revisits the reality of the «the Chinese Nation». It should be said that Fei Xiaotong affirmed the existence of an indivisible unity formed by the internal union of this territory but believed that this «unitary» was called «the Chinese Nation» only after «national consciousness». Fei Xiaotong's concept of «The Chinese Nation's Diversified Unity Pattern» has brought the academic world's interpretation of the «Chinese nation» to a new height, especially it has caused the domestic academic circles to pay attention to the «Chinese nation», and its merits are more worthy of full recognition.

## CONCLUSION

Almost all old empires tried to learn from the nation-state system when facing the impact of Western colonialism. The construction of nation-state in China developed from the process of China's anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle. Liang Qichao's national theory of grand nationalism and the concept of «Chinese nation» mainly based on territorial nationalism laid the tone for the construction of the Chinese nation in a certain sense. When advocated Sun Yatsen's national theory is mainly based on the Han national theory of «Expel the Tartars, restore China» to a more general territorial nationalism «Five Races Under One Union», has begun to think about the current situation of multinationalism in China, which, to a certain extent, beyond the single-territorial nationalism inherent in the West.

During the period of the People's Republic of China, Chinese intellectuals combined the concepts of national equality advocated by Soviet ethnology, which argued nationality as a community of natural culture and history, with the traditional Chinese culture and unification of the world, brought their own understanding and interpretation of nationalism. They tried to establish a pluralistic and unified national theory, in which not

only recognizes the legitimacy and equality of the small communities of all nations, but also recognizes the large unified cultural community from empire to nationality constructed in the history of pluralism, and reforms Chinese nationalism through the perspective of political positivism Construction. The three basic ideological resources of the national theory of the People's Republic of China: absorbing the «Five Races Under One Union» idea of the bourgeois reformist national theory; the «pluralistic unity» theory based on Stalin's national theory; and a very simple anti-imperialism established through the anti-imperialism fight. These three elements are well interpenetrated. The nation-state is a sovereign state entity of reductionist territorial nationalism and the most basic atom in international relations. But internally, territorial nationalism in different countries also has different histories. The particularity of this inherent ideology in the study of international relations naturally affects its behavior and demands in international relations. An interpretation of the nation-state in a complete reduction theory cannot fully reveal the actual interests of each nation-state, only through specific analysis can we understand the emergence and nature of a modern nation-state as an independent subject in international relations.

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**ОТ РЕДКОЛЛЕГИИ РЕКОМЕНДУЕТ СТАТЬЮ ДЛЯ ПУБЛИКАЦИИ**

**Агапов Михаил Геннадьевич** – доктор исторических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник Тюменского научно-го центра Сибирского отделения РАН (специальность 07.00.03)

#### **РЕЦЕНЗИЯ**

#### **на статью Тао Цзинхун (Tao Jinghong) и В. А. Кузьмина (Vadim A. Kuzmin) «Конструирование национального государства в Китае в XX веке (The Constraction of Nation-State in China in the 20th Century)»**

Рецензируемая статья посвящена в высшей степени актуальной проблематике формирования (конструирования) национального государства в Китае. На основе оригинальных китайских материалов (от работ Лян Цичао, Сунь Ятсена до текстов Фэй Сяотуна) авторы выявили этапы формирования современной концепции национального государства в Китае и вскрыли импульсы, предопределявшие особенности этого процесса. На основе результатов проведенного исследования достаточно четко обозначились принципиальные различия между теми вариантами, которые предлагали сторонники конституционной монархии, а затем и революционные демократы от концепции, ставшей основой политической линии во времена Китайской Народной Республики.

Следует особо отметить репрезентативность источниковой базы предлагаемой статьи, основанной на оригинальных китайских материалах, в высшей степени корректно использованных и интерпретированных.

Наконец, вполне можно согласиться с утверждением авторов о том, что посредством представленного материала им удалось выйти на анализ специфики Китая как самостоятельного субъекта международных отношений.

Полагаем, что рецензируемая статья отвечает самым высоким требованиям научной публикации. Написана на хорошем английском языке, позволяющем сохранить специфику китайских исторических и политических процессов.

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