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Universidad del País Vasco Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

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NATIONS ON PAPER

Nation building and historical
practice in China and Britain
(1880–1930)

Directed by Prof. Ludger Mees





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Thesis Dissertation by

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Abstract

We, living in contemporary societies in which the nation-state is the hegemonic political organisation, hardly ever ask ourselves how national identities are produced and reproduced, or even how they first came into being. To most of us, history offers a continuous account that explains the past as a tale of national development, and that therefore legitimises the nation's present status and claims.

It is the objective of this research to trace the transition to this nationalist worldview in China and Britain, and to compare how the adoption of this framework differed in the two cases, what resistances it found and what debates and issues it generated.

To do so, we will first analyse the main assumptions and principles of national historical narratives, from which national identities stem. Secondly, we will apply our results to historiographical and political sources from 1880 to 1930 China and Britain, in order to determine the degree and pace of adoption of these master narratives in the two cases. Finally, we will compare how the particular geopolitical and historical circumstances of the two examples interacted with these assumptions and principles to amplify or limit the opportunities of specific national histories and discourses to arise.

The results of this study evidence that there exists a particular narrative framework at work in national histories, and that historical practice was decisively influenced by its main assumptions in China and Britain between 1880 and 1930. This, in turn, prompted the apparition of new identities, objectives, and strategies based on these national accounts. However, the particular cultural and historical circumstances of the two countries, in combination with the need to adapt to these discursive assumptions, decisively shaped and constrained the possibilities of imagining national communities and their ultimate success.

Resumen

En nuestras sociedades contemporáneas, en las que el estado-nación es la forma hegemónica de organización política, pocas veces se cuestiona cómo se producen y reproducen las identidades nacionales o cómo llegaron a existir en primer lugar. Para la mayoría, la historia ofrece un relato continuo que explica el pasado como una narración de progreso nacional y que, en consecuencia, legitima el actual estatus y reivindicaciones de la nación.

El objetivo de este trabajo es observar la transición a esta cosmovisión nacionalista en China y Gran Bretaña, así como comparar las diferencias en la adopción de este marco en los dos casos, las resistencias que produjo y los debates y cuestiones que generó.

Para ello, analizaremos primero los principios básicos de las narrativas históricas nacionales a partir de las cuales se originan las identidades nacionales. En segundo lugar, aplicaremos nuestros resultados a fuentes historiográficas y políticas chinas y británicas de entre 1880 y 1930 para determinar el grado y ritmo de adopción de estas narrativas maestras en los dos casos. Finalmente, compararemos cómo las circunstancias geopolíticas e históricas particulares de los dos ejemplos interactuaron con estos principios para amplificar o limitar las oportunidades de aparición de historias y discursos nacionales específicos.

Los resultados de este estudio muestran que existe una estructura narrativa particular común a las historias nacionales, y que ésta influyó decisivamente en la práctica histórica de China y Gran Bretaña entre 1880 y 1930. Este hecho, a su vez, originó la aparición de nuevas identidades, objetivos y estrategias basadas en estos relatos nacionales. Sin embargo, las circunstancias culturales e históricas particulares de los dos países, en combinación con la necesidad de adaptarse a estos principios narrativos, delimitaron y restringieron las posibilidades de imaginar comunidades nacionales así como sus probabilidades de éxito.

Laburpena

Gure gizarte garaikidetan, estatu-nazioa erakunde politiko nagusia dela eta, gutxietan bururaten zaigu nortasun nazionalak nola sortzen eta erreproduzitzen diren kuestionatzea, edo hauen agerpenari buruz galdetzea. Gehiengoarentzat, historiak hedapen nazionalaren kontaketa ezkaintzen du eta, honezkero, nazioak aldarrikatzen duen estatus eta erreibindikazioak legitimatzen ditu.

Lan honen helburua Txinan eta Britania Handian honako mundu-ikuskera nazionalistarekiko transizioa behatzea da. Gainera, marku honen adopzioak bi kasuetan eragindako ezberdintasunen, erresistentzien, eztabaiden eta arazoen arteko konparaketa sustatzea du jomuga.

Horretarako, lehenik nortasun nazionalak sortzen dituzten narratiba historiko nazionalen funtsezko oinarriak aztertuko ditugu. Gero, lortutako emaitzak Txinan eta Britania Handian 1880tik 1930ra ekoiztutako iturri historiografiko eta politikitekin alderatuko dira, narratiba nagusi hauen adopzioaren maila eta abiadura zehaztatzearren. Azkenik, bi kasuetako egoera geopolitiko eta historikoak konparatuko dira, hauek kontakizun eta diskurtso nazional espezifikoen agerpenean izandako rol anplifikatzaile edo mugatzailea antzemateko.

Ikerkuntza honen emaitzek kontakizun nazionalak egitura narratibo komuna dutela agerian uzten dute, eta honek Txinako eta Britaina Handiko jardute historikoetan izandako eragin erabakigarria nabarmentzen dute. Influentzia honen ondorioz, gainera, kontakizun nazional hauetan oinarritutako nortasun, helburu, eta estrategia berrien sorkuntza azaltzen da. Hala eta guztiz ere, bi herrietako egoera kultural eta historiakoak eta printzipio narratibo hauetara moldatzeko beharrak komunitate nazionalen imajinazioan eta haien bidegarritasunean ezarritako mugak azpimarratzen dira.

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Note about translation

For the romanisation of Chinese names, we have opted for utilising the *Pinyin* system. So, for instance, terms like *Beijing* or *Liang Qichao* have been found preferable to other possible romanisations such as *Peking* or *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*. The only exception has been the name of the President of the Republic of China Sun Yat-sen, which has been maintained to the spelling best-known to most English readers.

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I

Introduction

The first day of the eighth month of the 34th year of the Guangxu emperor's reign, or August 27th, 1908 according to the Western Christian calendar, was a day charged with significance. After decades-long debates between literati and imperial officials, court machinations, and revolutionary intents, China was about to be granted the first constitutional draft of its history. The ensuing document, aptly named 'Outline of the Constitution', did not simply announce the establishment of a Western-style parliamentary assembly, but regulated, in its brief 23 articles, the competences and relationships between this chamber and the executive power.

But the fact that China, the epitome of royal grandeur, a land which boasted the claim of 4,000 years of uninterrupted Heavenly-sanctioned imperial rule, was to join in the latest political trends imported from Europe and America was not the most surprising fact that surrounded the publication of the 'Outline', but the identity of those who authored it. For a century, the country had been faced by endless struggle both in its outer borders as well as from within. The abating attacks of the foreigners had struck China from the north, east, south, and –something almost unheard of in its long history - from the sea itself. In most cases, the strangers had attained victory against the Central Kingdom (*zhongguo* 中國); they had even been capable of introducing remote ideas which had preyed on the ambition and unrest of many within China itself and had threatened the stability of the empire. Widespread turmoil and insurrection had been difficult to appease, and their scars were still far from healed. For that reason, the previous decades had witnessed increasingly more

officials and scholars advocating an institutional reform of the empire to face such formidable threats, an appeal that had remained largely unheeded by China's rulers. That was why the issuing of the 'Outline' was such a momentous event: for the first time, constitutional ideas in China appeared not in literati¹ memorials, foreign newspapers, or revolutionary propaganda; instead, they commanded the formidable authority of a document stamped with the imperial seal itself.

The text, despite its outer appeal to parliamentarism, established a framework in which the right of the monarch was still almost unchallengeable. The large prerogatives of the throne to direct legislative, judicial, and executive institutions were embodied, better than anywhere, on the first article of the 'Outline'. 'The emperor of the Great Qing (*da Qing* 大清) dynasty shall reign over and govern the Great Qing empire with his majesty's unbroken line of succession for ages eternal'.² Sovereignty was firmly on the hands of the monarch, and although the document made some compromises in areas such as free speech or protection from arbitrary arrest, it still referred to the inhabitants of the empire as subjects (*chenmin* 臣民).

Less than four years after the publication of the 'Outline', a full-fledged provisional constitution was finally promulgated. However, its contents, as well as the circumstances in which it had finally come into being, could hardly have been more different from those of 1908. The Qing dynasty, after a reign of 268 years, had been dethroned, and from its debacle there had arisen an unstable republican system. Concessions had been made for the revolution to succeed, such as the allocation and

¹ In this work, we use the definition of Benjamin A. Elman, who describes the literati as 'select members of the land-holding gentry who maintained their status as cultural elites primarily through classical scholarship, knowledge of lineage ritual, and literary publications. The term gentry refers to those before 1900 who wielded local power as landlords or provincial and empire-wide power as government officials. The cultural status of both the gentry at large and the literati in their midst correlated with their rank on the civil service examinations. In addition, during the late empire, gentry and merchants intermingled, with the latter becoming part of the gentry elite'. See Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900* (Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 2005), xxi.

² Chuzo Ichiko, "Political and institutional reform, 1901-11", in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 11: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 397.

sustenance of the imperial family in the imperial palace,³ and many prominent political actors of the former state still retained large influence on the new policy. Despite these facts, the revolutionaries thoroughly believed that the establishment of the Republic meant a new beginning for China. Therefore, they conceived the constitution of March 10th, 1912 as a direct reverse of the monarch-centred approach sketched in the 'Outline'. Rather than asserting that it ruled on behalf of the sacredness and unmarred majesty of an emperor, the Republic claimed to obtain its power, instead, from a wholly different source: the Chinese people. This group no longer comprised subjects, but was made out of equal citizens (*renmin* 人民), who were portrayed as the bearers of ultimate sovereignty and rights.⁴ It must have seemed to many, not just to the revolutionaries, that the world had certainly turned upside down. The legitimate mandate to rule, instead of being a supernatural prerogative bestowed upon the mighty, had turned out to be the complete opposite: a command which grew upwards from the common and subjected like the branches of a tree.

These two documents, so close in time yet so different in their assumptions, do not fail in raising a series of questions. For example, what had prompted the Qing court, in 1908, to embrace a constitutional approach that they had been rejecting for decades? Why did they choose to write a constitution in which they allocated such a small place for anyone other than the ruler? How can we explain the seismic change not only in content, but also in vocabulary and political concepts that mediate the distance between the 'Outline' and the provisional constitution of the Republic of China? Where did these ideas come from, and how were they adapted to the circumstances of late Qing China? And, no less importantly, what was exactly the people, and how did it relate to the state that allegedly spoke on its behalf?

³ Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus & Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 283-284.

⁴ "The Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China", *American Journal of International Law* 6, no.3 (1912), 149.

Historians have offered multitude of answers for these issues. From the bleak depiction of the late Qing Empire painted by early Republican authors to the vivid ideological *milieu* described by modern historiography, the change from empire to republic has been a constant attraction for anyone interested in the modern history of China. However, the importance allocated to revolutionaries, emperors, court officials, literati, warlords, and foreign diplomats has, up until very recently, concealed what may be considered a larger and deeper problem.

The last decades of the rule of the Qing, and particularly the period from 1890 to the revolution of 1911, bore witness of a fundamental change in the way in which many in China perceived not only politics, but the world itself. For a whole generation of students, scholars, and officials, ideas that for centuries had provided the axis of morality and social intercourse had stopped making sense. A new mental framework was sweeping the old convictions, and not even the supernatural authority of an emperor seemed powerful enough to sustain its attack. The 'Outline' had been only the eleventh-hour attempt by the dynasty to adapt to the new circumstances; the measure of their failure was the lack of any mention to the Qing in the new constitution. In the battle between the old and the new, between the empire and the nation, there was no one to doubt who had been the victor.

But, how had such a victory been achieved? What was so novel and so incredibly powerful in these new ideas that made them unbeatable for a system which claimed to have its roots buried deep in the most ancient of antiquities? The answer to this question, it is my deepest belief, cannot be grasped simply by looking at what happened in China between 1890 and the early 1910s. It is a much larger problem, both in geographical as in chronological terms, and which for this reason must be addressed in a comparative, historical way.

After all, Europe, where many of the ideas that shock the Chinese worldview originated from, was in the late nineteenth century living its own heyday of empire. The most successful of these, both in extension as well as in the riches and the authority that it commanded, was also widely considered to be the birthplace of the constitutional system which both the Qing and the revolutionaries had tried to

emulate. To some of them, at least, the fact that the British enjoyed such an impressive position in world affairs must have seemed a mockery of their own circumstances. How was it possible to explain, otherwise, that the problems that afflicted China, such as the irresistible influence of the 'people', were not causing an enormous entity like the British Empire to suffer as much as the Central Kingdom did?

Yet this quiet and tranquil picture of the British metropolis was not wholly true. The same ideas that ravaged the cloth of the Qing imperial mantle were making themselves felt in England. There was also talk of the nation and its rights, of the ongoing battle between the modern and the old, and about the need for reform in the face of foreign threat. The rulers of the empire, upper classes of traders, bankers, and colonial officials, to whom their powerful situation in international affairs granted a better position to hold than that of their Qing counterparts, remained worried, nonetheless. Old certainties were losing their appeal, and a new outlook at the world, in which it was the national community which would possess the ultimate importance, was steadily gaining ground.

To us, living in a world in which the nation-state is the unopposed hegemonic mode of political organisation, many of these developments seem rather ordinary. We have come to see empires as things of the past, and to imagine the tide of popular sovereignty, once awoken, as an unstoppable force. We find it difficult to imagine a world in which legitimacy to rule would come from above and not from below, and in which the full power of the people was not so much suppressed as not addressed at all. In fact, we go as far as to conceive populations around the world divided in equally sovereign nations, of which China and England are merely two, and which ultimately and inescapably were destined, in time, to found a nation-state, be it led by an emperor or a parliament. To the extent to which these assumptions still permeate our views about the world, both in Europe as well as in Asia, we live within the same ground-breaking framework that guided the Chinese Republic to claim that its power came from the people. We are the offspring of the revolutionary change that made the Qing disappear, and which, in due turn, would also see the British lose their empire.

In this work, it is our objective to trace this momentous change and its ontological, moral, and political consequences, and to describe how the ideas that sustain such a worldview were accepted (or rejected) by those who first came into contact with and shaped them. We will try to expose how they perceived the changes in the midst of which they lived and the broader world beyond, in what way their convictions about the past were transformed and adapted to the new role claimed by the nation, and the extent to which these modifications, in turn, affected their own self-understanding. In short, we do not attempt to provide a historical account of the events that took place in China or in the British Empire in the fateful decades from 1880 to 1930, but to uncover, instead, the logic that made these changes seem desirable, morally sound, and even necessary for the increasing number of individuals in both empires that espoused them.

In the present moment, in which nationalism is more and more equated with radical political attitudes, studies such as this one are indispensable to evidence the extent to which ideas about the nation, and the particular positions of the mind which are necessary for this concept to have any meaning, are central to our views about reality, history, and change. Instead of a marginal, peripheral phenomenon identified with extreme right-wing political ideologies or irredentist claims, these works prove that nationalism is best understood as a 'whole complex of beliefs, habits, representations, and practices', which, if reiterated enough, naturalise its constituent elements in an almost unconscious way.⁵ If we are capable of identifying them, of isolating their significance and the influence they exercise on our consciousness, we can expect not only to get a more complete understanding about our present societies, but also to appreciate better the ways in which similar worldviews were produced and reproduced in the past.

The development in recent decades of a turn towards 'global histories' also requires us to critically engage with the topics of nation-building and historical consciousness. The fundamental motives behind this movement, mainly the critique against the nation-state as the basic unit of historical analysis and a Eurocentric

⁵ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE, 1995), 6.

approach towards global phenomena, have resulted in a series of evocative works such as those authored by Christopher Arthur Bayly, Peter Frankopan, or Jürgen Osterhammel.⁶ However, even these exceptional examples only serve to emphasise our difficulties to make sense of the intricate web of global connections, as well as of the degree to which the historical consciousness of our societies is still framed around the historical agency of the nation-state.⁷

Benedict Anderson, one of the towering figures in nationalism studies, once wrote that it had been the magic of nationalism to transform 'fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning (...), to turn chance into destiny'.⁸ It is the ultimate ambition of this work to shed light on how such a transformation took place, almost simultaneously, in places so distant and distinct as the ones analysed in this study, and how it had come to be that no state, be it powerful or weak, Western or Asian, imperial or republican, could help but express its anxieties, its legitimacy, and its international position in terms which ultimately stemmed from a nationalist worldview. It attempts to trace from a comparative perspective, in short, the arrival of the world of nations.

a. What is a nation?

But, what do we even mean by the term nation? If this research represents an attempt at illuminating aspects of the transformation that led many, both in China as well as in Britain, to look at the world in a new particular way, in which the role played

⁶ Christopher Arthur Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global connections and comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁷ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3-4.

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London-New York: Verso, 2006), 11-12.

by the 'people' was taken for granted, it is fundamental to understand what they meant when they referred to this term. The fact that many of these words -nation, nationalism, people, or national identity- seem to have readily available meanings, and therefore appear to render further exploration pointless, is what actually makes this answer even more indispensable.⁹ As we will see, there is nothing truly obvious, no natural simplicity, in the idea of the nation: just the opposite. If, as the historian Tom Holland, we agree on that 'it is the incomplete revolutions which are remembered' and that 'the fate of those which triumph is to be taken for granted', the conceptual obscurity that surrounds term might as well be the truest measure of its success.¹⁰

Such an elusive nature might also be a consequence of the methodological divide that exists among those who analyse this phenomenon. After all, various disciplines such as History, Sociology, Anthropology, or Political Science have developed their own interest on nationalism, applying to its study their own insight and methods, but not a single one of them has obtained a monopoly on its research. In this regard, nationalism studies remain paradigmatic of the possibilities of a field in which social sciences must establish frequent connections and channels of communication, but also of the perils that academic fragmentation might have if these are not present.

What, then, do we know about nations? Actually, not that much. The most extended opinion among researchers –although far from consensual- holds the argument that nationalism is a recent occurrence, whose first appearance must be dated back, at most, to around the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. The authors who first defended this position, also known as modernists, were especially active during the 1980s, and although they offered valuable insight on the topic, they also left behind them a plethora of major, unresolved issues. For instance, how can we explain the evident continuities that exist between the allegedly modern nations and

⁹ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7-8.

¹⁰ Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little, Brown, 2019), XXIX.

previous ways of self-understanding? Were nations created by elite groups to push their own interests, or did they arise out of popular social classes? What is the precise relationship that exists between nations and states? To further entangle the question, researchers have tended, until very recently, to analyse solely the political usages of nationalism, whereas considerably less attention has been paid to its connection to cultural, psychological, social, or historical ideas.¹¹

As a result, the only firm conclusion we can obtain from such a review is that 'there simply is no agreement about what nationalism is, what nations are [or] how we are to define nationality'.¹² Yet, this does not mean that we must resign ourselves to know nothing about these issues; after all, many researchers have offered their own insight on how the establishment of the world of nations had first occurred, what it entailed, and what its consequences have been. By paying careful attention to their approaches we might get closer, if not to finding a satisfactory answer for what a nation is, at least to a better understanding of the darkness that seems to enclose the term.

We might take as our starting point the first mention of the concept made by the sociologist Ernest Gellner in his well-known book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). According to it, '[n]ationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'.¹³ As can be observed, here the author adopted a perspective of nationalism as a political doctrine, a logic of legitimation which connects a nation with a state; however, the definition also seemed to take for granted the pre-existence of something called a national unit (or nation).

Further along the text Gellner would provide a dual approach to explain what he meant by national unit. For one, he would state that two people are members of a single nation 'if they share the same culture, where culture means a system of ideas

¹¹ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1.

¹² David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism* (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), 3.

¹³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 1.

and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating'.¹⁴ It would appear, then, that Gellner embraced the essentialist belief in an objective and clear-cut division between different groups of peoples following such cultural lines. Nonetheless, his second attempt at definition debunked his first explanation, by adding that two members of a nation must also acknowledge each other as belonging to such a community. In the final reckoning, no matter the objective cultural similarities that existed between two people, it was their shared sense of nationality what would determine if they could be considered part of a single nation. In short, national units were ultimately communities of agreement and belief, 'daily plebiscites', as a previous historian had put it,¹⁵ rather than the natural and readily available divisions of mankind.

This second aspect of Gellner's conception of the nation opened the door to an uncomfortable thought. If the decisive component of national belonging rested, after all, not on external reality but on subjective criteria, did not such a position also entail that nations were communities as malleable and shifting as loose sand? What stopped two people from imagining themselves members of a single nation and addressing each other as such? Gellner fully embraced the utmost consequences of this argument: he stated that nations were, in fact, inventions, and that little could be learned from nationalist accounts because they were devoted to presenting a 'false consciousness'.¹⁶ Famously, he once went as far so as to affirm that nationalism was not 'the awakening of nations to self-consciousness', but that it invented nations 'where they do not exist'.¹⁷ In such a radical interpretation, nations were deprived of any claim to antiquity or naturalness; on the contrary, they were presented as a very modern innovation, a consequence of the requirements imposed by the industrial development on human populations.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conference faite en Sorbonne, le 11 Mars 1882* (Paris: Lévy, 1882), 27.

¹⁶ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 125.

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), 168.

Unsurprisingly, Gellner's radical modernism and subjectivism provoked a response not only among nationalist activists, whose core beliefs it directly attacked, but also among researchers and scholars. Some of them, such as the acclaimed British historian Eric Hobsbawm, devoted their efforts to show that, even if nations were social entities and not primary or unchanging, there existed in fact some elements that mediated the appearance of a national community and which could temper Gellner's voluntarism. In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990) he analysed some 'proto-national' principles –language, ethnicity, ethno-religious symbology, and deeply-rooted political consciousness- as the possible originators of later national identities. Although he was forced to conclude that none of these elements was capable of explaining, single-handedly, the future formation of a national group, he nonetheless noted that nationalism seemed to be most successful in those communities in which these 'proto-national' elements were previously present.¹⁸

A former student of Gellner, Anthony Smith, also confronted the latter's depiction of nationalism as a mere invention. Although he agreed with his mentor on identifying a reciprocal recognition between national members as a main component of national identity, Smith intended to underscore that such an acknowledgement was based on a constant cultivation of 'shared memories, symbols, myths, traditions, and values'.¹⁹ Instead of an elite-driven and modern process, he defended that nationalism could not help being profoundly rooted on previous conceptions of group belonging. For this very reason, and contrary to Gellner's asseveration that 'we shall not learn too much about nationalism from the study of its own prophets',²⁰ Smith and others who espoused his ideas –often labelled as ethno-symbolists- focused on tracing the representational connections between national and pre-existent communities.²¹

¹⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 77-78.

¹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), 29.

²⁰ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 125.

²¹ One interesting aspect of Smith's work is his call to understand nationalism as a type of religious system, 'one that is of this world and human centred, certainly, and thus secular, but

Even if the debate between ethno-symbolists and modernists would continue for some years, the basic stances of both sides had already been established. From our current perspective, it is difficult to deny that both groups of scholars were right in some aspects: there seem to be, indeed, elements of innovation in national identities, as the modernists said, and there exist also traceable continuities within them, as the ethno-symbolists defended. Agreement, however, was difficult to reach to the extent that, once objective criteria of nationhood were abandoned in favour of subjectivist approaches based on self-identification, no common ground could be easily laid out in order to determine what exactly was new and what had been inherited from the past. After a short while, these debates arrived at a lockdown.

