



National Minds and Imperial Frontiers: Inner Asia and China in the New Century

Citation

Elliott, Mark C. 2011 National minds and imperial frontiers: Inner Asia and China in the new century. In *The People's Republic of China at 60: an international assessment*, edited by William C. Kirby, 401-412. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:8895083>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

National Minds and Imperial Frontiers: Inner Asia and China in the New Century

Mark C. Elliott

It was in mid-spring 2008 that the stories first began to circulate about the so-called “Fuwa Curse,” or *Fuwa zainan lun* 福娃灾难论. The Fuwa 福娃, it will be remembered, were the five cute “good fortune doll” mascots, at one point nicknamed in English “Friendlies,” devised to help promote the Beijing Olympics. First introduced in 2005, four of the Fuwa were drawn as animals, the fifth being a flame. Each was associated with a color, one of the Olympic rings, and an element of nature. Beibei 贝贝 the sturgeon was blue and stood for water; Jingjing 晶晶 the panda was black and represented the forest, or wood; Huanhuan 欢欢, the red flame, corresponded to the Olympic torch, i.e., fire; Yingying 迎迎 the antelope was yellow, symbolizing earth; and Nini 妮妮 the swallow was green and stood for the sky. Read together, their names (贝-晶-欢-迎-妮) spelled out the happy, homophonic phrase *Beijing huanying ni* 北京欢迎你: “Beijing welcomes you.”¹

As 2008 unfolded, however, the Five Friendlies of the Olympics became the Five Dolls of the Apocalypse. After the devastating May earthquake in Sichuan, bloggers in China decided that the Fuwa were responsible for the disasters that had come one after another in the first half

¹ This explanation of the significance of the Fuwa is taken from the Chinese-language website of the Beijing Olympic Committee, <http://www.beijing2008.cn/spirit/symbols/mascots/n214067075.shtml>. Accessed 19 August 2009. The English-language site offers this explanation: “Designed to express the playful qualities of five little children who form an intimate circle of friends, Fuwa also embody the natural characteristics of four of China's most popular animals -- the Fish, the Panda, the Tibetan Antelope, the Swallow -- and the Olympic Flame.” See <http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214068254.shtml>, accessed 19 August 2009. Earlier descriptions in English refer to the Fuwa as “Friendlies.” See, for instance, <http://www.chinese-tools.com/beijing2008/fuwa.html>.

of the year: freak snowstorms in the south at the New Year that left millions stranded were said to have set the stage for disaster, beginning as they did on January 25 – the notion being that the digits for the date (1/25) added up to eight, as did the digits of the date of the Sichuan quake (5/12) – thereby perversely portending a year of bad luck, rather than the good luck supposedly brought by the number 8. The March riots that erupted in Tibet and in Tibetan areas of Gansu, Sichuan, and Qinghai, were retrospectively linked to Yingying, the prancing yellow Fuwa with little horns who represented the endangered Tibetan antelope (*Zang lingyang* 藏羚羊). For a terrible train collision that took place in Shandong on April 28, Nini the green swallow took the fall. The kite depicted with Nini provided a connection to the town of Weifang 潍坊, located very close to the site of the accident, which is famous as a center of kite culture in China and the home of a major international kite festival.² Huanhuan was easily associated with the stormy progress of the Olympic flame as it made its way around the world in late March and April, greeted at every stop by protests over the government’s handling of the Tibet problem. The earthquake itself, which occurred on May 12 with its epicenter at Wenchuan, was tied, naturally enough, to Jingjing the panda, since pandas make their home in Sichuan. With four of the five elements accounted for, bloggers in May predicted that a water-related disaster was sure to follow. As if on cue, in the second week of June torrential rains caused massive floods across much of the southern half of the country. The Fuwa Curse was complete.³

² See the organizers’ website: <http://www.weifangkite.com/index.asp>.

