

THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY
IN POST-TIANANMEN CHINA:
Cultural Nationalism v. State Nationalism

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MA

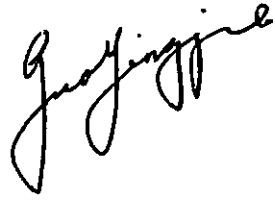
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yingjie Guo', written in a cursive style.

Yingjie Guo

May 2001

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Abstract

In much of the existing literature on 'Chinese nationalism', the critical distinction between nation and state is rarely made, and 'Chinese nationalism' is generally treated as a generic concept and an undifferentiated whole. Consequently, nationalism often appears as loyalty to the state rather than identification with the nation, and the state usually predominates in what is presumably national identity, whereas the nation becomes something represented by the state in mute acquiescence. Yet, in a 'revolutionary development' in China's politics of national identity since 1989, both the official configurations of the nation and the state's monopolised right to name the nation have come under rigorous challenge.

This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of 'Chinese nationalism' by exploring one of the critical aspects neglected in the literature - the disjunction of people and state that brings the category of nation and the phenomenon of nationalism into play. It relocates arguments about nationalism outside of the common statist frameworks of analysis and examines the cultural nationalists' challenge to the Party-state by means of discourse analysis. It argues that the challenge centres on the projects of revolution and Westernisation, which cultural nationalists hold responsible for the identity crisis in China and the dissipation of the national ethos. A political frontier is drawn between competing projects based on competing evaluations of China's cultural traditions, the socialist legacy, the official version of patriotism, modernity, and authentic experience and authentic community.

The politics of identity unfolds on three levels in the main. On the first level is the struggle for hegemony in determining what constitutes Chineseness. Cultural nationalists demand that what the state *is* and what it *does* match the nation's will, beliefs, values, interests and its conception of itself. They further seek to reform the Party-state in accordance with their conception of national essence and national will. Their conception calls in question the legitimacy of a Party-state that portrays itself as the sole legitimate representative of the nation. Furthermore, the reconstructed national identity alters existing systems of meaning – the meaning of Chineseness, the hierarchy of values and the vision of historical destiny. In doing so, it transforms the basis upon which the nation makes decisions about its

collective life and thereby influences those decisions. The CCP's compromise with cultural nationalists suggests that it is no longer able to hold its ground or continue to monopolise the right to name the nation.