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## **Cultural Metaphors and Reasoning : Folklore Scholarship and Ideology in Contemporary China**

### **Abstract**

This article examines contemporary Chinese folklore studies within the ideological context of modern Chinese society. Drawing from Bruce Kapferer's work on violence and political culture in Sri Lanka and Australia (1988), the concept of a cultural reasoning, one which makes sense of the cultural world, underlies the analysis. Within the logic of this reasoning and the metaphors through which it is expressed, assumptions about the nature of Chinese society are relevant to the practice and legitimation of folklore study in the People's Republic of China. In particular, dominant assumptions of a continuous Chinese civilization and of China as a unified nation of diversity combine to present the Chinese nation as a historical and cultural entity. This cultural reasoning, far more pervasive than the official ideology in China, lies at the base of the contemporary construction of a field of folklore study with "Chinese characteristics."

**Key words:** Chinese folklore — cultural reasoning — violence  
Chinese civilization — political culture

## INTRODUCTION

**I**N 1985 the Kalevala came to China, preceded by announcements in the nation's newspapers. The Chinese people "welcomed" the opportunity to join the Finnish people in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the publication of their national symbol. In this spirit of welcome and unity, folklore journals devoted special issues to the significance of the events;<sup>1</sup> the Ministry of Culture, Association of Literature and Art Circles, International Friendship Association, and Chinese Folk Literature and Arts Research Society sponsored a festive ceremony; and the People's Republic of China (PRC) issued commemorative coins and stamps. A year later Finnish folklorists participated in a joint Finnish-Chinese seminar on collection and recording of folklore (HONKO 1986).

This image of celebration of the Kalevala in China may appear a bit unusual, but it certainly fits within the context of a special issue on folklore, nationalism, and politics. The connection is made, of course, through William A. WILSON's *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (1976), a book that helped highlight and define the initial parameters of research on the relation between folklore studies and nationalism. The thesis, simply stated, is that the field of folklore studies developed within the context of nationalist movements and ideologies. Other studies today locate the development of folklore scholarship within periods of nationalist sentiment in countries across the globe.

The image of the Kalevala celebration also points out important features of contemporary Chinese folklore studies. Folklore, seen as an expression of the Chinese people, is accorded a positive value, as are symbols of the nation and their continuity. Their celebration creates an arena, a social context and tangible products, in which to make the ideas concrete. Government units and scholarly associations combine forces to promote symbols of Chinese culture, and an array of organizations contribute to the effort by producing books, movies, and material artifacts. These activities occur within a context that is in-

tensely national, in content and scope, but also avowedly international.

Chinese folklorists today, in their narratives of the history of the discipline, likewise locate the beginnings of their field in the context of nationalist thought in the first few decades of this century.<sup>2</sup> During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals looked for national vitality and essence, a basis upon which to unify and revive the nation; they were concerned with Chinese culture and traditions, with China's uniqueness. These concerns are central to the discipline today as well.

These issues of nationhood might serve to circumvent problems involved in discussions of nationalism in contemporary China. Apart from studies of nationalistic movements at the turn of the century or of minority groups (non-Han Chinese) in the PRC, nationalism is not a term found frequently in English-language scholarship on China in the latter half of the twentieth century. Nor is the term nationalism (*minzu zhuyi* 民族主義) used in post-1978 Chinese scholarship. Contemporary Chinese Marxist political theory, still dominant and state supported, defines nationalism as a type of thought and policy associated with the capitalist classes; countries such as China and North Korea, "under the leadership of the proletariat and the revolutionary government and Party, have not only completed nationalist democratic revolution, but also have realized socialist revolution" (EDITORIAL BOARD 1986, 331). Using the term "nationalism" in connection with the PRC is a bit tricky, yet in contemporary China we can see the same attention to issues and claims that are defined as nationalistic in other countries and periods.

These issues and claims form a central topic of this article. Chinese folklore studies are carried out within an ideological context, or cultural reasoning, which serves to make sense of the world. In this sense I am taking my cue from Bruce Kapferer's comparative analysis of the structure and logic of nationalist ideologies. An "investigation of the assumptions that are integral to the cultural worlds in which people live and by which they interpret their realities" underlies this analysis (KAPFERER 1988, 24). The meaning of the "fundamental principles of being in the world" are worked out in human action, "ontology realizes its meanings, and exerts the force of its logic, only through the ideological actions of human beings in a social and political world" (80).<sup>3</sup> In this article I focus on assumptions about the nature of Chinese history, culture, and folklore as they relate to and are expressed in the practice of studying and promoting Chinese folklore. These assumptions gain significance in contemporary attempts to construct a discipline with and based on Chinese charac-

teristics. The context of this cultural reasoning is not, however, confined within the territorial borders of the PRC. Ideas about Chinese civilization and about theory and method in folklore scholarship form part of an ongoing international dialogue. To be sure, folklore study in the 1920s was influenced by Western and Japanese scholarship (and attendant nationalist ideologies), but Chinese scholarship has also exerted a tremendous influence on international scholarship in Sinology. And both have combined, to a large extent, in political theory and popular images of Chinese culture.

Before turning to contemporary Chinese folklore scholarship and the ideological assumptions upon which it is practiced, theorized, and legitimated, I will briefly survey concepts about the relationships between nationalism, scholarship, and folklore that inform my treatment of the Chinese case. In particular, the notions of boundedness, continuity, and homogeneity (HANDLER 1988) are essential to the analysis of the reasoning about Chinese culture.

*Scholarship on Nationalism.* Anthony Smith and Eric Hobsbawm have both discussed the history of theories of nationalism within European contexts.<sup>4</sup> In his analysis of the "era of triumphant bourgeois liberalism" in the nineteenth century, Hobsbawm concludes that "in practice there were only three criteria which allowed a people to be firmly classed" as a nation:

The first was its historic association with a current state or one with a fairly lengthy and recent past. . . . The second criterion was the existence of a long-established cultural elite, possessing a written national literary and administrative vernacular. . . . The third criterion . . . was a proven capacity for conquest (HOBSBAWM 1990, 37-38).

Nationalism was linked to a specific political and territorial organization of society, the nation-state, within a discourse on international power. "What was invented in the early nineteenth century was the ideology—the belief that nations were the natural and only true political units, the foundations on which states, governments, and their policies should depend" (TIVEY 1981, 4). Theories of nationalism served the nation-state by legitimating and proliferating ideas about the natural organization of human beings according to criteria of nationality and within the territorial bounds of the nation.

In the twentieth century many writers turned their attention to the role of modern media in the construction of national culture. Nations could be integrated through the mobilization of mass sentiments,

especially those sentiments that strengthened individual identification with a set of goals common to the nation (HOBSBAWM 1990, 141–42; LIU 1965 and 1971). Nationalism scholarship extended its range to non-European contexts and theorized new “varieties of nationalism.”<sup>5</sup> These theories remain with us today in scholarship and in common-sense notions of what nationalism entails and of the proper international arrangement of societies, but such assumptions are no longer unquestioned.

Rather than taking nation as a given, Bruce Kapferer focuses on how nationalist ideology, as a type of social theory used to make sense of the world, objectifies and sacralizes the nation. This view of nationalism helps to explain, in part, the close connection between the ideology of nationalism and social science theories, as “the cultural reasoning which is involved in nationalism is also ingrained in the serious, objective analyses of modern social science” (KAPFERER 1988, 18).

*Scholarship and Nationalism.* Nationalists, scholars, and politicians assume most of the responsibility for discourse on nationalism, and the degree to which they share common assumptions is striking. That scholars and nationalists are often the same people suggests one target for analysis (see, for instance, WILSON 1976 and HERZFELD 1982 and 1987). Furthermore, studies of the cultural and historical context of anthropology and folklore demonstrate that scholarships—like nationalisms—feature similar models.<sup>6</sup> Richard HANDLER’s analysis of Quebec nationalism reveals “metaphors of boundedness, continuity, and homogeneity that both nationalist ideology and social-scientific discourse presuppose in their understanding of nations as entities” (1988, 7–9).

