Hushuo 胡說: The Northern Other and the Naming of the Han Chinese

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Historians face a challenge in trying to understand the recurrent unity of Zhongguo, or of what in English we call “China.” When compared with the failure of other antique empires to maintain their existence into the modern age, the longevity of the Chinese state seems to be something of an anomaly. For this very reason, it demands our attention; indeed, it is the basis for that oft-asked question, How is it that China lasted when Greece and Rome (or Egypt, or Parthia) did not? One may be inclined to frame a response in terms of the enduring qualities or customs believed to define the Hua – a kind of cultural core of “Chineseness” – and the close connection seen to obtain between it, a geographic core (what is often called “China proper” or in older Chinese documents neidi 内地, the “inner lands”), and a demographic core made up of the people who have historically inhabited China proper, i.e., the group typically referred to as Han.

But this response raises further uncertainties as to these various core notions: What set of beliefs, values, or practices makes Chinese culture “Chinese”? Where precisely do its geographic sources lie? And who, exactly, are the Han?

As part of the effort made in this volume to develop a critical approach to the study of the Han, this essay seeks to address the last of these questions: Whom or what we are talking about when we talk about some group of people identified, whether by ourselves, by others, or by themselves, as “Han” – that is, Hanren 漢人, Hanzu 漢族, or Han minzu 漢民族? The challenge is greater than it might at first seem. For as will become apparent, the historical usage of the term Han is highly unstable, and even in the contemporary world, the term can be slippery. Sometimes it is used synonymously with “Chinese,” sometimes not; people who might be considered Han in some contexts might not be in others – they might call themselves Tangren 唐...
人，for instance，as is very common among Cantonese speakers still today; and there is a long and lively debate over who the “true” Han people are and where they came from. In short，it is hard to escape the conclusion that the label Han is just one of many untidy terms that encumber the world we live in.

The goal of this essay，therefore，is not to answer the question，“Who are the Han?”but to ask，“Why is Han used to talk about the people we know as the Chinese?” In other words，how has Han acquired the sense of an ethnic identifier？What does this category mean today and what has it meant in the past？What can we learn about the Han，or，more precisely，about Han as a classificatory imperative，by understanding its origins and evolution？To address the above questions，this paper offers a preliminary investigation of the history of the term Han and how it came to be applied to the Chinese，that is，to the people of the Central Plains. This is not to say that the matter of the actual origins of the Han people themselves—as represented by the question，“Who are the people who now make up the majority population of China?”—is not an important one. But it would seem that this is a problem more for geneticists than for historians.

We are already getting parts of the answer，and more will come as new techniques involving DNA analysis become more widespread. Instead，for historian and anthropologist alike，a critical approach to Han means investigating the complicated processes of definition，discrimination，identification—as well as，crucially，the discourse on these processes—all the

1 Adachi Fumito，Kanminzoku to ha dare ka：kodai Chūgoku to Nihon rettō o meguru minzoku，shakaigakuteki shiten（Tokyo：Yubun shoin，2006），p. 168.

2 Still，whatever information is produced through such work will not really help us understand the category “Han” as such，especially not when nearly all the DNA research that is done focuses on China’s “ethnic groups，” generally understood as referring to the non-Han. See Yonggang Yao，et al.，“Genetic Relationship of Chinese Ethnic Populations Revealed by mtDNA Sequence Diversity，” American Journal of Physical Anthropology 118.1（2002），pp. 63-76 and “Mitochondrial DNA Sequence Polymorphism of Five Ethnic Populations from Northern China，” Human Genetics 113.5（2003），pp. 391-405. In this and other work，geneticists have established the fact of a broad division between what they term northern and southern haplotypes. To be sure，some of this research does involve Han populations（e.g.，Yao，“Phylogeographic Differentiation of Mitochondrial DNA in Han Chinese，” American Journal of Human Genetics 70.3（2002），pp. 635-651），but this is not framed as work on “ethnic groups.”
different things people do as part of forming into larger, more-or-less discrete entities we now call ethnic groups. Assuming, that is, we agree that the Han constitute an ethnic group – a problem to which I shall shortly return.

The essay offers two main conclusions: First, the development of *Han* as an ethnonym owed greatly to the intervention of the *Hu*, the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples living to the north of the Central Plains. I propose that just as the name *Hu* was an invention of the people of the Central Plains, so the name *Han* – *Han* that is, a label for people who, by descent, language, and cultural practice, were recognized as Central Plains dwellers (or their descendants) – was largely the invention of the people of the steppe. In short, *Han* was a Hu proposition – hence my title. Second, I would suggest that the ethnic unity of the Chinese as seen in the adoption of *Han* to describe themselves is really more the product of repeated efforts to create and foster political unity than it is the source of that unity. For while *Han* as an ethnic term can be dated at least as far back as the 6th century CE, its meaning and usage varied greatly over the succeeding millennium, stabilizing only in the 15th century or so, after the founding of the Ming dynasty. In the interim, *Han* was applied to all kinds of people, some of whom we would regard as “Chinese” and others decidedly not. In other words, the notion of a durable, unified conception of the Han people as a people dating back millennia is largely a myth; for much of Chinese history, divisions of various sorts – both those between Chinese and non-Chinese and those between northerners and southerners – prevented such an idea from taking hold.

On “Ethnicity”

Before going further, it is worth saying something about terms and concepts. This would seem to be a necessary step if we wish to avoid accepting existing labels or classification
schemes as in any way given or obvious. We must remember to ask why this term and not that, and at the same time move beyond mere words to understand not just what is being described but why it is being described in a particular way at a particular time and by whom. We are obliged, moreover, to exercise a certain reflexivity in questioning our own ability to pose questions objectively, given the limitations placed upon us by the time and place framing our own inquiry.

The principal term that demands our attention is “ethnic.” It is sometimes claimed that the Han is “the largest ethnic group on earth.” Is this true? Not, is it the largest, but is it an ethnic group at all? The answer is to this question will depend greatly on what one means by “ethnic group” and how one understand ethnicity and other kinds of processes of identity formation. Whole books have been written on this subject, which is obviously far too complicated to fully treat here. Though I do not expect universal agreement with my position, let me summarize my own views in an attempt to offer at least a working definition of the term and to raise some issues for consideration. I have elsewhere defined ethnicity as “the social organization and political assertion of difference perceived to inhere in culturally bounded, descent-based categories.” This short definition might be amplified by the observation that ethnic categories are understood by the scholar as historical constructions, which arise in particular contexts and change as those contexts change. This is as much to say that though ethnic phenomena are found in many places in the human historical record, including in the pre-

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4 Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners,” p. 34.
modern era and even antiquity,⁵ individual ethnic formations themselves do not in fact constitute unchanging and archaic social facts, despite assertions of the antique, even primordial, qualities of one or another ethnic group of the sort that people frequently make.