In this context, a new perspective was necessary. 1983, the same year of the publication of Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, had also witnessed the issuing of another paradigmatic work on the field. However, unlike Gellner, who was not very interested on the processes by which national self-understandings were produced, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) was entirely devoted to answering that question. After all, if to consider oneself –and others- as members of a nation was the main factor for national identity, comprehending the processes by which such a connection was rendered believable was a matter of utmost importance. Instead of inventions concealing deeper motivations, or noticeable developments from previous groups, Anderson defined nations as 'imagined communities' and rejected the idea that these could exist anywhere outside the mental production of their members.²²

Although Anderson's book offered interesting explanations about how nationalist ideas had first arisen, the main impact of his work was his transference of the phenomenon to the field of representation. Later researchers found in this approach a viable escape from the debates between ethno-symbolists and modernists:

a religion nonetheless, with the nation as its exclusive divinity, the sovereign people as the elect, a distinction between sacred national and profane foreign objects and symbols, a strong conviction of national history and destiny and, above all, its own national rites and ceremonies'. See Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism*, 76-77.

²² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

instead of focusing on the veracity or novelty of nationalist accounts, it was the creative process that made it possible to conceive a national community which had taken the centre stage. In other words, it no longer seemed useful to determine if a nation was imagined or not; the main question shifted instead to understanding how such an imagination could have occurred in the first place.

Anderson's thesis pointed out to the fact that, all things considered, 'the nation exists as an imagined identity and relationship, historically produced from a dense matrix of cultural and material political processes'.²³ It was the work of the British social scientist Michael Billig which explained that, far from being a concluded process, the creation and recreation of national identities was a continuously ongoing activity. In his influential *Banal Nationalism* (1995) Billig explained that the constant reproduction of a 'whole complex of beliefs, habits, representations and practices', reiterated on a daily basis, lay at the source of our uncritical and naturalised perspective on nationalism.²⁴ Such a systematic repetition would encompass, for instance, the issuing of passports and national documents, the depiction of maps with easily recognisable shapes, or commemorative acts in which respect was paid to the national flag. Instead of being content with an interpretative approach to the concept of 'imagined communities' as a shortcut for extreme voluntarism, Billig's thesis suggested that material elements were the ultimate producers of nationalist frameworks and self-understandings.

The widespread identification and study of these material resources has made 'banal nationalism' one of the central concepts of the field, motivating research on topics as diverse as banknotes, football, or movies.²⁵ However, not every single element contributing to the formation and reproduction of a national identity has

²³ Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London-New York: Routledge, 2006), 136.

²⁴ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6.

²⁵ See Bea Vidacs, "Banal nationalism, football, and discourse community in Africa", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11, no.1 (2011): 25-41; Charles W. Nuckols, "The Banal Nationalism of Japanese Cinema: The Making of Pride and the Idea of India", *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no.5 (2006): 817-837; Anat First and Na'ama Sheffi, "Borders and banknotes: The national perspective", *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no.2 (2015): 330-347.

been conceived as an equal partaker in the process. After all, it is relatively easy to picture a nation without a football team, with no banknotes, or which boasts no cinemas. A Cartesian method such as this one may as well lead us to imagine nations with no shared religious texts, lacking any widely recognised political organisations, or even without a common or unique language. In fact, once we take such an approach, few elements can sustain their claim to a central, mandatory status in national imagination. But, what if we could propose something we could not even begin to conceive a nation without? What would we say, for instance, about a nation with no past?

b. Nation and History

The existence of a particular connection between history and national identities has been widely recognised by leading research on the field.²⁶ After all, Anderson himself had stated that, when nations were imagined, they were so as solid communities ‘moving steadily down (or up) history’.²⁷ Similarly, other authors also pointed out that, until at least the 1960s, the main function of history writing remained ‘to construct and legitimise this new [national] identity, often rewriting significant parts of the past in national terms’.²⁸ The purpose of these accounts was to infuse their readers, especially students, with a sense of love for the national community, but they were also instrumental in influencing their images of other

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26. Also, Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism*, 30. Smith has defined ethnic communities -the foundational core of national communities- as ‘named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity’. See Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 32.

²⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26.

²⁸ Mario Carretero and Floor van Alphen, “History, Collective Memories, or National Memories? How the Representation of the Past Is Framed by Master Narratives” in *Handbook of Culture and Memory*, ed. Brady Wagoner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 286.

peoples and of themselves.²⁹ Rather than simple vehicles to introduce historical contents, they were, under this interpretation, much more significant as tools for framing experiences and representations about the world and the past.³⁰

The importance of these experiences and discourses can hardly be overstressed. Narrative psychologists, for instance, have highlighted that humans, as 'interpretative creatures', are prone to constructing self-understandings 'through the medium of language, through talking and writing' and that, for this reason, 'individuals are constantly engaged in the process of creating themselves'.³¹ Others have also proposed that one of the central elements which define national groups is their existence as 'mnemonic communities' who fill a mental necessity to bridge the past and the present and to offer continuity.³² Consequently, it seems not far-fetched to conclude that, if we could comprehend better how these texts operated, this may carry us a long way into knowing more about how these connections between history, identity, and emotional attachment are established.³³

What, then, can we say about such a relationship? Nation-builders, especially after the 1850s, seem to have widely believed that the creation of a national historical consciousness was 'the most important precondition for engendering true national

²⁹ Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen, *For Love of Country?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 11-12.

³⁰ Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History or How the Past is Taught* (London-Boston: Routledge, 1984), VII. Also, Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio and María Rodríguez-Moneo, "History Education and the Construction of a national identity", in *History Education and the Construction of National Identities*, ed. Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio and María Rodríguez-Moneo (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 10.

³¹ Michelle L. Crossley, *Introducing Narrative Psychology: self, trauma and the construction of meaning* (Buckingham-Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 10.

³² Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

³³ There is an ongoing debate around the role played by emotions in political movements. For a glimpse on the arguments of this discussion and its implications for nationalism studies, see Ludger Mees, "Emociones en política. Conceptos, debates y perspectivas analíticas", in *Emoción e identidad nacional: Cataluña y el País Vasco en perspectiva comparada*, eds. Géraldine Galeote, Maria Llombart i Huesca, and Maitane Ostolaza (Paris: Éditions Hispaniques, 2015), 19-45.

feeling in the wider population'.³⁴ The debates between ethno-symbolists and modernists were also developed, in turn, around Gellner's statement that national movements invented nations out of thin air to push the political interests of the industrial elites. As a consequence, both activists and scholars have been obsessed, for a long time, with demonstrating the veracity or falseness of the claims that national histories made about the past.

But, what if the contents of a national history were not the most important element that contributed to produce a national self-understanding in the minds of their members? What if, following the Cartesian method utilised above, we could compare different national histories, from different times or nations and strip superficial aspects from them? What would such barebones accounts include? We could probably find some common features between them: a main protagonist –the nation-, some heroes and villains that fight for or against this character,³⁵ and the depiction of periods of turbulence and decay and of others of glory and plenitude. Of course, this is a basic abstraction, but it comes handy to show that there exists a level, deep underneath the particulars of each chronicle, in which some principles are reiterated and stable. It comes to show, in a word, that there might be a structure to national history.

Researchers such as Homi Bhabha have argued that the meaning of nation is constructed as a 'system of cultural signification' through narrative processes not wholly dissimilar from those of fiction and historical practice and to which narrators must adapt in order to construct a coherent perspective of their nations.³⁶ But identifying these strategies and methods is no easy task. After all, the national imagination relies on unacknowledged principles, on the repression of opposing ideas, and in the naturalisation of its constituent elements and the interactions between

³⁴ Stefan Berger, ed., *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

³⁵ Ludger Mees, ed. *Héroes y Villanos de la Patria* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2020).

³⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation", in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London-New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-2.

them.³⁷ If we are to understand the hidden and ordaining sources or assumptions of these 'collectively experienced fantasies',³⁸ we will have to navigate the difficulties that such an approach entails.

It was the historian Prasenjit Duara who, in his book *Rescuing History from the Nation* (1995), offered a starting point for such a research. As he himself acknowledged, his main intention in this work was to demonstrate that 'national history secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time'.³⁹ Packed within such a definition we can find a striking reflection: that it is historical practices which actually construct national identities as a result of presenting these communities as the subjects of their accounts. Far from being a casual development, the fact that 'nations emerge as the subjects of History just as History emerges as the ground, the mode of being of the nation' was, for Duara, the central factor to national identity.

But this approach, which in fact may not be so different from the principles of banal nationalism exposed by Billig, offered Duara the opportunity of explaining that there exists a latent tension between the ways in which nations are presented in historical accounts. For one, they are conceived as 'timeless' historical actors which manifest themselves in different groups and peoples at different times. So, for instance, it would be possible to imagine an eight-century Anglo-Saxon and an eighteenth-century British individual as members of the same 'English' nation at different stages of its existence. But, at the same time, modern nationalist movements emphasise their striking novelty and claim to be the first true representatives of the nation, fighting for a future national fulfilment after the completion of which no further historical development would be necessary. In Duara's perspective, this *aporia*, which allows the nation to be imagined at the same time as 'essentially

³⁷ Lloyd Kramer, "Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no.3 (1997): 536.

³⁸ Donald E. Pease, "National Narratives, Postnational Narration", *Modern Fiction Studies* 43, no.1 (1997), 4.

³⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning narratives of modern China* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

atavistic and completely new',⁴⁰ is ultimately a consequence of the role that historical practice plays in constructing national self-understandings.

Duara's reflections about the problem of the unity of the national subject and its alleged continuity have been, however, far from the only ones who have tried to shed some light on the internal structure of national histories. Mario Carretero and Floor van Alphen have recently conducted an empirical research which has evidenced that master narratives play a fundamental role in the shaping of historical consciousness among students of national history. Among the narrative strategies by which such perspectives are articulated they have identified some like the depiction of the national community as a natural, homogeneous, and transcendental category, the contrast between a national 'we' and a non-national 'other', the elevation of heroic national characters, a monocausal or teleological account of events, or the persistence of value judgements.⁴¹ What studies such as these seem to prove is that, although imposing a particular historical identification might be difficult due to the constant interplay of competing social forces, academic historical practices remain a fundamental element for the formation of communal identities.⁴²

c. Theoretical approach

So, coming back to our starting question: what do we know about nations, and how does this knowledge help us understand the transformative process that engulfed the Qing and the British at around the turn of the twentieth century?

Although we thoroughly agree with modernist authors such as Gellner or Hobsbawm in denying that nations are primordial and readily observable entities, we

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴¹ Carretero and van Alphen, "History, Collective Memories, or National Memories?", 293-294.

⁴² Keith C. Barton, "School history as a resource for constructing identities: Implications of research from the United States, Northern Ireland, and New Zealand", in Carretero, Asensio and Rodríguez-Moneo, *History Education*, 105.

also support the ethno-symbolist position that underscores that there exist certain - albeit somewhat problematic- continuities between national identities and previous communal self-understandings. As we have mentioned, interest on nationalism studies has shifted from the search for objective elements that define national identity *a priori* to a perspective which emphasises the creative procedures behind the construction of these imagined communities. In this regard, Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism', Duara's approach to the interaction between historical practice and national identity, or Bhabha's acknowledgement of the similarities between fictional and national narratives, all seem to point in the same direction: that nations are best understood as the result of a textual production which obeys certain rules of composition and which is based, in turn, on a particular set of assumptions that allow their creation, diffusion, and continuous reproduction.

In the case of our study, this interpretation entails two main consequences. First, it supports the idea that historical practices do not simply reflect experiences and representations about the world, human communities, and the passing of time, but that they actively frame them. This formative process takes place, fundamentally and as authors such as Carretero, van Alphen, and Duara have shown, at the deeper level of narrative structure, and not at the more superficial level of contents and events. Secondly, it also seems to evidence that the worldviews which result from these developments are the motivators of later political, cultural, or social claims made by nationalist movements. In this regard, some recent work has tried to show the extent to which socialisation within a logic of interaction and legitimacy based on nationalist principles can be a fundamental factor in the production of national identities and state agendas.⁴³

Therefore, in the light of these conclusions, we think it possible to trace the process of extension and adoption of the nationalist worldview by paying attention to the historical consciousness developed in our two cases. However, such an approach

⁴³ Asier H. Aguirresarobe, "National Frameworks: Reflections on the Construction of National Interests and Political Agendas in Interwar Europe", *Studies on National Movements* 5, no.35 (2020): 80-114. For a broader approach to the relationship between identities and interests, see Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization* 46, no.2 (1992): 391-425.

needs to satisfy a series of requirements in order to be considered useful for obtaining the kind of knowledge we want to gain.

First, it is necessary to analyse the deep narrative structure of these national historical statements in order to isolate the main principles and assumptions that vertebrate what we may call the national outlook towards the past. To do so, we would propose a comparative approach to materials obtained from our two cases, and the use of an analytical method by which we would be able to recognise similarities, tendencies, and differences among our sources. Far from being a totally novel approach to the study of the deep national assumptions, this analysis follows strategies already present in other works interested on national historical master narratives.⁴⁴ This evidence must later be reorganised in order to render our conclusions more understandable and useful for further application in our research of China and Britain.

Once we have been capable of outlining the core elements that constitute these national narrative structures, it is time to apply the developed theoretical instrument to the study of the historical materials from late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century China and Britain. We intend, in this step, to understand the degree and pace of adoption of these master narratives; however, we must be careful of not rushing to conclusions. Although a national worldview arises out of the combination of a series of principles and assumptions about reality, these master narratives do not appear – and are certainly not adopted- in an all-comprehensive way right from the beginning. Whereas some of these ideas might be easy to understand or accept –maybe because they can be conflated with previously prevalent notions- others might directly confront the basic tenants of the identity of the group or the individuals who compose it. For this reason, our study must pay central attention to each of these assumptions as separate entities which follow distinct chronologies, until they are finally combined in a full-fledged national narrative structure.

⁴⁴ Carretero and van Alphen, "History, Collective Memories, or National Memories?", 283-304.

Finally, the last requirement of our method would be to historically situate this process of adoption within the larger historical framework of politics, economy, military, international relations, and social factors. In order to achieve this goal, we must ensure that we take into account the opportunities and limitations that framed the narrators' acceptance of these master narratives. After all, even if they were increasingly certain of the legitimacy of the assumptions of this discourse and the need to adapt to them, they were also constrained by the particular circumstances of their time and place. In this regard, this method encourages not just diachronical comparisons, but also an inter-case analysis which may shed light on why some solutions or approaches were possible in one example but not in the other.

After outlining the requirements of our method, we must also justify to which materials and chronologies we will apply it. Thankfully, we once again do not play the part of pioneers in this regard, and can work on the shoulders of previous research on the topics of historiography and historical consciousness in China and Britain that has been developed in recent decades. For the case of the relationship between history and nationalism in Qing and Republican China, for instance, we possess a wide variety of materials available in English, authored by scholars such as Edward Q. Wang, Hon Tze-ki, Julia C. Schneider, Mark Elliot, Peter Zarrow, or Tang Xiaobing, to cite but a few. Similar studies about the British Empire, although maybe scander, are also of a magnificent quality. The works of Michael Bentley, P.B.M. Blaas, Alexander Grant, Keith J. Stringer, Krishan Kumar, Peter Mandler, or Duncan Bell offer some examples of this trend.⁴⁵

To this secondary bibliography we would also have to add, of course, the direct analysis of source materials. It has been tried, in this research, to focus on the most widely-read or most impactful texts about history; for this reason, although many were published as academic or scholarly works which shaped the perspectives of students and historians later on, it has been considered necessary to include other approaches which appeared in articles and journals authored by famous journalists and intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao, or in political discourses by leading figures

⁴⁵ Full references for these works will be provided in the following chapters.

like Sun Yat-Sen. By offering such a varied perspective, it is our aim to recreate the general cultural context within which these narrations about the past were produced, and to be capable of identifying the most fundamental trends and definitory moments that marked this development.

The same criterion -pregnancy of implications- has guided the selection of the chronological range for the research. After a deep analysis of the source material, as well as of the works of previous historians, it has been concluded that the years from, approximately, the 1880s to 1930 offer the most compelling evidence of the shift to a world of nations which we intend to explore. In terms of events that mark the start or the ending of this purported chronology, it is difficult to find a single one that settles the question once and for all. As we will see, some meaningful events for these developments may have occurred earlier than 1880, such as the publication of John Richard Green's influential *A Short History of the English People* (1874) or William Stubbs' *The Constitutional History of England* (1875-1878). By the same token, others, like the classification of ethnic minorities and their inclusion in the national history of the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China up until the 1950's, may extend long after the end of our research in 1930.⁴⁶

However, it can be argued that, even if the process we aim to trace may burst outside the limits of this chronological framework, this particular period witnessed an acceleration and consolidation of the trends that would lead to a thorough change of outlook based on national assumptions. In the case of China, some of these elements were increasingly adopted by officials and historians during the 1880s, but their utmost implications were only contemplated during the 1890s and 1900s.⁴⁷ In Britain, the loss of the paradigmatic status of the 'Whig interpretation of history', which led to a re-calibration of historical coordinates and possible national subjects, was a process starting in the late 1870s and virtually concluded by the third decade

⁴⁶ For a historical perspective on this process, see Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Hao Chang, 'Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and Intellectual Changes in Late Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, no.1 (1969): 30.

of the twentieth century. In this regard, talks for the creation of a Greater Britain, a nation-state that would encompass most -if not all- of the territories of the British Empire, and which motivated wide efforts of historical transformation, are paradigmatic of opportunities that became possible during this period only to be abandoned once new frameworks became dominant. It is in this combination of ingenuity and creativity by those who first tried to adapt to a national understanding of the world, in their successful notions as well as in their more utopian projects, where we can ultimately grasp the main appeal of our research topic.

By applying these methods to our materials and chronologies we aim to test the following arguments. First, that there exists a deep structure to national historical narratives, which arises out of the combination and interplay of a series of discrete assumptions and principles about the world and the flow of time. Second, that the application of this model can produce changes in the self-understanding of those who accept it, in their motivations and in the ways in which they express and try to achieve their interests, even to the point of limiting or constraining them. Third, that the adoption of the discrete elements which compose this worldview is connected to the degree to which these can be equated with previously accepted assumptions and principles. Finally, that differences between national histories in both our cases obey to the particular circumstances within which these were developed and to the goals of those who narrated them, but also to the limitations that this narrative structure imposed on their possibilities of imagining coherent national communities.

The outline of our research would try to satisfy, therefore, the main requirements of our method and the statements we aim to evidence.

Chapter II offers a historical background of our two cases which focuses on the main events occurred between 1880 and 1930. When necessary, this overview is extended to earlier or later developments and includes political, military, social, economic, or cultural aspects which will later be helpful for our exploration of the change to a logic of nationalism in China and Britain.

In Chapter III, we conduct an analysis in order to determine which are the central assumptions of national historical narratives. To this end, source materials

from the two cases and which encompass the whole chronological framework are taken into account, and a comparative study is developed. The obtained results are then carefully organised and their implications to national imagination are considered.

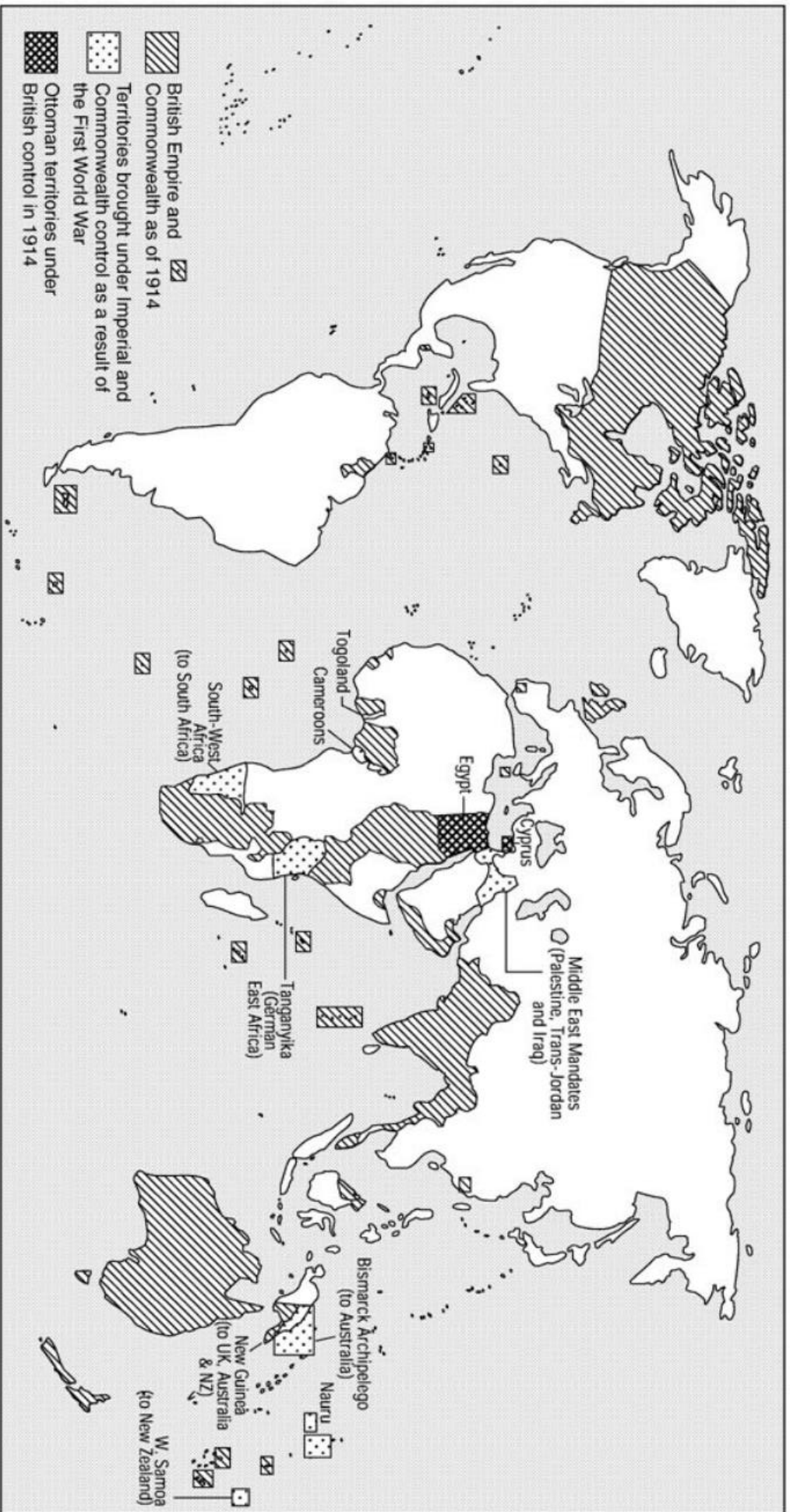
Chapter IV explores the relationship that exists between the alleged historical subjecthood of the nation and the development of new periodisation schemes for national histories in China and Britain. The deep connotations of different periodisation patterns are exposed, and, via a comparative approach, some conclusions about the extent to which changes in these representations reflect the increasingly prevalent conception of the nation as the main protagonist of history are obtained.

In Chapter V we focus on the topic of the purported homogeneity of the national group. In this regard, we investigate how national histories contribute to create the image of the nation as a collective subject via the depiction of a natural connection between the individuals who compose it. We also explore how these bonds and connections are represented in different times and contexts, and the problems and opportunities such self-understandings entail.

