Discursive Construction of National and Political Identities in China: Political and Cultural Construction of the Chinese Nation

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Introduction

This chapter examines the discursive formations, features and strategies of identities in modern China, focusing on the notions of nation and politics.[1] It discusses the origins, development and functions of China's multiple identities and how the circulation of identity discourse interacts with broader socio-political processes and shapes the understanding of Chinese identities amidst China's ascent as a major power. Identity is understood as being continually constructed and reproduced through discourse that mediates the relationships between social practice, institutions and values. It argues that the historical legacy of the sharp break with the past in the early twentieth century created an identity crisis generated conflicting visions for the future and perennial political struggles to realise these visions. National and political identities have been at the heart of these visions and struggles as identity politics became the primary domain of the nation- and state-building that constitutes the core of China's quest for modernity. Seeking moral high ground and political legitimacy, these visions and struggles are played out in the symbolic world of discourse that are no less fierce than the physical world of politics.

Drawing largely on Fairclough's idea of discourse as a social action (Fairclough, 1992), this chapter conceptualises identity discourse as a principal instrument to mediate, manage and shape profound social changes in modern China. It examines the role of discourse in moulding specific understandings of society by developing novel ideologies at crucial historical junctures. The focus of analysis is placed on what Fairclough (1992:96) calls 'discursive change' that leads to social change in a dialectical relationship between orders of discourse and orders of society. Examining identity discourse offers a unique vantage point in revealing macro sociohistorical problems that China has been confronted with in modern times. The investigation follows a broad chronological order. First, it discusses the great break with traditions as historical conditions that gives rise to the problem of modern identity. It highlights the impact of transforming a traditional empire into a modern nation-state on the sense of identity crisis that sparked competing ideologies and political rivalries as discursive struggles for a viable route to modernity. The analysis then moves to the complexities of national identity discourse as formulated, negotiated and communicated from the 1911 Xinhai Revolution to the post-1978 economic reforms. The discursive battles between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are underlined as an interplay of nation-building and identity politics. This is followed by a case study of the 2017 CCP National Congress Report to illustrate the latest cultural turn of identity through nationalism as a fresh discourse of reinventing the CCP as a loyal heir to China's ancient civilisation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of identity discourse as a dynamic historical process.

Historical conditions of identity discourse

The great break and epistemological shift

To understand the dynamics of the formation, communication and contestations of national and political identities and their discourses, it is crucial to appreciate key historical conditions that created China's identity dilemmas. Intrinsically linked to China as a unique civilisation, these conditions embody the fundamental problems inherent in modern identity politics. Gellner (2006: xxiv) argues that identity is based primarily on culture. When culture shifts, identity shifts. The arrival of industrialism in European societies precipitated a rapid transformation of identity in the transition from traditional to modern way of life. China experienced a double transition in early twentieth century – from an agrarian to industrial society and from a traditional indigenous to modern western epistemology. Identity problems became even more intense in China. The first transition occurred in the physical world of reorganising the state system and interstate relations; the second in the symbolic world of discourse that guides the physical transformation. The double transition however arose abruptly as a defensive mechanism to meet external challenges posed by Western powers. Imperial China (221BC–1911) as the world's longest and only surviving ancient empire in the early twentieth century was forced to transmute into a modern 'nation-state' in the 1911 Xinhai Revolution that dismantled the millennia-old imperial order.

The nineteenth-century Western colonial encroachments also triggered a sense of cultural inferiority that convinced the Chinese elites of the imperative of adopting not only Western political structure of nation-state, but its epistemological system of modern knowledge to restructure the understanding of society radically different from China's own (Cao, 2017a). An entirely new set of discourse about the nature of the state, nation and society began to emerge prominently in the modern press promoted by intellectual leaders such as Liang Qichao. Empires, ancient or modern, rose and fell, but the Chinese empire went through only cycles of dynastic change. Built on a long tradition of civilisation, the

Chinese empire was sustained by a Confucian belief system with a centralised bureaucracy. But in a short period of time between the 1895 defeat of China's maritime war with Japan and the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, this belief system was largely swept away in a momentous epistemological shift. Western ideas, institutions and values that were introduced to China became widely accepted among the literate class. The new form of modern knowledge became a dominant mode of discourse that rapidly altered the traditional way of thinking and created a break with China's intellectual traditions, parallel to the break with the traditional form of state and government. The double break set off fervent attempts by diverse political forces to construct new national and political identities shaped by a multiplicity of perceptions and outlooks inspired by the fresh epistemological system.