Two other important points that are fundamental to this interpretation of ethnicity are, first, that, as a highly elaborated expression of social difference, ethnicity requires not just the assertion of difference, but also its recognition by others; and second, to be “ethnic,” a group must lay down certain expectations of its members in terms of action, expectations that are not applied to those outside the group (and may even be forbidden to them). Ethnicity is, in other words, transactional and exclusive in nature: it depends on the delineation and maintenance of boundaries, and the mutual acknowledgment that such boundaries exist, whether or not they are in fact respected; it depends, too, on the creation and continuation of certain practices and institutions, and on the broad, though not necessarily universal, recognition that such practices and institutions belong to, and define, that group, and no other – whether this is in fact true, again, being largely irrelevant. This is not to say that people do not move in and out of ethnic groups, whether temporarily or for their whole lives. Of course, this happens all the time. But doing so involves costs – losses as well as gains (and in this double sense is also “transactional”) – and is subject to the same conditions of recognition and delineation.

The above approach to ethnicity, as both subject of analysis and as critical concept, is echoed in a wide range of works by anthropologists⁶ and has gained wide currency among historians, to judge from the increasing frequency of its use in book and article titles.⁷ The

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⁵ “In the ancient world ethnicity was widespread, although nationality in the political sense was rare.” John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., Ethnicity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 105.
⁶ References to much of this work will be found in the notes to Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners” and Abramson, Ethnic Identity in Tang China. See also the edited volume of Hutchinson and Smith mentioned in the preceding note.
problem of identity formation in the Ming and Qing periods is prominently featured, for instance, in many of the essays in *Empire at the Margins*, including, notably, the introduction, where it is observed that ethnicity “is relative in the deepest sense,” “ephemeral,” “constructed,” and may either be “imposed by state machineries or asserted by local populations . . . to mark boundaries and to highlight differences,” all phrases one is likely to encounter in the broader literature. This trend appears to suggest a movement away from earlier formulations, in which ethnicity was understood specifically as a modern phenomenon, too problematic to be applied to the era preceding the rise of the nation-state—though even here, as the editors of *Empire at the Margins* caution, “all historians who project ethnic phenomena back to the period before the nineteenth century do so as a matter of interpretation.”

One might reasonably extend this caution to any discussion of ethnicity before the 1950s, when the word first enters common discourse. But it must be noted that at that time, the meaning of “ethnic” differed from that proposed above, as it tended to be restricted to marginalized groups in society—that is, it was understood sociologically, as a way of speaking of minoritarian status, not anthropologically, as a way of treating identity discourse generally. If current scholarship is any guide, it is no longer the case

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*Ethnicity* (Washington, DC: Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies, 2001), and Mark J. Hudson, *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999). For treatments of ethnicity in pre-modern China, see the work of Wang, Abramson, and Elliott, cited earlier; important new scholarship in this same vein includes that by Erica J. Brindley, Miranda Brown, Leo Shin, and others. Studies of ethnicity in 20th-century China using what Abramson calls the “post-sinological approach” are too numerous to list; two important books that helped chart the course are Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995) and Melissa Brown, ed., *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1996).

8 Crossley et al., *Empire at the Margins*, p. 5.
9 Evident from the essays on “Ethnicity in the Modern World” collected in Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, pp. 133-186.
10 Crossley et al., *Empire at the Margins*, p. 14. The authors’ meaning here is somewhat opaque: One would have thought that most anything historians might have to say about ethnicity in the period before the nineteenth century—or, indeed, about anything in any period at all—would be regarded as a “matter of interpretation.”
11 The word “ethnicity” first appeared in the OED in 1953 (Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, p. 4).
12 The classic work of this early phase of ethnic studies is Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan’s 1963 book on contemporary American society, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, in which “race” was clearly a primary concern. But it is worth noting that ethnicity has come to be framed much more broadly than just about “racism,” since it permits the inclusion of groups whose identity may lack that phenotypical aspect of difference. This makes “race” a much less
that an interest in ethnicity implies an exclusive concern with marginalized or subjugated groups, or just the modern era, however defined.\(^\text{13}\)

Yet, if one were to search for an explanation as to why Han “ethnicity” has so far eluded careful scholarly examination, this might well be because, as the dominant group, the Han were by definition denied the possibility of being ethnic at all. We find that that this older paradigm prevails still in work by Chinese scholars, where to be “ethnic” is to be a minzu 民族, or, more precisely, a shaoshu minzu 少數民族, formerly translated uniformly into English as “minority nationality” and now, in a significant shift that began in 1995, as “ethnic group.”\(^\text{14}\) Generally, minzu and related terms tend to reflect the older English meaning of “minority-ethnic,” while the newer, constructionist (or circumstantialist) notion of ethnicity is signified by a different word in Chinese, the neologism, zuqun 族群.\(^\text{15}\) This term might be applied even to dominant groups, which, no less than minority groups, also engage in identity-making that can legitimately be regarded as ethnic in nature. The definition I advance is thus not predicated on where a group might be positioned within social, political, or economic hierarchies; i.e., one can legitimately speak of Japanese, not just Korean or Ainu, ethnicity in Japan; French, not just Algerian or Vietnamese, ethnicity in France, etc. Nonetheless, it is perhaps suggestive that, as will become

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\(^{13}\) An exception to this generalization – unexpected, since it does not seem to represent the approach taken in the majority of essays in the volume – is to be found at one point in the introduction to Empire at the Margins, where the authors state that, “To be ethnic is to be marginal, not part of the canon, not part of the established culture central to legitimacy of the state, not mainstream, not authoritative” (p. 5). This would seem to make it impossible to admit that anything like Han “ethnicity” has ever existed, or could exist. This argument repeats points made earlier in Pamela Kyle Crossley, “Thinking About Ethnicity in Early Modern China,” Late Imperial China 11.1 (June 1990), pp. 1-35.


\(^{15}\) Cf. the work of Wang Mingke, cited earlier; also Jiang Bin and Cuiping He, eds., Guojia, shichan gu yu mailuohua de zuqun (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2000), Zhang Haiyang, Zhongguo de duoyuan wenhua yu Zhongguo ren de rentong (Beijing: Minzu cbs, 2006) and Jian Zhixiang, Zuqun guishu de ziwo rentong yu shehui dingyi (Beijing: Minzu cbs, 2006). A search of the electronic China Academic Journals Full-text Database (www.cnki.net), shows that zuqun comes to be used commonly in titles only beginning in 2005.
clear below, the group that came to be known as the Han began to acquire this identity in a cumulative process during periods, beginning in the sixth century CE, when they actually were marginalized, at least politically. This is as much to say that even if one did not want to foreclose the possibility that a socially or politically powerful group, such as the Han, might have something that could be called an ethnic identity, one would still need to consider the significance of that group’s relative place in political, economic, or other hierarchies.