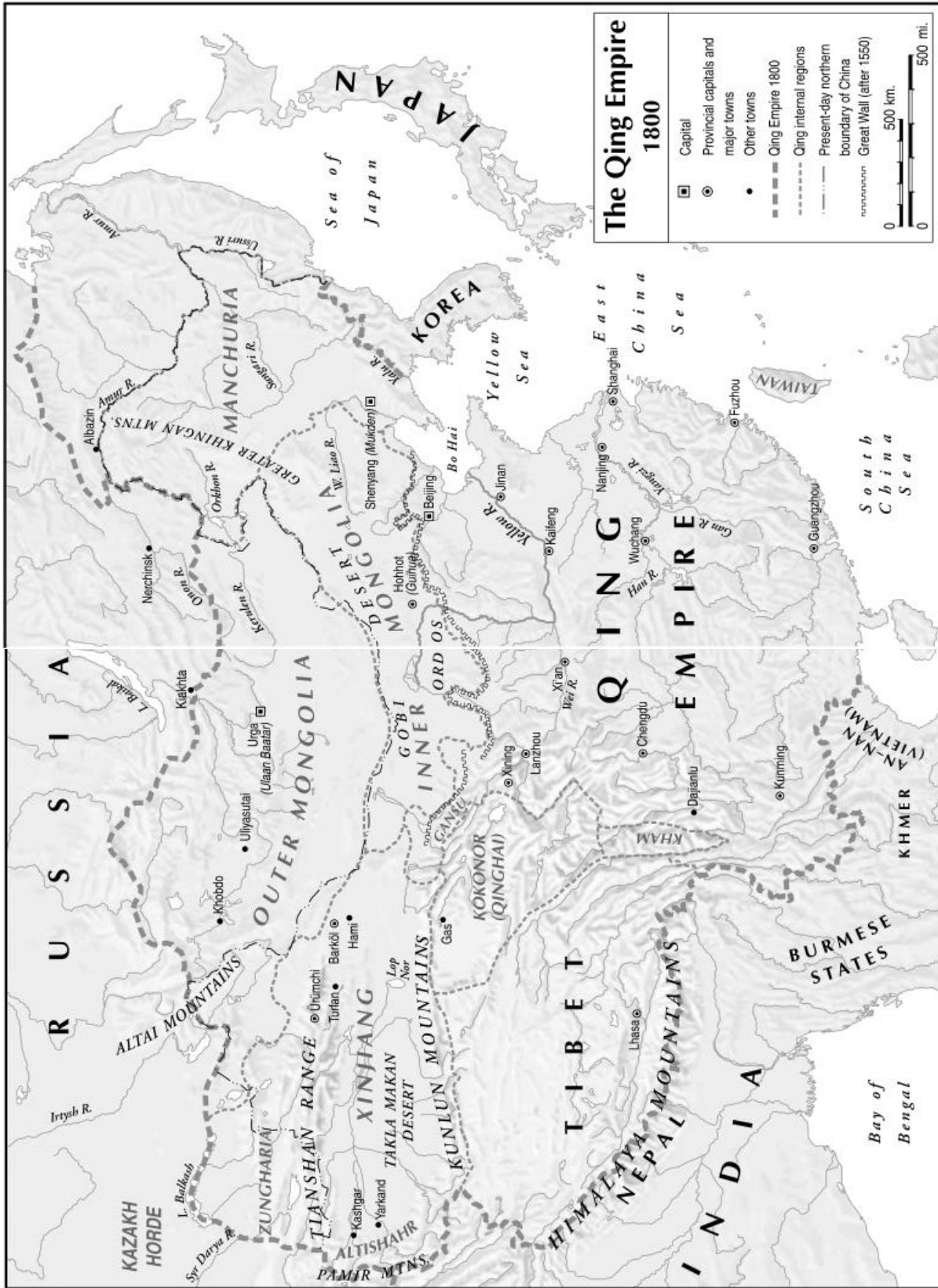
Chapter VI offers a brief outline of the problem of national continuity that authors such as Duara have previously exposed. In this regard, historical narratives play a fundamental role in creating an image of the modern and the traditional, the useful and the useless, and the necessary and the harmful in national history. In this regard, we argue that the circumstances faced by the Qing and the Republic of China rendered the distinction between these pairs more acute than in the case of the British.

Chapter VII includes a study of two projects by which the imperial geo-bodies of the Qing and the British Empires were intended to be transformed into nation-states. By comparing these two historical experiences, as well as the national narratives produced to sustain and legitimate them, we intend to evidence the shared characteristics that such schemes displayed, as well as to identify the factors that rendered them less successful in Britain than in China.

Finally, the last section of the research comprises a summary of the conclusions obtained in the previous chapters and provides some reflections about the contribution of the theoretical approach to the more general research topic of nationalism and national identity. Additionally, it also offers an outline of some gaps of knowledge in this regard, as well as suggestions for further investigation.



Map 1 Expansion of the British Empire in the First World War. Judith M. Brown and W. Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol IV. The Twentieth Century* (Oxford—New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.



Map 2. The Qing Empire, 1800. William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8.

II

Historical background

If we are to understand the changes in historical consciousness and collective identity that took place between 1880 and 1930 in China and Britain, it is mandatory that we always keep an eye on the circumstances in which these occurred and which ultimately motivated them. After all, in order to evaluate the narrative strategies that historians and intellectuals contributed to the development of national identities, we cannot obviate the wider historical context in which these were displayed and against which they were discussed, accepted, or rejected. For this reason, in this chapter we will provide a brief overview of the main events that most profoundly affected the construction of a national imagination in China and Britain, as well as the institutional and ideological setting within which these were produced.

a. Britain

By 1880, the British Empire was, without a doubt, the largest and most impressive of all the political entities in the world. From London it was ruled, albeit with a varying degree of autonomy, a territory which accounted for a quarter of the inhabitable landmass of the globe, as well as a population of close to 400 million people scattered across 'one continent, a hundred peninsulas, five hundred

promontories, a thousand lakes, two thousand rivers, [and] ten thousand islands'.⁴⁸ To such human strength the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland contributed approximately a 10 per cent of the total, being vastly outnumbered by some of its subjected colonies, particularly that of India, which boasted a population of more than 290 million inhabitants. It was hardly surprising, then, that the British themselves found it difficult to make sense of such a Leviathan, to which nothing but the most extreme superlatives seemed to do any justice, and that many chose instead not to think much about how it had come into being. From their perspective, '[t]he people have gone out, they have settled, they have cultivated the land, [and] they have multiplied', and from such a process there had risen the greatest empire the world had ever seen.⁴⁹

Yet, what such a polity possessed in terms of vastness and immensity, it certainly lacked in cohesion and homogeneity. Nowhere did this empire command an undisputed monopoly of power among its neighbours, and its territories could hardly be understood as encompassing and fully-containing a single, readily understandable civilisation.⁵⁰ In the face of this reality, the governance of the empire had drifted away from any fiction of cultural similarity and had produced three distinct spaces defined by their political connection with the imperial centre.⁵¹

First, there were the settlement colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, in which the proportion of white colonists was far superior to that of any other place in the empire. These populations had obtained –or were to obtain during our studied period- a wide degree of self-government often referred to as Dominion status. This autonomy did not relieve them from their subordination to the

⁴⁸ *St James Gazette* (1901), quoted in Ronald Hyam, "The British Empire in the Edwardian Era" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol IV. The Twentieth Century*, eds. Judith M. Brown and Roger Louis (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48.

⁴⁹ James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or England and Her Colonies* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1886), 2.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 460.

⁵¹ John Darwin, "A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics", in Brown and Roger Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol. IV*, 65.

British Parliament in Westminster, but made it possible for them to decide in their domestic affairs, if not in external relations with other powers.⁵² A second space comprised the rest of the imperial territories, such as India, which were directly ruled from London through a combination of force and co-operation with native elites, in which previously existent hierarchies were often co-opted and consulted in order to more securely sustain an often small British administration.⁵³ Finally, there existed a third area in which annexation was rendered unviable or unnecessary, an informal empire of trade and investment which included spheres of influence such as Egypt, Argentina, or some trade concessions in the Chinese mainland, and which had to be sometimes defended by British diplomacy and military power.⁵⁴

These three spaces were further connected to the metropolitan nucleus by a steady and continuous flow of migrants. Between 1815 and 1914, for instance, about 4 million people quit the British Isles to go to Canada, 2 million chose to head towards Australia and New Zealand, and about 750,000 people migrated to South Africa; however, these volumes were dwarfed by the 13.5 million British subjects who went to the United States during the same period.⁵⁵ The Dominions would not become the principal destination for British migrants until the first decade of the twentieth century, when they comprised 63 per cent of the total, a figure that was to rise to the 78 per cent by the start of the First World War.⁵⁶

⁵² Martin Kitchen, *The British Empire and Commonwealth: A Short History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 48.

⁵³ Peter Burroughs, "Imperial Institutions and the Government of the Empire", in *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol III. The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179.

⁵⁴ Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919 – 1939* (Basingstoke – London: Macmillan, 1986), 4; Darwin, "A Third British Empire?", 65.

⁵⁵ W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 40.

⁵⁶ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 459.

These movements, unsurprisingly, had a direct bearing on the ability to imagine collective identities both in the metropolis as well as in the colonial settings themselves. Although some intellectuals may have regarded the migratory flows as a way for England to get 'rid of a great deal of refuse'⁵⁷ who arrived in the colonies mainly motivated by greed, many others were driven to picturing the relationship between the United Kingdom and its settler colonies as that of a single family, destined to 'have a sovereign voice in the coming fortunes of mankind'.⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, this sentiment was not extended to the dependent empire, which was mostly regarded as a wholly distinct entity populated by strange peoples and in which the British saw themselves playing not the role of settlers, but that of paternal rulers guiding lesser races forward in the path to civilisation.⁵⁹

The complex historical intercourse between the metropolis and these three distinct spaces –settler colonies, dependent empire, and informal empire- decisively limited and shaped the possibilities of British historians, intellectuals, and politicians to imagine a national community. Theoretically, nothing hampered the idea of including colonies such as India in the imagination of the nation; practically, however, this was very rarely done. England, Britain, the United Kingdom, the settler Dominions, the dependent empire, and the informal empire may be understood in this regard as a series of concentric circles around the metropolitan core, increasingly difficult to satisfactorily represent and symbolically mobilise in comparison to the ones directly preceding them. For most people in Britain, any meaningful national connection could hardly be stretched beyond the white, European populations that inhabited Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa, and even this, as we will see, was a contentious issue when political projects of closer union with the

⁵⁷ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences* (1869), quoted in Mark Francis, "Anthropology and Social Darwinism in the British Empire: 1870-1900", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 40 (1994): 211.

⁵⁸ Froude, *Oceana*, 17.

⁵⁹ Theodore Koditschek, 'Narrative time and racial/evolutionary time in nineteenth-century British liberal imperial history', in *Race, nation and empire: making histories, 1750 to the present*, eds. Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 51.

metropolis were involved; few went so far so as to perceiving Indians or citizens of Hong Kong as members of the British nation. During the period 1880-1930, the possibilities for such a national imagination were fundamentally altered due to developments within the United Kingdom and between it and its three subject spaces; for this reason, a brief exploration of these processes is mandatory in order to historically situate the world in which our studied national narratives were displayed and consumed.

One of such main issues took place within the metropolitan heart itself. From 1873 on, an Irish Home Rule League had made itself felt in British politics, demanding federation with Britain and a degree of self-government for the island similar to that attained by the Canadian colonies in 1867.⁶⁰ Isaac Butt (1813-1879), the founder of this group, intended to offer Ireland 'independence without breaking up the unity of the Empire, interfering with the monarchy, or endangering the rights or liberties of any class of Irishmen', and by 1886 the idea of repelling the Act of Union with Britain had even found the support of the Liberal Prime minister William Gladstone (1809-1898).⁶¹

Gladstonian sponsorship of the idea met with a strong degree of opposition even within his party, and many saw it as an evident sign of the decline of British greatness. Some brought forward an alleged Irish racial incapability to rule themselves as the main reason behind the need to maintain English suzerainty over the island;⁶² others chose instead to completely deny the existence of any Irish national sentiment that would legitimise Home Rule.⁶³ This kind of fervour for keeping the union with Britain was not only displayed in the metropolis, but it was

⁶⁰ Andrea Bosco, *The Round Table Movement and the Fall of the 'Second' British Empire (1909-1919)* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 55.

⁶¹ David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire" in Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol III.*, 505. Also, Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870-1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 75.

⁶² Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The history of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2006), 126.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 115.

also prevalent among many Irish Protestants, who tended to emphatically state the extent to which 'the Western Island (...) share[d] in the Greatest Empire/ the world has ever known'.⁶⁴ Although the impact of the Home Rule debate provoked major repercussions in British politics and especially for the Liberal party, the most significant consequence for our study was that it completely divided British intellectuals and academics and faced them with the task of dealing with Ireland's claim to self-government and nationhood on the basis of history. In turn, this forced them to utilise new narrative and symbolical strategies to sustain their imagined national communities, which may –or may not- include Ireland within them.

During the latter years of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries the problematic status of Ireland within the empire remained mainly circumscribed to the obtainment of Dominion status, even if Irish responses to other imperial developments such as the Boer war or the evolution of a more decentralised system of administration for the empire were mixed and often difficult to foresee.⁶⁵ This developments reflected the ambivalent conception of the empire among the Irish both as a tool towards a looser alliance of self-governing territories and as an instrument of oppression of subjected and colonised peoples. In 1914, amidst growing tensions between nationalists and unionists, the Home Rule Bill was finally enacted, although decisions on the details of its application were postponed until the end of the First World War.⁶⁶

Most significant among the examples of opposition to British rule during the war was the Easter Rising, an armed insurrection in Dublin during April 1916 that marked the beginning of the Irish revolutionary period. The rebels would be finally defeated by the intervention of the British army, and the situation would settle with the execution of sixteen of the movement's leaders. However, the rebellion, coupled

⁶⁴ Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire", 508.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁶⁶ Deirdre McMahon, "Ireland and the Empire-Commonwealth, 1900-1948", in Brown and Roger Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol. IV*, 139.

with the unpopular nature of the executions, greatly contributed to increasing the support for Irish independence.

On 6 December 1921, after three years of violent strife, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was finally signed, and the Irish Free State was constituted as a self-governing Dominion within the British Commonwealth and without sovereignty over the north-eastern part of the island. Five years later, the Balfour Report on Inter-Imperial Relations would recognise Ireland's –as well as the rest of the Dominion's- status as equal to that of the United Kingdom within the empire, its full capacity in terms of external relations, as well as the right to secede from the Commonwealth, prerogatives which would become firmly established in the Statute of Westminster of 1931.

The Irish question and its evolution during this period were also decisively affected by the development of metropolitan control over the settler Dominions and the status of the latter within the Empire. In 1867, Canada became the first of these self-governing entities, with its title -Dominion- being drawn from biblical references; Australia would follow suit in 1901, New Zealand and New Foundland in 1907, and South Africa in 1910.⁶⁷ Although the relationship between the metropolis and these colonies was not always smooth, especially in topics such as the establishment of empire-wide protectionist tariffs or the contribution of the Dominions to their own defence, leaders in the settler colonies were often vocal about their desire to strengthen connections with Britain.⁶⁸ In this regard, the celebration in 1897 of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee marked a high point of enthusiasm about the imperial bond, the culmination of a process of increasing confidence in the benefits

⁶⁷ The reference seems to be drawn from the Psalms: 'He shall give them dominion from sea to sea'. See Trevor Lloyd, *Empire: The History of the British Empire* (London–New York: Hambledon and London, 2001), 98.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

of the British rule and in the stability and capability of the empire to be maintained safe and progressive.⁶⁹

This self-assurance would be deeply shattered in the following years. The difficulties of the British against the Boers in the South African War of 1899-1902, which had an enormous cost both in economic as well as in terms of prestige for Britain, cast a lingering shadow over subsequent thought about the empire.⁷⁰ No longer would British intellectuals be completely convinced of the untainted desirability of the Empire's rule, neither about their own fitness for government nor about their ability to protect and preserve the empire. After all, if the minuscule army of the Boers had been capable of enduring the imperial military effort for three years, what would not a greater colony, or a Great Power, do in the same situation? It certainly seemed that the 'English fibre had been softened and disintegrated by prosperity',⁷¹ that the Victorian contentment had been washed away by a new international position in which foreign threats were lurking outside the borders of the empire, and that the British, if they wanted to maintain their claimed primacy as the 'most progressive race' in the world⁷², would need to unite closer for its defence.

⁶⁹ Michael Bentley, "Shape and Pattern in British Historical Writing, 1815-1945" in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. Volume 4: 1800-1945*, eds. Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maignascha and Attila Pók (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 216. Also, Lloyd, *Empire*, 119.

⁷⁰ Hyam, "The British Empire in the Edwardian Era", 65. The relationship of the British Empire with the Boer communities that resided in the colonies of Transvaal and the Orange Free State during the nineteenth century was very complex. The discovery of gold mines in the territories of the Transvaal republic had led to strong immigration by British settlers from the Cape Colony and Natal, whereas the British pressures to support the right to vote of these immigrants was only the catalyst that would finally lead to military confrontation between the empire and the two states. The war itself would conclude in 1902 with a British victory, yet the cost of the conflict as well as the guerrilla strategies used by the Boers mined the morale of the metropolitan public and resulted in strong criticisms against the intervention.

⁷¹ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (1938), quoted in Anthony Lyons, "Social Darwinism: an Undercurrent in English Education, 1900-1920" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1996), 32.

⁷² John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan & Co. 1883), 177.

The critique against any strand of overt, aggressive imperialism that arose as a reaction to events in South Africa occasioned the accession to power of the Liberals in 1905 after ten years of what they saw as 'unjust and uncalled for wars'.⁷³ In turn, their new policy towards the empire was marked by the concession of responsible government to the South African colonies of Transvaal (1906) and the Orange Free State (1907), as well as to New Zealand and New Foundland (1907), and by the institutionalisation of periodical conferences of representatives of the metropolis and the Dominions.⁷⁴

However, it would be the First World War which would mark the consolidation of these policies. The response of the Dominions to the declaration of war to Germany in 1914 dissipated the doubts about the possible neutrality of the self-governing colonies in case of a European war, and the presence and actions of their representatives in the Imperial War Cabinets of 1917 and 1918 made sure that a new conference would be called for to consider a new framework for imperial relationships in case of a British victory.⁷⁵ These representatives demanded 'full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth', and it was their aspiration, as equals in status to the United Kingdom, to have their own voice in foreign policy, prerogatives which would be articulated in Resolution IX of the Imperial War Conference of 1917.⁷⁶

Further evolution of Dominion status during the 1920s tended towards increasing their independence from metropolitan political control. The term 'British Commonwealth' became established as the prevalent way of talking about the United Kingdom and the Dominion colonies, with British Empire now being reserved to the dependent empire.⁷⁷ During the early years of the decade, the right of the Dominions

⁷³ Hyam, "The British Empire in the Edwardian Era", 51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁵ McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 177.

⁷⁶ Darwin, "A Third British Empire?", 68.

⁷⁷ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 469-470.

to exercise an active foreign policy and not to be bound by treaties signed by the Imperial government became widely recognised; moreover, during the 1922 intervention of British forces in Turkey, and despite the backing of New Zealand and Australia, any notion of a united, uncritical support of the Dominions to British military efforts after the war was shattered due to the refusal to commit of Canada and South Africa.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the culmination of this process arrived in 1926, when the Balfour Report recognised the Dominions as 'autonomous communities within the British Empire, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.⁷⁹ In 1931, the Imperial Parliament renounced its right to legislate for the Dominions except at their own request, and so the road towards the formal equality between metropolis and settler colonies within the empire seemed finally guaranteed. However, this did not entail the dissolution of the ties that bound the empire together: even though the weight of the imperial centre had certainly lessened in relative terms, the Commonwealth connection remained strong.

Paradoxically, whilst the direct relationship between Britain and the Dominions seemed to become less solid, the dependent empire reached its geographical apex. After the First World War, the British Empire gained trusteeship of large expanses in the Middle East, such as Palestine and Iraq, as well as direct control of the Suez Canal. Although the position assumed by London was now one of efficient and low-costing defence, the empire nonetheless intervened with armed forces in Russia, Iran, Turkey, central Europe, and the Mediterranean during the

⁷⁸ Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower*, 5-6. The crisis had been caused by Turkish efforts to push Greek and Allied armies out of Turkish territory and re-take control of Istanbul and Eastern Thrace. As the Turkish army advanced to the Dardanelles, the likeliness of a military conflict between the United Kingdom (whose public opinion was against the war) and the former arose. Finally, after the refusal of some Dominions -as well as of France and Italy- to the intervention, Turkey was granted a negotiated settlement by which to recover its lost territories.

⁷⁹ Lloyd, *Empire*, 152.

1920s.⁸⁰ This should prevent us from imagining a declining empire after 1918, although disinterest in imperial affairs and thorough risk-managing now marked the post-war evolution of imperial government and public consciousness.

Cultural trends mirrored the changes exposed above. Between the years 1880 and around 1900 the climate was marked by an increasing confidence in the possibilities of the imperial connection displayed by many intellectuals and historians. After the Education Act of 1870, representations of the Empire in school textbooks of history and readers acquired major significance, although official standardisation of these materials was still not enforced;⁸¹ after all, history would remain an optative subject in English education until 1900.⁸² The objective of most of these resources, many of which became inspired by John Robert Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1883), was ultimately to infuse on their readers a more definite sense of national cohesion, which in some cases would also embrace the settler colonies.⁸³

This did not mean, however, that the preponderance of the metropolis was criticised or attacked in these accounts: as we will observe in later chapters, even in those texts written by fervent supporters of imperial unification the upholding of this Greater Britain was effected by a nominal extension of the positive qualities of England to the rest of the Empire. Significant for this fact was that these materials – and others directed at a wider audience- were mostly conceived and marketed as histories of England, in which English symbols such as the Common Law, the Church

⁸⁰ Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower*, 45-76.

⁸¹ John M. Mackenzie, "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures" in Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol III.*, 285.

⁸² Peter Mandler "Against 'Englishness': English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (1997): 161.

⁸³ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character*, 129. Also, Peter Yeandle, "Lessons in Englishness and Empire, c.1880-1914: Further Thoughts on the English/British Conundrum" in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, eds. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 275.

of England, or parliamentary progress featured prominently.⁸⁴ Such confidence in the global signification of the English historical example was to be one of the few beliefs that would remain mostly undisputed by historians after the First World War.⁸⁵

In parallel to this reorganisation of the educative standing of the discipline, the years 1880-1930 also witnessed the development of a more professional outlook towards the task of the historian. As late as 1870, for instance, History remained tied to the study of law in the most prestigious British universities such as Cambridge, and it was not uncommon to find that the most widely read authors of the time, such as Seeley himself, had not received specialised training as historians.⁸⁶ This type of amateurism lost ground during the last two decades of the nineteenth century in favour of a new understanding of historical practice which, influenced by the currents of German historiography, identified the aim of historical research with the production of an objective, systematised knowledge based on scientific theoretical and methodological standards.⁸⁷ In this regard, the creation in 1886 of the *English Historical Review* can be seen as an indicator both of this ideal as well as of German influence on English historiography.⁸⁸ As we will explore in chapters 4 and 5, this newly-found interest on objectivity, facts, and historical laws became fundamental for the revision of previously well-established historiographical currents by a new generation of historians during the first two decades of the twentieth century. These

⁸⁴ Reba Soffer, "Nation, Duty, Character and Confidence: History at Oxford, 1850-1914", *The Historical Journal* 30, no.1 (1987): 103.