Crucially, related to the double transformation is an entirely new set of vocabularies that entered the Chinese language during this period of time to express new practices, institutions and values. These vocabularies that encode the western episteme constitute the fibric of a new mode of modernity-based discourse. Facilitated by fresh terminologies, such a discourse acquired an exclusionary nature of segregation and rejection from its inception. It operates in a dichotomous fashion to discursively segregate the past with the present, rendering traditional epistemology irrelevant in the discussion of solutions to the present problems and visions of the future. In a similar vein, it rejects the past either through nonrecognition or attacks on traditions. The rise of the exclusionary modernity discourse in its many facets emerged with new generations of scholars frustrated with China's predicaments. One significant group who contributed substantially to the rise of new modernity-related vocabularies are returning Chinese students from Japan. The majority of new vocabularies are Japanese Kanji (Chinese characters in the Japanese language) in origin that are used in translating Western books into Japanese in the late nineteenth century. Brought back from Japan by returning students, these new words became a significant

addition to the Chinese language. Most are nouns that express a (western) concept, or abstract nouns. As a result, large amounts of terminologies in modern Chinese about politics, economy, society, science, art and literature are Western in origin. It is in this sense that Levenson contends that the West changed China 'with a new language', through which foreign ideas *displaced* domestic ones. That is, rather than broadening Chinese culture with linguistic enrichment, the new language 'removed Chinese culture to another plane' (Levenson 1968: 161). Currently, over 30% of Chinese words emerged since the late Qing period; most are concept nouns from the West. More than 70% vocabulary in any piece of modern political text consists of terms from abroad (Wang 1980: 516). Indeed, the new language created a new system of (western) knowledge that underpins all prevalent modern discourses, including Marxism. In other words, it created a new 'conceptual map' (Hall 1997) through which fresh identities are developed, circulated and reproduced. Table 1 shows three lists of typical modern terminologies introduced into China as Japanese Kanji around the turn of the twentieth century.

Table 1: Western concepts translated into Kanji in Japan

No.	**Culture**	**Politics**	**Nation**
1	文化 culture	政治 politics	民族 nation
2	文明 civilisation	共和 republic	民族主义 nationalism
3	文学 literature	革命 revolution	主权 sovereignty
4	艺术 art	民主 democracy	国民性 national character
5	哲学 philosophy	共产主义 communism	国家 state

6	美学 aesthetics	自由 liberty	世界观 worldview
7	认知 cognition	阶级 class	殖民地 colony
8	主观 subjectivity	权利 right	治外法权 extraterritoriality
9	表象 representation	法律 law	领土 territory
10	批评 criticism	民权 civil rights	帝国主义 imperialism

Identity, discourse and social change

Identity is a sense of who we are, including our beliefs and values. It involves a sense of belonging to a group, either ethnic, racial and cultural, or linguistic and national. Erikson (1959: 27–8) defines identity as a mutual relation – it connotes a persistent sameness within oneself while sharing some characteristics with others. It highlights the historical conditions that heighten a national sense of identity rather than a static national character (Erikson 1968: 198). Dittmer and Kim however emphasise the role of the state in identity formation, arguing that a nation is not simply 'the largest and most inclusive form of collective identity', it is subject to state authority in a modern 'nation-state' (Dittmer and Kim 1993: 6). Identity is a cultural construction that is fluid, adaptive and changing. It becomes crucial for individuals, groups and nations in troubled times because the sense of identity is often aroused by crisis as discussed above. A nation always redefines its identity when challenged or corroded as a process of adaptation in restoring an equilibrium between traditions and challenges. However, it is through discourse that identities are formulated, articulated and communicated with a cultural group. As a mode of representation as well as social action, discourse has a

dialectical relationship with social structures. Discourse is shaped and constrained by social structures, while simultaneously constituting them (Fairclough 1992: 64). This is what Foucault (1972) postulates as discursive formation of objects, subjects and concepts that organise our understanding and actions in dealing with the external world. Discourse not only represents the world, it constructs it. Much like Europe since the eighteenth century, discourse on national identity played a key role in nation- and state-building in twentieth-century China.