In short, ethnicity as defined here acknowledges a link between power and identity, but it is not so simple or straightforward, and rejects any implicit inverse relation between ethnic identity and access to power or prestige. History shows, it seems, that the powerful are as capable of rousing ethnic sentiments among their number in the defense of privilege as the weak are in the protest of it; and that the ruled are as liable to find themselves the objects of ethnic classification schemes conceived by their rulers as the latter are of seeing the terms of their own identity shaped and limited by the governing institutions they purport to control.

Which Other?

To propose, as above, that ethnicity is created transactionally is to say that it emerges only when there is interaction between two groups. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the group presently calling itself the Han is no exception to this general rule, the question then arises, Who is (or was) the Other to the Han Self? Seeking an answer to this question must be regarded as an important part of developing a critical approach to the study of the formation of Han identity. We know that the popular idea of a China cut off from the world, hiding behind walls great and small, is an utter myth. China, or what would later become China, has known many
Others.\textsuperscript{16} Conversely, many Others have known China – or perhaps we should say, “many Chinas,” lest we be suspected of positing an essentialized, unchanging “China” through time. Not being separated by impassable natural barriers, interaction on or near Central States territory between peoples on all sides, living different lifestyles, speaking different languages, and possessing wholly different cultures was an integral part of their lived experience for all of recorded history, and no doubt for much of the period before that, before we can even begin to speak in terms of “China.” Thus the earliest opportunities for ethnic formation are lost in the very distant past, though what little we can glean about this seems to suggest an extended process of amalgamation and acculturation that eventually produced something recognizably “Chinese,” called by various names, most commonly Hua 華.

Among China’s various Others, the most important in terms of understanding the story of Han ethnogenesis, none is more important than nomadic pastoralists living north of the central plains, in early times known in the Chinese language most familiarly as Hu 胡, and by other names as well, such as Fan 蕃, Yi 夷, and Lu 劫. As I will attempt to show, the initial work to transform Han from a political to an ethnic term was done by the Hu, and the further development of the term owed much to its use by later Hu groups. While the basic trajectory of the story is fairly straightforward - the label Han starts out as a political designation and ends up an ethnonym – this development was anything but. In fact, it was quite tortuous, owing in no small part to a deep and irreconcilable division among Chinese elites as to who could become like them (i.e., the Hua) and whether such people could legitimately claim, as many did, to hold the Mandate of Heaven. For these reasons, the evolution of the name Han is closely intertwined with China’s political and intellectual history, especially concerning issues having to do with

\textsuperscript{16} The importance of the Other in the process of ethnic formation is recognized, too, by many Chinese scholars. See, for example, Zhong Han, “Minzushi yanjiuzhong de ‘tazhe’ shijiao,” \textit{Lishi yanjiu} 2008.1, pp. 43-66.
defining who and what the “Chinese” and “China” were, and with the historical relationship between Central States dwellers and the people living to the north, a notoriously ambiguous relationship that became more fraught over time.

To avoid being dismissed as nonsense (in the usual, colloquial, meaning of hushuo), the claim that Han was a Hu proposition must immediately be qualified by the insistence that the Hu alone could not have accomplished this construction. Two parties were required to pull it off, the Hu and the Hua, i.e., the future Han.17 (I will address below the question of why Han, and not Hua, came to be an ethnic categorization, while Hua continued to function as a broader ethnocultural category.) Han began to be used as a label for Central States people in the fourth century, during the Northern Wei (386-534). Over approximately the next millennium, Han evolved into a kind of ethnic supersign, as the interaction between the inhabitants of the Central States and the inhabitants of the territories on its northern borders led to its adoption by the Han themselves. The term was variously employed in the Tang and Song, and used with different meanings again under the Liao, Jin, and Yuan, until by the Ming Han had begun to acquire something like its modern meaning, in that it had become a single referent for southerners and northerners alike. Even then, however, the term remained somewhat in flux, as is borne out by the creation of the Hanjun identity category in the Qing, or the various proposals put forth in the early 20th c. that aimed to define who the Han really were. Ultimately, the process of generating Han can be seen as a process that permitted the bridging of the longstanding divide between north and south. In other words, the emergence of the Han as a single ethnic group was not so much the basis for Chinese unity as a consequence of it.

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17 The mutual referentiality of these terms is nicely captured in what may be the earliest use of the expression hushuo in a Southern Song text, Qidong yeyu, by Zhou Mi, where Han Zhou, speaking of Zhou Jun, says, “Here comes that fellow again, talking gibberish” 這漢何來胡說. Cited in Morohashi, Dai Kan-Wa jiten. The use of Han (or Hanzi) as a colloquial term for an adult male – yet another chapter of the story of Han – seems to have become common at this time. See Chen Gaohua, “Lun Yuandai de chengwei xisu,” Zhejiang xuekan 2000.5, pp. 123-130.
Given the complexity of these various issues and the long time span involved, there is not the space to do more than outline the case. I will therefore focus on the early stages of the process of Han ethnogenesis – understood here in the strict sense of the evolution of the label Han – during the Northern Wei and succeeding northern dynasties prior to the establishment of the Sui (581-618), with briefer treatment of the term’s changing meanings up to the Ming, when usage appears to have stabilized.

Initial Moves From Hua to Han

The name Han, as is well known, derives from the Han River (Hanshui 漢水), which flows from modern Shaanxi through to Hubei, where it joins the Yangzi at Wuhan. It became the name of the state founded by Liu Bang (256? 247?-195 BCE), known after its successful reunification of the old Qin empire as the Han dynasty, and which, according to conventional dating, lasted from 206 BCE until 220 CE, with a brief interregnum between 9-24 CE. Not surprisingly, the first historical references to Hanren are found during this period, and they are abundant. However, examination of these references makes it quite clear that Han was purely a dynastic referent, so that Hanren meant the “people of Han,” the subjects of the Han emperor, with no reference to culture, descent, language, or anything we might understand as indicating ethnic identity. Historians are mostly in agreement on this point: Han originated in the Han period, but as a political identifier, not an ethnonym. Other words existed that carried a sense of the group’s cultural self-definition, most especially Zhongguo 中國, Hua, Zhonghua 中華, and Xia 夏 (often used in combination, e.g., Huaxia), all of which could be combined with ren.

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18 For an explanation of the source of the name Han for the river, and Liu Bang’s reasons for choosing to name his dynasty for the river, see Hu Axiang, “Liu Bang Hanguo hao kaoyuan,” Shixue yuekan 2001.6, pp. 57-62.
(“person”) and which enjoyed high classical associations, but not Han. After the fall of the Han in the early 3rd century, then, those terms persisted, while Hanren largely fell out of use, replaced instead by Weiren, Jinren, Wuren ("people of Wei," etc). The only people who remained Hanren were the subjects of the rump Han state that arose in Sichuan. Amid this political flux, the term that perhaps enjoyed the greatest favor as an ethnicized autonym was, it seems, Hua.