⁸⁵ David Cannadine, "British History as a new Subject: Politics, perspectives and prospects" in *Uniting the Kingdom? The making of British history*, eds. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (London-New York: Routledge, 1995), 16.

⁸⁶ P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 62.

⁸⁷ Eckhardt Fuchs, "Contemporary Alternatives to German Historicism in the Nineteenth Century" in Macintyre, Maiguascha and Pók, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. Vol. 4*, 63-6.

⁸⁸ Michael Bentley, "The Age of Prothero: British Historiography in the Long *Fin De Siècle*, 1870-1920", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 20 (2010): 182.

changes, developed in leading universities such as Oxford or Cambridge, had a fundamental significance for history writing at large due to the fact that graduates from these institutions tended to enjoy relevant offices in other universities and public schools.⁸⁹

b. China

The Qing empire, on its part, comprised a vast arrange of territories ruled through three main mechanisms inherited from its predecessors to which the Manchu dynasty made only certain significant alterations: a civil government made up of the successful candidates of a complex examination system based on Confucian scholarship, a military force which safeguarded both the frontiers of the empire and maintained order within it, and finally a supervisory system that ensured the correct functioning of administration.⁹⁰ After the conquest of the Ming dynasty in 1644, the Qing had made sure to place themselves at the top of each one of these structures. To do so, they developed a policy of collegiate ministries to ensure the preponderance of the vastly outnumbered Manchus over the subject population, while at the same time establishing encampments and settlements of their own people across China to maintain the loyalty of the country.

In the great scheme of things, however, the collaboration of Chinese local elites (mainly landholding gentry and merchants) was ensured through the process of selection of bureaucrats. Success in composing a series of complex commentaries on a canon of texts -including Confucius' works- gave access, through imperial appointment and depending on the examination type (local, provincial, or at empire level), to a series of official posts and revenues. From this system, local elites obtained a series of benefits: 'confirmation of their beliefs, social status, political power, [and]

⁸⁹ Soffer, 'Nation, Duty, Character and Confidence', 79.

⁹⁰ John K. Fairbank, "Introduction: The Old Order" in Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 10*, 24.

landed wealth'. The Qing, on the other hand, bolstered their own legitimacy as the rightful rulers of China, presented themselves as the bulwarks of traditional teaching, and towered as patrons of the whole examination process.⁹¹

The circumstances in which this whole government structure entered the 1880s may be better understood as reactions to two processes that had taken place in the decades which followed the mid-nineteenth century. The first one was the transformation in governance that had occurred after the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), a movement which had combined anti-Manchuism, social claims, and Christian millennialism to challenge the dynasty's rule over China. Although the rebels had been put down thanks to the support of the official gentry in the provinces, such a victory had been at the cost of the Manchu-centred policies of the dynasty, which tended to ensure the prevalence of ethnic Manchus in the leading posts of responsibility. By entrenching their own legitimacy in the defence of the traditional society, the Qing opened the gates for a series of Han Chinese scholar-officials such as Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) and entrusted them with the task of defeating the rebellion.⁹² Even though the policy can be considered a success, as the balance struck between the central and provincial governments allowed the dynasty to survive for forty more years, at the same time it also meant that the barriers which had previously inhibited the political aspirations of Chinese officials -and on which a large part of the strategy of ethnic segregation between the Manchus and the Han was based- were now effectively dissolved.

The second process which deeply influenced the situation of the empire at the end of the century was the increasing acceleration of the imperialist intrusion and aggression of Western powers since the mid-century. The Opium War of the 1840s, which erupted as a consequence of the empire authorities' intent of controlling the harmful exportation of this drug by the British, had been followed by another Anglo-

⁹¹ Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2000), XIX.

⁹² Kwang-Ching Liu, "The Ch'ing Restoration" in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 10: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part I*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 481.

French intervention between 1857 and 1860 and Russian intrusions in Manchuria during the early-1870s.⁹³ The latter had taken advantage of the Qing difficulties with the Taiping, and had had a significant consequence for the dynasty's own vision of itself: by choosing to face the Taiping challenge in China while retreating from Manchuria, the Qing had ultimately sealed the perception of this territory as an imperial periphery and that of China as the dynasty's most important possession.⁹⁴

These two circumstances combined to produce a sense of heightened concern among Qing officials and leaders, who recognised that the balance of power in East Asia was rapidly changing. To face such a process, the rulers of the empire embarked themselves in an often discontinuous and half-hearted reform effort commonly known as Self-strengthening movement (*zhiqiang yundong* 自強運動) from the 1860s onwards. The focus of these plans was mainly the import of technical and military knowledge from the West, which the Qing had experienced first-hand during the Opium Wars and had even utilised themselves to put down the Taiping revolt. However, it also engulfed other aspects. In international relations, it represented an intent of understanding and using the principles of Western diplomacy to ameliorate the position of the empire. To this end, a proto-foreign office was created in 1861, texts on international law were translated and studied, the ancient -and, to Western delegates, humiliating- custom of performing the *kowtow* (叩頭) prostration was recalled, and diplomatic missions in other countries were established in the late 1870s.⁹⁵ Similarly, the Self-strengthening movement also had an intellectual aspect,

⁹³ Fairbank, "Introduction: The Old Order", 3.

⁹⁴ Joseph Fletcher, "Sino-Russian relations, 1800-1862", in Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 10*, 341.

⁹⁵ The term *kowtow* refers to the act of kneeling and inclining as far as too touch the ground with the forehead. In imperial times, it embodied a profound sign of respect and reverence, and was used as such in diplomatic and official ceremonies. See Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "Late Ch'ing Foreign Relations, 1866-1905" in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 11: Late Qing, 1800-1911, Part II*, eds. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 70. For a more in-depth review of the discussion around the performance of the *kowtow* by British diplomats, see Wang Dongqing, "Negotiating Chinese modernity: British imperialism and the late Qing reforms" (PhD diss., University of Hong Kong, 2013), 99-143.

exemplified in the translation of Western technical texts and the sending abroad of some students to attend courses in countries such as Britain.⁹⁶

While the condescension of posterity would remember these efforts as futile and short-sighted, it is true that imperial officials had some reason to be hopeful for the future. Although claims of suzerainty over the territory had led the Qing to fight the French in Vietnam between 1883 and 1885, and even if Russian inherece extended now not only to Manchuria but also to the north-western lands of Xinjiang, the treaties signed with these two powers recognised Qing sovereignty over its now diminished frontiers.⁹⁷ Xinjiang was made a full-fledged province for the first time in 1884, and the same would happen to the very Manchu homeland in 1907.⁹⁸ Thanks to the introduction of concepts of sovereignty from Western international law, the embattled dynastic-state became, both in the eyes of imperial bureaucrats and in those of foreign diplomats, the main guarantor of the survival of China, its rightful independence, as well as its due international obligations.⁹⁹

And yet all this did not suffice. The Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 over Korea has been widely regarded as the episode which certified the inadequacy of the Self-strengthening movement as a bulwark against foreign imperialism and, at the same time, as the catalyser which liberated the energy of Chinese nationalism.¹⁰⁰ This 'unmitigated disaster'¹⁰¹, in which the Empire's North China Fleet -which had ranked

⁹⁶ Jin Xiaoxing, "Translation and Transmutation: The *Origin of the Species* in China", *British Journal for the History of Science* 52, no.1 (2019): 122.

⁹⁷ James Reeve Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 6.

⁹⁸ Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing Became China" in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Joseph W, Esherick, Hasan Kayah, and Eric Van Young (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 240.

⁹⁹ Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: the Conceptual Transformations of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 92-93.

¹⁰⁰ Tuo Ting-tee, "Self-strengthening: The pursuit of Western technology", in Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 10*, 491.

¹⁰¹ Kwang-Ching Liu, "The military challenge: the north-west and the coast", in Fairbank and Liu, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 11*, 273.

as eighth in the world¹⁰²- was destroyed, concluded with the ratification of the Treaty of Shimonoseki on 17 April 1895, which established the end of any Chinese suzerainty over Korea, the payment of an enormous and humiliating indemnity to Japan, and the cession of the Taiwan and Pescadores islands and the Liaodong peninsula -although the latter would not be ultimately effected-.¹⁰³

The conflict would have an earth-shaking impact on the dynasty's view of itself, as well as on the self-understanding of the Chinese at large. The incontestable defeat of the Empire against a former tributary state ruined any image of China as the central country in East Asia, and entailed the recognition by officials and literati of the Great Qing (*da Qing* 大清) as only one among many powers in a world of crushing competition.¹⁰⁴ In this new environment, in which any previous complacency was cast aside in the face of utter necessity, many reformers and intellectuals convinced themselves that copying Western technology was not enough; deeper restructuring - in some cases, radical and against centuries-old traditions- would be required if the Empire was to maintain its independence and stand the onslaught of foreign intrusion.¹⁰⁵

The newly discovered place of China not as the Central Kingdom but as only one power among others was accompanied by the increasing qualitative equivalence between Western and Chinese knowledge. New influential translations were produced which went beyond the previous technical focus, such as Robert Mackenzie's *The Nineteenth Century: A History* in 1894 or the introduction of Darwinian thought by Yan Fu (1853-1924) after 1895.¹⁰⁶ Official reformers such as Kang Youwei (1858-

¹⁰² Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 122.

¹⁰³ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 27-28; Hsu, "Late Ch'ing Foreign Relations", 108.

¹⁰⁴ Rebecca E. Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", *The American Historical Review* 103, no.4 (1998): 1102; Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 391-392.

¹⁰⁵ Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 123.

¹⁰⁶ Paul A. Cohen, "Christian missions and their impact to 1900", in Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 10*, 580; Vincent Shen, "Evolutionism through Chinese Eyes: Yan Fu,

1927) or Liang Qichao (1873-1929) now based their programs on Western and Japanese examples, and understood the Chinese struggle against imperialism as only another manifestation of a process which had already led to the submission of India, Poland, Egypt, or Vietnam.¹⁰⁷ In short, the new knowledge, although not widespread among the population, started to deeply influence the minds of those cultural and official elites who were most to shape China's national imagination during the following decades.

Kang and Liang, as well as their reformist program, would enjoy a brief moment of success from 11 June to 21 September 1898, during a period known as the Hundred Days Reform. Through the direct sponsorship of the Guangxu emperor (r. 1871-1908), they were tasked with the establishment of a parliamentary government, so 'the ruler and the citizens discuss the nation's politics and laws together'.¹⁰⁸ The laws issued during this brief expanse also affected the economic, military, and cultural-educational spheres, in which they represented an emphasis on the policies already started during the Self-strengthening movement. In educational terms, especially, the prospected reform entailed the transformation of the examination system, the mechanism by which officials for the imperial bureaucracy were selected and from which they obtained their cultural capital,¹⁰⁹ by substituting some of its contents for essays on currents affairs and more practical skills inspired on Western knowledge.¹¹⁰

Ma Junwu and Their translations of Darwinian Evolutionism", *Asia Network Exchange* 22, no.1 (2014): 50.

¹⁰⁷ Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2002), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Zarrow, "The Reform Movement, the Monarchy, and Political Identity" in *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, eds. Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Asia Center & Harvard University Press, 2002), 32.

¹⁰⁹ Tze-ki Hon, *The Allure of the Nation: The Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 79.

¹¹⁰ Hao Chang, "Intellectual change and the reform movement, 1890-8", in Fairbank and Liu, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 11*, 326.

A successful coup d'état led by the empress dowager Cixi (1835-1908) and supported by conservative officials within the Manchu court led to the dismantlement of all the transformative legislation issued by Kang and Liang, who, among others involved, faced persecution and were forced into exile.¹¹¹ These events marked the end, in the eyes of those looking for reform, of moderate and tradition-based change as a useful tool for transforming China, which led to a radicalisation of anti-imperial and anti-Manchu stances.¹¹² For these revolutionaries, many of whom were based in Japan, the Qing had become the most formidable obstacle to China's chances of survival, a perspective they saw vindicated when the most anti-foreign elements within the court, among them the empress, backed the uprising of some secret societies against Western diplomats, missionaries, and citizens. This Boxer rebellion (1899-1901)¹¹³ would end up with an allied force of Western and Japanese armies sacking Beijing while the Qing court retreated from the capital, and the need of finding some understanding with these foreign powers led to the strengthening of a more reform-oriented faction of provincial officials who had opposed the Boxers such as Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) or Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909).¹¹⁴

The circumstances after 1898 and the Boxer Rebellion forced the dynasty to embark on a much more ambitious program of reform. Although initially these were focused on military and educational transformation, which entailed the creation of a

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 328-329.

¹¹² Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, 27.

¹¹³ 'Boxers' was the English name for the Chinese secret society of the 'Righteous and Harmonious Fists' (*yihequan* 義和拳). This society, well-connected with other anti-Qing triads and secret societies, carried its activities in many provinces across China. However, it was only by the 1890s that it took a strong anti-Western stance, which advocated for violent actions against foreigners and their collaborators. During the Boxer uprising, this would lead them to assassinate almost two hundred Western missionaries and over thirty thousand Chinese Christians, as well as to siege the Legation Quarter in Beijing, where foreign diplomats would be trapped for fifty-five days until their liberation by the allied forces of the Western powers and Japan. Some regiments of the imperial army, following instructions of the Empress Dowager Cixi, took part alongside the Boxers in these events. See Cohen, "Christian missions and their impact to 1900", 590; also, Hsu, "Late Ch'ing Foreign Relations, 1866-1905", 118.

¹¹⁴ Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations*, 587.

new, modern army and the substitution of the examination system by a Western-inspired school model, the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 accelerated this process. The abolition of the examinations was effected that very year, and the local gentry seemed to have involved itself deeply in the founding and managing of the new educative institutions.¹¹⁵ In politics, the New Policies (*xinzheng* 新政) went much further, paradoxically, than the reformist intents of a decade earlier, bringing to an end the prohibition to Manchu-Han intermarriage or the administrative dyarchy that reserved certain administrative and governmental posts for ethnic Manchus.¹¹⁶ More surprisingly, and as we have noted in the introduction, were the court's half-hearted promises of establishing a constitutional monarchy.

All in all, the New Policies did not save the Qing. They alienated the most conservative amongst their officials, they did not convince those revolutionaries who were already preparing for a Han-led state, and, by intending to alter the political structures and balance in the peripheries, fundamentally weakened the court's position in border regions such as Mongolia, Tibet, or Xinjiang. When the Wuchang uprising of 1911¹¹⁷ escalated into a full-fledged revolution, the negotiated abdication of the dynasty was issued by the Qing prime-minister Yuan Shikai, who would then

¹¹⁵ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, 32.

¹¹⁶ Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus & Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 119-120.

¹¹⁷ The rebellion against the Qing in Wuchang, province of Hubei, took place on 10 October 1911. Revolutionary and anti-Manchu ideas had been extending in the army for years, and on occasion of popular unrest against the Qing dynasty's intention of granting control of the railway system to foreign banks, the garrison in Wuchang assaulted the residence of the governor. The rebels would soon take the city and their example would be seconded in many more localities across China, sparking the revolution that would topple the dynasty, although their own significance would be rapidly lost to other political actors such as Sun Yat-sen or Yuan Shikai.

become president of the Republic of China, thus evidencing the extent to which the establishment of the new state had left unscathed the power of the old ruling class.¹¹⁸

The first elections of the Republic of China in 1913 were won by the Chinese Nationalist Party led by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), but the timely assassination of one of the leaders of the party radicalised the opposition to Yuan's presidency. After a brief military conflict between the two factions that was easily put out by the central government, Yuan Shikai tried to cross the ultimate line and attempted to make himself named emperor. He announced that, by the start of 1916, the Republic of China would become the Empire of China (*Zhonghua diguo* 中華帝國) and he went as far as to stage a ceremony in which he obtained the acquiescence of the deposed Qing emperor.¹¹⁹ Despite this fact, Yuan's monarchical endeavour was a fiasco which weakened his position even within his own clique, and many of his political rivals considered such a movement the proof that his days at the front of China were 'numbered'.¹²⁰ When Yuan Shikai died in June 1916, the political regime he had shaped crumbled under his feet.

The death of Yuan marked the start of the warlord period, a decade-long series of military campaigns and alliances between provincial governors and military leaders in which the country was fragmented into a myriad of different constituencies. The Nationalist Party would ultimately re-unify the country in 1928, under the command of Sun's successor, Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), who proclaimed Sun 'Father of the Country'.¹²¹

The rapid succession of empire, republic, Yuan's emperorship, and warlordism left an indelible imprint on Chinese thought. Confidence on the suitability of Chinese traditional institutions, such as the imperial state or the Confucian tradition, to

¹¹⁸ Ernest P. Young, "Politics in the aftermath of revolution: the era of Yuan Shih-kai, 1912-1916", in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 12: Republican China 1912-1949, Part I*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211.

¹¹⁹ Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 238.

¹²⁰ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 270-271.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

transform China into a powerful nation-state were shattered without remedy, and most intellectuals, especially those of the younger generation, became convinced of the necessity of abandoning this legacy and embracing the modern, scientific example of the West. In this regard, as we will see, the May Fourth Movement of 1919 represented a landmark, as the new scholars and academics searched for a new definition of what it meant to be Chinese in the face of the perceived disintegration of the centuries-old imperial system. The canon of Confucian classics lost its sacred value and was turned into a historical source for understanding the past, whereas the veracity of the semi-mythical sages came into deep scrutiny by the professionalised practices developed in the newly founded universities. Considered as a whole, this process entailed the comprehensive reconfiguration of the whole fabric of Chinese historiography, in which the intellectuals of the period saw the key to strengthening China's place in the modern world.¹²² The best way of changing China's present, they concluded somewhat paradoxically, was, in fact, to re-imagine its past.

In this chapter we have tried to provide a brief account of the most relevant events which affected the development of national imagination in Britain and China. In the British case, the evolution of the relationship between the imperial metropolis and the various comprising elements of the Empire (the United Kingdom, the Dominions, the dependent empire, and the informal empire) fundamentally shaped the contents of the produced national histories and, as a result, of national imagined communities. In China, on its part, the succession of various state forms as well as the challenge with which Western knowledge and institutions faced the traditional system were the main motives that pushed Chinese historians and literati to write their accounts. Even if, as we will see later, conceiving a bond that could unite geographically disparate territories such as Tibet or Mongolia to China was also necessary, the Chinese had to come to terms with the question of what it meant to be

¹²² Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 3.

Chinese in the first place. This kind of self-doubting, produced by perceived weakness and decline, cannot be said to have struck the British in any similar measure, probably because, despite the de-centralisation of the empire or the threat of foreign powers such as Germany, Russia, or the United States, they still remained a commanding - and, after 1919, victorious- power in the world. Because the British and the Chinese, as we will see, increasingly inhabited a mental framework shaped by analogous principles of nationalism and international competition, this also ultimately meant that their collective identities turned out to be adapted to their relative positions within this hierarchy of nations.

III

Assumptions and principles of national historical narratives

We have sketched in the introduction to this work that there exists a close relationship between ideas of nation and history. From this asseveration we concluded that modern historiography seems to support that historical practices, far from being just means of recording events from the past, play a central role in producing frameworks by which to interpret and categorise these. It has also been suggested that it is this constructed worldview which, ultimately, provides legitimacy to any subsequent claim made by nationalist movements.

The central connection between the two terms -nation and history- revolves around the concept of national statement. A national statement is an enunciation produced by employing the textual pattern which arises from the combination of the main principles of the national discourse. By referring to them as enunciations and not simply as texts, we try to emphasise the broad nature of the concept: even if often these statements are texts, such as political speeches or national histories, in many other instances they are not. After all, for example, a national flag waving at the top of a public building can only acquire meaning within a certain interpretative framework which operates around some profound assumptions: that the institution inside is, in some way, a representative of the nation; that it acts on behalf of the national community; and that it is possible to imagine other national flags waving at the top of different buildings and which represent different nations. Ultimately, the deepest assumption would be, unsurprisingly, that such thing as a nation even exists.

In other words, although a flag is certainly not a text, the process by which we make sense of its appearance in particular moments and places is one of textualisation: in this regard, it certainly comprises a statement.¹²³

In this chapter we will try to determine which ideas and assumptions characterise this national outlook, and how these principles are combined with each other to produce a mental framework to organise and categorise peoples, beliefs, and events, both in the past as well as in the present and the future. After a close and comparative reading of a variety of national histories produced in China as well as in the British Empire from 1880 to 1930, we suggest that there exist eight such notions –unity, community, continuity, sovereignty, purity, historical subjecthood, representation, and international global spatiality-, and provide evidence as well as further explanation about them based on our source material.

Given the transitional nature of the period as shown in the introduction and the historical context sections of this work, not all these historical accounts were completely based on the eight elements sketched here, and we will explore the different chronologies of the acceptance of these elements in later chapters. Also, and due in no small extent to this same fact, it has been extremely difficult to find the most clear-cut examples of each notion within a single text. After all, these profound beliefs may sometimes be readily apparent, acknowledged by the author as an important notion, but it is far more common for them to lie underneath the discourse, hidden and unspoken, evident solely to a close reading and a keen observer. This, far from being an apology, is an inherent feature of the type of research we intend to conduct. We hope that the obtained results compensate any limitation that such a methodology may entail.

¹²³ The idea of statement can be linked with Billig's banal nationalism and the 'whole complex of beliefs, habits, representations and practices' by which a national worldview is established and endlessly reproduced. See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE, 1995), 6.

a. *Unity*

The concept of unity establishes that nations exist and that they are homogeneous, natural communities which possess a unique and distinct character. They are supposed to share a powerful common bond (which can be imagined in terms of a blood connection, or as a language link, or as any other kind of union) and unified interests, goals, and preferences too. As a consequence of this alleged uniformity and distinctiveness, intra-national divisions and supra-national amalgamations are considered artificial and negative: this is because the former breaks the common bond that keeps the nation together, whereas the latter agglutinates populations without considering their imagined distinct characters.

The prevalence of this assumption in national thought has been widely recognised by those studying nationalism and national identity. As Frank Dikötter aptly summarised, '[n]ationalism, in its broadest sense, endows the members of a national population variously referred to as a nation, people, nationality, or even "race" with an identity which is thought to be unique and distinct from other population groups. A nation, however defined, is thus thought to be a relatively homogeneous entity with shared characteristics which transcend internal divisions of class, status, and region'.¹²⁴ A similar argument was put forward by Ellen Comisso when she stated, following Gellner's famous definition, that nationalism can be regarded as 'the desire for the boundaries of a state and a culturally homogeneous population to coincide'.¹²⁵ Although the existence of such apparent and consistent communities has been considered no more than a mental representation rather than

¹²⁴ Frank Dikötter, "Culture, "Race" and Nation: The Formation of National Identity in Twentieth Century China", *Journal of International Affairs* 49, no.2 (1996): 590.