The key moment of China's redefining national identity began with its transformation from a universalist 'all-under-heaven' to a specific multi-ethnic nation-state - 'the Republic of China' (ROC, 1912) and later 'the People's Republic of China' (PRC). However, the forced metamorphosis created an anomaly described by Lucian Pye (1992: 235) as a 'civilisation-state' disguised as a nation-state. A civilisation-state is based on the power of *culture*, in contrast to a nation-state built on a nation as a group of *people*. The anomaly arose from the contrived nature of the Chinese nation-state as a 'manufacture', rather than as a natural historical growth. Its expedient character as a survival strategy forebodes innate contradictions, ambiguities and paradoxes in national identity. To catch up with the West, Chinese elites hastened to abandon their traditions to experiment with novel values and institutions in what the historian Yu Ying-shih (1993: 141) calls 'a 'neoterist mentality – a mentality obsessed with change, with what is new'. The collapse of the traditional order and a constant search for new tools to amass wealth and power determines the *transformative* nature of identity discourse. Transformative discourse emerges to copes with rapid social changes and identity crisis. It is oriented towards innovation and drastic actions, invents new social structures and develops new power relations (Fairclough 1989: 37–9). The imperative to create new cultural self and relations with others obliged Chinese elites to radically alter their conventional thinking. New frames of reference and vocabularies have become the

primary repertoire to produce inventive identity discourses. Such discourses (analysed below) are typified by a constant struggle for change rather than sustaining continuity. Driven by a catch-up mentality, the struggle is played out by fighting for the right to define, defend and lead the nation for survival and to an eventual triumph. The discourses are also characterised by *strategic* and *communicative* modes of communication (Habermas 1984). The strategic discourse is oriented towards Chinese nation-state building; while the communicative discourse operates to achieve consensus-building for popular support and solidarity.

Constructing the 'nation': discourse of nationalism and national identity

Discourse of the nation

As a territorial community, a nation is understood as a population united by a common descent, history, culture or language. But this notion is a modern European invention as Hobsbawm (1990) and Gellner (2006) have argued. Highlighting its constructive nature, Hobsbawm (1990: 20) contends that 'if the nation had anything in common from the popular-revolutionary point of view, it was not, in any fundamental sense, ethnicity, language and the like, though these could be indications of collective belonging'. Similarly, Gellner (2006) defines nationalism as a function of modernity – it is nationalism that produces nations rather than the other way around. For Gellner, nation and nationalism are consequences of European industrialism. 'Nation' (民族) as a new term first appeared in China in 1837 in *Eastern Western Monthly Magazine* (东西洋考每月统纪传) to describe the Israeli people. However, in the next six decades it was only used 13 times until 1895 when China was defeated in the *Jiawu* maritime war with Japan. A sharp rise occurred in the use of 'nation' since 1895 as a novel concept of interstate relations in the post-war crisis. Liang Qichao coined the term

'China nation' (中国民族) in 1901, but a year later he changed it to the 'Chinese nation' (中华民族) – a term that has been used to this day. Trying to instigate fundamental changes in a 'stagnant' society, Liang Qichao and Sun Yet-san believed it was critical to develop a sense of nation to forge a collective solidarity against external aggression.

However, the idea of 'nation' is alien to imperial China that saw itself as the centre of the world in a universalist view of 'all-under-heaven' (天下). In the Sinocentric world, the centre of *huaxia* (华夏 China) and the periphery of *yi* (夷 barbarians) are defined culturally rather than ethnically. The empire expanded or contracted in accordance with its cultural influence, though backed by military power. Steeped in Western modernity and interstate politics, the idea of 'nation' rarely registered in the Chinese mind. '民' and '族' as two separate Chinese characters in the translation of 'nation' conjure up meanings embedded in traditional epistemology. '民' indicates people in the four categories of scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants, while '族' refers to extended families or clans. Conscious of the challenges of promoting the idea of 'nation', Sun Yat-sen lamented: 'there is no nationalism in China but familism and clannism. Foreign observers see the Chinese as a heap of loose sand . . . Chinese unity is limited only to the clan and has never been extended to the nation'[2] (Sun 1924: 1). To develop a collective 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of the Chinese nation, the political elites underscored the discourse of national survival, revival and prosperity to enhance cohesiveness among the people and loyalty to the nation. Serving the 'nation' constitutes the core *legitimising discourse* for political, sociocultural and economic campaigns, including those that are ideologically coloured. The industrialist discourse of wealth and power has become a dominant mode of talking about the nation. The spirituality-based cultural world has given way to a materiality-defined political world of nation-state that determines significantly the discursive structure of national identities.