The revival of the term Hanren, and its earliest use with a meaning synonymous with Huaren or Zhongguo ren, seems to have occurred under the Särbi (Xianbei 鮮卑) rulers of the state of Wei 魏, known to history as the Northern Wei. As is well known, the ruling clan, the Tabgach (Tuoba 拓拔), were from the north, outside the Hua ecumene. The Särbi pastoral economy and daily customs were close to those of the Xiongnu, the old nemesis of the Han, and their language, what we have been able to recover of it, was proto-Turkic, with Mongolic elements. In short, the Northern Wei, one of a number of northern regimes, represented the resurgence of Hu power in the Period of Disunity that followed the collapse of the Three Kingdoms – a resurgence commonly and tellingly described in traditional Chinese historiography as “the five Hu disordering China” (wuhu luanhua 五胡亂華) – a phrase invented by southern writers unhappy with this turn of events.

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19 This is firmly demonstrated in Chen Shu, “Han’er Hanzi shuo,” Shehui kexue zhanxian 1986.1, p. 290; see also Wang, Huaxia, p. 318; Zhang, Zhongguo de duoyuan wenhua, p. 31, and elsewhere. Based on occurrences in Shiji and the Hanshu, Wang notes that the most common term of self-identification at this period was simply Zhongguo ren (p. 290, n. 1). He argues that it was during this time that the limits of “China” and “Chineseness” initially hardened along the lines that later Chinese states would generally assume, but on the basis of terms such as Zhongguo and Huaxia. Applying the term Hanren, not to mention Hanzu, to describe “the Chinese” at this time should be seen as highly anachronistic – though one sees it often, even in serious historical scholarship.

20 On the repeated emergence of Han as a dynastic name, see Hu Axiang, “Zhongguo lishishang de Hanguo hao,” Jiangsu xingzhengyuan xuebao 23.5 (2005), pp. 130-136.


To meet the challenge of ruling a large part of Zhongguo (also called Zhongtu 中土 or Zhongyuan 中原), the historical Hua heartland, the Northern Wei ruler Xiaowen (r. 471-499) adopted a policy of wholesale acculturation, moving the capital south to Luoyang, promoting the wearing of Chinese-style clothing, changing Särbi names to Chinese names, embracing the literary heritage of the Central Plains, and advocating intermarriage between Chinese and Särbi. At the same time, some Central Plains dwellers who remained (many families had fled to the south) acculturated the other direction, wearing Särbi clothing and embracing military careers rather than depending on noble connections in earning their livelihoods. A distinct northern culture arose as a result of this synthesis, characterized, among other things, by the patronage of Buddhism, which was adopted earlier and more universally among Särbi than among Chinese, even those in the north. The result, as more than one scholar has observed, was a kind of “hybrid vigor” that reflected as much the sinicization of the Hu as it manifested what I would propose calling the “borealization” of the Hua. Such hybridity is amply attested, 


24 Both Naitō Kōnan and Miyazaki Ichisada saw the Northern dynasties as a key moment in the evolution of Chinese society, in which (in Miyazaki’s language), the “civilizationism” (bunmeishugi 文明主義) of the Hua was challenged by the “rusticity” (sobokushugi 素樸主義) of the Hu, resulting in the erosion of the privileges of elite families and, eventually, the emergence of meritocratic ideals in the Sui and Tang. The tension between Hu and Hua thus figures as a major theme of Japanese scholarship on the period. See Kawamoto, Gi-Shin minzoku mondai, p. 13, and Tanigawa Michio, “Sōsetsu” (general introduction), in Tanigawa, ed., Gi-Shin Nanbokuchō, Zui-Tō jidaishi no kihon mondai (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1997), pp. 19-20. For a brief review of scholarship on the period generally, see the introduction to Albert E. Dien, State and Society in Early Medieval China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 1-30. The most recent complete treatment in English is Lewis, China Between Empires.


26 Wong, “Ethnicity and Identity,” p. 82, citing in particular the work of Albert Dien. “Hybrid vigor” is Audrey Spiro’s phrase; see her essay, “Hybrid Vigor: Memory, Mimesis, and the Matching of Meanings in Fifth-Century Buddhist Art,” in Pearce et al., Culture and Power, pp. 125-148. Kawamoto speaks in similar terms of the “energy” of the Northern Wei and other Hu regimes (Gi-Shin minzoku mondai, p. 344). “Borealization,” on the other hand, is a term I would like to suggest in place of “Xianbei-ization” or “Särbi-ization” to describe the acculturation of the
for example, in the tomb art of the period, which shows how fluid the boundaries were between “Chinese” and “foreign” styles.  27

Under these conditions of confidence and prosperity, Northern Wei emperors conceived the plan of expanding beyond the Central Plain southward, to reconstitute a greater empire and reunify the world, i.e., tianxia 天下. To do this, however, required considerable political leverage. The chief disadvantage they faced was that, even in the eyes of many of their own subjects – not to mention southerners, for whom the “barbarian” North had taken on the appearance of a cold, forbidding, and distant foreign country, at least to judge from how they wrote about it in their poetry  28 – the Northern Wei regime remained, despite broad evidence of acculturation, alien and mistrusted. At least some (it is impossible to say how many, especially since we know that many Chinese officials actually took Särbi surnames  29) leading Northern Wei Chinese elites shared the general attitudes of people such as Jiang Tong and chafed at Särbi rule, leading to political insecurities on both sides.  30 It was in part out of a desire to address these issues – and not owing to an irresistible urge to “become Chinese” as so much thinking on

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27 Cf. the description in Lewis of representations of “a Chinese history and cosmos in which everyone was Xianbei, or a Xianbei world that embodied Chinese history and values” (China Between Empires, p. 168).


30 In a recent master’s thesis, Shaoyun Yang has shown that it was at this time that the Zuozhuan phrase now so familiar to us – fei wo zulei, qi xin bi yi 非我族类，其心必異 – was creatively re-interpreted by the Western Jin literatus Jiang Tong 江統 (d. 310) as part of an argument as to why the “Rong barbarians” (i.e., the Qiang and Di) who had been allowed to settle in the Guanzhong area should be relocated. In the Xi Rong lun (徙戎論), Jiang combined the Zuozhuan phrases 非我族類，其心必異 (originally a reference to lineages) and bu yu Hua tong 不與華同 (“not the same as the Hua”) – in its original context a comment on material distinctions only in food and clothing, joining them with his own phrase, Rong-Di zhitai 戎狄志態 (“the state of mind of the Rong and Di”), to form a “quotation” from a classical source that would support his own exclusionist position. See Yang, “Becoming Zhongguo,” pp. 62-64. The essay is found in the biography of Jiang Tong, Jinshu j. 56.
sinification might suggest – that Xiaowen promulgated his acculturationist policies, which were part of a larger effort to reshape thinking about the empire. The move was based in part on a selective reinterpretation of the classics, whereby the ethnic exclusivism found in such texts as the Zuozhuan was downplayed in favor of the sort of cultural universalism prevalent in such texts as the Mencius, whereby the possibility is admitted that the Other can become civilized, can become part of Zhongguo, if by their actions they manifest virtue and righteousness. Hence the Northern Wei adoption of the Rites of Zhou should be seen as a consciously archaizing maneuver.