¹²⁵ Ellen Comisso, "Empires as Prisons of Nations versus Empires as Political Opportunity Structures: An Exploration of the Role of Nationalism in Imperial Dissolutions in Europe", in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayah, and Eric Van Young (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 159.

an objective reality¹²⁶, it is hardly deniable that this myth possessed (and still possesses) a powerful grip on public imagination.¹²⁷

Historical perspectives often brought to the fore this alleged shared quality between its members by endowing the nation as a whole with a particular 'national character', be it a unique 'capacity to rule'¹²⁸ or a tendency towards representative government.¹²⁹ Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a central figure to turn-of-the-century Chinese nationalism, stated that 'for millions of years the human race ha[d] multiplied in separate places, and each people prospered. From language and customs to even concepts and legal systems, all differed in form and substance as well as in spirit, and thus peoples inevitably developed their own nations'.¹³⁰ To him, the latter were the result of an original fatality of human development. Language, customs, and legal systems were different around the world because the peoples that had produced them were infused by unique, distinctive spirits which could not be communicated to other groups. Such an interpretation, which established national unity as a marker both of communal bondage as well as of difference from foreigners, was deemed as self-explanatory: rather than a mental construction or a myth, it was the natural way of the world.

¹²⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), 33.

¹²⁷ Tze-ki Hon, *Revolution as Restoration: Guoci xuebao and China's Path to Modernity, 1905-1911* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 9-10. Also, Mario Carretero and Floor van Alphen, "History, Collective Memories, or National Memories? How the Representation of the Past Is Framed by Master Narratives" in *Handbook of Culture and Memory*, ed. Brady Wagoner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 293.

¹²⁸ Vincent A. Smith and Robert Balmain Mowat, *The Oxford History of England for Schools in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 14.

¹²⁹ J. Howard B. Masterman, *A History of the British Constitution* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 2.

¹³⁰ Liang Qichao, "Xinmin shuo" (Discourse on the New Citizen 新民說, 1902), quoted in *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, eds. William Theodore De Bary and Richard Lufrano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 297.

The ultimate source of these national characters, however, remained unclear. Most intellectuals and historians tended to wholeheartedly believe, during our studied period, that common blood played a most important role in the transmission of shared qualities. A history of England titled *The Growth of the English Nation* (1894), for instance, stated that they were 'the national traits inherited from ancestral races and the tendencies impressed by the physical features of the country [which] give to a people its peculiar character'.¹³¹ In China, the revolutionary scholar Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936) echoed a similar position when he argued that the existence of a common culture was ultimately superseded to the existence of a common blood lineage between the members of a nation.¹³² As late as 1926, the British historian George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962) still explained differences between the various peoples inhabiting the British archipelago as the result of the distinct interplay of Nordic, Celtic, and Welsh racial elements.¹³³

Although, as we will see in later chapters, a too exclusive conceptualisation of blood descent or racial belonging presented its own challenges in the context of such heterogeneous empires as the Qing and the British, the underlying idea which established that homogeneity and unity were the ultimate sources of power and political stability did not fade away. For this very reason, national historical accounts tended to depict as positive those developments which advanced self-awareness of the shared qualities of a people. Conversely, they became very critical of what they identified as provincialism or chauvinism. For instance, James Franck Bright (1832-1920), author of a five-volume *History of England* in the late nineteenth century, spoke in the following terms about the first king of the Plantagenet dynasty (r. 1154-1399):

¹³¹ Katharine Coman and Elizabeth Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation* (New York: Flood and Vincent, 1894), 9.

¹³² Zhang Taiyan, "Explaining the "Republic of China", trans. Pär Cassel, *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies*, 8 (1997): 24-25.

¹³³ George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1926), 29.

The consolidation of the nation was the great work of Henry of Anjou [r.1154-1189]. He brought to it great gifts, sagacity, masterful courage, a legal and judicial mind; while his training, as the prince of widely extending countries, prevented the intrusion of petty local interests into his views for his people's good.¹³⁴

What determined, in Bright's interpretation, the distinction between the greatness of the monarch's work and the pettiness of the motives of those who opposed him was, in the final reckoning, that one was portrayed as uniting the nation, whereas the others were pictured as fragmenting it. In the wake of the Qing dynasty's downfall in 1912, when peripheral regions of the empire such as Outer Mongolia or Tibet strove for independence, it was once again Liang Qichao who criticised their motives as 'an expression of tribal thinking'.¹³⁵ The Chinese nation-state he intended to create could only make sense if it included all the territories which had comprised the Great Qing, and for this reason he defended that it was 'not only the Mongols and the Tibetans who are not to have a state [of their own]', but that 'not one inch of territory is to have a state [of its own]'. From his perspective -and that of many others, both in China and Britain-, fragmentation of the nation became a shorthand for weakness and moral decay.

But if the division of the nation had negative implications, the union of different national communities was thought to be just as harmful. Because each people possessed a particular character of their own, it was not far-fetched to think that ultimate assimilation was a utopia; and, if that was the case, the use or the threat of the force remained the only available instrument to maintain such different groups

¹³⁴ James Franck Bright, *A History of England. Period I: Mediaeval Monarchy* (London: Rivingtons, 1877), 89.

¹³⁵ Liang Qichao, 'Yi nianlai zhi zhengxiang yu guomin chengdu zhi yingshe' (Illumination of the one-year-old government's situation and of the level of the nation 一年來之政象與國民程度之映射, 1913), quoted in Julia C. Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity: Chinese Discourses on History, Historiography, and Nationalism (1900s-1920s)* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 140.

together. After all, even those who favoured the creation of empire-wide nation-states, such as the English historian John Robert Seeley (1834-1895), were not immune to the implications that such a perspective could have when applied to the British Empire:

But of course it strikes us at once that this enormous Indian population does not make part of Greater Britain in the same sense as those ten millions of Englishmen who live outside of the British Islands [in the settler colonies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa]. The latter are of our own blood, and are therefore united with us by the strongest tie. The former are of an alien race and religion, and are bound to us only by the tie of conquest.¹³⁶

If this was the position that a fervent imperialist author espoused, it is unsurprising that those who despised imperial control were much more critical of these processes of amalgamation. In China, the fact that the reigning Qing dynasty was of Manchu origin was often combined with a Han-centred nationalism to produce a heated and violent revolutionary rhetoric. Zou Rong (1885-1905), a young author which did much to extend such a message among Chinese students, argued, referring to the Manchus and other ethnic groups of the empire, that they were 'inferior foreign races who contaminate our nation and violate the rights of our sacred Han race'. In his view, the union of the Han with these peoples was an unnatural and harmful occurrence. For this reason, he encouraged all his (Han) co-nationals to sacrifice their lives to drive the Manchus out of China and to restore the rights of their nation to independence.¹³⁷ As Zhang Taiyan condensed, such a racial understanding of the principle of national unity meant that 'if two blood lineages [were] standing opposed

¹³⁶ John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), 11.

¹³⁷ Zou Rong, "The Revolutionary Army", *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 31, no.1 (1999): 34.

to each other, there [was] no case for assimilation, however much one wanted that to be the case'.¹³⁸ Given that incorporation was impossible, the last resort was violent action.

In later chapters we will analyse how different interpretations of national character and national unity shaped the evolution of self-understandings and historical consciousness in China and Britain. However, despite these changes, the main foundations of the concept of national unity remained stable. The idea that a nation was a distinct and natural (in opposition to a man-made) community which shared common interests and goals and which was ultimately indivisible and unassimilable achieved widespread success, whatever the concrete content with which these notions were endowed at any given time. As a consequence, nations kept being imagined, not as mere groups of individuals, but as 'populations united in a very special way and by very special forces'.¹³⁹

b. Community

A second core assumption that has been identified in the national outlook towards the past is that of community. This can be understood as the principle which identifies nations as large groups of people -imagined, at least, as larger than tribes, families, clans, or city-states- and also establishes that important developments are those caused by and which affect these ample populations.

That the nation always meant a large community, an amalgam of various different classes or individuals, was an idea often brought to the front in national historical narratives. As such, for instance, it was once again John Robert Seeley who wrote that England did not refer to a certain geographical location, but to a particular

¹³⁸ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 24-25.

¹³⁹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 219-220.

population. In this regard, he asserted that 'England will be wherever English people are found, and we shall look for its history in whatever places witness the occurrences most important to Englishmen'.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, other British historians, like John Adam Cramb (1862-1913) or Samuel Rawson Gardiner (1829-1902), also emphasised this picture by addressing the 'nation at large'¹⁴¹ or the 'union of the classes'¹⁴² in their respective historical accounts.

However, the assumption of national community could also be interpreted - and it often was - as an anti-elite and democratic discourse. After all, if the nation could be pictured as a union of individuals sharing a common bond that made them unique from the rest, it was not surprising that internal differences within the group were considered by many to be certainly unnatural. In the historiographical arena with which we are concerned, this assumption meant an increasing interest on telling the history of the nation as a group, instead of through the lives of famous or powerful individuals. In England, probably the most influent representative of this current was John Richard Green (1837-1883) who, with his widely-read *A Short History of the English People* (1874), opened, as we will see later, a period of growing interest about the history of the common people.

In China, on the other hand, this tendency was inaugurated by Liang Qichao's 'New Historiography' (*Xin shixue* 新史學, 1902), a work influenced by the ideas of various Chinese, Japanese, and Western authors among which Green was present.¹⁴³ In it, Liang criticised traditional Chinese historians for their focus on royal figures and

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

¹⁴¹ John Adam Cramb, *Reflections on the Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), 13.

¹⁴² Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England From the Earliest Times to the Death of King Edward VII. Vol I: B.C. 55-A.D.1509* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 258.

¹⁴³ Q. Edward Wang, "Narrating the Nation: Meiji Historiography, New History Textbooks, and the Disciplinarization of History in China", in *Transforming History: The Making of a Modern Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 115.

imperial history -which he called 'the family genealogies of twenty-four surnames'¹⁴⁴- and their lack of interest on the broader population. In turn, Liang's call for a revolution in Chinese historiography would lead to a major reconfiguration of national history in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

In both cases, the shifting focus which witnessed the transformation of a nation 'of the barons and the clergy' to one which also included 'knights and citizen[s]' also entailed a new evaluative process of past characters and events.¹⁴⁵ The interest on romantic figures was abandoned and gave way to new historical practices which upheld that history ought to tell the evolution and change in the lives of the common people. The only exceptions in this regard were those characters who, as we will explain further in this chapter, were assumed to be representative of deeper trends which had affected the nation as a whole. Towering figures like the Yellow Emperor, Confucius, Edward I, or Elizabeth I, as we will see, kept being highly regarded in most historical accounts, but now their importance became tied to the nation as a group, just as one cell in an organism is tied to the rest.¹⁴⁶

As a consequence, both in China as well as in Britain, the national outlook affected the imagination not just of the present, but also of the past. The picture of the nation as an ample community succeeded in being established, and this excerpt by Eileen Power (1889-1940), lecturer at the London School of Economics and Political Science, from 1926 provides a clear example of the historical creed which a whole generation of historians and intellectuals, both in Europe as in Asia, would pursue and develop:

¹⁴⁴ Liang Qichao, "Xin Shixue" ("New Historiography" 新史學, 1902), 4-5, trans. Maura Dykstra and Devin Fitzgerald, accessed 07/09/2020, https://www.academia.edu/35963418/Translation_A_New_Study_of_History_%E6%96%B0%E5%8F%B2%E5%AD%B8_by_Liang_Qichao.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Oman and Mary Oman, *A Junior History of England: From the Earliest times to the end of the Great War of 1914-1918* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1920), 33.

¹⁴⁶ Darwinian thought played a fundamental role in the extension of these organicist views of the nation, both in Britain and in China. In this regard, for instance, Herbert Spencer's comparison between 'individual organisms' and 'social organisms' merits particular attention. See Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), 330.

We still praise famous men, for he would be a poor historian who could spare one of the great figures who have shed glory or romance upon the page of history; but we praise them with due recognition of the fact that not only great individuals, but people as a whole, unnamed and undistinguished masses of people, now sleeping in unknown graves, have also been concerned in the story.¹⁴⁷

c. *Continuity*

If identifying what connected the members of a nation to each other in the present was already a crucial question to answer, as we have seen for the British portrayal of the Indians or the Chinese depiction of the Manchus, establishing the relationship of this community to its own past was a not less pressing and complicated one. No national can consider himself the first of his kind; he always feels the necessity of linking his own identity to that of previous peoples in former times. As Judy Giles and Tom Middleton have claimed, 'evoking an apparently common past and a common culture is one of the ways in which a sense of national identity is promoted', a notion also supported by leading research about the connection between nationalism and history.¹⁴⁸

The assumption of national continuity is what bridges this gap between past and present. Essentially, it claims that nations can remain fundamentally self-same

¹⁴⁷ Eileen Power, *Medieval People* (London: Methuen & Co., 1926), 2.

¹⁴⁸ Judy Giles and Tom Middleton, eds., *Writing Englishness, 1900-1950: An introductory sourcebook on national identity* (London-New York: Routledge, 1995), 22. Also, Stefan Berger, ed., *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

through changing circumstances, and that their defining features can endure over time and space. A common blood, or a particular language, or a predisposition to freedom and constitutional government: whatever its fundamental characteristics are imagined to be, a nation is supposed to be capable of transmitting them down the generations. As a result, these groups 'can be imagined as communities, not just of the living, but of the living in continuity with the dead and the yet unborn, and [...] as "projects" -transmissions from generation to generation of an invariant substance'.¹⁴⁹

But, how is this alleged continuity constructed through historical practice? Given that one of the main indicators of the principle of national continuity is the sense of belonging, by which a national feels himself part of the imagined community because his ancestors (be them real or not) can be pictured as members of it, one common strategy is the use of the first-person plural in historical accounts.¹⁵⁰ Let us take as an example Louise Creighton's (1850-1936) *A First History of England* (1881). At the start of it, the author made the following claim: 'We belong to the German peoples. Whilst the Romans were ruling in our land, our forefathers, the English, were living in the northern part of Germany'.¹⁵¹ Via this strategy, the reader, given that he could imagine himself as a member of the national community, was capable of believing in a deep connection between the nation today, of which he and the author were part, and those ancient forefathers in their original German birthplace.

Another example of this kind of relationship was also displayed, for instance, when some Chinese nationalists defended that 'our [Chinese] people had been established as a nation on the Asian continent for several thousand years'.¹⁵² This type

¹⁴⁹ Geoffrey Cubitt, ed., *Imagining Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 8.

¹⁵⁰ Carretero and van Alphen, "History, Collective Memories, or National Memories?", 293-294.

¹⁵¹ Louise Creighton, *A First History of England* (London: Rivingtons, 1881), 14.

¹⁵² Liang Qichao, "Xinmin shuo" (Discourse on the New Citizen 新民說, 1902), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 290.

of imagination of a common historical journey became one central theme of national histories around the world, with a stark division between 'our History' and History in general.¹⁵³ In these accounts, the antiquity and continuity of the national community were emphasised, and to narrate the 'authentic history' from 'the beginnings of our race [...] up to the present' became the ultimate objective.¹⁵⁴

Apart from the use of the first-person plural as a strategy for connecting the national past and present, there existed other ways by which the principle of continuity was manifested. That was the case, for example, of the depiction of differences in time as circumstantial variations of a national core. According to this approach, it was possible to speak of the 'English' in the Dark Ages, but also of the 'English' in Victorian England, thus establishing an identification between the two groups within the narration which overcame the evident and readily available differences between them. Because these types of equation were founded, ultimately, not on objective criteria of similarity but on narrative metaphors, they could not be pushed too far and tended to remain fuzzy and unspoken:

Altogether a marvellous place was England at the end of the Middle Ages, so full of what we have lost, so empty of what we now have, and yet, [...] so English and so like us all the while.¹⁵⁵

However, despite all the imprecisions and silences, texts such as this brought forth an assumption that became entrenched in national thinking: that no matter the extent of change in material conditions, no matter the years that had passed between two given moments of national histories and the differences between them, a nation

¹⁵³ James Franck Bright, *A History of England. Period IV: The Growth of Democracy* (London: Rivingtons, 1888), 328.

¹⁵⁴ Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People* (Shanghai: China Committee, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927), 1.

¹⁵⁵ Trevelyan, *History of England*, 262.

would remain true to itself. When Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), a lifelong revolutionary and founder of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang 國民黨, GMD) compared the conquest of China by the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) to that effected by the Manchu Qing (1644-1912), and stated that both groups, after being assimilated, 'became in fact Chinese', he was not bothered by the evident difficulties raised by such a comparison.¹⁵⁶ After all, the exact borders of 'China' or what it meant to be Chinese were topics still not agreed upon, and, for that matter, the Yuan and the Qing dynasties had not even controlled the same territories nor faced similar historical circumstances. Sun's was an equivalence that ultimately could only work at a narrative level; nonetheless, via this strategy, the Chinese nation could acquire its status as an entity which defied time and change, and established an eternal connection between past and present.

As has been observed, the assumption of continuity was tightly connected to the principle that any national community possessed a unique, distinctive character that could be communicated over time. However, this transmission was not rendered possible only between the past and the present: it could also be extended to the future. It was for this reason that one of the most fundamental aspects of national historical practices was to provide solid proof of this process of uninterrupted continuity and ensure its perpetuation. To learn national history was to learn about events and characters 'with great results which will affect the lives of ourselves and our children and the future greatness of our country'.¹⁵⁷ In this interpretation, the historian was expected to abandon any interest on anecdote and romantic -but useless- endeavours: 'by examining the past and revealing the future, he will show the path of progress to the people of the nation'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Sun, *San Min Chu I*, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 308.

¹⁵⁸ Liang Qichao, "Jinggao wo tongye zhujun" (Some respectful advice for people in the business of journalism 敬告我同業諸君, 1902), quoted in Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 50.

In short, the idea that there existed a shared quality between members of a nation, impermeable to the hazards of time and change, constituted one of the main foundations of national history.¹⁵⁹ The existence of the national community could be extended to the past and stretched to the future, constantly adapting itself to the evolving circumstances around it while, paradoxically, also remaining self-same. Such a perspective about continuity embedded in endless historical time allowed authors to believe in a profound connection between the Englishmen of the wake of the First World War and those of the fourteenth century; the same could do revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen while equating their present nation with the Chinese of pre-Qing times.

d. Sovereignty

The relationship between nation and power, as has been shown in our introduction, has been one of the basic research topics in the field. John Breuilly, for instance, has focused intensively in this sole regard, and has gone as far so as to isolate this connection as the defining factor to determine what nationalism really is.¹⁶⁰ To this day, it seems undeniable that claims to nationhood include, more often than not, explicit vindications of political goals. But obvious though this question might seem, why should these imagined national communities have anything to do with politics at all?

It is via the principle of national sovereignty that answers to this question become, in time, self-evident and naturalised. According to this assumption, nations

¹⁵⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning narratives of modern China* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

¹⁶⁰ 'To focus upon culture, ideology, identity, class or modernisation is to neglect the fundamental point that nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and that politics is about power'. See John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1.

possess, by the mere fact of being so, inherent political rights and attributions, among which towers the right to self-determine their own political organisation, and, as a consequence of this, it establishes that states are the political expression of a national community. Any other loyalty or interest which undermines such a prerogative is bound to be considered, in this interpretation, as harmful and negative, whereas any inverse development, by favouring the nation's political rights, will be greeted as positive and natural.

Historical accounts from our analysed period often recognised the novelty and the broad implications of such a principle. Seeley, for instance, straightforwardly stated that it was a 'modern idea [...] that the people of one nation, speaking one language, ought in general to have one government'.¹⁶¹ This kind of understanding of the relationship between a nation and a state, which considered the latter as a creative outgrowth of the former, extended around the world during the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries. So, for instance, the reformer Tan Sitong (1865-1898), who would be executed for his implication in the Hundred Days Reform movement of 1898, publicly voiced a political program which heavily paraphrased Rousseau contractual theories: 'there must be people before there can be a prince; the prince is therefore the "branch" [secondary] while the people are the "root" [primary]'.¹⁶²

The hierarchical superiority of the nation over the state was also emphasised in these narratives by accentuating moments of struggle between the two. So, for instance, modern English history was often portrayed as a fight between the community, embodied in Parliament, and a royal power which aimed to outstrip 'all the rights and lawful powers that belong to the nation'.¹⁶³ Similarly, the first national history textbooks published in late Qing times did much for the imagination of the

¹⁶¹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 41.

¹⁶² Tan Sitong, *Renxue* (Exposition of Benevolence 仁學, 1898), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 283.

¹⁶³ James Rowley, "Rise of the People and Growth of Parliament" in *Epochs of English History*, ed. Mandell Creighton (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889), 189.

nation as a separate -and more natural- entity than the dynasty.¹⁶⁴ As the Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China of 1912 evidenced, in both empires the idea that the national group was the *locus* of a set of inherent rights had become a powerful assumption of political imagination by the early twentieth century and national histories echoed this principle by claiming that to govern itself was a 'fundamental right of a nation to its own'¹⁶⁵ or that they were solely to decide 'who was to be the prince of their own country'.¹⁶⁶ It must not surprise us, then, that to many anti-Manchu and nationalist Han Chinese 'to recover our sovereignty and regain our position as ruler' were the main goals of their revolutionary stance against the Qing.¹⁶⁷

Another notion which derived from the assumption of national sovereignty was the idea that any power or authority exerted over the nation, to be considered legitimate, should ultimately have its root in it. This was an extension of the principle that equated the state as an outgrowth of the national character of the group, and led to the conclusion that the opposite to a power which emanated from the people at large was necessarily an oppressive and tyrannical government. Narratively, this difference was mediated by making allusion to the wishes of the nation, the accordance to which determined the ultimate evaluation that a given power would receive in a historical account.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Peter Zarrow, "The New Schools and National Identity: Chinese History Textbooks in the Late Qing", in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, eds. Tze-ki Hon and Robert J. Culp (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 42-43.

¹⁶⁵ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 116.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Frederick Tout and James Sullivan, *An Elementary History of England* (London-New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908), 90.

¹⁶⁷ Hu Hanmin, "Minbaozhi liuda zhuyi" (The six principles of the *Minbao* 民報之六大主意, 1906), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 317.

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, Frederick York Powell, "Early England" in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 47; Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England From the Earliest Times to the Death of King Edward VII. Vol II: A.D. 1501-1689* (London-New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 574; Trevelyan, *History of England*, 97; Sun, *San Min Chu I*, 84; Smith and Mowat, *The Oxford History of England*, 309.

However, it is not striking that affirming that the wishes of a population were the main legitimator of political power made historians and politicians living within imperial entities uncomfortable. How could the British Empire and its extension over vast continents be understood as according to the will of those subjected to its authority? Such a tricky question threatened to erode the very foundations on which the empire had been built. And yet, intellectuals found an argument by which to deny any power to such an argument. In a strategy which would later be echoed in Liang's criticism of the independent intents made by Mongols and Tibetans, the imperialist referent John Robert Seeley once again found a way to overcome the problems faced by his projects of imperial unification. In one passage of his *Expansion of England* he claimed that India was not a nation. Because no nationality existed there, the English ought to consider instead 'what benefits our rule may confer upon the country in general'.¹⁶⁹ With a single stroke, Seeley had eliminated the issue that threatened British ascendancy over the colonies. After all, had the Indians constituted a true nation, then it would have been impossible to rule over them; as it was, only by denying the latter's existence was it possible to justify British rule in India as non-oppressive. From his perspective, there existed one single nation in the Empire, the British, and it would radiate its benevolent rulership around the world for the good of all.

e. Purity

Very closely connected to that of national sovereignty is another principle of the nationalist historical outlook. As we have mentioned, nations are imagined as communities bound together by strong and powerful ties, which find outer expression in fields as varied as art, political organisation, or customs and traditions. In this

¹⁶⁹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 275.

regard, they represent self-contained communities, which require no foreign aid nor influence in order to develop themselves fully.