Strands of nationalism discourse

Since the emergency of national consciousness in the late nineteenth century, nationalism has become the rallying call for sociopolitical and cultural campaigns. Different strands of nationalist discourse arose in different contexts with different objectives, but most are politically motivated. Different forms of nationalism have been enmeshed with diverse political as well as cultural forces to mobilise the public for a particular understanding of the national situation. The discourses they produce focus principally on national identities and political tasks required to deal with nation-building. Drawing largely on diverse modernity-based sources, each strand highlights a particular element of western intellectual tradition in constructing its argument. Four types of nationalism, however, have become significant over the last century in shaping the way that the nation is understood and promoted.

Ethnic nationalism

Ethnic nationalism is the earliest form that arose around the turn into the twentieth century as a response to the Manchu rulers' failure to resist Western imperialism. Seeing Manchus as an alien non-Chinese regime, late Qing revolutionaries argued for an ethnic revolution to remove the Manchus as a first step to establish a modern republic. Articulated as the first of the 'three peoples' principles' – (ethnic) nationalism - the revolutionaries imagined the Chinese nation as consisting of Han Chinese as the basis of a modern nation-state. The Han ethnic identity was inspired by social Darwinism promoted by the cultural elites to awaken their compatriots from centuries of Manchu rule. This divisive nationalism on ethnic grounds however was quickly replaced by an inclusive 'five-ethnicity republic' (五族共和) based on shared historical experiences. The 'multi-ethnic nation' aimed to bind together the Han,

Manchus, Mongols, Huis and Tibetans to convert the Qing empire into a modern nation-state. Within the ethnic-political project, the majority Han gained state power and incorporated all ethnicities into a 'big ethnic family'.

Nonetheless, ethnicity has acquired a different strand of meaning in emphasising a common ancestral origin in China of the legendary Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor discourse presents the Chinese nation as united by ties of blood, wherein cultural characters have become secondary to ethnic specificity. Membership of the nation is ascribed in terms of congenital endowment. The discourse of patrilineal descent has therefore become a cohesive device of national identity construction. Such an emotive discourse is capable of transcending religious, linguistic and regional differences in forging a shared sense of Chineseness. The Yanhuang (Emperors Yan and Huang) descendants discourse suggests a familial bond and kinship. Ethnicity-defined Chineseness has been at the heart of the communicative discourse aimed particularly at developing a sense of commonality in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and the expanding overseas Chinese communities. In contrast to the early narrow ethnicity-defined nationalist discourse, the familial bond strand of ethnicity moves to the symbolic world to enhance the sense of Chineseness at a global scale.

Liberal nationalism

Inspired by Western liberal ideas of individual rights, early twentieth-century intellectuals imagined a strong nation-state as comprising free individuals united in their political values in opposing external aggression and internal arbitrary rule. Enthused by democratic ideals, liberal nationalists campaigned for civil liberty and political accountability. Critical of the Kuomintang government's authoritarian rule, they were sympathetic to and at times allied with the communists to fight for democracy. Purged in the post-1949 Maoist campaigns, they regrouped in the reform period to push for democratic changes. Liberal nationalism is similar

to what Hutchinson (1987: 12–13) calls 'political nationalism' that transcends ethnic and cultural differences in anticipation of a common humanity. Liberal discourse of nationalism inherited the spirit of the late Qing revolutionaries and the 1919 May Fourth Movement activists in advocating 'democracy and science' as universal values. The May Fourth has become a primary repertoire from which later liberal nationalists drew their inspirations.

The 1980s witnessed a 'golden age' of the liberal discourse when Western humanities and social sciences were introduced to China after three decades of prohibition. It coincided with the 'liberal period' of the CCP under general secretaries Hu Yaobang (1982–87) and Zhao Ziyang (1987–89), both removed from post for their liberal stance towards popular demands for anti-corruption and political accountability. The liberal discourse focused on a vision of China as the emancipation of individuals within the nation-state. The state was envisaged as a protector and guarantor of individual freedom, in addition to nationalist aspirations of wealth and power. However, the undercurrent of criticism of the authoritarian rule was apparent though tolerated by the then liberal CCP leaders. The liberal 1980s resembled the 1910s in their vision of 'salvaging the Chinese nation' by embracing liberalism as an emancipating project. To liberal nationalists, individual emancipation was not only compatible with national prosperity, but vital to achieve it. The liberal discourse has remained a constant force for progressive change - its most recent exponent includes Yu Keping, author of the acclaimed book *Democracy is a Good Thing*.