Certain claims of nationalists and social science theorizing are particularly relevant to folklore studies. Nationalists and social scientists spend time and energy searching for what is unique to the culture of a group. Both look to a similar set of traits (such as stable community, common language and customs, historical roots and continuity, territory, religion, and self-identification) to explain and define the culture. Many scholars of culture and nationalism argue vehemently against this type of trait listing, but scholars, nationalist leaders, and governments commonly enlist these traits to argue that a culture is a culture. In the PRC, scholars theoretically use a similar list of traits, set forth by Stalin, to identify nationalities. This essentializing theory remains common in the differentiation of peoples, nations, and ethnic groups.

Culture brings with it the concept of unity and continuity. In the case of China, the assumption of a 2,000–7,000-year history of Chi-

nese culture unifies the Chinese people. And scholarship and festivals bring the cultural past to contemporary life by recounting and re-enacting history in the present. Expressions of history and contemporary culture create a sense of unity of individuals in the nation and of legitimacy of the nation. Culture becomes reified; culture becomes an entity to which selected aspects of daily life belong or are left out.

Nationalists and scholars alike enlist culture, unity, and continuity in their rhetoric. And the rhetoric, more often than not, is persuasive because the definitions of and claims to culture are one and the same. At some point the question arises of who is persuading whom? Sally MOORE and Barbara MYERHOFF, in their critique of the thesis of the social solidarity function of ritual, write that Durkheim accepted "at face value the success of the very messages that many rituals are designed to propagate: the myth of cultural unity and social continuity, the myth of the unchanging common tradition, the myth of shared belief" (1977, 7). Durkheim was persuaded by the expression of a particular imagination of community; and many social scientists have similarly accepted expressions of nation and nationality. There is a sense of naturalness of nation as social entity, of members sharing a common culture and experience, of tradition, and of folklore. They are used persuasively to define and fix a culture.

The cultural reasoning behind such definitions is both pervasive and persuasive, and an analysis of the cultural reasoning requires an examination of precisely that which appears to be natural and convincing. According to Michael HERZFELD, Western academic disciplines such as anthropology and nationalists share a common discourse and these "discourses deny their own social and historical contexts, claiming instead the status of absolute truths" (1987, 13). Ideas that are phrased as absolute truths or natural ways of thinking about the world become part of an ideological discourse. The discourse may be jostled by another, with its own claims to truth; representations of reality are seldom free from valuation and judgment in practice. Take, for instance, the perception of myth and folktales as natural products of the common people that have developed spontaneously over time within a cohesive group and without "outside" intervention (*outside* defined as both non-common people and non-group). If one perceives folklore in this way and, further, assigns that folklore a positive value, then the numerous instances throughout the world of myth expressed in government ceremony or folktales printed in textbooks are perceived as changing the folklore, of removing it from its natural context and of altering the natural process of its development.

*Scholarship and Folklore.* Scholarship, Chinese or foreign, guides

our understanding of Chinese folklore today; even Chinese folklorists study directly only a "portion" of what is considered to be Chinese folklore. The scholarship mediates at a more fundamental level through a priori definitions of folklore. It sets up the criteria for identifying activities, expressions, and beliefs as folklore; it separates folk from non-folk and makes up the criteria on which to evaluate the authenticity of folkloric expressions. While it may seem natural to distinguish a story as being official and another as being folk, the distinction is made against and within categories and definitions established in scholarships. And the scholarships, like politics and folklore, are practiced within ideological contexts—quite often, the very same contexts.

Scholarships promote definitions of folklore and the value of the field: they promote themselves within a context of competing claims to value and to meaning. Some folklorists in China during the first half of this century justified their efforts by arguing that past scholarship ignored the major portion of the population and only promoted the culture of the ruling classes. The people were portrayed as vulgar and ignorant. The task of these twentieth-century folklorists was to right this wrong through research on the literature and customs of the common people. The scholars marked off their territory from that of specialists in literature by defining the topic, scope, and method of folklore studies (ZHONG 1981, 3–8). Later, in the 1950s, some folk literature scholars were criticized for not clearly recognizing the special character of oral creations and for separating themselves from the people who produced them. The category of people (or laboring masses), after having been defined by scholars and political theorists, became evidence for evaluation of scholarship and politics.

In the late 1970s, folklore was revived as a respectable academic field and, moreover, one that could contribute to modern Chinese society. As the field expanded in the '80s, narrow definitions of the "people" as laboring masses (primarily peasants), gave way to broader ideas of the Chinese people.

#### CULTURAL REASONING AND CHINESE FOLKLORE STUDIES

Contemporary Chinese folklore scholarship is theorized, defined, and practiced within the framework of contemporary Chinese society. Chinese scholars may not agree with the dominant ideology expressed explicitly in government and Party discourse, but they can scarcely ignore that discourse. And that official discourse itself is based upon underlying assumptions about the nature of human society, culture, history, and tradition. The ideology that serves to make sense of the world is not confined to a hegemonic Chinese traditional or modern

cultural view but is rather international in scope. Marxist theory is one of the more obvious examples of this international ideology, but other models and metaphors are accepted as natural and as given.

I suggest that assumptions, beyond the realm of questioning in China today, are fundamental to the cultural reasoning, particularly the assumptions of a long and continuous Chinese civilization and of China as a unified nation of diversity. They are expressed daily in scholarship, government policy statements, and everyday conversation; and they are found in most non-Chinese writings on China. They combine to represent China as a cultural and historical entity. Although particular configurations of the culture and history of the Chinese nation are debated, its historicity and nationhood is not. Folklore scholarship does not need to prove the continuity of Chinese culture and unity of the Chinese people; it merely must analyze the manner in which continuity and unity was achieved.

Richard Handler's summary of the nature of national ideology provides a useful frame to begin this discussion. Nationalism "is an ideology concerned with boundedness, continuity and homogeneity encompassing diversity. It is an ideology in which social reality, conceived in terms of nationhood, is endowed with the reality of natural things" (HANDLER 1988, 6). These three ideas merge in the formulation of the cultural heritage, so central to folklore studies.

Several terms are used in Party and government discourse that resonate with Handler's concept of nationalism: patriotism (*aiguo zhuyi* 愛國主義), Love of Motherland (*reai zuguo* 熱愛祖國), and nationality self-esteem (*minzu zizunxin* 民族自尊心). Patriotism, not confined to the citizens living within the PRC, extends to compatriots in Taiwan and Hong Kong and to overseas Chinese (LIN 1989, 44). Love of Motherland is a rudimentary part of the social morality "needed on the part of every member of a nationality" and carries with it love of the country's rivers and mountains, citizens, culture, progress and prosperity, and so on. It is not a feeling "spontaneously formed, but requires patriotic education" (LIN 1989, 65). Nationality self-esteem "is a reflection of a nationality's self-consciousness." And here nationality refers to the Chinese Nationality (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族; not Han or other nationalities), "a powerful, prosperous and mighty nationality with an outstanding long history and magnificent culture" (LIN 1989, 64-65). The Party theorists phrase nationality, patriotism, love of motherland, socialism, and the construction of a modern Chinese socialist culture in terms of the Party and as mediated through socialism.