³ Reports of the “Fuwa Curse” may be found at <http://news.sohu.com/20080605/n257287297.shtml>, <http://hi.baidu.com/st1678/blog/item/f65b08a4e099b7f29052eeb6.html> and <http://www.kanzhongguo.com/news/247310.html>. Some sources referred to a story in the June 17, 2008 edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, but no such story appeared until July 23. Rumors spread quickly via internet chatrooms and blogs (e.g., <http://q.sohu.com/forum/7/topic/2433643>, <http://t-tfamily.super-forum.net/forum-f46/topic-t667.htm>,

The official line was strongly to discredit the “Fuwa Curse,” which it dismissed as superstition, and to explain that there were rational, scientific explanations for each disaster. But for many people, such a series of misfortunes in what was supposed to be China’s year of glory was too much of coincidence. For them, some more proximate agent had to be found, and the “Friendlies” furnished a handy and persuasive framework for making sense of all the bad luck. Some said that the creators of the Fuwa (led by Beijing artist Han Meilin 韩美林) had wantonly reassigned geomantic values to the different mascots, and that this had resulted in imbalances generating unrest and instability in the earth, land, water, and sky, and, as in Tibet, among the people themselves. As one netizen wrote, “Inadvertently, or by fate, the five Fuwa have been designed to be ill omens that contravene Yin and Yang, the Five Elements, and the Eight Trigrams.”⁴ In other words, the crises visited upon the country were the direct consequence of a failure by the country’s leaders to properly regulate the national order.

For arguably, it was the harmony of that order, and not the Olympic spirit of “Stronger, Faster, Higher,” that lay at the core of what the Fuwa were really meant to represent, before they were overtaken by events. For the purposes of this essay, the most important of these events were the violent riots in March 2008, in which it is estimated that scores of Tibetans and Han Chinese lost their lives and countless more suffered serious injuries and arrest. These led, as already mentioned, to large-scale protests and demonstrations that ended up clouding the triumphant tour of the Olympic flame around the world. The unrest quickly invested Yingying the antelope with a very different kind of significance, turning him from an icon of health and

<http://0668.cc/blog/hello/index.php?cmd=showentry&eid=2115>) though many sites were scrubbed in June 2008 to remove references.

⁴ “这样一来五个“福娃”就被无意(或天意)中设计成了一个反阴阳五行八卦的凶煞大阵。”
From <http://secretchina.com/news/247310.html>.

environmental concern into a grotesque symbol of heavy-handed rule and failed policies, making a mockery of the originally intended message.

China's leaders may well have regretted politicizing the Fuwa as they did, especially with respect to Tibet, but they could hardly blame the connection between Yingying and the western frontier on the overactive imaginations of Chinese bloggers. In fact, it was there explicitly on the official Beijing Olympics website:

Yingying is a Tibetan antelope, alert, frisky, and fleet of foot. From China's vast Western lands he comes to spread wishes for health and beauty to the world. As a Tibetan antelope, a protected species unique to the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau, Yingying is the manifestation of a Green Olympics. The designs on his head incorporate the decorative style of the western regions of the Tibetan plateau and Xinjiang. Nimble and agile as a track star, he represents the yellow ring in the five Olympic rings.

迎迎是一只机敏灵活、驰骋如飞的藏羚羊，他来自中国辽阔的西部大地，将健康美好的祝福传向世界。迎迎是青藏高原特有的保护动物藏羚羊，是绿色奥运的展现。迎迎的头部纹饰融入了青藏高原和新疆等西部地区的装饰风格。他身手敏捷，是田径好手，他也代表奥林匹克五环中黄色的一环。⁵

Yingying's role, then, as avatar for Tibet and Xinjiang was planned from the beginning.

Authorities meant to use him to remind people of the inseparability of these places from the rest of China and of the importance to the nation of these frontier regions. To further underscore this point, the organizing committee made sure that the Olympic flame passed through the western

⁵ I have translated from the Chinese-language page of the Beijing Olympics website, found at <http://www.beijing2008.cn/spirit/symbols/mascots/n214067075.shtml>. The official English page, available at <http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214068254.shtml>, reads as follows: "Like all antelopes, Yingying is fast and agile and can swiftly cover great stretches of land as he races across the earth. A symbol of the vastness of China's landscape, the antelope carries the blessing of health, the strength of body that comes from harmony with nature. Yingying's flying pose captures the essence of a species unique to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, one of the first animals put under protection in China. The selection of the Tibetan Antelope reflects Beijing's commitment to a Green Olympics. His head ornament incorporates several decorative styles from the Qinghai-Tibet and Sinkiang cultures and the ethnic design traditions of Western China. Strong in track and field events, Yingying is a quick-witted and agile boy who represents the yellow Olympic ring."

parts of the country, including not just cities such as Lhasa, Urumqi, and Kashgar, but also the top of Mt. Everest (in Tibetan, Chomolungma).