Cultural nationalism

With the exception of few conservatives like Kang Youwei and Liu Shipei, late Qing intellectuals saw traditions as impeding China's progress and needing to be eradicated. From the 1910s May Fourth radicalism to the 1980s anti-traditionalism, Chinese culture was the constant target of criticism. However, cultural nationalism emerged in the academia in the

late 1980s and flourished in the 1990s amidst diminishing revolutionary discourse and as the backlash of the 1980s 'romanticisation of the West'. Regarding traditional culture as the foundation of nation-building, many scholars redefined national identity in a discourse of 'cultural Chineseness'. It refers to dominant values rooted in pre-Qin classics and their prevailing interpretations over two millennia. Anchored in a traditional epistemological frame, cultural nationalists rejected the Marxist interpretation of Chinese history, and saw it as a natural evolution from early civilisation maturing in the pre-Qin era, only to be vandalised in modern revolutionary campaigns. They argued nation-building should be based on the restoration of Confucianism and its adaptation to modern conditions. The traditional culture resurgence constitutes what some scholars call 'a Confucian renaissance' (Guo 2004). A key tenet of its discourse regards the Chinese nation as more than a political construct but endowed with a unique civilisation that should be treasured and revitalised. For them, China's most pressing problem resides not in economic development or political liberalisation, but in regaining the 'national spirit': 'over a billion souls were deprived of a spiritual guidance and wander aimlessly' (Jiang 1989: 64). Following the footsteps of 'new Confucianists' like Xiong Shili, Liang Shuming and Zhang Junmai, they reject imported Marxism and its application to Chinese history and society. The discourse has spread to various academic disciplines including history, linguistics, art and literature. Significantly, cultural nationalism has gradually entered official discourse of state nationalism in the twenty-first century.

State nationalism

State nationalism has been a dominant form since the Xinhai Revolution. It is characterised by a focus on the nation-state as a political-territorial unit and an organisational system. Inheriting the imperial legacy of investing immense power in the state, political elites

including the KMT and CCP emphasised a powerful state as an effective agency against external as well as internal threats. Regarding the state as having the ultimate responsibility of safeguarding national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national revival, all political parties rely on their nationalist credentials for political legitimacy. Highlighting its historical role of creating the PRC state, the CCP not only oversees the functioning of the state but defines what constitutes 'national interests' and how they are best served. The discourse of a powerful state under a party supervision was inherited directly from the KMT that created the party-state system. However, the CCP's patriotism discourse has extended state nationalism further; patriotism has become a key discursive mechanism through which the party-state determines the 'correct' forms and acts of nationalism. Through top-down campaigns, patriotism aims to achieve social consensus on specific versions of nationalism in a specific sociopolitical condition. The carefully executed discourse regulates the thinking and behaviours of the general public. Its key role lies in the CCP's power to define the relationship between individuals and the nation-state. In the post-reform era, its added importance arose when the CCP's legitimacy shifted from a socialist equality to economic performance. Patriotic education facilitated the transition by redefining the CCP's political identity from an ideology-inspired socialism to nationalism-focused developmentalism. It not only enhanced a sense of belonging to the Chinese nation, but de-ideologized the market as a neutral tool to organise economic life. Patriotism discourse functions largely as a mechanism of regulating the CCP-defined political boundaries in the rapid changing post-reform society.

Political identities as a struggle for the nation

Discursive struggles for the nation are constituted by the daily operations of politics. Politics could be defined as allocation of resources, arguably for the collective good. It involves

obtaining, exercising and maintaining power for the control of resources. To maximise consent and minimise coercion, political power needs to be legitimate – the right and acceptance of the authority of power-holders. Legitimacy is fundamental to social stability by reducing violent competition for power. In imperial China, the emperor's legitimacy derived from the 'mandate of heaven'. The cosmic-based legitimacy stamped out challenges to imperial power, and discredited rebellions as perverse. The post-imperial competition for political power focuses on the idea of nation-state building, centring on new identities and institutions. Critical to the process is managing the gap between imported political ideologies and the realities of an agrarian society.