*Boundedness.* The issue of China's boundedness is debated internally and internationally. In the past, the boundaries of China as

the Middle Kingdom were not fixed; China encompassed "all under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下).<sup>7</sup> Around the turn of this century, in relation to a new international organization of society made apparent through foreign imperialism, this older imagination of community was changed. Those Chinese concerned with the country as a whole gradually began to conceive of China as nation (*guojia* 國家), with attendant ideas of fixed, territorial boundaries and a national citizenry. This shift in symbolic terminology, from *tianxia* to *guojia*, is discussed in other terms by Benedict Anderson as a shift in the imagination of community.<sup>8</sup>

Today the territorial borders of the nation are fixed (albeit with contesting views from contiguous nations). In terms of human beings, however, the boundaries of "Chinese" are rather porous. They encompass "overseas Chinese" living within the boundaries of other nations.<sup>9</sup> And the Chinese cultural heritage (*wenhua yichan* 文化遺產) subsumes the cultures that have existed historically in the area now defined by the present-day boundaries of the PRC and the Republic of China.

*Continuity.* The concept of continuity is heightened considerably in China. One of the most dominant concepts, I argue the most dominant, in China and in the sinological literature, is that of China as a long and enduring civilization. "Our country is an ancient civilized country with several thousand years of history" (SHI et al. 1987, 5). And its continuity is phrased relatively in terms of uniqueness. Although most groups or nations consider themselves and are considered by scholars as unique, Chinese "uniqueness" itself is seen as unique. It is uniqueness celebrated and elevated.

Continuity, taken to its extremes, merges with the idea of changeless in contemporary imaginations of Chinese history, particularly imaginations of what is called traditional China.<sup>10</sup> With reference to the late imperial period, Gates and Weller write that traditional China "may no longer appear to scholars to be as unchanging as its Chinese propagandists once insisted, but its cohesion and continuities (even, to some extent, after 1949) are nonetheless unique." In this view China is an "enduring civilization," a vast system that has held together for centuries (GATES and WELLER 1987, 4-5).

*Homogeneity Encompassing Diversity.* With 2,000 to 7,000 years of history and a current population of over one billion people, the claim to homogeneity would appear to be a bit difficult to carry off; yet it has been rather successful. "Chinese reference to unity is, in part, descriptive, for Chinese people have maintained both a state and recognizable patterns of production, social organization, and belief for longer than any other complex society." Over the centuries social unity, as

a goal of the state, was described and theorized under an “incessant assumption that unity not only *ought* to characterize Chinese society, but that it actually *does* so characterize it” (GATES and WELLER 1987, 14). The image of the unity requires resolving or ignoring fundamental tensions within Chinese history and society: diversity of the people, regional and ethnic variation, various “traditions,” and social differentiation.

#### CULTURAL METAPHORS

Within the dominant line of China as a multinational state, the Han (漢) constitute the majority nationality (*minzu* 民族), making up about 94 percent of the population. This phrasing masks the tremendous linguistic, regional, and social diversity characterizing people called Han. Han are defined in relation to minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族), of which fifty-five separate groups have been identified.<sup>11</sup> Together they form the “Chinese Nationality” (*Zhonghua minzu*). Chinese folklore studies must take all of these *minzu*—the Han, minority nationalities, and Chinese Nationality—into account within the scope of their field.

Nationality is a relatively new term, emerging only in twentieth-century China. The *Cultural Studies Dictionary* defines *minzu* as a collective term referring to all of the nationalities within a multinationality country, and the Chinese Nationality is provided as an example (QIN et al. 1988, 268). In the *Dictionary of the Customs of the Chinese People*, again Chinese Nationality is the collective term for all of the nationalities, “it includes the fifty-six brother nationalities along with those nationalities that have not yet been identified” (TANG and PENG 1988, 1). This unified nationality developed gradually through history until the twentieth century, when it emerged full-fledged.

The form of our unified multi-nationality country can be traced back to ancient society. On one hand, each brother nationality matured and developed gradually throughout history; each nationality had its own language, region, economic life, culture, customs, and unique material and spiritual forms. Because of this, they formed stable nationality communities that not only existed in the past, but will continue to exist in the future. On the other hand, because of the interdependence of nationalities, cultural exchange, and mutual influences, continual mixing of the brother nationalities occurred. In the evolutionary course of history, they combined into one entity—the great Chinese Nationality. Moreover, the nation formed by the Chinese Nationality has 5,000

years of civilized history (TANG and PENG 1988, 2-3).

Thus, the unity of China is explained through processes of assimilation, amalgamation, and melting of peoples, and its greatness, as the crystallization of the best contributions of each. Government-sponsored popular texts and surveys of regional and minority folklore employ the metaphor of a family to illustrate how the different nationalities, as related members of a large family, each contribute their strengths to the nation.

*Cultural Traditions and Power.* The notion of traditions is used to help explain the overall unity of the apparent diversity. There are different Chinese traditions—the classical tradition, the ruling tradition, the intellectual tradition, the folk tradition, the regional traditions, philosophical and religious traditions, and ethnic or national traditions—all of which are woven together to form Chinese Civilization.

Anne BIRRELL in *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China* writes that the classical tradition is the tradition of the educated elite; “the Great Tradition in China instructed and entertained the generations of men whose destiny was to shape and govern the empire,” while the little tradition was made of “less visible layers” and created by the “nameless mass of people” (1988, 1). ZHONG Jingwen, a leading folklorist, similarly divides historical society into the official culture of the ruling groups and the folk culture of the people or masses (1981). Class or division of society into elites and peasants has been translated at different times according to prevailing English terminology such as the government and the people, the rulers and the masses, the elites and the folk. The terminology fluctuates, but what remains is the concept of a Chinese culture divided into two large traditions as an attempt to explain the unity within diversity of a powerful and long-lasting Chinese culture.

The cultural unity of China and the problem of equating traditional culture with Confucianism or the Han people formed the topic of a recent issue of the *Beijing Review*. “China’s traditional culture cannot be solely equated with Confucianism, nor can it be summed up as the culture of Han nationality alone, or even as the philosophical ideology of a certain social stratum. In fact, China’s traditional culture is a complex organic structure comprised of many layers and interwoven strands.” The authors simultaneously acknowledge that the Han “comprise the main body of the Chinese nation, and the culture of Han nationality is China’s principal culture” (SHAO and WANG 1989, 19, 20).

Chinese tradition, history, thought, politics are equated with the

Han. Even non-Han dynasties such as the Yuan are described as Chinese empires. Many historical treatments of the non-Han rulers of China (the Chinese empire was ruled for centuries by groups that are now called minority nationalities) point to their inability to resist the sinification powers of Chinese culture. Thomas Heberer writes of “non-Han peoples who had over time been unable to withstand the extremely powerful influence of the Han culture and in the end had become sinified” (HEBERER 1989, 18).

These formulations fit in nicely with the current political theories of culture in China. “Culture reflects the total actions of the people of a nationality, a nation, and even a region or territory. . . . And a great and mighty nationality creates a great and mighty culture” (SHI et al. 1987, 5). This idea of China as having a unique and powerful and long-lasting culture is important today. Virtually no one doubts that there is a Chinese culture and that it is part of a thousand-year-old historical process and of Chinese identity.

Another common metaphor, emphasizing continuity, compares Chinese history and culture to a river; the different Chinese traditions are like branches or streams flowing together to form a mighty river. In late 1988, the question of China’s historical culture was brought into the public limelight with the airing of *The River Dies Young* (*Hesheng* 河殇; also translated as *River Elegy* or *the Premature Death of the Yellow River*), a six-part television series. Newspapers printed articles and groups held seminars to discuss the implications of the program, which was met with controversy and opposition. The series, watched by over 600 million television viewers, centered on viewing traditional culture through the image of the Yellow River.

The first part tells the story of two people who died while going down the Yellow River on a raft. “It was reported that the two men had made their bid for fame in a reckless attempt to accomplish the venture before an American. The Programme poses the question whether these drifters died in the Huang River demonstrating a brave patriotic spirit or blind nationalistic fervour” (ZHANG 1989, 23). Issues central to the program and to much of the discussion throughout the 1980s dealt with the historical weight of Chinese culture, its “land-locked” ideology, its introversion, and its closure to the outside.<sup>12</sup> But even with these pessimistic images that portray cultural “faults,” Chinese culture and the power of the cultural legacy were accepted.