A key element of this universalizing program was to find a proper place for the Särbi in a Chinese world. Beginning with emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-500), Northern Wei rulers employed the terms Hu and Hua carefully, aiming to stress the pre-Han significations of each term. With respect to Hua, the idea seems to have been to shift the meaning of Hua away from the more narrow, quasi-ethnic sense it had acquired since the Han back to a more general meaning that included all who lived in the Central Plains and the lands surrounding them. As for Hu, this was a term that the Northern Wei scrupulously avoided using to describe itself; from the Särbi point of view, Hu were other Others, less civilized and deserving of a lower place in the hierarchy. Their establishment of a “Barbarians’ Hostel” (siyiguan 四夷館) in Luoyang was one sign of this attitude: an acknowledgment of the existence of a difference between Hua and Yi, and an assertion that they, the Northern Wei, belonged to the world of Hua, even if they had not been part of the Han order.

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31 This characterization of the Zuok Commentary should not be taken to mean that ethnic exclusivism is all-pervasive there; on the contrary, many passages suggest the possibility of transformation of “barbarians” into cultured Hua. See the discussions in Yuri Pines, “Beasts or Humans? Pre-Imperial Origins of the ‘Sino-Barbarian’ Dichotomy,” in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., Mongols, Turks, and Others (Brill, 2005), pp. 69-73.
The fact was that the conquest and permanent occupation of the Central Lands by Northerners in the medieval period greatly complicated any project of imperial restoration, since any such reunification could not be accomplished on the pretext of a restoration of the Han. That world lay in the past: the last attempt, in the early 400s, quickly failed.\(^{34}\) Instead, the re-imagination of a Greater Chinese world required a reconceptualization of empire and political legitimacy in the old Han geographic heartland but that was not predicated on the old Han order – an epoch-making moment that, distant in the past though it is, may still be recognized as “a vital prelude to the formation of the modern Chinese nation-state.”\(^{35}\) The inspiration for this reconceptualization lay in the pre-Qin corpus of historical commentaries, in which *Hua* remained a culturally defined category. This had obvious appeal to the Tabgach, who “had begun to form a consciousness of *Zhonghua* that was distinct from a worldview that had Han at its center.”\(^{36}\) The success of this enlarged vision of empire required not only resolving the lingering tension between *Hu* and *Hua*, but also dissolving the identification between the terms *Hua* (which was meant to apply to all civilized men and women) and *Zhongguo ren* (which applied only to those who originally hailed from the Central Plain and their descendants). Since Särbi, like *Zhongguo ren*, also wanted to make a claim to belong to the civilized world of the *Hua*, a different word was needed to describe that latter group, the Chinese living under Northern rule, one that

\(^{34}\) This, the first of a number of “Later Zhao” states, was founded by Liu Yuan, who, though a sinicized Xiongnu, claimed to represent a restoration of the Han house; his regime is sometimes called “Han Zhao.” Lewis, *China Between Empires*, pp. 51, 145.

\(^{35}\) Victor Mair, “The North(west)ern Peoples and the Recurrent Origins of the Chinese State,” in Joshua Fogel, ed., *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 77. Relevant here is the observation by Mark Edward Lewis that it was under the Northern Wei, when, for the first time “nomadic chiefs ruled over both Chinese and nomads within an empire,” that an expanded idea of “universal empire” took hold, in which political legitimacy hinged mainly on a conqueror’s willingness to abide by certain expectations, including building a capital, sacrificing to Heaven, and providing offices and salaries (Lewis, *China Between Empires*, pp. 150-151). While I would agree that this imperial universalism aimed to transcend any “overriding loyalty to a Han Chinese people and their culture” – a sensibility that is admittedly explicitly tied to the nation-state – it seems to me that one must not overestimate (whether in the Northern Wei or in later periods, including the present) the degree to which universalism trumped (or trumps) ethnic particularism.

\(^{36}\) Kawamoto, *Gi-Shin minzoku mondai*, p. 95.
differentiated the two, not according to region and not according to their place as either “barbarian” or “civilized” people, but according to original descent (real or putative), language, dress, and custom. That word was *Han*.

Though they have not done as much with the information as they might have, historians have known for a very long time that *Han* as a name for the Chinese – that is, a name for *Zhongguo ren*, not a name for the subjects of the Han dynasty – surfaced as early as the sixth century.\(^{37}\) It appears a number of times in contemporary histories, such as the *Weishu*, *Nanqi shu*, *Beiqi shu*, and the *Beishi*, as in these examples:

The emperor said, “Commander Gao [Ang] wants to use solely Han men, but I am afraid they will not be able to complete the job. We should separate out a thousand or so Särbi troops to intersperse among them. What do you think?”

Now if you take me to be your commander, things will be different than before. There will be no maltreatment of Han and no violations of military orders. Decisions of life and death will be left to me. Then I will agree [to be your commander].

It is apparent here that *Han’er* ("man of Han"), means inhabitants of the Central Plains, i.e., Chinese. *Hanren* also shows up in a discussion of Buddhism in the *Weishu*:

From now on, if anyone dares to serve the Hu gods by making statues of clay and bronze, they will be executed along with their entire family. Although they are said to be Hu

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\(^{38}\) *Beiqi shu* j. 21: 294

\(^{39}\) *Beishi*, j. 6: 215.
gods, when you ask Hu people today, they say they have no such gods. This [the spread of Buddhism] all owes to those Han scoundrels of former times, Liu Yuanzhen and Lü Boqiang and their followers, who invoked the absurd sayings of those Hu beggars [i.e., Buddhists], embellished by the falsehoods of Laozi and Zhuangzi. None of it is true.