The discourse of revolution: the rise of radicalism

Determined to bring about modern change, Chinese elites of all ideological persuasions embraced the idea of revolution. The twentieth century as 'a century of revolution' transformed China from the world's most conservative society to one of the most radical. It started from the 'Xinhai Revolution' (1911) and 'Second Revolution' (1913) through the 'New Democratic Revolution' (1911–49) and 'Nationalist Revolution' (1924–27) to the 'Land Revolution' (1927–37), 'Socialist Revolution' (1949–56) and eventually 'Cultural Revolution' (1966–76). Waged between opposing ideologies, political struggles went through three phases, each is characterised by a tension between a radical transformation and incremental reform. The first phase started in late Qing when 'conservatives' Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao campaigned for a constitutional monarchy as opposed to a revolution led by Sun Yet-san to establish a modern republic. The victory of the revolutionary publication *Minbao* over the monarchist *Xinmin congbao* in the 1905–07 press debate contributed to the fall of the Qing empire, but it also set in motion a chain of radical events in the following

decades. The second phase consists of the epic rivalry between the KMT with a vision of a democratic future, and the CCP with a socialist China. In claiming political legitimacy, each defined and defended itself as an exclusive champion of the Chinese nation. Each constructed a compelling narrative to bolster their military campaigns. It is in this sense that Mao sees the pen (propaganda) as powerful as the gun (army).

The third phase comprises the intra-CCP conflict between radical and moderate forms of socialism. The Maoist period (1949–76) saw the triumph of socialist radicalism over pragmatic gradualism. Under Maoist 'continuous revolution' discourse, China endured the most turbulent and destructive period in modern history. The impatience to achieve socialist miracles revealed the same thirst for radical change in the late Qing period. Utopian socialism resonated with the passionate promotion of the modern nation-state in the 1906–7 epic debate. The hegemonic discourse reverberated with the dominant mode of a binary representation of the society. It pitted modernity against tradition, the new against the old, and novelty against convention. 'Progress' was defined as a relentless quest for what is 'advanced'. In the post-reform China however, the ideological fervour subsided in a shift to economic development, though the radicalism vs. gradualism tension lingers on.

Like most modern terminologies, 'revolution' as a novel concept was introduced to late imperial China. Capturing the imagination of the elites eager to pursue modernity, the term gained an immediate currency in China. Translated in Chinese as 革命, the linkage between 'revolution' and the two Chinese characters '革命' is far from straightforward. '革命' as a term first appeared in *zhouyi* (周易) in the Western Zhou period (1066–771BC), referring to the change of dynasty. Tang and Wu (two kings) toppled the savage rulers *Jie* and *Zhou* in the name of the 'mandate of heaven'. However, the original sense of a cyclical dynastic change acquired a modern meaning embedded in the political ideology of the French and American revolutions. No longer a rebellion against the imperial authority, 革命 brings

down an *ancien régime* for an advanced political institution. Though Western in origin, 革命 was a Japanese translation in Kanji. Brought to China by returning students, the term delighted ethnic nationalists determined to topple the minority Manchu rulers. 革命 provided them with an added legitimacy in seeing 'foreign' Manchus as '*ancien régime*'. Adding to the heat of the revolution discourse was the publication of the 1903 booklet *Revolutionary Army* by Zou Rong (1885–1905) that fuelled further public support for revolution.

The discourse of left and right

Battles for political identity have created the Chinese left and right. Like the rise of these terms during the American and French revolutions, the Chinese left and right arose in the Xinghai Revolution. Many concepts and arguments that defined Chinese politics entered the scene in the early twentieth century. Unlike the West however, political divisions in China were far deeper and more violent. Conservatism as political right was largely disparaged during the Xinghai Revolution and has acquired a stigma of 'reactionary' or 'anti-revolutionary'. Associated with 'backward', 'feudal' and 'closed-minded', political right connoted resistance to progressive change. Political left however gained an image of being 'enlightened' and 'advanced'. Being revolutionary parties, the KMT and CCP shared some common ground in rejecting traditional polity and fighting for national independence, though offering different futures. Guided by Sun Yet-san's 'three peoples' principles' of nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood, the KMT envisaged an eventual liberal democracy through a nationalist revolution. Rejecting it as a 'capitalist democracy', the CCP offered instead to remove 'three mountains' on the back of China – imperialism, feudalism and comprador capitalism. The 'three peoples' vs 'three mountains' divide precipitated a life and death struggle between the capitalist 'right' and the socialist 'left' for political power.

Rejecting the KMT three-step 'military, supervisory and constitutional government' as the 'old democratic revolution', the CCP promised to propel China into a post-capitalist socialist utopia. Both parties created a compelling discourse to articulate their identities based on opposing political ideologies.