The scale of the protests in March 2008 surprised many people, but the grievances that gave rise to them are familiar enough, given the prominence around the world that the controversies surrounding Chinese rule in Tibet have gained in the last couple of decades. Further unrest in Xinjiang, another part of Yingying's domain, erupted during the Olympics themselves, when an attack on a police station in Kashgar in August 2008 resulted in the death of several policemen. The details of this event remain unclear still (two men were convicted and executed for the crime in May 2009), but the incident nonetheless did much to raise awareness of the plight of the Uyghur people, who, like the Tibetans, find themselves the objects of discrimination by ordinary Han Chinese and find their culture coming under ever greater pressure from the Han-dominated party-state. The violent uprising that took place in Urumchi in July 2009, resulting in at least 200 deaths and thousands of arrests, has underscored further the explosive tensions that simmer just below the surface of the state's ideal of ethnic harmony.

Though, as with Yingying, the PRC government typically chooses to present an optimistic picture to domestic and foreign audiences willing to listen, the widely held perception – namely, that central rule in the western third of the country is problematic – is in fact shared by knowledgeable officials and scholars in the PRC. Recent evidence suggests that at least some Chinese policy makers are coming to acknowledge that the challenges faced by Beijing's authority on the western frontier are not, as the usual formula has had it, simply the result of external actors “meddling in China's domestic affairs” or of a “small group of splittists” raising trouble. They concede, if obliquely, that the difficulties inherent in governing regions where the population is so far removed from the center, culturally as well as geographically, are not unique

to the Chinese situation and bear similarities to challenges encountered by other states elsewhere.⁶

To the extent that the deterioration in Han-Tibetan and Han-Uighur relationships is seen as the manifestation in China of a marked increase in ethnic tension around the world since 1989, this would appear to be yet another aspect of post-Cold War globalization, a darker counterpoint to the mostly positive messages surrounding China's new economic power and increasing technological sophistication. Certainly it is true that the problems the PRC government faces in its Inner Asian border areas are made more complicated by the changes of the last couple of decades, not least the internet, and one would not wish to deny the existence of shared elements between ethnic problems in Xinjiang and ethnic problems in other parts of the world, including the United States. But these relationships, and these problems, are of far greater vintage than 1989, or even 1949, and carry another dimension that is, in fact, peculiar to the Chinese case.

A longer perspective suggests that the challenges faced by the Chinese government in Tibet and Xinjiang are not really so new. Managing the Inner Asian frontier was a major preoccupation of every imperial state since the Qin unification in the third century BCE, and even before that, during the Warring States period. The biggest headaches, from the point of view of the Chinese, were always on the north and west, and the inability of Chinese rulers to

⁶ This is the thrust of a recent news release by Xinhua, extensively quoting the American anthropologist Dru Gladney's comments relativizing the situations in Tibet and Xinjiang: "Everybody recognizes that the problem is shared by the whole world,' such as the 2005 riots in France and Basque separatism in Spain, said Gladney. 'Language, religion played a role while the Internet and global communications make it (the ethnic problem) more complicated,' he noted. 'All modern nations in the era of globalization face tremendous challenges from migration, economic imbalance, and ethnic unrest,' said the scholar" (Yang Qingchuan, "Separatism Bad for China, the World: US Scholar," Xinhua News Agency release, 12 August 2009). One might see this merely as a face-saving or temporizing move on the part of the regime. At the same time, however, it represents a new willingness to place China's ethnic problems on an equal footing with problems in other parts of the world, as well as a tacit admission that problems do exist.

meet rising powers on the steppe resulted in the downfall of more than one dynasty. The last such case was of course the Ming, which fell to the Manchu-led armies of the rival Qing state in 1644. The Qing, itself of northern origin, brought this pattern to an end, the Manchus' 1755-1759 conquest of western Mongolia and eastern Turkestan eliminating the age-old threat from the north, at least until the Japanese invasions of the 1930s. Manchu rulers such as Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, managed to restore the "grand unity" (*da yitong* 大一统) of the empire in their successful pursuit of expansion and conquest, bringing not only Manchuria and China proper, but also Mongolia, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Tibet within the borders of their realm.