*History as Cultural Heritage.* Claims to history blend with claims to the nation, to tradition, to continuity, and to the persistence of the past in the present. This persistence is underscored by a wealth of historical documentation, documentation which is called upon in quotes

and in museum displays as evidence to support contemporary views. The historical written literature is declared to be a rich resource for folklore study, but one that has inherent problems. Since much of the written history was state-supported, it presents contemporary theorists with problems of "class bias" and different imaginations of China.

Earlier Chinese scholars turned to the past, in part as a reaction to foreign imperialism, but also to create a sense of an independent cultural identity of the nation. Scholars such as Gu Jiegang, who undertook a Reorganization of the National Past, were concerned with the historical and cultural basis of national survival (SCHNEIDER 1971). Scholars today interpret modern China in terms of perceptions of "its" past; they look for evidence of the essence, social structure, philosophy, and political theory of what is called traditional China to demonstrate its presence in China today (or that has been cut out in the revolution). "The general assumption [of Western scholars of the Chinese Communist revolution], although it is by no means a universal one, is that something of the 'essence' of traditional Chinese civilization has survived the upheavals of modern times to mold the nature of the Communist present" (MEISNER and MURPHY 1976, 13). These Chinese and foreign scholars search for survivals of the past in contemporary China—some of which are valued and others of which should be eliminated.

Over the last two decades, an increasingly greater amount of attention is paid to the glories of Chinese history in "New China." The Chinese nation is imagined as having a several-thousand-year-old culture from which members of New China can selectively choose to guide the national development. Critically inheriting or carrying forth the heritage of nationality culture (*minzu wenhua* 民族文化) has been a guiding Party principle in the PRC since its founding, but the emphasis now lies on the glories of the past rather than on its mistakes. A new culture cannot emerge totally divorced from the old culture (LIN 1989, 207); it must be guided by careful analysis and selection of the "outstanding traditions of nationality culture to be of service in developing a new culture." The benefits are clear: "using [the cultural heritage] can enhance nationality self-esteem, strengthen citizens' patriotism, assimilate the experiences of our predecessors, and build on their wisdom and good qualities" (LIN 1989, 165). Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s eschew the simplistic methods of "weeding through the past to bring forth the new" used a few decades ago. Their "task is to reunderstand [traditional culture] and avoid the excesses of simply dividing it into the two parts of essence and dross," according to rela-

tions between history and reality, the particularity and universality of traditional culture, and national and international culture (SHAO and WANG 1989, 22).

#### FOLKLORE STUDIES WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

The search for Chinese characteristics upon which to base changes in society also depends on beliefs about the uniqueness of Chinese culture. The national reformers at the turn of the century debated the future of China; scholars and politicians alike argued over questions of national learning and national essence. Many advocated a national written and spoken language.<sup>13</sup> After the founding of the PRC in 1949, political leaders talked about communism with Chinese characteristics, and Party theorists today discuss socialism and modernization in terms of Chinese characteristics. The *Dictionary of Propaganda Work* provides an entry for “construct socialism with Chinese characteristics” (LIN 1989, 11).

Most works published in the 1980s, including dictionaries and reference works, situate the Chinese discipline of folklore within an international context; they summarize the history of the study in different countries and outline definitions used during different periods within Western and Japanese folklore. Chen Qinjian, in *Contemporary Chinese Folklore Study* [Dangdai Zhongguo minsuxue], describes folklore as a humanities discipline with an international character that achieved recognition by the early twentieth century. He locates the beginning of Chinese folklore study within the May 4th movement in the first few decades of this century. TAO Lifan acknowledges the international discipline but warns folklorists to be aware of historical limitations inherent in the nineteenth-century development of the field as well as of national differences. “Because every country has a different national condition (*guoqing* 国情) and scholars hold different views, it is inevitable that there are different theories regarding the research aims of folklore” (1987, 10).

Other scholars trace back the study of folklore much further, some even to the Han Dynasty by citing the work of the Music Bureau. Folklore may have been established as an academic discipline after the turn of this century, but materials now defined as folk (*minjian* 民間) were collected and written about by the literati for centuries, and these materials can be looked upon with pride. “Our country has a civilized history of several thousand years and has been, since ancient times, a multinational country. . . . Our country has the richest documented records of folklore” (TAO 1987, 12). International theory and research are important “but the construction of Chinese folklore

study must be based on and draw nourishment from that which is particular to the strong heritage of folklore study in China." Only then can the discipline address and answer questions central to the history, present day, and future of Chinese folklore (ZHOU 1988, 16). Scholars establish the basis of Chinese folklore studies within an ideology that makes sense of the world in terms of international theory combined with Chinese characteristics.

*Historiography.* In advocating a study of folklore with Chinese characteristics, scholars use history as a prime target for their search for these characteristics. At the second meeting of the Standing Council of the Third Chinese Folk Literature and Art Research Society, a call was made to help construct and establish a study of folk literature and art with Chinese characteristics. LI Benchu responded to the call with research publications on the history of the study of folk literature, specifically during the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Sichuan (1984). Contemporary folklorists and others know of these historical narratives, to a greater and lesser extent, and these in turn shape their views. Narrating the history of Chinese folklore studies has become a task to create a discipline that draws on Chinese history.<sup>14</sup>

The association between politics and scholarship is close and explicit in the periodization of the history of Chinese folklore studies. Authors who trace the historical development of the modern fields of folklore and anthropology connect periods of decline and flourishing in their fields with political movements and policies. Today's narration of the history of the field in the twentieth century divides it into five periods: 1) the beginnings, in intellectual movements during the first two decades of the twentieth century; 2) the war period; 3) the '50s, after the founding of the PRC; 4) the Cultural Revolution period; 5) and post-1978 China.<sup>15</sup>

Folklore study was formally established as a scientific and national-studies discipline during the first period, when "China came into contact with and accepted the views of the [early British] anthropological school of folklore." CHEN Qinjian and other historiographers cite Charlotte Burne's definition of the field as particularly influential, especially with its theory of cultural survivals (1988, 4). In general, politics, intellectual philosophies, and the folklore field were heavily influenced by American, European, and Japanese ideas. The early intellectuals were familiar with foreign folklorists and anthropological theory, and the theory of cultural survivals fitted in well with the goals of some of the nationalists.

Although folklorists today concentrate on the study of folk literature at the time, this was only one of the trends characterizing the early

period of folklore studies. Scholars engaged in intense debate and questioning within a context of political disorder and violence. Lu Xun, for instance, put forth a new metaphor by describing the Chinese state at that time in terms of syphilis and rotteness (SPENCE 1981, 142-43). Foreign learning, Chinese Confucianism, and the common people were all considered as possible solutions to the nation's ills, but each had its problems: foreign knowledge may provide power, but perhaps at the expense of Chinese character; Confucian culture was rooted in Chinese history, but appeared no longer to be able to serve the needs of the nation; and the people simultaneously offered intellectuals a vital expression of the Chinese national spirit and a picture of backwardness and despair (HAYFORD 1990, HUNG 1985, and SCHNEIDER 1971). What is now seen as the beginnings of the folklore movement was at the time a loosely knit group of scholars, politicians, and nationalists with overlapping and conflicting theories of and desires for the nation. There were no neat categories; Cai Yuanpei, cited as one of the motivators of the folk song movement, was a classically trained member of the Hanlin Academy who later received a Ph.D. in Germany and served in the Republican government.