The left vs right battle did not conclude with the KMT's monumental defeat. In the post- 1949 China, the battle continued in a new mode but with disastrous consequences. In the Maoist era, moderate leaders were branded as 'rightists'. Intra-party campaigns purged millions from the CCP. 'Line struggles' as the ideological disciplinary machine imposed 'correct' political and ideological identities. Orthodox socialism achieved much of its objective of creating an egalitarian society in urban areas, with profound human costs. To resolve the command economy's efficiency problem, a market socialism was introduced in the post-1978 China. The deadly left vs right struggle subsided into a neutral discourse of economic development. Transcending the capitalism vs socialism divide, the ideological ambiguity facilitated market reform and economic growth. Nonetheless, the intra-party ideological rivalry resulted in the removal of the 'right-leaning' CCP leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.

In the post-Tiananmen China, the left/right divide has taken to a different domain – an intellectual debate under the watchful eye of the authorities with few policy implications. The party-state has united in its pro-business policy under an economic 'neoliberalism' (Harvey 2007). Emerging in the 1990s, the 'new left' arose in criticising international capitalist exploitation of Chinese workers. Armed with Western 'new left' theories, they represented a critique of capitalism in China that contributed to the widening gap between rich and poor. They focused on state ownership and argued for its greater role in improving social justice. However, the left/right discourse was overshadowed by developmentalism (Cao 2017b). The nebulous early-stage socialism faded into the background against the CCP's fresh identity

based on the materialist thrust of industrial modernity, resembling the late Qing self-strengthening movement.

Changing national and political identities: a case study of the CCP 2017 Report

With four decades of economic success, the CCP has oriented its identity towards cultural nationalism. The importance of traditional culture started to appear official discourse in the 2000s when the CCP reinstated the Confucian value of 'people as the basis' (民本) to underpin their policies. However, it is in the Party's external communication that culture was highlighted as constituting China's 'soft power'. Articulated in the 2007 CCP Seventeenth Congress Report, soft power was accorded a strategic importance in engaging in international competition. Enhancing the appeal of Chinese civilisation drives much of China's external communication efforts including setting up Confucian Institutes around the world. A shift occurred in the 2017 CCP Nineteenth Congress from external-directed 'soft power' to internal-focused 'national rejuvenation' (民族复兴). Soft power as part of 'comprehensive national power' is extended to embrace a 'national revival'. Both strands share the same communicative purpose of enhancing national cohesion, identity and solidarity, in addition to the CCP's political legitimacy. The 2017 Congress Report subsumes the CCP's political identity under cultural nationalism in an 'original aspiration' (初心) discourse. It interweaves the Party's history with a national journey of salvation and revival. The report opens with a party mission statement (Xi 2017): 'The original aspiration and mission of Chinese Communists are to seek happiness for the Chinese people and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. . . We must keep on striving vigorously toward the great goal of national rejuvenation'.[3]

It is significant that ‘national rejuvenation’ occurs 32 times in the report, more than the total number of its occurrences in the previous eight congress reports since 1982. In contrast to early narratives, the 2017 report presents an upbeat, confident and assertive projection of the nation. ‘Today, we have never been more confident, able and closer to achieving the objective of realising the great national rejuvenation’ (今天，我们比历史上任何时期都更接近、更有信心和能力实现中华民族伟大复兴的目标) (Xi 2017). Such a narrative intertwines with the ‘Chinese dream’ (中国梦) discourse Xi promoted since 2012 - a dream officially interpreted as an aspiration of national revitalisation. Crucially, the report elevates culture to the status of ‘national soul’ (民族的灵魂): ‘Culture is the soul of a country and nation. . . Socialist culture with Chinese characteristics is derived from China’s fine traditional culture born of Chinese civilization nurtured over 5,000 years. . . It has been a loyal heir to and promoter of China’s fine traditional culture’ (X 2017). The CCP thus casts itself as a guardian and champion of traditional culture. The metaphor erases memories of the ideologically inspired ‘anti-feudal’ cultural vandalism. Socialism is thus discursively coalesced to traditional values. Its history is streamlined into the progressive phases of ‘revolution, development and reform’ in a national journey of rebirth, recuperation and rejuvenation. Collapsing political and national identity in a single rejuvenation discourse, a new brand of cultural nationalism is created. It imagines the nation as based on a distinctive civilisation with a unique tradition and history.