What happens, then, when a nation enters into contact with another? In such a situation, the influence of one of these groups on the other is envisioned as a manifestation of power and, to those on the receiving end, as a force that must be resisted. Because the superficial aspects of the national community are, ultimately, expressions of their allegedly unique national character, it follows from these assumptions that these communities ought to remain devoid, to the largest extent possible, of any external influence. After all, the less altered by foreign inspiration, the truer to the national character any particular production will remain: in this interpretation, positive 'native' genius opposes negative emulation of the 'foreigners'. This we call the assumption of national purity.

One of the most readily available examples of this principle at work in historical narratives is the accounting of episodes of struggle against foreign political control. Given that national sovereignty and the right to self-government are an intrinsic aspect of the national community, the fight to defend such a prerogative from the hands of invaders is often presented as a natural and legitimate driver of action. For this reason, one of the most stressed marks of nationhood was the ability to not suffer this kind of conquest. For instance, despite their political disunity, Katharine Coman and Elizabeth Kendall explained in *The Growth of the English Nation* that the national spirit of the Welsh appeared 'in resistance to the English rule'¹⁷⁰; similarly, the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 made many Chinese leaders confident on the response of the people in case of a foreign intervention: 'if the Great Powers still try to conquer us, we shall certainly resist'.¹⁷¹

Although national independence was the most obvious instance that displayed the principle of purity in historical narratives, it was far from the only one. It was usual, for instance, to criticise harshly the bestowal upon foreigners of anything (government offices, landholder positions, etc.) considered to be reserved for

¹⁷⁰ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 104.

¹⁷¹ Sun, *San Min Chu I*, 11.

members of the nation. So, for instance, a medieval English king could be less condemned for his 'illegal extensions of royal power' than due to 'the total absence of national objects which distinguish his rule, which may be traced to his culpable partiality of foreigners'.¹⁷² Other historians might support this judgement, and would not hesitate in identifying his 'many foreign favourites and relatives, to whom he gave away great sums of money' as the source of 'the great discontent of his English subjects'.¹⁷³ The disturbing moral implications of all this, which equated danger and corruption with the influence of foreigners, turned out to be a pervasive and recurring theme in most national historical accounts.

Not that this premise was limited to politics. In China, where the Qing dynasty had imposed upon every man to wear a queue, anti-Manchu revolutionaries also wielded the principle of national purity against this foreign tradition. So, for instance, did Zhang Taiyan, who called this hairstyle 'a barbarian fashion instituted by force'.¹⁷⁴ In a letter directed at the leader of the 1898 Hundred Days Reform movement, Kang Youwei (1858-1927), he accused this scholar of complicity with the foreign rulers and stated that, even though 'after being forced to be a particular way for a long time, one becomes accustomed to it', this was 'certainly no way to determine right or wrong'. By abandoning the dress codes prevalent in Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) times, which he identified with the native Chinese tradition, in favour of stranger clothes, the Chinese had marked themselves, in his eyes, as a weak people. In this interpretation, the uncritical acceptance of a given dress code became framed as an insult to national dignity and even as a threat to the national community as a whole.

This preoccupation with maintaining an uncontaminated national purity in every field also affected language and literature. So, for instance, Louise Creighton pointed out that the 'best English is that which has the fewest of the foreign words

¹⁷² The referred king was Henry III [r.1216-1272]. See Bright, *A History of England. Period I*, 151.

¹⁷³ Oman and Oman, *A Junior History of England*, 30.

¹⁷⁴ Zhang Taiyan, "Bo Kang Youwei lun geming shu" (A refutation of Kang Youwei's work on revolution 駁康有為論革命書, 1903), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 311.

and most of the real old English words'.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, a later author also celebrated the achievements of English medieval writers, not due to the intrinsic value of their works, but because they had allowed an autochthonous literature to flourish instead of keeping England as 'a northern offshoot of French culture'.¹⁷⁶

But if there was an aspect in which national purity had to be encouraged and fiercely defended, such was the case of the preservation of the national character and the shared qualities which composed it. After all, if the nation would allow these elements to be disturbed, weakened, or destroyed by foreign intervention, how could it maintain any claim whatsoever to uniqueness, distinctiveness, or even independent existence? For this reason, many nationalists became involved in ensuring the maintenance of these qualities and urged their co-nationals to copy from strangers only those things that their own country did not possess.¹⁷⁷ From their perspective, it was evident that their countries enjoyed 'special characteristics that are grand, noble, and perfect, and distinctly different from those of other races', and for this very reason they made their own task to preserve them and 'not let them be lost'.¹⁷⁸

The equation of foreign influence with corruption and moral decay, however, imposed a curious restriction over the ability to imagine historical change in these accounts. The main issue faced by these historians was how to make sense of the national historical development, often defined in terms of invasions, cultural contacts, or commercial intercourse, when any external influence was assumed to be detrimental to it. The solution that many of them found, both in China as in Britain, was to attribute native -or universal- origins to these changes. So did, for instance, George Macaulay Trevelyan in 1926 when he stated that 'every important aspect of the English Reformation was of native origin'¹⁷⁹, or when he considered that Roman

¹⁷⁵ Creighton, *A First History of England*, 91.

¹⁷⁶ Trevelyan, *A History of England*, 234.

¹⁷⁷ Sun, *San Min Chu I*, 30.

¹⁷⁸ Liang Qichao, "Xinmin shuo" (Discourse on the New Citizen 新民說, 1902), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 290.

¹⁷⁹ Trevelyan, *A History of England*, 250.

civilisation had played no prominent role in English history because it was 'not a native product, sprung from the soil'.¹⁸⁰ In a similar fashion, Chinese reformers claimed that their own tradition endorsed the introduction of Western technology, ideas, and institutions, and even that some of these had their ultimate roots in China.¹⁸¹ But if this idea of native origin allowed some interesting developments, it also opened the door to criticising the intrusion of elements which were condemned as completely opposed to the national character.¹⁸²

In short, the assumption of national purity became the mobilising force behind intents as varied as the maintenance of political self-government or the preservation of cultural and traditional values. The depiction of the foreign as morally flawed and their influence as a polluting force became one of the main tenants of national historical narratives. In this regard, the maxim expressed by John Robert Seeley in the pages of his *Expansion of England* may as well have accounted for an universal truth: that 'the supreme happiness for a country of course is to be self-contained, to have no need to inquire what other nations are doing'.¹⁸³

f. Historical subjecthood

As we have mentioned in the introduction to this research, the nation also plays an ordaining role in the way historical practices are conceived in the modern world. This characteristic of the national imagined community has been addressed by authors such as Benedict Anderson, who noted that a nation is 'conceived as a solid

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸¹ Paul A. Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving perspectives on the Chinese past* (London-New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 23-47. Also, Sun, *San Min Chu I*, 48.

¹⁸² Joseph Richmond Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959), 212.

¹⁸³ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 192.

community moving steadily down (or up) history'¹⁸⁴, or Prasenjit Duara who labelled them 'a self-same, national subject evolving through time'¹⁸⁵ and it has also featured prominently in works centred on the study of master historical narratives.¹⁸⁶

The principle of the nation as a historical subject establishes that History must provide, first and foremost, an account of national development; that the contents of this narrative must be selected and appropriately evaluated in accordance to their importance and significance to this process; and that this development, if left unopposed, tends 'naturally' to a certain goal or conclusion.

Traditionally, the idea that History should deal with the development of the national community has been linked to the emergence of Romantic thought in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁷ However, this tendency was already present in Enlightenment historians who searched for universal principles common to all humanity and tried to find evidence of them in the particular history of selected nations.¹⁸⁸ By the 1880, a type of national history mainly interested on the imagined national community and its particular character was the most frequent and successful genre of historical writing in Europe; in China, on the other hand, the influence of this model via Japanese and Western translations and the thorough reconfiguration of historical practices would only take place in the early decades of the twentieth century.

¹⁸⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London-New York: Verso, 2006), 26.

¹⁸⁵ Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 4.

¹⁸⁶ Carretero and van Alphen, "History, Collective Memories, or National Memories?", 283-304. Also, Asier H. Aguirresarobe, "National Frameworks: Reflections on the Construction of National Interests and Political Agendas in Interwar Europe", *Studies on National Movements* 5, no.35 (2020): 80-114.

¹⁸⁷ Mario Carretero, María Rodríguez-Moneo and Mikel Asensio, "History Education and the Construction of a National Identity", in *History Education and the Construction of National identities*, eds. Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio and María Rodríguez-Moneo (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 12.

¹⁸⁸ Stefan Berger, "The Power of National Pasts: Writing National History in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Europe", in: Berger, *Writing the Nation*, 33.

In the years between 1880 and 1930, many Chinese and British authors tried to accommodate their historical outlook to the central position of the national community. Many of them regarded these intents as an opportunity to differentiate themselves for their competitors and forerunners, who had often not paid, in their eyes, due attention to the popular aspects of historical events. Moreover, these new types of national history were 'developed in order to be taught, such that [they] could be used to make people into national citizens'.¹⁸⁹ As a result of these factors, many of them explicitly brought forward their intention of solely narrating episodes of major significance for the process of national development. James Franck Bright, at the start of his monumental *History of England* in five volumes, defended his decision of omitting the Roman period in the following terms:

With regard to the starting-point chosen, it may be well to explain that the English invasion [of the fifth century] was fixed upon, because it so thoroughly obliterated all remnants of the Roman rule, that they have exerted little or no influence upon the development of the nation -the real point of interest in a national history.¹⁹⁰

The vindication of national development as the main topic of historical research was coupled with a demotion of purely political accounts of this process. In Britain as well as in China, a new historical outlook criticised previous historiography for writing elite discourses rather than popular ones, as we have seen when we addressed the notion of national community.¹⁹¹ So, for instance, Seeley charged against those Whig historians who 'make too much of the mere parliamentary

¹⁸⁹ Carretero and van Alphen, "History, Collective Memories, or National Memories?", 286.

¹⁹⁰ Bright, *A History of England. Period I*, II.

¹⁹¹ Liang, "Xin Shixue", 4-5.

wrangle and the agitations about liberty¹⁹² and were always tempted 'to write the history rather of Parliament than of the State and nation'.¹⁹³

Instead of this, the new generation of historians tried to develop a more holistic perspective of what they saw as the natural evolution of the national community over time. So, for instance, did Katharine Coman and Elizabeth Kendall, who identified the objective of their book with the tracing of 'the growth of the English nation from its beginnings in a weak and struggling island community to its present attainments of maritime supremacy and world-wide empire' and stated that 'such a study must concern itself, primarily, with social economic, and political conditions, since national achievement is the outcome of national character'.¹⁹⁴ In a similar manner, Liang Qichao, in his influential call for a radical change in Chinese historiography, emphasised that the most important duty of historical practice was to 'describe the interactions, competitions, and coming together of a group of people' and 'to describe what nourishes the livelihood of a group as part of the same community, and enable its evolution'.¹⁹⁵

Not that dynastical and elite histories were the only aspects of historical consciousness being confronted, for the criticism also extended to the established patterns of periodisation. Up until then, these had often been based on the succession of monarchs and royal families, or else in periods of moral rise and decline. However, the new centrality of the national subject also entailed a reorganisation of the past as a rational, collective experience around this reinvented agency.¹⁹⁶ Instead of 'such useless headings as Reign of Queen Anne, Reign of George I. [or] Reign of George II', these authors tried to establish new 'divisions founded upon some real stage of

¹⁹² Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 9.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹⁴ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, III.

¹⁹⁵ Liang, "Xin Shixue", 5.

¹⁹⁶ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 36.

progress in the national life'.¹⁹⁷ As we will see in following chapters, this led to the development of various periodisation schemes not only in Britain, where Seeley had made this remark, but also in China.¹⁹⁸

If the selection of the events narrated and the periodisation patterns utilised obeyed ultimately to the process of national development, to find trends within this course became one of the main tasks faced by historians. The idea that nations, just as individuals and other organisms, had a destiny they were compelled to fulfil had enjoyed success in Europe at least since Kant stated, in 1784, that 'all natural capacities of a creature [were] destined to evolve completely to their natural end'.¹⁹⁹ Following this principle, historians tried to narrate the process by which the national community had grown to its present form as well as to identify the profound motive that had compelled it to do so, thus leading to the construction of teleological historical accounts which depicted the national past as the necessary and natural predecessor of the present nation. These 'invariably climaxe[d] in a future, fulfilling moment of rejuvenation of the nation, now the central agent of history'.²⁰⁰ Rather than the result of chance and of complex and multifarious interactions over the ages, national history started to be pictured as the direct consequence of the evolution of a reduced number of guiding principles embedded in the national character.

This teleological pattern required, of course, to define the goal to which national history was directed. Some British historians, for instance, often identified the deepest trend in British history with the evolution of representative government²⁰¹, a thrilling account that presented, in a manner unparalleled in the

¹⁹⁷ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 18.

¹⁹⁸ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 298.

¹⁹⁹ Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784), quoted in Tymothy Grayson, "Going Somewhere? The pervasiveness of teleology in History and the 18th century great experiment to eliminate it" (PhD diss., University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, 2000), 93.

²⁰⁰ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 80.

²⁰¹ Bright, *A History of England. Period I*, 78. Also, Louise Creighton, "England a Continental Power", in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 148.

history of the world, 'the story of the evolution of liberty side by side with order'.²⁰² Others chose to emphasise that the guiding motivation behind British historical development was the progressive creation of a global empire. As has been mentioned, that was the case of Coman and Kendall when they aimed at narrating the growth of the English nation up to their place of world-wide empire,²⁰³ but also of Seeley, who categorically concluded that 'the modern character of England, as it has come to be since the Middle Ages, may also be most briefly described on the whole by saying that England has been expanding into Greater Britain'.²⁰⁴ In China, on the other hand, most intellectuals agreed on that the main success of the imperial state had been the progressive production of a united Chinese nation out of varied peoples, although the concrete degree to which these groups had been completely assimilated still remained a debated topic during the first decades of the twentieth century.²⁰⁵

In addition, most national histories shared the common assumption that this process had been, on the whole, a positive and desirable one. So, for instance, one historian could regard Edward I.'s (r.1272-1307) intents to conquer Scotland and 'uniting Britain under one crown' as a premature project which 'the events of later ages have fully justified'.²⁰⁶ In his eyes, it seemed natural to believe that Britain was somehow destined to be unified in a single political structure. The same pattern seemed to have developed in China, where Wang has underscored how 'for a generation who received their primary and secondary education in the 1900s and 1910s, it was taken for granted that Chinese national history followed an evolutionary trajectory'.²⁰⁷ Ultimately, and as has been advanced when discussing national unity,

²⁰² Frederick Bradshaw, *A Short History of Modern England from Tudor times to the present day* (London: University of London Press, 1915), 4.

²⁰³ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, III.

²⁰⁴ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 78.

²⁰⁵ Zarrow, 'The New Schools and National Identity', 24.

²⁰⁶ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development. Vol. 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 157.

²⁰⁷ Q. Edward Wang, "Between Myth and History: The Construction of a National Past in Modern East Asia", in Berger, *Writing the Nation*, 138.

these understandings tended to culminate on a moment of national self-consciousness which would be extended across every single one of its members. A 'consciousness of destiny'²⁰⁸ or of an independent 'life apart'²⁰⁹: this became, in the eyes of historians, both in China and Britain, the logical conclusion of the natural path of the nation, something 'larger and more important' than the individuals who composed it and which everyone, national or foreign, should recognise.²¹⁰

Unintendedly, the principle of national historical subjecthood also provoked the fragmentation of historical time and the development of a stronger sense of anachronism. Although the bond that connected the national community was, in this regard, 'outside of history' to the extent to which it was conceived as continuous and unchanging, the portrayal of national history as the account of the evolution of the nation over time eroded long-held perspectives of the past as an exact mirror to the present. As elements within a broader teleology of progressiveness, each individual and event possessed its own personality and role within the narrative that rendered it more historically situated than before. In China, this evolutionism was one of the principal factors that caused the dethronement of the universal validity formerly attached to Confucian tradition as well as its historical relativisation. As Liang Qichao exposed in his *New Historiography*,

The basic nature or soul of man, whether the Zhou [dynasty, r.1046-256 BC] or Confucius or Plato or Aristotle in their ancient wisdom, do not fail to compare to men of today's age. It's merely their time that defined them and raised them up. For there are always those things which great men do not know, and cannot do; things that even stinky mewling babies today know with perfect clarity, and can do with ease. Why?

²⁰⁸ Cramb, *Reflections on the Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain*, 103.

²⁰⁹ Trevelyan, *History of England*, 137.

²¹⁰ Liang Qichao, "Xinmin shuo" (Discourse on the New Citizen 新民說, 1902), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 296.

For no other reason that because people feed on the prosperity of their society. They enjoy the benefits of their society.²¹¹

In summary, we can conclude that the principle of national historical subjecthood was one of the most important components of the national outlook towards the past. It influenced the framing, inclusion, narration, and ultimate evaluation of historical events and characters, and also provided an evolutionary template by which to understand history as a developmental process. In this regard, although each author attached different goals or guiding principles to the national community depending on personal preferences or particular circumstances, the structure of national history as a description of the staged evolution of society maintained its hegemonic position over academic historiography until at least the 1960s.²¹² This also meant, in turn, that universalist readings of the past, which had been common during the Enlightenment period and in Chinese imperial historiography, became increasingly transformed and reconfigured into distinctively nationally-framed shapes.²¹³

g. Representation

The idea of national evolution over time, however, was not unproblematic, and faced historians with another set of questions: how had the nation evolved? How could a national community -composed of hundreds, thousands, or millions of

²¹¹ Liang Qichao, "Xin Shixue", 15-16.

²¹² Berger, *Writing the Nation*, 4.

²¹³ Prasenjit Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12, no.1 (2001): 125.

individuals- be portrayed as obeying its guiding principle and following its historical destiny at all?

The assumption of national representation provides some answers to these issues. It defends that nations can be historically represented by individuals, collectives, or institutions, and that, in order to achieve their natural development, nations are capable of embodying their claims and desires in historical agents who, through their actions, help in pushing forward this process. In this regard, studies on narratology have already noted how 'not only anthropomorphic actants, but also tribes or ethnic groups, states, institutions and other trans-human or non-human entities function as decision-makers' in national histories.²¹⁴ It is, thus, via this strategy of representation, that these groups can be imagined almost as real historical characters which influence events and circumstances in material reality.²¹⁵

If we observe how this embodiment of the nation in one of its representatives takes place in historical narratives, we can see that there exists a tendency to imagine the latter as vessels for national features or interests.²¹⁶ Let us observe the example of Simon de Montfort (c.1208-1265), the leader of the baronial party against the king Henry III (r.1216-1272) and an individual whose fight against the crown made him be often portrayed in British national histories as a hero in the struggle to achieve parliamentary government. In some accounts it was referred as possessing a 'national character'²¹⁷, while other historians rather explained how he 'gave England the guidance and inspiration she needed' and how he 'advanced her far on the road toward

²¹⁴ Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London-New York: Routledge, 2006), 79. Paul Carter has also noted how this notion is connected to the theatrical assumption that 'historical individuals are actors, fulfilling a higher destiny'. See Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (1987), quoted in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London – New York: Routledge, 1999), 376.

²¹⁵ This concept matches well with Rogers Brubaker's depiction of 'groupism'. See Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups* (Cambridge, MA–London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 8.

²¹⁶ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 81.

²¹⁷ Bright, *A History of England. Period I*, 168.

constitutional freedom'.²¹⁸ Histories in the 1920s were still prone to imagine him as 'a giant' who had fought stoutly for 'the liberties of England'²¹⁹, and some claimed that he had 'learnt to identify his cause with his country's' and, as a consequence, that the 'country felt it and knew it'.²²⁰ It is clear that these descriptions offer a very positive and almost hagiographic image of the character. But, curiously, Montfort was not presented, in any of these excerpts, as an individual who possessed unique and positive qualities. Instead, he seemed to be pictured as playing an important and necessary role in the historical advancement of the nation: a means towards an end, and as the material -in this case, human- expression of the spirit of the nation against despotic rulership.

Such a production and reproduction of the image of national heroes and enemies was, of course, one of the most evident examples of the principle of national representation.²²¹ However, it was far from the only one. Being a representative of the wishes, desires, and destiny of the nation, as anyone can imagine, could have direct implications on the legitimacy of political actors and institutions. After all, if, as we have seen, the nation possessed inherent political rights from which stemmed its political organisation, it seemed rather clear that its rulers should play the role of representatives of the national community. Because the ultimate *locus* of sovereignty was the nation and not the ruler, this led to a reformulation of the relationship between the two:

Those courts that are established legally are courts that represent the nation, and thus to love the court is to love the nation. Those courts that are not established legally are courts

²¹⁸ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 101.

²¹⁹ Smith and Mowat, *The Oxford History of England*, 78.

²²⁰ Trevelyan, *History of England*, 175.

²²¹ See Ludger Mees, ed., *Héroes y Villanos de la Patria* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2020).

that betray the nation. Only if the court is legitimated can one speak of love of country.²²²

Both in Britain and in China, and based on the principle of national purity, accusations of foreignness were also instrumental in the portrayal of despised rulers as non-representatives of the national community. In this regard, the cases of the Manchu Qing and the Stuart dynasty in England are emblematic.²²³

However, the assumption of representation was not limited to politics. In many accounts, the artistic or literary genius of particular individuals was described as an expression of the national spirit.²²⁴ Whereas Shakespeare's plays offered a symbol of true English character, the same was true for Confucius -at least according to some reformers-. What we can conclude from these examples, as well as from that of Simon de Montfort, is that there seems to be at work in these histories a principle which stated that the imagined community and its essence could not exercise their influence in the material world in an autonomous and direct manner; instead, they required to be imprinted on human agents.

There were other strategies by which the notion of representation was implied in these texts. One of the most telling, probably, was the extensive use of the adjective 'national', which could reference people, institutions, policies, events, motivations, works of art and many others; after all, alongside the 'national leader' there also existed the 'national poetry' or the 'national education'. The most significant function of this adjective was to connect the noun to which it was tied to the imagined community; in other words, it identified the term as an embodiment or manifestation of a particular aspect of the national character.

²²² Liang Qichao, "Xinmin shuo" (Discourse on the New Citizen 新民說, 1902), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 296-297.

²²³ Zhang, "Bo Kang Youwei lun geming shu", 310-313. Also, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1917), 204.

²²⁴ Cubitt, *Imagining Nations*, 15.