One important trend of the time, which extended through the '40s, was a rural reconstruction and mass education movement intended to bring a new culture to the people so that the masses could participate in the national culture and government. A part of the movement was called "to the people," and intellectuals were sent to the countryside to discover the people. Charles Hayford and others have pointed out that there is "also a sense in which they [Y. C. James Yen and Mao Zedong] and their cohorts did not so much *discover* the people and the village as *invent* them" (HAYFORD 1990, xiii-xiv). Intellectuals engaged in a double-edged program in which they were to learn from as well as to teach the people. Coordinated social survey research was conducted to understand the current rural conditions with the goal of reform.<sup>16</sup> During the '30s and '40s, academics were forced to the border regions, where they discovered in full force the non-Han groups; at the same time they were pre-occupied with arousing national (and political) sentiment through publications and mass movements.

In 1950, a year after the establishment of the PRC, the Chinese Folk Literature and Art Research Society (*Zhongguo minjian wenyi yanjiuhui* 中国民间文艺研究会) was formed with Guo Moruo as Chair and Lao She and Zhong Jingwen as Vice Chairs. But later in the decade, the government abolished folklore and anthropology as tools of capitalist imperialism. Using a Soviet model, scholars concentrated on folk literature, and ethnology subsumed the rest of folklore (CHEN

1988, 1). Large-scale, coordinated social and historical investigations of regions and groups throughout the country were conducted by the new ethnologists, but the publication of most of these studies was delayed until the late '70s. The current rhetoric on the fate of folklore studies during the Cultural Revolution is simple: folklore studies of all forms came to a halt.

*Contemporary Scholarship.* The post-1978 years are labelled the springtime for folklore studies, with 1978 being a key year in many respects. In that year a group of well-known scholars (including Gu Jiegang and Zhong Jingwen) put forth their recommendation to re-establish the discipline of folklore studies. The flourishing of folklore studies and cultural studies in general is explicitly tied to the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978 (with its policies of reform and opening) and the Fourth Congress of Literature and Art Workers in 1979.

From the time of the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress, under the leadership of the Party, all of the nationalities were united simultaneously in the construction of a higher level of material and spiritual civilization; strong efforts were made to improve the level of science and culture of the entire nationality, to develop a rich and varied cultural life, and to construct a high level of socialist spiritual civilization; under those prerequisites (presuppositions), ethnology, folklore, sociology, anthropology, and so on flourished within a short period of time (TANG and PENG 1988, 3-4).

The springtime thus relies on a flourishing folk culture and a government that recognizes the value of folklore and that has the ability to harness the resources of large groups of people to collect and publish folklore.

The *Dictionary of Propaganda Work* defines folklore (*minsuxue*) as the study of cultural survivals from the past, although it acknowledges that new trends in the study of folklore include a broadening of scope, emphasis on modern research, and increased connections with other fields (LIN 1989, 397). Folklorists, in particular, highlight the recent changes in the field, the broadening of scope from a narrow concentration on ancient cultural survivals to a contemporary "picture of life" (*shenghuo xiang* 生活相; CHEN 1988, 4-5). Chen Qinjian outlines three significant changes: 1) from the study of the people of the village and country (*xiangmin* 鄉民) to people (*renmin* 人民); 2) from a historical science to a science of contemporary life; 3) from an independent

science to one that overlaps or merges with other new fields of study, such as literary folklore study, linguistic folklore study, historical folklore study, economic folklore study, and so on (CHEN 1988, 3–11).

Most leading theorists advocate strengthening the multidisciplinary nature of folklore study, itself a cultural phenomenon (*wenhua xianxiang* 文化現象). Folklore, an independent scientific discipline, was produced and developed in connection with other social science disciplines and with other cultural phenomena (TAO 1987, 2). Zhou Xing speculates that the practice of subsuming folklore under a larger rubric of folk literature study (*minjian wenxue* 民間文學) was a “mistake” of the past that might account for the backwardness or underdevelopment of the field. With this narrow disciplinary base, folklore lacked a flexible concept of culture. According to ZHOU, it is actually folklore that subsumes the study of folk literature and more attention paid to anthropological theory will benefit the field (1988, 15–16, 23).

In the 1980s Chinese-language publications on folklore and culture have increased tremendously. Folklore study today is taught throughout the nation’s universities, particularly within Chinese language and literature departments as a national studies discipline. To accommodate the increasing numbers of people interested in the study of Chinese folklore, especially within the context of “searching for roots” (*xungen* 尋根), folklore societies and research stations have been set up all over China. In 1985 the Chinese Folk Literature Correspondence College was established in response to calls “from readers [of *Minjian wenxue luntan*, Tribunal of Folk Literature], lovers of folk literature, provincial cultural centers (*wenhuaguan* 文化館), schools, and academic organizations, all wishing to receive training.” Courses in 1985 included: principles of the study of folk literature, genre studies (tales, legends, songs), basic knowledge of ethnology, history of Chinese folk literature study, folklore and field methods, history of Western folk literature and art study, and so on. Professors from various institutes and academic societies, such as the Central Nationalities Institute, Beijing University, Social Science Academy, Beijing Teachers College, and Liaoning University, were in charge of the course (notice in *Minjian wenxue luntan* 1985, no. 5).

Searching for roots combines with culture as a “hot” topic (*wenhua re* 文化熱) to form a trend of searching for the roots of national culture (*xunqiu minzu wenhua zhi gen de wenti* 尋求民族文化之根的問題; XU 1986, 4), as an enthusiastic generation of scholars explores the relationships between and theories of folklore, literature, and everyday social life in Chinese and foreign scholarship.

Today the scope of Chinese folklore scholarship is wide but em-

phasizes certain topics. One of the most frequently studied topics deals with folklore and customs of minorities. In conversations with all types of people, I was told that to really study folklore I should go to the border regions, where China's national minorities live. Some expressed the idea that Han Chinese folklore, if it exists at all anymore, is not nearly as interesting. Others commented that Han Chinese folklorists study minority folklore, and foreign folklorists study Han Chinese folklore. Of course, folklore of the Han nationality is studied, but it is not promoted at the national level as enthusiastically as the study of minority group folklore. In part the emphasis on minority folklore can be explained through instrumentalist theories on the motives of the central government and its need to present a good image of its minorities. On the other hand, the desire for the study of the "other" is an impetus for cultural studies disciplines in many nations. The vast majority of Chinese folklorists concentrate on folklore within the PRC; while they are aware of international theory and foreign folklore, few conduct research on folklore outside of their own nation. The "other" thus becomes other nationality, other region, or other class. In yet another sense, there is a belief, with accompanying rhetoric, that folklore and products of people have long provided vitality to Chinese civilization, through a mutual borrowing between the folk and official (*guanfang* 官方) cultures (TAO 1988, 6). This idea has been extended to minority groups as well. Through an anthology approach, Chinese folklore collections put forward an image of a strong and unified nationality; the folklore of all the nationalities (usually translated into Chinese) is put together in one book to represent the Chinese Nationality.

Urban folklore is quite a new topic of folklore research and is still being promoted as worthy of study in the late 1980s. Zhou Xing, arguing for the study of the contemporary society, divides folklore study into three categories: the study of the rural, urban, and nationality folklore (*nongcun* 農村, *dushi* 都市, and *minzu*). The object of Chinese folklore study is the lifestyle of the Chinese people (*renmin* 人民; ZHOU 1988, 23, 16). Studies of urban society represent a change in defining the folk in terms of their location in the villages and participation in agricultural activities (WU and CHEN 1988).

Folklore study is divided between theoretical and applied research. Practical research has been important to social science and humanities disciplines since their inception in the PRC, in keeping with the ideology of looking to and elevating the masses. KE Yang explains that basic theoretical research concentrates on what folklore was or is like now; applied theoretical research is concerned with how to advance change

(1988). Today folklore research plays a role in the realization of the four modernizations (TAO 1985). A related aim of applied folklore research looks to the direct role the field can play in the people's lives. Nai-tung TING describes this aim in its most elaborated form as a theory of "from the people and to the people," with the peasants as the people preserving and investigating folklore (1987, 257).<sup>17</sup>

The springtime of folklore and cultural studies has its limitations, especially after spring 1989. Since then the government emphasizes the issue of patriotism (*aiguo zhuyi*), and literature and art units are urged to stress patriotic themes in their works. The publisher's introduction to *Traditional Culture and Modern China*, part of the educational reader series on national conditions, asks the question "why is the introduction of new ideological trends, itself an achievement of [the policy of] openness, accompanied by a negation of traditional culture and traditional research methods?"