自今以后，敢有事胡神及伪造像泥人、铜人者，纠其，虽言胡神，问今胡人，共无有。皆是前世汉人无赖子弟刘元真、吕伯强之徒，接乞胡之诞言，用老庄之虚假，加而益之，皆非真实。40

In his study of the emergence of the ethnonym Han, Shaoyun Yang has found other evidence to suggest that Northern Wei literati were aware of this meaning of Han, and that they used it in speaking about their language, i.e., as Hanyu.41 Certainly this was the impression held by scholars during the Song dynasty. In Zizhi tongjian, Sima Guang refers to the wish of the Northern Wei ruler to remove the crown prince because “he is no longer like us and has taken on the qualities of the Han.” In his commentary, Hu Sanxing (1230–1302) explained to the reader that “The Xianbei called the people of the Central Country ‘Han’.”42

So it seems that the adoption of Han as a term for “the Chinese” was indeed well under way by the mid-6th century. By virtue of these semantic shifts, Hua could also not conveniently be used by northerners to talk about Chinese in the south, so a new word, Nanren 南人 (“Southerner”), was introduced around this same time as a means of speaking about them.43

Southerners, on the other hand, continued to refer to themselves freely as Hua and to nomads

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40 Weishu j. 114: 3034.
42 Zizhi tongjian, j. 167: 帝嘗嫌太子得漢家性質，不似我，欲廢之(鮮卑謂中國人為漢). Elsewhere, in the commentary to juan 22, Hu offered a more complete genealogy of the term: “In Han times, the Xiongnu called the people of the Central Plains “men of Qin.” In the Tang and in the present dynasty, they [referring to the nomadic heirs of the Xiongnu] call [people] of the Central Plains Han, as in Han’er, Hanren, and so on. This has become the custom.” Cited in Zhao Yongchun, “Shilun Jinren de ‘Zhongguo guan’,” Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu 19.4 (Dec 2009), p. 4.
43 Kawamoto, Gi-Shin minzoku mondai, p. 361.
(former nomads, really), as Yi; the term Beiren 北人 (“Northerner”) also emerged, but as a purely regional referent, applicable to anyone, Chinese or Särbi. The long life enjoyed by all these words, which remained part of the Chinese political vocabulary for centuries, is testament to the fundamental divide between north and south, a divide eventually papered over by Han, but only much later.

The quotation from the Weishu cited above, in particular the phrase qianshi Han ren 前世漢人, offers a clue as to the transformation of the term Han. One possible understanding of this phrase is that it means “a Han person of a former age,” i.e., a former Han subject. However, since the figure of Liu Zhenyuan mentioned in the passage is identifiable as a Buddhist monk of the late 4th century, he was clearly not alive during the Han and therefore not a former Han subject. One is therefore led to conclude that Hanren here is an ethnic, not a political, label, an attempt by the author to draw attention to the fact that, while Buddhism was originally a teaching of the Hu, it was propagated by non-Hu followers such as Liu, who were manifestly Hanren, i.e., Chinese. One imagines that the habit of referring to the Chinese as Hanren, “people of the Han,” remained in use in at least some circles and led to the kind of shorthand we see here, where it came to refer to latter-day descendants of former Han subjects who obviously no longer owed any political allegiance to the Han, but were connected in other ways (descent, language, residence, custom) with people who had lived under the Han.

As we have few attestations of Hanren being used in this way before this time, it is difficult to know among which circles this habit may have been sustained. At a minimum, however, these citations make clear that distinguishing between Hu and Hua – or, from the point of view of the Northern Wei, distinguishing between Särbi and Han within the Hua ecumene –

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44 Xiaofei Tian, personal communication, 23 December 2008.
was everyday practice. It may have been the continuation of old practice: Just as *Rum* and *Frank* continued to be widely used in the Arab world to refer to regimes of Asia Minor and Europe, respectively, long after the demise of the Roman and Frankish empires, so Särbi people simply carried over the custom of referring to Central States people as *Han*. They did add a disrespectful twist, it seems, since the term *Hanʼer* is generally regarded as having carried pejorative connotations. And after all, ethnic groups often name each other in not very complimentary ways. The terminological evolution we observe in the north in the fifth and sixth centuries is, by this logic, a “natural” outcome of the intensified interaction between peoples who, on both sides, saw themselves as quite different from each other and were poised in distinctly unequal relationships. We can think of *Hu* (or the much more offensive *Lu* or *Yī*) as Chinese names for the Northern Other, while *Han* (or the less complimentary *Hanʼer*) were Särbi names for the local Other in the Central Lands. We should also expect that the Särbi had another name, in the Särbi language, for the Chinese, which name corresponded to *Han*. Indeed, early on the need to communicate in the Chinese language may well have suggested the need to find a suitable corresponding term, with *Han* emerging as the most obvious choice.

Northern dominance over the centuries, and the switch by elites to exclusive use of the Chinese language, assured the rise of the ethnonym *Han*. But the Northern Wei attempt to reframe the discourse of “civilization” was only partially successful, and they certainly never managed to reunify the world, a task that fell to the Sui and the Tang – not coincidentally, both states that, like the Northern Wei, had strong connections to the world beyond *tianxia*, that is, to

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45 My thanks to Yuri Pines for this suggestion. For comparison, a fascinating exploration of the afterlife of imperial labels in the Ottoman empire is found in Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of Oneʼs Own: Reflections Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum,” *Mugarnas* 24 (2007), pp. 7-26.  
46 Jia, “Han minzu,” p. 16; Lewis, *China Between Empires*, p. 167; Yang discusses this issue at length in “Becoming Zhongguo,” pp. 97-106. See also Liu Fugan, “Sanguo Wei-Jin Nanbei chao mali yuyan shuolue,” *Zhejiang jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao*, p. 35, who emphasizes that *Hanʼer* was used by “minority peoples” to insult the Chinese.  
47 Yang points to a passage in the *Beishi* where the Särbi word *Ran’gan* is mentioned, perhaps with this meaning. Yang, “Becoming Zhongguo,” p. 93.
the northern steppe. If one can make a judgment on the basis of the use of terms in the dynastic histories, it seems that *Hanren* was not very widely used in the Sui. There are only three occurrences of the word in the *Suishu*, all clearly associated with stories from the Han period; when the meaning was “Chinese,” it seems, *Hua* remained the word of choice. *Hua* continued in use in the Tang and the Five Dynasties period, but *Hanren* in the meaning of Chinese came to be used with increasing frequency, usually in a pairing with *Fan*. This same use continued under the Song, when Ma Yongqing, writing in the early 12th century, could simply remark, “the Yi and Di today call the Chinese ‘Han’.” Yet the situation was not so simple, and *Han* did not stabilize nearly so quickly. Nor was it universally applied. As in earlier periods, it was at least as common to refer to people as *Tangren* 唐人 (“men of the Tang”) or *Songren* 宋人 (“men of the Song”) as it was to refer to them as *Hanren*; but when *Hanren* was used, it did not mean “men of the Han.” It meant “Chinese.” The tendency seems to have been to turn to this word when the subject at hand required drawing attention to ethnic or “national” distinctions that otherwise remained unsaid, whether because they were unimportant or because they were obvious. But beginning in the tenth century, *Han* took on new meanings that considerably exceeded those it had acquired up to that time. To some degree, one can characterize this as the unfolding of a bifurcated discourse, whereby on the one hand administrative exigencies prompted the

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48 Based on searches of phrases in the electronic Scripta Sinica 漢籍電子文獻資料庫 database version of the *Suishu*, maintained by Academia Sinica. All searches of dynastic histories cited in the notes are from this database.