From a historian's point of view, however, the assumption that the realm created by the Qing would necessarily survive the dynasty's fall is false. In 1912 there was no knowing which parts of the Manchu empire the emerging Chinese state would inherit. After all, the empire went through many periods of disunity, some a few decades, some a few centuries in duration, and it has been reconstituted in many guises, each time shaped by the particular historical context. Indeed, a fundamental challenge confronted by various modern leaders, from Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek to Mao Zedong and Hu Jintao, has been to transform the Qing empire into a Chinese nation-state, to consolidate central control, and to make it all look "natural."⁷ Here the historic achievement of the PRC has been the restoration of the old imperial borders (with the notable exception of Mongolia), which was accomplished in part through military force and in part through political control and the promise of economic and social reform. While at first

⁷ The idea common to much nationalistic thinking, that nations are somehow endowed with natural features (populations, territories, boundaries, etc.), is analyzed in much of the literature on nationalism; a good starting point is Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1991). A useful exploration of this notion with respect to modern China may be found in Uradyn Bulag, "Naturalizing National Unity: Political Romance and the Chinese Nation," Chapter 3 in Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). See also the discussion in James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2006).

glance it would seem that the PRC has succeeded where preceding governments failed – indeed, as shown below, there are many points of commonality between the Qing and Communist systems of rule for Inner Asia – the lingering problems surrounding the integration of the territories and peoples of Inner Asia suggest that the question remains open as to how enduring that success is.

It has often been noted that the foundations of the modern Chinese state were laid down during the years of Manchu rule.⁸ With respect to the government of Inner Asia, it is not hard to discover a number of similarities between the Qing regime and the PRC order. Qing policy toward the Inner Asian frontier was a patchwork of special arrangements that reflected the particular conditions under which each region was brought into the empire. In southern Manchuria, the civil administration put in place to govern Han subjects was overlaid by a military administration headed by garrison commanders who oversaw all aspects of government; until late in the Qing, there were no Chinese officials here. Its military governor, always a Manchu bannerman, also supervised the management of tribute relations with tribal peoples living in the far north. In Mongolia, too, there was also a bannerman appointed at Urga, but his role was limited; the Qing court gave Mongolian nobles a wide berth in exchange for their loyalty, and these jasag-princes exercised considerable economic and judicial power. Dzungaria, after the conquest of 1758, also became a zone of military administration, with extensive garrisons of the Eight Banners and a limited number of civil officials; the oases of Kashgaria

⁸ The classic statement of this point is perhaps Ping-ti Ho, “The Significance of the Ch’ing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 26.2 (February 1967), pp. 189-195. For an expanded, alternative interpretation, see also Evelyn Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (November 1996), pp. 829-50. Another recent evaluation is Joseph Esherick, “How the Qing Became China,” in Esherick et al., eds., *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 229-259.

were governed through local headmen, whose activities were monitored by light garrison forces at a few major cities. As for Tibet, a number of different arrangements were tried at various points, but after 1750, Manchu rule here was represented by two banner officials and a small garrison of troops from Sichuan; in the main, Qing suzerainty depended upon the special relationship between the emperor and the Dalai Lama. As a rule, Qing officials never intervened in local administration.

What we find, then, is a crazy-quilt of *ad hoc* compromises that proved themselves over time to be effective. The diversity of this system, the lack of consistency across regions, and the fact that it differed so utterly from the administrative system used in the interior provinces, seems not to have bothered anyone very much until the very last years of the dynasty. Instead, the Qing put an emphasis on adapting to local conditions, on taking advantage of existing local systems of authority and ruling through them, and on keeping its ambitions modest (e.g., the queue was never imposed in Xinjiang or Tibet). It also tried to limit Han migration to Inner Asia.