People have their character and dignity; nations have their character and dignity. The national character and dignity is the condensation and crystallization of many years of nationality culture and spirit. Negation of this culture and spirit is the negation of the national character of the independence of the Chinese Nationality in the world's forest of nationalities" (EDITORIAL BOARD 1989, 1-2).

Again the metaphor of the Yellow River comes out, this time not to reflect on the stagnation of Chinese culture but to portray its might and longevity. The Yellow River, as the place of origin and development of Chinese civilization, is a "spiritual symbol of the spirit of the Chinese Nationality." The Great Wall as well is applauded as a symbol of the spirit and diligence of the Chinese people in resisting foreign oppression. To conclude, the relationship between the river, the wall, and the Chinese Nationality is said to be one of "flesh and blood" (3-4).

The book, through a series of short articles, goes on to pose and answer questions concerning the nature and place of events, symbols, and people throughout Chinese history, to provide hope and encouragement and highlight the path of the future. "Only with the Communist Party can China be saved, only with socialism can a new China be developed" (EDITORIAL BOARD 1989, 2).

#### ORGANIZING, DISPLAYING, AND PROMOTING FOLKLORE

The structure of folklore investigation parallels the nation's well-defined

and structured administrative organization, which extends from the national level to the villages. The vast horizontally and vertically structured network of organizations devoted to research on folklore is partially government sponsored and partially the initiative of non-governmental organizations. Through top-level organizations such as the Ministries of Culture and of Propaganda, the state devises plans for cultural undertakings and communicates them to art and culture stations, mass organizations and universities. The collection, editing, and presentation of folk literature and art are among the tasks assigned to provincial, district, and county cultural centers (CHINA HANDBOOK 1982, 79; LIU 1981). The state or local governments provide training and technical, promotional, and economic support for national folk arts competitions and local performing arts troupes. Coordination of folklore research is an avowed national goal. Again scholars look to the cultural heritage to contextualize these contemporary activities: the tradition of collection (*caifeng chuantong* 采風傳統) and a political tradition that "considered the relationship between folklore and government life to be important" (ZHOU 1988, 19).<sup>18</sup> The 1989 publication of *Chinese Scenes* builds on the annuals of local history to create a "new style of local history" that introduces the scenery, history, folklore, art, and historical sites of China (REN and BAI 1989).

The collections of minority-group folktales and research reports on regional variation reveal the diversity of Chinese culture. But the work is conducted and published with a nationally coordinated scholarship. To an extent, the same research is pursued in all parts of China simultaneously through vast national projects. During the 1980s, The Three Collections Project is the current priority; and folklorists from every province and city are publishing the collections of folktales, songs, and proverbs within a uniform series.

The national associations of folklore research draw their membership from throughout the country, although scholars from the major metropolises hold a larger proportion of important offices within the societies. Provincial associations have been formed nation-wide, most often in coordination with the national organizations. But there also exist several important regional centers of folklore studies such as those in Yunnan, Liaoning, and Shandong provinces and in the Northwest. Folklorists such as Ke Yang (Gansu province in the Northwest) and Wu Bing'an (Liaoning) actively participate in national folklore activities by holding high offices in academic societies, teaching, and publishing in national folklore journals. They have simultaneously worked with others in their region to develop regionally-based studies that have served to strengthen multidisciplinary research and cross-disciplinary

dialogue (TUOHY 1988, 250–324).

*Museums and Other Displays.* Over the last ten years, museums devoted to folklore have been established in many parts of the country (*minsu bowuguan* 民俗博物館). As with other museums, they are locations where Chinese history and culture are displayed concretely to Chinese and foreigners. These specialized museums are growing in number because of the flourishing in folklore studies and the contemporary interest in Chinese culture. This year, for instance, plans are being finalized for the establishment of folklore and nationality villages. The Folklore Villages Project receives support from overseas Chinese business people, along with the National Tourism Administration and the Cultural Ministry; the project will be located next to an amusement park in Guangdong. Folklore tours are another forum for display, again for domestic and international tourists. The tours center around a specific region, minority group, or topic, such as folk arts of Shandong.

A rapid expansion in the publication of dictionaries of Chinese “culture”—dictionaries of important cultural and religious sites (national and regional), of legends and customs, of historical and legendary figures, of Chinese tradition, of figures in Chinese folktales—displays culture through the printed word. The late 1980s witnessed a new genre of writing that lists the “-ests,” the “mosts” in Chinese culture. One of these books, published in 1990 by the People’s Liberation Army Press, lists and gives short descriptions of the “mosts” of Chinese culture and arts: the earliest, most ancient, most unique, biggest, largest in number, tallest, most famous, and most precious examples of Chinese painting, literature, movies, music, folk arts, postage stamp art, architecture, and collections of poems and legends. The book begins this way:

In between the world’s largest mountain range and ocean developed the light of Chinese culture and arts, a light that has shone continuously for six or seven thousand years, that has flourished without being extinguished, and that presents to the history of humanity a wondrous spectacle, one built on a solid foundation of the unified Chinese Nationality. The vitality of Chinese culture and arts is the vitality of the Chinese Nationality (Xu 1990, 1).

The book intends to provide a “crystallization” of Chinese culture and arts and to “take readers on a tour, of massive proportions, of the exhibits of the great Chinese culture and arts” (1990, 1). It is intended for patriotic education; it “introduces the cultural and artistic accomplishments of the Chinese Nationality in order that people today

can understand the ancients, in order for people to understand their nationality and their homeland" (1990, 2).

*Propaganda-Promotional Work.*<sup>19</sup> When conducting folklore research in China in 1983–85 and in 1990, I frequently came into indirect or direct contact with the Propaganda Department at national and local levels. The Propaganda Department is charged with the tasks of: promoting Marxism, Leninism, and the thought of Mao Zedong; nurturing socialism; promoting patriotism, collectivism, and communism; and "transforming people's world views and their consciousness and cognitive abilities" (LIN 1989, 3; 191). The work is carried out in varied arenas: newspapers and presses, TV and radio, schools, theaters, performance troupes, clubs, tea houses, and other stages of artistic and cultural performances. Major holidays can be used as forums to organize activities centered on patriotism and education in the revolutionary tradition (LIN 1989, 4; 37).

The organization of propaganda work follows a structure similar to folklore research, extending from the national center to the villages. At the village level, in the provinces of Gansu and Qinghai, a large portion of the propaganda department workers come from the areas in which they work. They appear to be responsible for much of the local-level research, performance, and publication in folklore. Several of the propaganda-unit workers whom I met during field research were extremely knowledgeable about and enthusiastic promoters of the folklore and performing arts of their areas; many were performers and collectors themselves. As with regionally based folklore studies, these regional propaganda units promote the uniqueness of their particular area as well as the contributions the area makes to the national culture (TUOHY 1988, 315–19; 403–14). The regions contribute to and compete for a place on the national stage.

*New Technologies.* More people participate in a national environment not only because of mobilization and mass-campaign movements sponsored by the government, but also through the mass media. The government, among others, has made use of these technologies. The *Dictionary of Propaganda Work* lists several tools of promotion used in propaganda work. The development of these tools followed the developments in science and technology, from the time when "one pen, one piece of paper, and one mouth were used" to now, when the mass media spread information quickly and far with direct results (LIN 1989, 4). Folk festivals in Gansu are broadcast to Beijing residents, and Yunnan song competitions are the subject of a series of feature films. Every day, television and radio stations broadcast special programs such as "Folk Songs of the Nation," "Life in China's Provinces," and

“Minority Nationalities’ Customs and Folk Arts.”