49 Of the ten occurrences of *Hanren* in the Tang histories, about half reflect the new usage as an ethnonym. This proportion is greater in the Five Dynasties histories. Again, these conclusions are reached on the basis of the frequency with which *Han* and its various compounds appear in the dynastic histories. I am aware that there are limitations to the use of these texts as indices, and that the same search terms are found in other contemporary texts as well. My goal, at least at this point, is not to be exhaustive but to determine relative frequency and general range of meaning in elite discourse; for this purpose, the dynastic histories will serve adequately.

50 “今之夷狄謂中國為漢”, cited in Chen “Han’er,” p. 9. The original text is found in juan 1 of Ma’s best-known work, *Lanzhenzi* 亂真子.

assignation of the label upon new groups, usually politically defined, while on the other hand, the
memory of the earlier meaning of *Han* for “the Chinese” persisted, especially in popular usage.

**Hanren and Nanren in the Liao, Jin, and Yuan**

The employment of the terms *Han* and *Hanren* in the cismural states (or “conquest
dynasties”) of Liao 燕, Jin 金, and Yuan 元, is much better known and more widely studied than
it is in preceding periods, in part because historians in the Qing took an interest in the matter
beginning in the 18th century.⁵² The major reorganization of identity categories occasioned by
the dramatic political shifts of the 11th-13th centuries suggests that there were significant
incongruencies with preceding as well as later norms.⁵³ It is important to be mindful of such
discrepancies and of the ways in which notions of who is and is not “Chinese” depart from
modern expectations. These incongruencies appear particularly obvious in the meanings
assigned to *Han* by the Liao, Jin, and Yuan regimes anxious to impose greater legibility over
local populations newly brought under their control.

According to one recent scholar, early in the dynasty, the Liao began to use *Han’er* to
describe ethnic Chinese whether or not they were Liao subjects. Later on they discriminated
more carefully, using *Hanren* or *Han’er* only for former Song subjects whom they had captured
and brought under their authority.⁵⁴ At this time, it appears that *Han’er*, which was in fairly
common use, lacked the negative meaning it had once had; moreover, the word was routinely
used by Song officials in their communication with Liao officials to refer to Chinese subjects of

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⁵² One of the first to remark on the changed meaning of *Hanren* was Zhao Yi, who wrote about this in *Nianershi zhaji*, juan 28, “Jin Yuan juyou Hanren Nanren zhi ming.” He fails to mention the use of the term in the Liao, however, saying only that the Jin applied it to those living in Liao territory when they took over.
⁵³ *Huaren* appears not once in the *Liaoshi* or *Jinshi*, and only twice in the *Songshi*, both in sections on foreign countries.
the Khitan ruler and by Song writers describing the activities of ethnic Chinese at the Liao court, though *Hanren* is also seen, too.\(^{55}\) (*Hanren* is much more common in the *Liaoshi* than *Han’er*, the latter being totally absent in the *Songshi.*) As for Song, they regarded the Liao *Han’er* as little better than the Khitan themselves, and often lumped them together all as *Fan* or, less offensively, *Beiren 北人, “Northerners.”*\(^{56}\)

Thus in the Liao usage of *Han* and its variants there is a perceptible “northward creep,” as the word that was previously applicable to all Song subjects came to be used in a more restricted sense to just those Song subjects living under Liao rule, or to Song subjects dealing directly with the Liao. This development was carried further in the Jin, and then the Yuan.

When the Jin defeated the Liao and drove back the Song armies, according to the treaty of 1142 they also took over those territories north of the Huai River that had once belonged to Song, meaning that, in addition to the Chinese population concentrated around Yan 燕 (the Liao Southern Capital, modern Beijing), they administered another sizable group living in modern Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Shanxi, and parts of Shaanxi. In these altered circumstances, the new Jin rulers continued Liao usage by calling the Chinese subjects of the Liao they inherited (i.e., the descendants of former Song subjects who were now former Liao subjects) *Hanren*, and sometimes *Yanren 燕人*, but former Song subjects who had not been part of the Liao were called *Nanren*.\(^{57}\) This distinction, which was quite clearly upheld, made for an even further narrowing of the meaning of *Han*, which excluded them from the category of *Zhongguo ren*.\(^{58}\) The

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56 Liu, “Shuo ‘Hanren’,” p. 121.
58 In an edict of 1161, the Song emperor is quoted as saying that he would welcome any who come to him from the Jin side, “Jurchen, Bohai, Khitan, and Han’er alike,” and that they will be treated no differently from the “people of the Central Lands.” Liu, “Shuo ‘Hanren’,” p. 111. The quotation (from the Song *Huiyao*) reads: 如女真，渤海，契丹，漢兒應諸國人能歸順本朝，其官爵賞賜并與中國人一般，更不分別.
overwhelmingly preferred term for the Chinese living under Song rule was, in a pattern we have seen before, Songren.⁵⁹ Nanren and Hanren were differentiated not just by the Jin regime, but by the Song government as well: Hanren refugees from the north who returned to Song territory were classified separately as guizheng ren 啟正人. Zhu Xi explained the difference as follows:

Guizheng people are those who were originally from the Central Plain and who fell under barbarian [rule] but then returned to the Central Plain; they have escaped wickedness and returned to rectitude.

From this, it seems plain that, whereas from the modern perspective one would instinctively tend to see all these people as “Chinese,” in the Song the guizheng ren were viewed as belonging to a slightly different group. Once again, as in the Northern Wei, the fact of Northern rule had forced a redefinition of who the Han were.

Further complications were introduced in the Yuan period, particularly after the fall of the Song in 1279, when the Mongols assumed control over all of China proper. Much has been written about the Yuan status system, with its four categories: Mongol, Semu 色目 (“Central Asian”), Hanren, and Nanren. It is the last two categories that really interest us here. The basic division between them depended, as before, on who was on which side before military conquest brought about a political reorientation. Thus Hanren in the Yuan included all those who had been Hanren or Han’er in the Liao and Jin plus those who had been Nanren in the Jin; Yuan

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⁵⁹ I base this conclusion on the frequency of its appearance in the Jinshi relative to other terms.
⁶⁰ Cited in Liu, “Shuo ‘Hanren’,” p. 112. This was in distinction to guiming ren, defined by Zhu Xi as “people who were originally not from the Central Plain. They are like the Yao people who lived in caves and have come to the Central Plain, emerging from the darkness into the light.” 归明人，元非中原人，是遙洞之人來歸中原，蓋自暗而歸于明也。
Nanren were former Song subjects now under the sway of the Mongol khan. But Hanren meant more than just this: It included essentially everyone who had been a Jin subject. This meant an assortment of at least eight different groups – including Khitans, Jurchens, Bohai, Koguryo, and the old Hanren – a conglomeration that was totally at odds with previous interpretations of Han. As such it conveyed more forcefully than ever before the idea that Han was a fungible and capacious term that could be expanded according to administrative need – such needs, after all, being the primary motive behind classifying populations in the first place – and lacked any firm ethnic connotations. We can say, I think, that for the Mongols, Han was synonymous with Beiren, “Northerner.” It was a supra-ethnic rubric, reminiscent of the encompassing category Hua introduced by the Northern Wei, except that, unlike Hua, it did not include everyone in the empire – there were limits, and former Southern Song subjects were outside those limits (as were, of course, Mongols and Semu, too). In sum, then, in the Yuan, Nanren meant “Chinese” and Hanren meant “Northerner.” Had Yuan rule lasted longer, or had the Mongols not defeated the Song, it is conceivable that Chinese people today would be calling themselves the “Nanzu” or “Songzu”.