What do we see in Chinese Inner Asia today? For one thing, it's constituted differently: Manchuria is smaller and more completely integrated with the rest of China, much of Qing-era Mongolia is gone, part of an independent Mongolian state, and Xinjiang is a little smaller than it was under the Manchus. On the surface, there is far more regularity and comparability across the administrative horizon than there was in the Qing, and there is unquestionably a far greater presence of the center even in remote regions. Yet we can also see that, like the Qing, the PRC has gone to great lengths to accommodate the special needs of the frontier in its administrative structures and to an extent in its permissiveness toward the variety of local cultural, legal, and economic life. Thus we find that, as in the Qing period, Tibet, Mongolia, Ningxia, and Xinjiang, along with significant portions of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan, are all assigned a special place

in the make-up of the state, as autonomous regions, countries or prefectures. In fact, in the modern PRC, 64% of national territory is classified as part of a non-Han autonomous administration. Officials of the state and party, who are overwhelmingly Han, have long recognized the need to work with, or act through, members of local ethnic groups, and to cooperate with religious figures.⁹ The PRC has even claimed the same right as the Qing to approve the choice of major Buddhist incarnations – a bizarre and awkward role for the government to play when it is led by an officially atheist organization. So we see some of the same characteristics as in the Qing: high adaptability and recognition of the importance of local sources of authority.

For all these similarities, the Qing empire, based as it was as much on an Inner Asian as on a Chinese political model, provided an imperfect – not to say highly problematic – foundation for twentieth Chinese political leaders to build upon.¹⁰ This has resulted in numerous ironies and contradictions in the constitution of the state, such as the persistent involvement of the Party in the spiritual affairs of the Gelugpa Buddhist hierarchy, which are as uncooked lumps in the baking of the Chinese “nation-cake.”¹¹ On the one hand, the exigencies of a new nationalism at the turn of the 20th century prompted the declaration of a belief in the separate fate of the Han people, constructed as distinct from Manchus, and in their right to govern themselves and their own lands. On the other hand, geo-political realities hindered most (not all) nationalists from pursuing this proclamation through to its logical conclusion: a declaration of independence of

⁹ The story of the Party’s long, troublesome relationship with the non-Han, especially in Mongolia, and the many awkward ideological and political accommodations it engendered, is well told in Xiaoyuan Liu, *Frontier Passages* (Stanford University Press/Wilson Center, 2004).

¹⁰ See the essay by the present author, “La Chine moderne: les mandchous et la définition de la nation,” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 61.6 (Nov-Dec 2006), pp. 1447-1777.

¹¹ I borrow this metaphor from James Leibold, “Whose People’s Games?” in *The China Beat*, 3 December 2008 (<http://www.thechinabeat.org/?p=299>, accessed 26 August 2009).

Han territories from the lands of the non-Han. This, of course, would have meant the loss of over half of the territory that had belonged to the Qing and to which the new Republic wished to lay claim, a cost most viewed as unacceptable. Thus the predicament of Han revolutionary intellectuals was that they were the spiritual heirs of the nativist Ming but the political heirs of the cosmopolitan Qing. No wonder the effort to rebuild the Chinese republic on the imperial model was at first not very successful, and that by the 1930s, the Nationalist government exercised no meaningful control over Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Taiwan, or Tibet.

To escape this predicament, countless thinkers, polemicists, politicians, and scholars set about redefining who the “Chinese” were. Some (such as Zhang Binglin) argued that this group was limited to the Han, and that the non-Han should be cut off from a new Chinese state; others insisted that China could not be narrowly limited to the Han, but should encompass all the former subjects of the Qing, up to and including the late-reviled Manchus. The consensus that eventually emerged across the political spectrum leaned toward the latter solution: for practical purposes, “the Chinese” – to be known as the *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 – were *de facto* all the peoples within the borders claimed by the central government, which coincided by and large with the extent of Qing territory.¹² Elaborate justifications of this decision were produced to assert its “scientific” accuracy, and hence its legitimacy and the legitimacy of the state itself, none more famous than that later provided by the anthropologist Fei Xiaotong 费孝通.¹³

This stumbling block removed and serious military and political rivals vanquished, after the victory of the CCP in 1949, it was possible in short order for the Party to take in hand the

¹² Different aspects of this process of redefinition are discussed extensively in Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago, 1996), John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China* (Stanford, 1996), and Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*; see also Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation* (California, forthcoming).