As an example of this, the king Edward I was often described as the first 'English' or 'national' monarch in British national histories, often highlighting his legislative activity as a major expression of the national tendency towards constitutional government.²²⁵ However, the same logical framework could be used to underscore the un-representative character of a ruler, as when the authors of *An Elementary History of England* (1908) claimed that 'not one of all the English kings was so little of an Englishman, or cared so little for the country as King Richard [I., r.1189-1199]'.²²⁶ In this manner, historians, working within the paradigm of the historical centrality of the national subject, could establish a clear qualitative division between its representatives and the rest of historical actors. After all, as Liang's guide for a new perspective on the past argued, 'a truly excellent history uses historical characters as material; not as subjects'.²²⁷

A last interesting aspect of the assumption of national representation was its adaptation to the staged evolutionary pattern of these national historical accounts. Even though, as we have seen, the attaining by all members of self-consciousness of their status as a nation remained a central goal of these narratives, they also implied that, prior to this moment, the national spirit and character had only been truly manifest in the actions of selected individuals and institutions. Paradoxically, thus, the celebration of these heroes and heroines of the past was sustained on the promise of a future in which national representatives such as them would no longer be necessary. As one British historian wrote in 1915, referring to the Tudor dynasty, '[t]he Tudors acted well the part of national leaders, but when the nation had come to its full stature the royal power was sharply curtailed'.²²⁸ On the other side of the world, Sun Yat-sen echoed the same thought when he attacked the imperial system:

²²⁵ Bright, *A History of England. Period I*, 170; Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 103; Chesterton, *A Short History of England*, 107; Trevelyan, *History of England*, 197-198.

²²⁶ Tout and Sullivan, *An Elementary History of England*, 67.

²²⁷ Liang, "Xin Shixue", 5.

²²⁸ Bradshaw, *A Short History of Modern England*, 4.

'[w]hen we were children, we needed the care of our parents, but now that we are men and earning our own living, we do not need to rely on them, but are independent'.²²⁹

Thus, the historical development of the nation became increasingly understood as a process of transformation from a limited representation -through 'chosen' individuals and institutions'- to a promised one, yet to be totally achieved, in which the nation as a whole would acquire such a representative status. To play the role of a vessel for the national character, as the examples above seemed to imply, was in the end a chronologically limited requirement in its development.

h. International global spatiality

Up to this point we have seen how national histories describe the nation as an imagined community, united by a powerful and profound connection, which possesses political rights and a claim to independence, and whose development is the main focus of history. During this process, the core essential characteristics of this group had been capable of remaining unchanged and had been embodied over the ages in the actions and works of a series of chosen representatives. However, there remains a main component of this way of picturing the nation that we have yet to address: its relationship with the world at large.

Nations must exist in a world of formally equal nations. That is, the imagination of one nation necessarily implies the existence of other ones which share its same characteristics, each unique and distinct to the rest. After all, as Benedict Anderson argued, 'no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind' and therefore it must be located in a particular place and within a definite -although somewhat elastic over time- set of borders.²³⁰ The result of such a division, in turn, produces the mental picture of the world as composed by 'uneven and different national territories

²²⁹ Sun, *San Min Chu I*, 46.

²³⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

and spaces'.²³¹ In this regard, a process of territorialisation and fragmentation of boundless space is fundamental for the imagination of the nation to be possible at all.²³²

National historical accounts often brought forward this spatial limitation and the status of neighbouring nations. So, for instance, a history of the English recognised the 'fundamental right' of the French people to 'be ruled by a French king'.²³³ Another one similarly referred to the 'Scottish right to national independence'²³⁴ or criticised the foreign 'interference' of Austria and Prussia during the French Revolution, given that the 'French had a right to change the government of their own land if they pleased'.²³⁵ In China, the assumption of the world as divided among equal and unique nations was increasingly accepted from the turn of the century onwards.²³⁶ To Liang Qichao, one of the first to embrace this notion, it seemed obvious that '[i]f the world consisted of just one nation, then the "nation" would not have been named. So "myself" appears when two selves stand side by side, "my family" appears when two families are adjacent, and "my nation" appears when two nations confront each other'.²³⁷ In his view, therefore, it was only by accepting the existence of the 'other' that any national self-understanding could arise.

But, if history should deal with the unique development of these communities, how was it possible to find any common ground to compare them with each other? After all, were not each of these nations different and distinct, and, as a consequence, did not their national histories obey to their particular characters and rhythms? Such

²³¹ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 2.

²³² Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism*, 27.

²³³ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 116.

²³⁴ Gardiner, *A Student's History of England. Vol. I*, 223.

²³⁵ Osborne William Tancock, "England during the American and European wars" in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 599.

²³⁶ Tze-ki Hon, "Cultural Identity and Local Self-Government", *Modern China* 30, no.4 (2004): 516.

²³⁷ Liang, "Xinmin shuo", 297.

a perspective seemed to imply the total fragmentation not only of space, but of time as well; each nation and its history would become totally autoreferential, and larger narratives that relied on comparison and contrast would then lose any legitimacy.

It may be surprising to observe, then, that these problems did not arise. Comparison and competition between national communities and their histories was found everywhere on these narratives: it was often instrumentalised, as we will see, to justify the rule of the British in places such as India or Ireland, and also to support the attacks of the revolutionaries against the Manchu Qing. Universal categories such as 'Civilisation', instead of being swept away by a historical conceptualisation based on bounded imagined communities, were transposed and adapted to the new worldview of separated national entities. Universal, global time became the yardstick by which to compare the new territorially defined spaces, as the historian James Franck Bright exposed in the preface to his *A History of England*:

The history of civilisation can be traced in great lines which have more or less followed a similar direction throughout all Europe. The interest of a national history is to observe the course which these lines have followed in a particular instance; for, examined in detail, their course has never been identical.²³⁸

What Bright's excerpt evidences is a belief in that universal, historical time could only manifest itself through the nationally limited space. In other words, that it could only be made intelligible through national history.²³⁹

²³⁸ Bright, *A History of England. Period I*, XXXV.

²³⁹ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 78. Also, Peter Zarrow, "Old Myth into New History: The Building Blocks of Liang Qichao's 'New History'", *Historiography East & West* 1, no.2 (2003): 218.

The adaptation of universal categories such as civilisation and barbarism to the new fragmented experience of national histories had direct consequences on how historians -and their readers- perceived the world.

On the one hand, it made it possible to compare national histories in contrast to an allegedly universal template, and thus to conceive differences in space as differences in time.²⁴⁰ So, for instance, the Aryans of India could be portrayed as resembling 'strikingly the medieval phase of the civilisation of the West'²⁴¹, or Anglo-Saxon peoples in fourth-century Germany could be compared as sharing a stage of development with the North American Indians of the fifteenth.²⁴² Similarly, it provided legitimacy for interpretations of the Chinese nation as a more advanced people than the rest of inhabitants of the Great Qing.

On the other hand, it pushed the development of a hierarchy of human populations in accordance to their alleged 'objective' national progress. If, as we have explained, national histories presented the self-consciousness of the national community as the main goal of the historical journey of the nation, historians acquired the authority to establish a distinction between those who had already achieved it and those who had not. As a consequence, the status as a nation, which implied the recognition of all the fundamental rights exposed above, was posited at the core of a framework which divided the peoples of the world and determined their position in the new international society.

It is not surprising, then, that intents to undermine the claims to nationhood of subject populations, such as Seeley's rejection of an Indian nationality or Liang Qichao's attack on Tibetan and Mongol nationalists, became fundamental to the maintenance of large political entities. Similarly, to sustain indisputable claims to national status was the main focus of nationalist intellectuals, especially in places

²⁴⁰ Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 17.

²⁴¹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 243-244.

²⁴² Tout and Sullivan, *An Elementary History of England*, 31.

threatened by foreign political, military, and economical intrusion such as China.²⁴³ So, the revolutionary author Zhang Taiyan, preoccupied with the interference of colonial powers, went to large extents to evidence that '[t]he Chinese terrain and national spirit are vastly superior to those of India. The land is not fragmented and the people are possessive. Ever since the Manchu conquest [of 1644], we have been enraged by the sheep stink of these lesser races'.²⁴⁴ This excerpt evidences the importance that to be considered a nation had acquired in Chinese attempts of resisting the ideological attacks of foreign imperialism.

In summary, nationalism sketched a worldview in which time became universal, but space was fragmented. Within this ideological environment, universal concepts such as civilisation or progress became intrinsically connected to particular national histories.²⁴⁵ As a consequence, the idea of the progressiveness of the national community turned out to be created in contraposition to the image of backward empires, as that of civilised races was framed in contrast to barbaric tribes and peoples. It became ingrained in a modernisation theory that related it to other such binaries as autocracy/democracy, classical/vernacular language, elitism/populism, or literati/uneducated.²⁴⁶ Even though they nominally pictured the world in terms of qualitatively equal nations, these narratives did not help in producing a more egalitarian international society; on the contrary, by connecting particular experience to universal value, they established a hierarchy between nations and no-nations, as well as between the vanguard and the rearward of human progress.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), 4. Also, Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 67.

²⁴⁴ Zhang, "Bo Kang Youwei lun geming shu", 313.

²⁴⁵ Prasenjit Duara has explored this phenomenon regarding the concept of civilisation. See Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism", 100.

²⁴⁶ Hon, *Revolution as Restoration*, 1-2.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

In this chapter we have tried to describe the ideas and principles which endow the national outlook to the past with its distinct character. We have exposed eight such notions: unity, community, continuity, sovereignty, purity, historical subjecthood, representation, and international global spatiality. We have explored the ideological foundations of these views, as well as their expression and display in national historical accounts produced in China and Britain between 1880 and 1930.

It remains, however, to provide a summarising overview of the textual structure which results from the combination of these principles and which ultimately shape the national interpretation of the past, the present, and the future.

According to such a narrative template, the world is divided into nations, natural communities which result from the instinctive development of mankind. These nations are bound internally by a strong tie, which is shared by every single member of the group and which lies at the root of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the community. The particular character of the nation also combines with its unalienable right to govern itself and finds expression in the development of independent political systems.

However, nations are far from a novelty or a temporal union: as the notion of continuity establishes, they are capable of maintaining their identity over time, regardless of change in external circumstances, thus connecting the past, the present, and the future. But despite this fact, nations can evolve in accordance to the pursuit and development of their unique national character, and they do so through the action of chosen individuals who embody their needs and aspirations. The ultimate goal of the national progress remains, largely, to assure that each single one of its members can become such a vessel for the national spirit.

Nations, as has been shown, co-exist with other national communities, equal to each other in their attributions and rights, which fight or collaborate ceaselessly. Yet the evolution of these groups is not simultaneous, and they advance towards self-

fulfilment at varying rhythms, thus producing a natural hierarchy between those more advanced and those behind them. As time goes on, these national communities would endure, whereas non-national communities and peoples -such as tribes, or multi-national empires- would be ultimately condemned to disappear.

In the next chapters we will explore how these notions were introduced, accepted, and adapted to the contexts of China and Britain between 1880 and 1930. As we will observe, their distinct relative positions in terms of international standing, culture, political customs, and historical practice played a fundamental role in shaping the ways in which these processes occurred in each case. However, the principles sketched in this chapter ultimately made their way into the historical consciousness of the inhabitants of both countries and, in the course of such development, profoundly affected their characters and self-understandings. By the end of it, although some previous markers of identity remained, they had become so drastically changed by their adaptation to these premises that they would turn out to be, for all intents and purposes, completely different from the elements from which they had originally arisen. For this reason, we consider that these eight principles must feature prominently in any discussion about the construction of national identity, but also about nations and nationalism in general.

IV

The nation at the core: historical periodisation models in Britain and China

Placing the nation at the centre of history carried with it certain challenges. As the protagonist of a new type of narrative about the past, the nation's historical journey had to be presented as a continuous development towards fulfilment and self-completion. The establishment of such a progressive pattern over previous historical conceptions, both in Britain and China, required authors to systematically reconsider the deep narrative structure that would make the past interpretable (via periodisation schemes) and also to identify the ultimate goal of national progress. By studying the answer they provided to these two necessities, it is possible to better understand the stress that the core national assumption of historical subjecthood put on the ways in which national history could be conceived and the consequences this provoked.

Periodisation is, as Jacques Le Goff put it, 'a complicated business'.²⁴⁸ First and foremost, periodising the past involves a conscious intent to make sense of the continuous passing of time by dividing it into distinct sections defined in accordance to certain shared characteristics. In doing so, the flux of time is made intelligible and manageable, and can be put to use. Second, and for that same reason, periodising is impossible if we do not define the set of features whose change we will consider as marking the turn from one period to another. Without such elements, periodisation

²⁴⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 4.

becomes mere arbitrariness and fails, as a result, in its purpose of providing a guide to understand and comprehend the past. In other words, dividing the past into distinct 'ages' is not only an exercise of signalling certain events or dates as fundamental, but also one of defining the criteria by which those particular events are chosen over the multitude of possible others.

A feature that is rarely considered, however, is that periodisation schemes often work at different levels and that they can coexist within a same historical narration. Although an author may choose one main periodisation model as the guide for its work, this does not necessarily (and most often does not) mean that others are not identifiable within his account. As we have pointed out, periodisation schemes are not mere landmarks placed all over the historical landscape, but the result of the application of an evaluation and sieve process concerning what is important and remarkable about that past. But if, as we defend, periodisation schemes may co-exist together within the same narrative, how do these assessments relate to each other? In some cases, they may evaluate the same period similarly in broad terms (even if for different reasons). In those instances, one periodisation scheme may support and buttress the conclusions that can be extracted from the other. In other circumstances, however, they may present conflictive judgements about the same event or period. As a result, tension between them arises, and the internal coherence of the account suffers.

The principle of the historical subjecthood of the nation provided historians, both in Britain and China, with a definite yardstick with which to measure the past. If history told the story of the development of the national community, then events and actors had to be judged in accordance to their importance to this process. By the same token, periodisation had also to reflect the distinct stages of this progressive pattern, connected internally by the changes that affected the nation.

But given that different periodisation schemes could coexist, most national histories did not embrace such a 'pure' model. Although historians increasingly accepted that History meant indeed national history, they -most likely unconsciously- also introduced in their accounts previous interpretations and

periodisation models that were not based on the historical subjecthood of the national community. According to them, for instance, certain periods were regarded as 'golden ages', or, oppositely, as times of tyranny and retrogression. Nonetheless, given that the progress of the nation had to be displayed as a continuous and upward development, the new narrative framework increasingly pushed historians to a re-evaluation of these previously appraised (or loathed) episodes. In some cases, these changes were accepted with relative ease; in others, especially when they concerned periods which had been traditionally idealised or despised, the reinterpretative process shook the foundations of the historical continuity of the national community. In due course, the need to provide new criteria by which to evaluate the past would inevitably lead to a new interpretation of the present and the future of which the apparition of these new periodisation schemes were only outer reflections. In this section we will analyse the tensions and opportunities that arose from this process of adapting older perspectives to the new national periodisation scheme both in China and Britain, and we will also present how these restrictions shaped the ways in which their national histories were framed and interpreted over time.

A. The Whig interpretation of history

In Britain, since at least the mid-nineteenth century, the most-common interpretative structure to understand British history had been a Liberal interpretation of the development of the constitution and the growth of parliamentary institutions.²⁴⁹ As a fundamental part of what would later be labelled the 'Whig interpretation of history', this focus on constitutional struggle provided, in the eyes of its supporters, an explanation for the unique and exceptional nature of the British (English) nation. From the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlement in Britain during the Dark Ages up until the 1832 Reform Act, constitutional history told the story of a

²⁴⁹ 'A capacious Liberalism remained the dominant force within the [British] political culture between 1880 and 1920. Other views had to accommodate, or be accommodated by, this one.' See Robert Colls, "Englishness and the political culture", in *Englishness: politics and culture, 1880-1920*, eds. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 29-30.

continuous, endless advancement of liberty and parliamentary democracy: the signing of the Great Charter in 1215, the establishment of representative parliaments in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, or the opposition to the Stuart tyranny during the seventeenth century that culminated in the expulsion of the dynasty in the 1688 Glorious Revolution represented some of the major thresholds in this pattern. Under this light, the whig narration of the birth of this constitution, the 'most perfect combination'²⁵⁰ of political balance and counterbalance, supplied 'an irreducible minimum of what should be known: it excused ignorance by defining true knowledge and tested its acquisition in a hundred tests and examinations, a thousand lessons learned by rote'.²⁵¹

Although increasingly criticised during the period from the 1880s to the 1930s, this kind of British constitutional history (or, in other words, the constitutional history of England²⁵²) maintained a large hold over the public imagination of Britain's past, especially among the upper social classes.²⁵³ Attacks against it focused on the lack of scientific validity of many of these 'Whig' claims and, in many cases, were aimed at correcting and reinterpreting concrete episodes or historical periods. However, these criticisms did not produce an alternative and coherent narrative model; although the new histories distanced themselves from the previous pattern of interpretation, they were still understood as 'anomalies' that had to be dealt with. The

²⁵⁰ Michael Bentley, "Shape and Pattern in British Historical Writing, 1815-1945" in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. Volume 4: 1800-1945*, eds. Stuart Macintyre, Juan Miguascha and Attila Pók (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 209.

²⁵¹ Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870-1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19-20.

²⁵² 'These years may have witnessed the zenith of the British nation-state, of the United Kingdom, and of the British Empire, but the nation whose history they recounted and whose identity they helped to proclaim was England. Moreover, these books were almost without exception in praise of England. They celebrated parliamentary government, the Common Law, the Church of England, ordered progress towards democracy, and the avoidance of revolution. They took English exceptionalism for granted: it existed, it was good, and it was the historian's task to explain it and to applaud it.' See David Cannadine, "British History as a new Subject: Politics, perspectives and prospects", in *Uniting the Kingdom? The making of British history*, eds. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (London-New York: Routledge, 1995), 16.

²⁵³ Geoffrey Cubitt, ed., *Imagining Nations* (Manchester, 1998), 13.

transformation of this conglomerate of anomalies into a full-fledged new interpretation of British history would only take place after the Second World War.²⁵⁴

However, the attention paid to this constitutional interpretative pattern has tended to eclipse its coexistence and interrelation with other modes of periodisation in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century British national histories. Although such a model was certainly prevalent in these accounts, there existed other periodisation schemes that were also often being reproduced by historians. Among them, the most salient were the politico-dynastic periodisation, the traditional tripartite periodisation, and the Whig tripartite periodisation. The combination of these with the progressive model essential to national historical subjecthood we consider of major importance to adequately understand this 'Whig interpretation' -or, as we will refer to it from now on, the 'Whig progressive periodisation'- as well as its evolution during the analysed period.

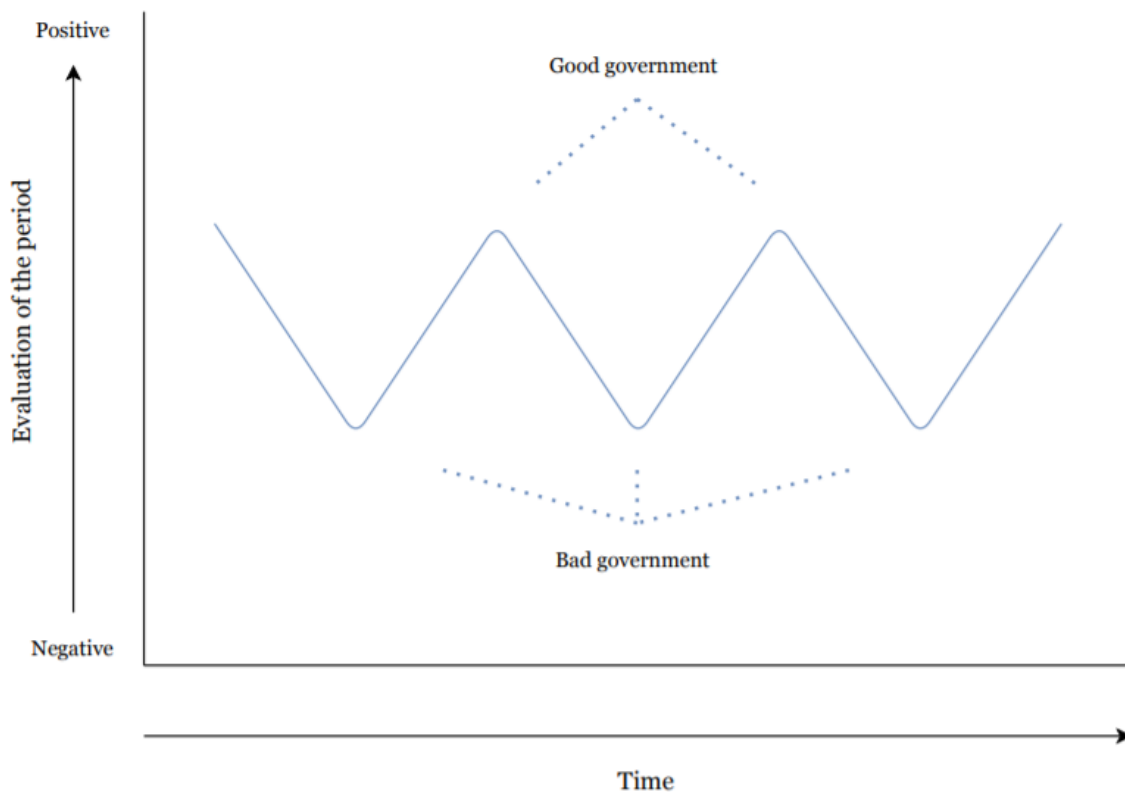
Amongst these co-existing frameworks, the periodisation model based on political and dynastical succession was, probably, the most successful in European historical narration since at least the mid-nineteenth century. A period, in this interpretation, would comprise the expanse of time during which a given actor held politically significant attributions, such as Edward II's reign (1307-1327) or Lord Palmerston's ministry (1855-1858 or 1859-1865). By dividing time according to events related to the transmission of political power, this pattern tended to emphasise the influence of political actors over the rest of society. As such, it often favoured an individualised analysis of those in power over broader aspects such as the study of institutions or social history, which sometimes led to an over-emphasis on the impact of those rulers' personal attributes.

British historians during the period 1870 to 1930 maintained the custom of utilising this periodisation model systematically. Many history books, for instance, were divided into chapters according to the politico-dynastical pattern. John Richard Green's *A Short History of the English People* (1874) titled most of its sections in

²⁵⁴ P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 66-67.

accordance to reign or ministry dates (such as 'Henry III' or 'Walpole') or to events closely related to the transmission and exercise of political power (with headings like 'The Good Parliament', 'The Tyranny', or 'The King and Parliament'). James Franck Bright's *A History of England* in five volumes (1877-1904) also equated, almost without exception, the start of a new chapter with the start of a new reign or government. As much can be stated for *A History of England from the Earliest Times to the Revolution of 1688* (1884) edited and extended by John Sherren Brewer, Samuel Rawson Gardiner's *A Student's History of England* in three volumes (1891-1920), Thomas Frederick Tout's and James Sullivan's *An Elementary History of England* (1908), Charles and Mary Oman's *A Junior History of England from the Earliest Times to the end of the Great War 1914-1918* (1920), *The Oxford History of England for Schools in India* (1924) by Vincent A. Smith and Robert B. Mowat, or most of the chapters of George Macaulay Trevelyan's famous *History of England* (1926).