In “China’s Minority Nationalities in the Mass Media,” the authors outline the manner in which news of minority nationalities in the mass media promotes minority policies and publicizes developments and achievements of minority literature and art. The conclusion is that the mass media help to

propagate respect for minority languages and customs to prevent and overcome the tendency of great-nation chauvinism. . . . The media also give a wide coverage to ethnic groups’ cultural heritage and their heroic and outstanding deeds so as to arouse their patriotism and their national pride, and to prevent the rise of regional nationalism and to eliminate inferiority complex” (INSTITUTE OF NATIONALITY STUDIES 1986, 117).

These activities that promote and display Chinese folklore are meant to encourage preservation and understanding. Regional folk songs and minority folk arts, like the Chinese cultural heritage, are to be seen as valuable parts of Chinese contemporary culture, worthy of attention and preservation. Chinese scholars’ attempts at preserving culture have been bolstered by a number of factors: past criticisms by foreigners that the Chinese government ignored or attempted to destroy Chinese traditional culture; the current search for cultural roots; and the flourishing of tourism since the late ’70s. Preservation of the past has become a valued activity; it proves continuity. Concrete examples of the cultural past in the present display the uniqueness and longevity of Chinese culture. They display national symbols in a powerful image that overrides China’s diversity.

#### CONCLUSIONS

China has had a long history of what is often seen as a fundamental contradiction: a preoccupation with regional folklore and social diversity and a preoccupation with creating a unified culture and people. China has been most successful in persuading outsiders on the latter point, of the concept and unity of Chinese civilization. Yet diversity is a celebrated and much discussed topic of conversation in China. This point was continually impressed upon me as I talked with people. They constantly explained differences between foods, customs, and behaviors of people in this province and that one; people became excited as they argued over the various ways that a particular character was pronounced in different parts of China; folklorists outlined the myriad styles of folk architecture used throughout China. They seemed

to want to impress upon me the tremendous diversity and rich variation of Chinese culture. But this discourse was carried on against the background of *a* Chinese culture—one with several thousand years of history.

Having heard and read so many times the phrase “China has a 2,000–(to 7,000–)year-old culture,” I began to question people. Did they mean it was the same culture? And, if so, what exactly did they mean by the word *culture* (*wenhua* 文化)? Some thought I was having a problem with Chinese terminology (perhaps true at times); others proceeded to outline the historical development of the Chinese culture. In other words, phrasing Chinese culture in terms of assumptions or fundamental beliefs, rather than as historical fact, was not met with agreement among the people with whom I was talking. Indeed, the notion seemed to border on the heretical. The continuity of Chinese culture is a fact; it is not problematized. Variation and diversity is admitted, in fact celebrated, but within this unified Chinese culture.

In my own thinking, I draw heavily from Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined community and my concept of imagined tradition (ANDERSON 1983; TUOHY 1988). Anderson was quite explicit in his discussion of the imperial and twentieth-century Chinese communities that he is comparing imaginations of those communities. In fact it was because he used the term “imagined communities” to counter the theoretical dichotomy set up between natural and invented ones that I took up his concept in my own work on the notion of the imagination of the Chinese tradition. If Anderson is right, people are imagining community, and by extension the traditions and cultures. And the versions or visions of this culture that are accepted are those that have the most persuasive or persistent expressions. If we look for the *doxa*—that which is beyond question and undiscussed—at the basis of the contemporary imagination of China, then we come face-to-face with the enduring Chinese Civilization.

The government and the Party promote the idea of a Chinese Civilization as the Chinese National Culture, and that idea is reinforced by a cultural reasoning far more pervasive than the official ideology. Chinese Marxist theory, at the basis of theory in folklore studies, depicts Chinese history as a linear series of stages moving toward the future. The metaphors of Chinese culture as a river portray its continuity; the metaphors of flesh and blood, of the family and body, portray its unity. A folklorist explaining the role of Chinese culture was able to combine these into a larger metaphor that likened China to the human body within which culture circulated (personal interview).

The organization of folklore research and performance, museums,

promotional work, and the media work hand-in-hand to form what can be called a national stage. This stage makes the image of national culture, with its branches and traditions, concrete. Performed anthologies of music of the minority nationalities, Tang dynasty music, and folk songs of the provinces display the diversity of China within a coherent whole. The conduct of folklore research, similarly, brings these diversities into line within a scholarship that is avowedly based on and seeks to explain Chinese characteristics. The national stage, in the abstract, can accommodate the regional and ethnic and past and present in its presentation of the Chinese Civilization. The folklore of China is seen as both existing within and forming one of the Chinese traditions that combine to form this civilization.

#### NOTES

1. For instance, *Minjian wenxue luntan* 民間文學論壇 [Tribunal of folk literature] 1985, no. 2, contains five articles under the sectional heading "Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Publication of the Kalevala."

I use the pinyin system of romanization for Chinese terms and names. Unless otherwise indicated, I am responsible for the translations from the Chinese.

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2. Among the many works on folk literature and art historiography in Chinese are: Duan Baolin 段宝林, *Zhongguo minjian wenxue gaiyao* 中国民間文學概要 [Outline of Chinese folk literature] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1981), pp. 289-97; Ma Changyi 馬昌儀, *Qiusuobian: Zhong Jingwen minjian wenyixue daolu tantao zhiyi* 求索篇: 鐘敬文民間文藝學道路探討之一 [The quest: A discussion of Zhong Jingwen's path in the study of folk literature and art], in *Minjian wenyi jikan* 民間文藝集刊 (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 1983), vol. 4, pp. 213-451; and Ye Tao 叶濤, *Minsuxue de xingqi he fazhan* 民俗學的興起和發展 [The beginnings and development of folklore study], *Minsu yanjiu* 1 (1985): 82-83.

Because several English-language studies cover this early period, I will not recount the history in detail here. SCHNEIDER (1971) and HUNG (1985) focus on the folk song and folklore movement from 1919 to 1936; see also Chao, Wei-pang, "Modern Chinese folklore investigation, Part I," *Folklore Studies* 1 (1942): 55-76; Part II, *Folklore Studies* 2 (1943): 79-88; and Yen, Chun-chiang, "Folklore research in communist China," *Asian Folklore Studies* 26 (1967): 1-62. Charles HAYFORD's recently published work on the rural reconstruction movement is an important contribution to our understanding of this period (1990).

Studies published over the last ten years build on a scanty English-language literature. Many of these studies have been done by scholars who are specialists in Chinese studies—they know the language, are conversant with the Chinese scholarship on their topics, and have had the opportunity to travel to China for extended periods of time—and have a good grounding in recent anthropological and folklore theory. See Ellen R. Judd, "Cultural redefinition in Yan'an China," *Ethnos* 4 (1986): 29-51;

Bonnie S. McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese literature and performing arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Helen F. Sui, "Recycling tradition: Culture, history, and political economy in the chrysanthemum festivals of South China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 765-94. See also Chapter 6, Folk Arts Studies in China, in TUOHY (1988, 325-98).

3. KAPFERER analyzes the logic of cosmologies, myths, legends, traditions within nationalist ideologies in terms of political culture, "rites of the nation," and other rituals. While he works out the argument concerning cultural reasoning, ideology, and ontology throughout the entire book, chapter 1 (1988: 1-26) outlines the basic premises; see also pp. 79-84 and 209-18.

4. Hobsbawm lists twelve works he considers important introductions to the field, "genuinely illuminating the question of what nations and national movements are and what role in historical development they play" (HOBBSAWM 1990, 4-5). Anthony Smith's outline of theories and varieties of nationalism is among those works listed (*Theories of nationalism* [2nd. ed. New York: Homes & Meier, 1982]).