Positioned as cultural nationalists, the CCP accentuates cultural membership through national uniqueness and cultural distinction. As such, the organising strategies of nationalism are deployed to add nationalist credentials in addition to economic performance. Nonetheless, socialism’s symbolic presence gains a ritualistic prominence with its 148 occurrences in the report. Its high frequency is nonetheless limited to the naming of current practice as having a

socialist nature. Early-stage socialism is tied to a developmentalist discourse substantiated with policy details. As the report's highest frequency term, 'development' appears 232 times. The narrower focus and circular rhetoric underline the ideological significance of socialism, though its discursive structure has been firmly anchored in cultural nationalism and economic developmentalism. The CCP leaders have sought to incorporate classical thinking into their governing principles. Hu Jintao embraced the Mencian 'people as priority' in his 'harmonious society'. In addition to highlighting the 'spiritual homeland' (精神家园), Xi quoted pre-Qin classics in governing styles in his 2014 speech at the CCP politburo study session. Xi drew on eight classics including those by Confucius and Mencius.

Identity discourse as a process

Foucault sees discourse as a way of constituting knowledge by producing meanings in the symbolic world. Any knowledge however is historically situated and socially contested. It is the contestation among groups with different interests that create the dynamics of discursive struggles. Situated in a turbulent historical process, China's identity discourse has undergone many shifts and turns. The excruciating process of uprooting millennia-old practices, institutions and values gave rise to much of the strife, challenges and dilemmas, as well as the drive, determination and aspirations for a new future. The metamorphosis engendered a plethora of ideologies, values and institutions among competing political forces to carve out a viable route to modernity. Shulman (2002: 559) identified three types of national identity – civic, cultural and ethnic. Civic identity is similar to political nationalism discussed by Hutchinson. Concerned with equal rights based on a cosmopolitan conception of the nation, individuals identify the nation by common laws and mores. This is what late Qing intellectuals embraced as post-enlightenment values. Liang Qichao promoted this version of

national identity in his *Discourse on New Citizen* (新民说) first published in his newsmagazine *Xinmin congbao* in the early 1900s. Liang sees an independent citizenry as the foundation of nation-building, without which state-building is impossible. Taken up in subsequent campaigns, 'the new citizen' evolved into a 'national citizenry' (国民) discourse. Though rekindled in the 1980s, the liberal strand of national identity has been overshadowed by state and cultural nationalism. However, with the democratic change in the KMT rule in Taiwan, civic identity has grown in the island. Paradoxically, it has posed a challenge to the state, and to a lesser extent, cultural nationalism in mainland China as a separate identity based on civic consciousness.

Shulman includes in civic nationalism the constituent elements of citizenship, consent, institutions and law'. These dimensions are key to China's inter- and intra-party division, rivalry and struggle. Both the KMT and CCP however have shared state nationalism, accentuating state authority in defining national identity. Nonetheless, the KMT as the dominant political force fell in Taiwan in ceding to rising civic nationalism. In the mainland, state nationalism has nonetheless remained constant and prevalent. Post-reform rising living standards and a growing middle class have boosted state rather than civic national identity. Grotenhuis (2016: 131) argues the expectation that ideologies and institutions imbedded in the West are fit for purpose in local conditions is unrealistic. Robust state nationalism could be attributed to China's imperial tradition and centralised authority. The modern state has inherited not only the power structure but a mode of discourse that sanctions, legitimises and rationalises that structure.

Regarded as crucial building blocks, tradition and language are central to Shulman's definition of cultural nationalism. As discussed earlier, Chinese tradition condemned in much of the twentieth century has made a comeback in official nationalism. Its communicative value of rallying the public behind the CCP is obvious. However, it is unclear which aspects

of traditions will eventually adopt not only in rhetoric but in practice. It is too early to say China has come closer to bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. Ancestry and race - two central elements in ethnic nationalism - have been pivotal in forging the discourse of a shared Chineseness. While largely successful in mainland China, they are less effective in Taiwan. Emerging indigenous identity has testified the KMT's diminishing influence in Taiwan as a historical party, but more crucially the complex and fluid nature of identity politics.

A century has elapsed since the fall of the Chinese empire. The political elites have embarked on the road of industrial modernity, pushed through by state power. Wealth, power and the international standing motivated late imperial reformers and revolutionaries as well as those that followed their footsteps. It is perhaps unsurprising that official identity discourses have centred on the grand narrative of the state. Even Liang Qichao's 'new citizen' is conceived as an instrument to build a powerful modern nation-state. The human dimension of modernity as reflected in civic national consciousness and the empowerment and welfare of the individual has been overshadowed by the hegemonic official discourses of national identity. The road to modernity as a project for the nation-state and the people living in it is far from being complete. The discursive struggle for the project continues.

Notes

1. The production of this chapter was supported by a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council Open
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2. The translation from Chinese to English is mine.
3. The translation of this report is based on Xinhua News Agency's version with minor changes for accuracy.

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