The Unification of the Han

The reassertion of southern political power in the shape of the Ming dynasty overturned once and for all the onomastic conventions of the Yuan world. Mongols and Semu were banished from the realm, as was – nominally, anyway – everything to do with the Hu (as the Mongols were frequently called by their Chinese enemies, reviving a term that had all but disappeared from use by the 15th century). Led by a former Nanren, Zhu Yuanzhang, the Ming,

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as is well known, championed a chauvinistic cause to defame the Mongols and gain legitimacy for himself.\textsuperscript{62} He had a difficult job, especially in the northern territories, which had not been part of “China” for at least two hundred, and in some cases, three hundred years. The local population had acculturated along the lines of a northern cultural synthesis and it is open to question if they thought of themselves as “Chinese” – that is, in the sense of being \textit{Zhongguo ren} as we mean it today – at all. To what degree the categories imposed by the Yuan for administrative purposes had come to affect individual identities is something we know little about, and deserves further study. In any event, it must have been quite disorienting to northerners to discover that \textit{Hanren} suddenly meant not just them, but all the \textit{Nanren}, too, whose speech they could not understand and various of whose customs differed quite considerably from their own.

Apart from the various military challenges that confronted him, the main task that lay before Zhu was to unify the country, not just in the sense of bringing all the provinces of China proper under his control but more importantly in the sense of reintegrating Northerners and Southerners into a single group. Various ideological tools lay at his disposal, which have been exhaustively studied, but one way of going about this task that has not been much dwelt on was the deployment in the Ming of a single ethnonym, \textit{Han}, for everyone in north and south alike.\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Nanren} might have been chosen for this, but the Han imperial model was one that Zhu

\textsuperscript{62} It is worth observing that this aspect of Ming ideology is easily exaggerated, since in between talk of the stench of mutton and Mongol perfidy, Zhu also took the time to make it clear that he was open to the idea of Mongols (and others) as his loyal subjects. The ambiguous place of Mongols in the Ming empire is the subject of much work by David Robinson; for example, see his “Politics, Force, and Ethnicity in Ming China: Mongols and the Abortive Coup of 1461,” \textit{Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies} 59.1 (June 1999), pp. 79-123.

\textsuperscript{63} Extracts from the \textit{Da Ming Huidian}, for instance, show that \textit{Hanren} was used commonly to refer to Chinese subjects of the Ming wherever they might live when it was necessary to differentiate them from those whom we might now reasonably call the “non-Han.” Cf. the following, dated 1546: 又令、凡川廣 雲貴陝西等處。但有 漢人交結夷人，互相買賣 借貸誘騙。引惹邊疆。及潛住苗寨，教誘為亂，贻害地方者。俱開發邊衛，永遠充軍。 Cf. also the emperor’s 1374 appeal to the Dali kingdom in which he notes, “Seven years have passed since the day . . . my many brave men brought peace and restored to the Han people their old lands, unifying China” 謂自洪武元年戊申秋八月群雄盡平復我漢人故國統一中夏於今七年. \textit{Ming shilu}, j. 92.
consciously followed; plus, using this name would potentially make it easier for him to draw in the north, which to him was essentially alien territory. The Mongols had prepared the way by pushing a broadening of *Han* a century earlier; now Zhu was broadening it yet again in one direction – by expanding *Han* to include Southerners – and tightening it in another – by excluding Mongols, Semu, and those in the *Hanren* group who had not been Song subjects, or who were as yet insufficiently acculturated (or motivated) to claim that identity. While usage in the early years of the Ming seems to have vacillated between Yuan and Ming norms, within a generation or so Jurchens and Khitans and Bohai and other Yuan-era Hanren were *Hanren* no longer, and a general identification reached between the Ming realm, the Central Lands (i.e., “China,” *Zhongguo*), the “Chinese” (*Zhongguo ren*), and *Hanren*. A more detailed review of this process (beyond the scope of this paper) would show how the situation eventually returned roughly to that of eight hundred years before, with *Hanren* reverting to mean “Chinese” in an ethnic sense. In the establishment of a kind of equivalence between *Han* and *Hua* – the later term enjoying very broad use in the Ming – we see the closing of the distance between ethno-cultural and political-administrative terms. A further adumbration of the term along these lines occurs in the 17th c., when *Han* is used as an ethno-administrative classification applied to the Chinese forces fighting with the Manchus, the so-called *Hanjun* 漢軍.

**Conclusion**

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64 That through the period of Jurchen rule a distinction was drawn between *Zhongguo* as a cultural idea and *Zhongguo* as the name for the state that controlled the Central Plains, regardless of which ethnic group was in political power, is persuasively argued in Zhao, “Shilun Jinren de ‘Zhongguo guan’.”

65 A notable difference between the *Hanjun* in the Qing and the forces of the same name under the Yuan is that while the former was composed of men taken solely from households of ethnic Chinese (called in Manchu *Nikan*) that had come under Qing rule before the 1644 conquest, the latter were from the entire range of households classified as *Hanren* in the Yuan.
I would close with two main points. First, in this paper I have tried to demonstrate that we can neither refer unproblematically to the “Han” before the 15th century, nor can we assume that we are dealing with one people or a geographic center continually occupied by any such group. For these reasons, it is very difficult to argue that the putative unity of the “Han people” as such was a factor in maintaining the Chinese empire on the old Qin-Han model. If the story presented here is approximately correct, it is probably sounder historically to regard the common identity shared by Hanren today very much as an early modern artifact, the result of the Ming imperial enterprise, both made urgent because of, and enabled by, the persistent occupation of significant parts of the Central Lands by Northern Others and the repeated challenge they threw down as to who the Hua or Han were.

The second point is simply to emphasize that the evolution of the term “Han” is by no means linear. I have focused here on the twists and turns taken by Han before the Ming. As other papers at this meeting show, however, this convention of naming remained subject to further change in the Qing and later periods, owing, among other things, to the dramatic expansion of the borders of the empire under the Qing beyond those of the “Central Lands” and the renewed prominence of non-Chinese populations in national politics. As I hope this paper has shown, the incongruencies raised in later imperial times were by no means new, and the difficult and sometimes contradictory negotiations that continue today between being “Han” and being “Chinese” are but the latest twist in a historical process stretching back to the sixth century, a process in which now, as then, the Other has played a role that is, in every sense, critical.