5. ANDERSON (1983), Joshua A. Fishman, *Language and nationalism: Two integrative essays* (Rowley: Newbury House, 1972); and Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

6. For instance, Michael Herzfeld discusses European statist's use of E. B. Tylor's theory of survivals and the "close relationship between global models of evolution and nationalistic doctrines of cultural continuity" (1987, 10); see also Walter Stephens, *Giants in those days: Folklore, ancient history and nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 9-23.

7. The characters for China, 中国 [*Zhongguo*], essentially mean Middle Kingdom. On the topic of the imperial Chinese world order and of Chinese political philosophy, see John Fairbank's *The Chinese world order: Traditional China's foreign relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) and C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Chinese view of their place in the world* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

8. Anderson refers to the older imagination of community as classical or sacral and cites China as a prominent example. "In the older imagining, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another" (ANDERSON 1983, 94).

9. The Overseas Chinese (*huaqiao* 華僑) are Han Chinese or *Huaren* 華人. Seldom are members of minority groups living outside of China called Overseas Chinese, although Mongolians and Tibetans living outside the PRC are at times considered to be a type of overseas Chinese in the sense of the Chinese Nationality (*zhonghua minzu*).

10. A portion of American sinologists attempt to prove that there has been, and often imply that there should not have been, a "break" in the continuity with the establishment of the PRC.

In the Editor's Introduction to *The Mozartian historian: Essays on the works of Joseph R. Levenson*, the editors take up the issue of continuity in historical theory and speculate that "perhaps few historians actually mean what they seem to imply—that continuity is simply the opposite of change (MEISNER and MURPHY 1976, 9). See also, Joseph Levenson, "Marxism and the middle kingdom" (in *Modern China: An interpretive anthology* [New York: Macmillan, 1971], pp. 228-36), who asks "What is it all in aid of, this nagging concern with continuity?" and states that "we need an end to 'essences'" and to deterministic theories of a never-changing China (235-36).

Paul A. Cohen refers to the preoccupation with traditional China as a static society, especially in contrast with the modern period. "It is this tradition-modernity dyad

. . . that has cast the greatest spell over American historians of China" (*Discovering history in China: American historical writing on the recent Chinese past* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], p. 58).

11. Li, Youyi, "Retrospects and prospects of ethnology in China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 5 (1981): 117-35; and Fei, Hsiao-tung, *Toward a people's anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press, 1981) and "Ethnic identification in China," *Social Sciences in China* 1 (1980): 94-107, take up the issue of identification of national minorities from the 1940s to the 1970s.

I will not discuss the problems of Han and minority nationality identification here; see Dru C. Gladney, "Muslim tombs and ethnic folklore: Charters for Hui identity," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987): 495-532 and HEBERER (1989). Stevan Harrell, in "Ethnicity, local interests, and the state: Yi communities in Southwest China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 515-48, discusses the principles and practices of identification of minorities (pp. 517-19). His article illustrates how minority nationality designations also mask diversity—in this case groups of people identified as Yi.

12. The January 23-29 *Beijing Review* article was quite positive in its treatment. It quoted a viewer who said "the fact that *The River Dies Young*, with its radical and sharp language and unorthodox standpoint, can be screened by CCTV, the television station with the world's largest number of viewers, reveals that the psychological ability to accept new ideas has advanced to a higher stage in all sections of Chinese society, and in particular among the upper stratum" (in ZHANG 1989, 27). Since that time, however, the government has banned the series.

13. See John F. De Francis, *Nationalism and language reform in China* (New York: Octagon, 1972); Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the state in modern China: A narrative history* (New York: Free Press, 1981); and HAYFORD (1990).

14. See publications such as Zhong Jingwen, *Liushinian de huigu: Jinian Zhongshan daxue minsuxuehui chuangli 60 zhounian* 六十年的回顧: 紀念中山大學民俗學會創立周60年 [A sixty-year reflection: Commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Zhongshan University Folklore Society], *Minjian wenxue luntan* (1987), no. 6: 4-7; and Wang Song 王松, *Guanyu jianshe Zhongguoshi de minjian wenxue lilun tixi de jiti wenti* 關於建設中國式的民間文學理論體系的幾箇問題 [A few problems regarding the construction of a Chinese-style theoretical system of folk literature study], *Minjian wenxue luntan* (1984), no. 4: 8-14.

15. This history is discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 6 of TUOHY (1988).

16. Hayford cites other similarities between Yen and Mao as pragmatists who "addressed the problem of how political power and China's culture could be used to build a modern nation. Each combined respect for China's traditions with a contempt for the educated elite who defined Chinese culture in selfish literature terms" (1990, xiii).

I benefit from Uli Linke's discussion ("Folklore, anthropology, and the government of social life," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 [1990]: 117-48) in which she links the development of eighteenth-century German folklore study to "two distinct political motives: romantic nationalism and administrative particularism" (119). The goal of the latter, the administrative-statistical school, was "one of social administration: the systematic acquisition of ethnographic knowledge . . . to promote a process of cultural reformation" (134). However, I disagree with her characterization of the folklore movement in early twentieth-century China, which she uses as a contrastive example, as a form of or "means for inciting movements of" popular resistance (139-41).

Folklore was established as a discipline in conjunction with a state-supported reorganization of the educational system intent on pushing forward a political reorganization of society. During the '30s, some intellectuals worked to mobilize the masses to resist Japanese imperialism. But the leaders of the folklore movement derived their goals from the larger aims of various political-ideological positions (for instance, Nationalist and Communist ideologies). While folklore research may not have been a mechanism for administrative control by a strong centralized state (during the late 1920s and '30s, no such state existed that could exert that kind of control at a nationwide level), the intellectual's attempts at social reform and use of folklore to mobilize the population were directed to the realization of such a state in the future—whether it be a democratic, nationalist, or socialist one. They drew inspiration from a number of sources: a Confucian heritage of collecting the songs of the people to gauge public opinion and writing of local histories (*difangzhi* 地方志), a European ideology of romantic nationalism, American pragmatism, and Japanese national history. And, in the 1950s, many of the same researchers participated in large-scale social and history investigation projects under the leadership of the Communist Party.

17. TING's article is based on 1985 research and discussion with folklorists, a period during which he observed folk starting to collect and publish their own oral literature (1987, 258). He writes that these publications illustrate the "initial success leading Chinese folklorists have achieved in awakening the nation to China's immensely rich oral heritage" (260). While I have read of such aims and know of the mass collection movements, I have little direct knowledge of the publications, nor did scholars emphasize this aspect of the field to me. Therefore, I do not know how central this trend is in contemporary folklore.

18. The government collection of popular songs in the Han dynasty is well documented, as are early political theories of the necessity of collecting to know the feelings of the people (see, for instance, BIRRELL 1988). On the topic of "Local History" and folklore studies, see Zhang Zichen 張紫晨, *Zhongguo fangzhi minsuxue de fasheng yu fazhan* 中国方志民俗学的发生与发展 [The development of Chinese "local history" folklore study], in *Dangdai Zhongguo minsuxue*, ed. by CHEN Qinjian (1988), pp. 222–30. Chinese folklorists simultaneously search for "feudal remnants" and the negative influence of historical ruling classes in folklore. Today, the state-supported ideology declares the "people" to be the leaders of the nation, and politics is very much to be a part of everyday life.

Schneider presents an excellent analysis of the changing figure of Qu Yuan in official biography and in festival and legend in *A madman of Ch'u: The Chinese myth of loyalty and dissent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

19. While conducting research in 1990, I noticed that the word "promotion," instead of propaganda, was increasingly used to translate the term *xuanchuan* 宣傳 when speaking or writing in English.

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