¹³ Fei Xiaotong, *Zhonghua minzu de yiti geju* 中华民族的一体格局 (Zhonghua, 1989).

chaotic situation on China's Inner Asian frontiers. Needless to say, there was no plebiscite held as to whether those living in frontier territories dominated by non-Han groups were interested in joining the new Chinese republic; the decision was imposed, backed up ultimately by force or the threat of force. And so, with the exception of Mongolia and Taiwan, these frontier lands, together with the provinces of China proper (in Chinese, *neidi* 内地), became what we today call, usually without reflecting on it very much, "China."

Yet it is difficult – difficult for a historian, at least – to accept that this somehow represents the East Asian equivalent of a Fukuyama-like "end of History." However successful the effort has been to naturalize the present "geo-body" of the Chinese state, and however persuasive may be its claim to sovereignty over former Qing territories (in at least some, if not all, cases, the principle of *uti posseditis*, widely recognized in international law, would seem to apply), today's leaders in Beijing must be aware that history is not on their side. They are doubtless familiar with Republican government's limited success at converting the Qing empire into a Chinese nation, and they must know that no state of the same geographic scale as the present-day People's Republic has managed to last very long under Chinese-led (that is, Han-led) rule.¹⁴ PRC leaders must also bear in mind the ultimate failure of the USSR in turning the multi-ethnic Russian empire into a viable multi-ethnic state.¹⁵ For all these reasons, the evident fragility of the Party's hold on the loyalties of the majority of Tibetans and Uyghurs (and of many Mongols as well) is of particular concern to Beijing.

¹⁴ Though of lasting historical significance, direct Han and Tang rule over parts of Inner/Central Asia lasted only about a century apiece. The Ming exercised no effective control over Mongolia, Tibet, or the area of modern Xinjiang.

¹⁵ See David Shambaugh, "The Chinese Discourse on Communist Party-States," in Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (California/Wilson Center, 2008), pp. 41-86.

Given the stakes involved, it is worth asking whether, in spite of the absence of the age-old nomadic military threat, two thousand years of history have ceased to matter when it comes to the relationship between sedentary China and its continental frontier. Of course, the Chinese state today is much more centralized than under the Qing, but the expectations held of the state are also quite different than before. The PRC represents a very different kind of political formation: in principle, it's a nation-state – a “unified polyethnic nation-state” (*tongyi de duominzu guojia* 统一的多民族国家), to be precise – and not an empire. Empires are fine with being uneven, asymmetrical, hierarchical, but nation-states are supposed to be regular, symmetrical, and smooth. Additionally, the demands upon the modern state to tell a consistent story are far greater than they were upon the pre-modern state. If there was slippage between different conceptions of “China” and “the Chinese” in Qing-style grand unity, no one was much bothered by it. But because modernity presupposes precision, transparency, and finite boundaries, 20th-century states have found much less room to maneuver between ideologies of sovereignty and 21st-century states even less. As a consequence, the notion of unity in China today is understood much more literally than in the Qing.

On top of this, with the abandonment of orthodox Communist ideology and economic policy after 1989, there is the fact that neither the Chinese government nor the Party can appeal to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought for a set of valid and universal claims that offer political legitimacy. In place of Communism, the state and the Party alike have had to look elsewhere, and particularly to a chauvinist brand of nationalism, to shore up their position. Nationalism was always an important ideological tool of the CCP, to be sure, but for the last twenty years it has been asked to do even more work than before. All the more difficult, then, for the Party to tolerate threats to national unity, whether from inside or outside, real or

imagined: any perceived injury may potentially threaten the general political stability of the regime.

It is for this reason, I would argue, that PRC sovereignty over its Inner Asian frontier has become ever more essential to the continued legitimacy of the Party. The Qing did not need to be quite so obsessed with this idea; they had Heaven on their side, and Confucian virtue, not to mention Manjusri and the mandate of Mongol khans. The PRC does not have this luxury, and symbols such as Yingying the antelope are clearly not up to the task. How it will solve the chronic problems facing Chinese rule in Inner Asia is one of the major unresolved questions of the next sixty years.