Fig. 1. Politico-dynastical periodisation model



This periodisation pattern was even more manifest if we regard the use of longer historical periods that corresponded to dynasties instead of to individual reigns. In this manner, most of the aforementioned accounts were divided into sections or chapters (which often encompassed even more sub-sections within them) labelled 'Norman Kings', 'Angevin Kings', 'Tudor Monarchy', 'The House of Stuart', or 'The Hanoverian Kings'. These divisions stretched the politico-dynastical focus on individual rulers and extended it to longer expanses of time defined according to the ruling house. In consequence, they offered the historian more room to depict events and phenomena which could hardly have been associated with one single reign without having to abandon the main tenets of the politico-dynastical scheme.

If we consider the broad evaluative implications of this periodisation model (see *Fig. 1*) we can observe certain details. First, the model comprised a succession of ascending and descending trends which reflected periods of 'good' and 'bad' rulership. As one government or monarch succeeded another, and given that personal character was largely seen as defining polity, the pattern mirrored an orderly sequence of virtuous and vile individuals. Considered from a dynastical standpoint, such a perspective displayed the ascension of ruling houses, their consolidation and exercise of power, and their ultimate decline and substitution by a new one. As such, we reach the second main feature of the politico-dynastical periodisation: its cyclical nature. Under this model, the continuous rise and fall of rulers and dynasties was not temporally constrained and, as a consequence, presented no goal or directionality. The only consideration historians had to pay attention to was to provide ultimate judgement on the positive and negative aspects of each ruler and reign, and to locate the reasons for its ascension or demise. As such, widely revered 'good' monarchs such as Alfred the Great, Edward I, Elizabeth I, or Queen Victoria provided behavioural and moral examples that contrasted with despised, 'bad' ones like King John or Charles I. Ultimately, this meant that the cyclical pattern of political succession offered no progression over time, and that, in a certain sense, it stressed the optimistic (or fatalistic) assumption that good times would always come after bad ones, and vice versa.

Although we will deal with him in more detail in a later chapter when we analyse projects for Greater Britain, John Robert Seeley also developed the most important attack against the use of politico-dynastical periodisation in national histories. In *The Expansion of England* (1883) he proposed to substitute this framework by a periodisation model based on stages of national development that would better represent, in his view, the historical subjecthood of the nation:

The first step then in arranging and dividing any period of English history is to get rid of such useless headings as Reign of Queen Anne, Reign of George I., Reign of George II. In place of these we must study to put divisions founded upon some real stage of progress in the national life. We must look onward not from king to king, but from great event to great event. And in order to do this we must estimate events, measure their greatness; a thing which cannot be done without considering them and analysing them closely. When with respect to any event we have satisfied ourselves that it deserves to rank among the leading events of the national history, the next step is to trace the causes by which it was produced. In this way each event takes the character of a development, and each development of this kind furnishes a chapter to the national history, a chapter which will get its name from the event.²⁵⁵

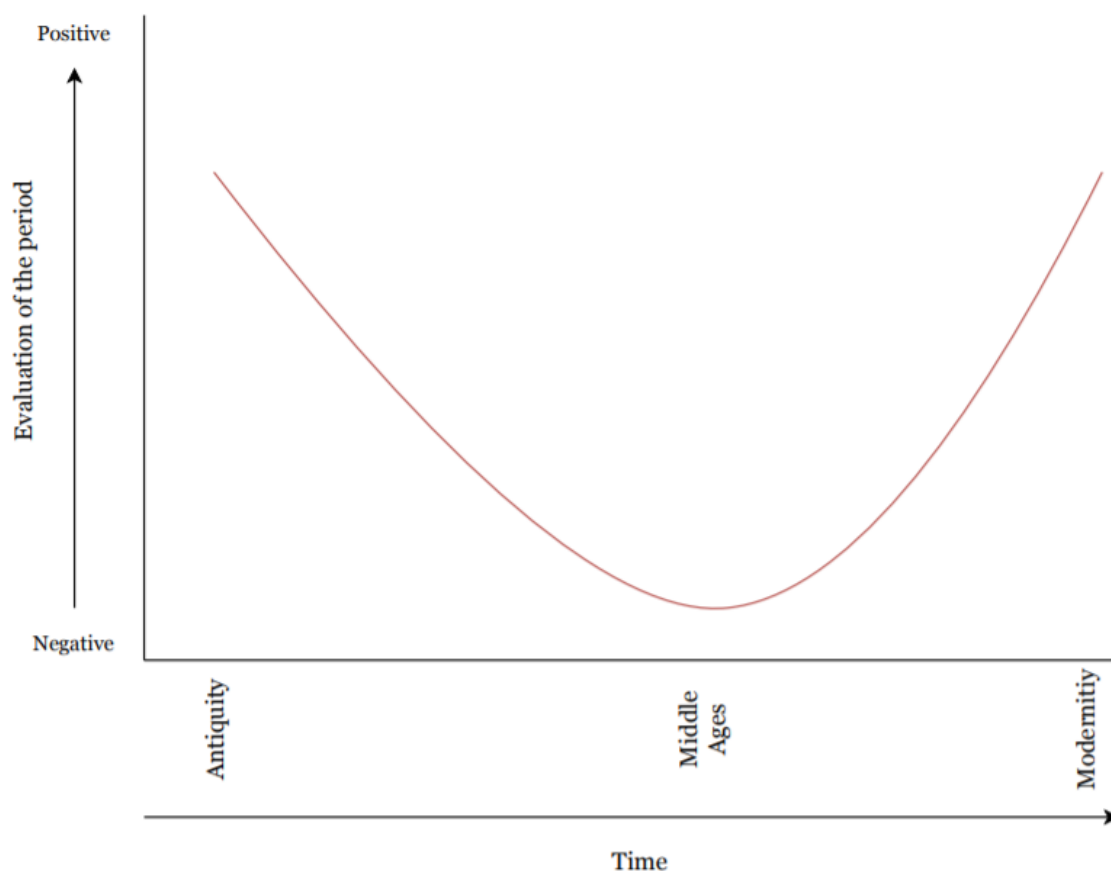
Apart from the politico-dynastical model, historical accounts written by British historians during the period were also deeply influenced by the traditional tripartite periodisation scheme. The name of this model refers to the well-known tendency of Western historiography to divide the past in three long periods or 'ages': Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Modernity. Although first produced in Italy during the

²⁵⁵ John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan & Co. 1883), 18-19.

fourteenth century, the pattern would not become broadly used, however, until the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁵⁶

In essence, tripartite periodisation showcased the existence of an exemplary past, in which humans had achieved great developments, particularly in the fields of arts, philosophy, and scientific knowledge. This 'classical' Antiquity was then regarded to have entered a period of decline which witnessed the abandonment and the fall into oblivion of the features that had previously defined it. Long years had to pass before this sad state of affairs could be addressed by the action of devoted individuals who dedicated their efforts to rescuing the knowledge of the ancients and to extending again their virtues and examples. In this interpretation, *modernitas* represented a vindication of the past and the bestowal upon humanity of a new age of achievement. The period between these two moments of triumph -Antiquity and Modernity- was to be known as the Middle Ages: a parenthesis with no distinct quality but its location

Fig. 2. Traditional tripartite periodisation model



²⁵⁶ Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 15.

between two far better moments, and the tacit expression of the notion 'that humanity, having emerged from a surpassingly brilliant period of its history, had to wait a certain time before it could enter another that would be every bit as dazzling' (see *Fig. 2*).²⁵⁷ Although the perception of the Middle Ages became more positive during the nineteenth century, British historians still utilised the traditional tripartite division in their histories. Little did it matter that the pejorative undertones previously attached to the term were increasingly removed by the rehabilitation of the medieval past and, alongside with it, the ultimate significance of what the Middle Ages had previously meant: historians continued to make reference to terms like 'medieval' or 'feudal' (a common way to describe the Middle Ages at large²⁵⁸). Such mentions appeared in the aforesaid works of Green, Bright, Brewer, Gardiner, Tout and Sullivan, Oman and Oman, Smith and Mowat, and George Macaulay Trevelyan, as well as in many others such as William Stubbs' *The Constitutional History of England* (1875-1878), the volume of *Epochs of English History* (1889) edited by Mandell Creighton, Katharine Coman's and Elizabeth Kendall's account in *The Growth of the English Nation* (1894), *A History of the British Constitution* (1912) by John Howard Bertram Masterman, Frederick Bradshaw's *A Short History of Modern England from Tudor Times to the Present Day* (1915), or *A Short History of England* (1917) by Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

Unlike the politico-dynastical periodisation, however, the traditional tripartite model lacked a definite, clear-cut chronology. In this regard, the two fundamental questions remained to ascertain when the Middle Ages had begun and when they had concluded.

The first of these questions was not usually explicitly answered in these national histories. The reason was probably that the period of Roman government, which in the original Italian tripartite version was identified with the apex of

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵⁸ As Jacques Le Goff points out, '[i]n France, Italy, and England, in the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth century, it was more usual to speak of the "feudal" world'. In the case of Britain, our analysis seems to evidence that remnants of this tendency survived well into the twentieth century. Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 15.

Antiquity, was perceived to lack any real continuity with later periods of British history.²⁵⁹ Moreover, the decline of this empire stood in close connection with the actions of the alleged forebears of the modern English: the Angle, Saxon, and Jute peoples coming from Saxony. Therefore, British historians may have found it difficult to tell a tale of triumph and subsequent decline without representing, at the same time, the ancestors of their own national community in pejorative and barbaric terms.

However, such local circumstances did not prevent them from utilising broadly similar dates to those most frequent in other European countries, i.e. the returning of Western Roman imperial insignia to Constantinople in 476, the fall of that city to the Turks in 1453, or Cristopher Colombus' arrival at the New World in 1492. In this regard, the most important particularity of British history writing remained its further sub-division of the Middle Ages in two distinct halves: the Dark Ages (from the end of the Roman period to around the 1066 Norman Conquest) and the Middle Ages proper (from 1066 onwards).²⁶⁰

If the starting date of the Middle Ages was not a topic that historians in Britain generally wanted to bring to the fore, the same was not the case for the chronological conclusion of this period. In this regard, scholars embraced two different positions. The first one was that of the 'Long Modern Age'. According to this proposal, the medieval period had concluded in the fifteenth century, around the time the house of Tudor had gained the English crown (1485), and had given way to Modern England. Frederick Bradshaw, author of a history of Modern England from this period onward, summarised this idea in unequivocal terms at the start of his book:

²⁵⁹ For instance, James Franck Bright, in the first volume of his *A History of England* (1877), acknowledged this fact: "With the regard to the starting-point chosen, it may be well to explain that the English invasion was fixed upon, because it so thoroughly obliterated all remnants of the Roman rule, that they have exerted little or no influence upon the development of the nation – the real point of interest in a national history." See James Franck Bright, *A History of England. Period I: Mediaeval Monarchy* (London: Rivingtons, 1877), II.

²⁶⁰ Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 15.

It has been sometimes maintained that the history of Modern England began with the accession of the House of York [1461]. However, it is probably a truer, and it is certainly more convenient view, to trace that beginning from the fatal field of Bosworth [1485], when the last of the feudal nobles made their choice in favour of the house of Tudor.²⁶¹

This conflation of the accession of the Tudors to the throne with the end of the Middle Ages was a pattern extensively utilised by British historians.²⁶² Given that it offered a way of connecting the chronologies of the politico-dynastical periodisation with that of the traditional tripartite model, this proposal made its way easily into many national histories. The clear-cut division between the Middle Ages and Tudor times was also reinforced by the frequent allusions to the restoration of the ancient learning and arts. This 'Revival of the Letters', as John Richard Green had termed it in his best-selling *A Short History of the English People*, was a call back to the assumptions of the original traditional periodisation. As such, it manifestly served to underscore the negative aspects of the preceding medieval time:

The Utopia [written by Thomas More, 1516] itself, in its wide range of speculation on every subject of human thought and

²⁶¹ Frederick Bradshaw, *A Short History of Modern England from Tudor Times to the Present Day* (London: University of London Press, 1915), 1.

²⁶² For some further examples, see David Hume and John Sherren Brewer, *The Student's Hume: A History of England From the Earliest Times to the Revolution in 1688* (New York: American Book Company, 1884), 230; Katharine Coman and Elizabeth Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation* (New York: Flood and Vincent, 1894), 167; Thomas Frederick Tout and James Sullivan, *An Elementary History of England* (New York-London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 158; Vincent A. Smith and Robert Balmain Mowat, *The Oxford History of England for Schools in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924); and George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1926), 226.

action, tells us how roughly and utterly the *narrowness and limitation* of the Middle Ages had been broken up.²⁶³

The sixteenth century marks the change from medievalism to modern society. (...) The *descended intelligence* of Europe was stirred by the wonders suddenly revealed, the *chains of medieval thought* were thrown off, and the intellectual life of the age thrilled in response to the new vigor of the world of action.²⁶⁴

Apart from this proposal of the 'Long Modern Age', there existed another position we may call of the 'Short Modern Age'. According to it, Modernity would not have begun until at least the second part of the seventeenth century. The most famous supporter of this view was John Richard Green, who wrote that,

No event ever marked a deeper or a more lasting change in the temper of the English people than the entry of Charles the Second into Whitehall [1660]. With it modern England begins. Influences which had up to this time moulded our history, the theological influence of the Reformation, the monarchical influence of the new kingship, the feudal influence of the Middle Ages, the yet earlier influence of tradition and custom, suddenly lost power over the minds of men.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London: Macmillan and o., 1874), 297. Italics mine.

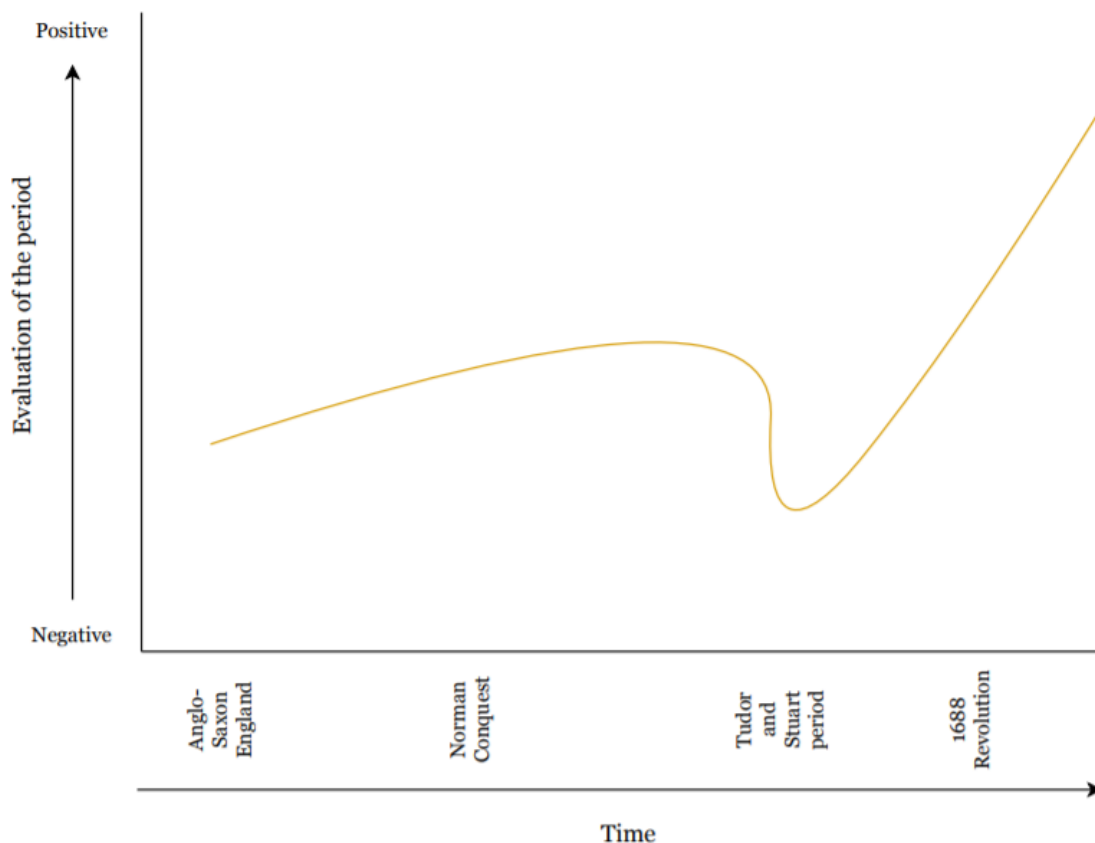
²⁶⁴ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 167.

²⁶⁵ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 587.

By extending the Middle Ages -or at least delaying the beginning of Modernity to the seventeenth century-, Green could also take back some of the positive assessments made about the Tudor and Stuart periods. He still emphasised, as we have seen, the change that the Renaissance had made in breaking up the mental horizons of the previous period, but this he did not equate with the beginning of Modern England. As a consequence, his evaluation left the period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries in a kind of indeterminate state, not fully medieval yet not fully modern either.

The negative consideration of the Tudor and, especially, the Stuart dynasties was much more manifest in another periodisation model present in many contemporary historical accounts. This framework defended that the history of England (and, as a result, Britain) told the story of the development of liberties and parliamentary institutions over time. According to this interpretation, some events acquired a symbolic relevance: the signing of the Great Charter in 1215, its defence

Fig. 3. Whig tripartite periodisation model



by Simon de Montfort, or the first Parliament convoked by Edward I in 1275. However, after these promising early developments, further progress was to be halted by the irruption of the absolutist and non-parliamentary monarchy of the Tudors. Under their authoritative control, the liberties enjoyed by Englishmen in previous times were surrendered and the Parliament brought low. This sad state of affairs would be yet complicated by the arrival of the Stuart dynasty, which defended that a king's right to rule came from its direct connection with the divine. At that moment, as these accounts told us, the liberties of England arose again after their long slumber in order to face the Stuart tyranny. The Civil War, the establishment of the Commonwealth, and, especially, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 represented, thus, the indelible testament of the recovery of lost freedom and of the beginning of a new era of progress.

As can be observed, this periodisation model shared many similarities with the traditional tripartite pattern exposed above. In both cases, an early era of advancement was suddenly stopped by the arrival of a pernicious time and, with its disappearance, its benefits became lost to those who came afterwards. After long years under this undesirable system, there took place in the two models a steady rehabilitation of the early past, which ultimately led to the final triumph of this re-awakening over its immediate past, and to the opening of a new age of development. In summary, these two frameworks featured of a positive early age, a negative middle age, and a, once again, positive modernity (see *Fig. 3*). Because of that, we will refer to this periodisation pattern as the 'Whig tripartite periodisation', in reference to the tendency by many authors who made use of it to 'write on the side of Protestants and Whigs'.²⁶⁶

This type of periodisation was manifest in most of the fundamental historical accounts of the period in one way or another. In Green's *A Short History of the English People*, chapters with headings such as 'The Tyranny' or 'The Second Stuart Tyranny' reveal the author's critical position in relation to those events. Bright's *A*

²⁶⁶ The expression is taken from Herbert Butterfield's famous book *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931). See Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: The Norton Library, 1965), V.

History of England combined this pattern with the politico-dynastical periodisation in its chapter organisation, thus producing mixed titles such as 'Edward I. Settlement of the Constitution', 'Edward III. Beginning of the Hundred Years' War and Constitutional Progress', or 'Edward IV. Hereditary Royalty without Constitutional Checks'. Similar topicality in the narrative structure of historical works can also be found in Brewer ('Development of the English Constitution'), Mandell Creighton ('Rise of the People and Growth of Parliament' and 'The Settlement of the Constitution' by James Rowley, or 'The Struggle against Absolute Monarchy' by Gardiner), Coman and Kendall's *Growth of the English Nation* ('Struggle for the Charter' and 'Rise of the Commons') or George Macaulay Trevelyan's *History of England* (with chapters such as 'The Norman Conquest Completed and Norman Institutions Established' or 'Parliamentary development from Edward III to Henry VI').

In broad terms, the Whig tripartite periodisation offered a progressive account, in which communal development was thought to mirror the historical development of the British constitution. At the same time, this approach was also defined by three interrelated features, which determined the particular ways in which historians interpreted and evaluated past events and characters.

The first characteristic of the Whig tripartite model was its presentism. As criticised by later authors, this meant 'an approach to the past based exclusively on present concepts and directed towards the present, whichever era or course of events in medieval or modern history may be the subject of study'.²⁶⁷ This notion manifested itself, for example, in the tendency of Whig authors to introduce personal commentaries in their historical texts while, at the same time, remaining deeply situated in their own contemporary circumstances. Let us clarify this with two excerpts from Mandell Creighton's *Epochs of English History* (1889) and Samuel Rawson Gardiner's first volume of *A Student's History of England* (1900):

²⁶⁷ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 10.

In the time which we have now reached many great changes came over England, and it began to make for itself the national character which it still has.²⁶⁸

The Scots might attack it at its basis by retorting that Edward [I of England, r.1272-1307] had never truly been lord paramount of Scotland at all; or they might assert that it did not matter whether he was so or not, because the Scottish right to national independence was superior to all feudal claims. It is this latter argument which has the most weight at the present day, and it seems to us strange that Edward, who had done so much to encourage the national growth of England, should have entirely ignored the national growth of Scotland.²⁶⁹

In both these fragments the author of the account makes himself visible and takes a judgemental approach towards the past. In Creighton's case, the past is made meaningful not because of its inherent characteristics or interest, but due to the connection it bears to the author's present. In this view, the significance of the development of the national character of England does not rest on its effect on past events, but on the fact that it is the character that England *still has*. Gardiner's text, on the other hand, undertakes an even harsher criticism of Edward I by utilising a modern nationalist stance and implying that the king should have taken it under consideration. It is this universalisation of the author's contemporary concepts, values, and perspectives which leads, ultimately, to the portrayal of Edward's attitude towards Scotland as 'strange'.

²⁶⁸ Mandell Creighton, "The Tudors and the Reformation", in *Epochs of English History*, ed. Mandell Creighton (London-New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889), 283.

²⁶⁹ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England From the Earliest Times to the Death of King Edward VII. Vol I: B.C. 55-A.D.1509* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 223.

The presentist approach fostered by the Whig tripartite periodisation was also evidenced in the finalist and teleological structure with which it endowed historical accounts. To some degree, this may explain the underlying tone of contentment and celebration that surrounded Whig constitutional historiography: as the restoration of the past had already occurred in the present (after a period of decline) British history was, on the whole, a story of success. A clear example of this satisfaction with contemporaneity can be found in John Richard Green's evaluation of Charles II's reign (r.1630-1680) in *A Short History of the English People*:

For nineteen years, in fact, with a Parliament always sitting, Charles had had it all his own way. He had made war against the will of the nation, and he had refused to make war when the nation demanded it. While every Englishman hated France, he had made England a mere dependency of the French King. The remedy for this state of things, as it was afterwards found, was a very simple one. (...) So long as the majority of the House of Commons itself represents the more powerful current of public opinion it is clear that such an arrangement makes government an accurate reflection of the national will. But obvious as such a plan may seem to us, it had as yet occurred to no English statesman.²⁷⁰

Green's assessment was charged with optimism and satisfaction for the present situation of England, in which the government had become, at last, 'an accurate reflection of the national will'. But it is also full of condescension for those poor statesmen that were incapable of conceiving such a 'simple' and 'obvious' idea back in the seventeenth century. As the present became the standard by which the past was measured, and to the extent to which constitutional history told a story of progress, previous ages were always found lacking, and their significance was merely

²⁷⁰ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 638-639.

considered up to the extent to which they could resemble aspects of contemporary Britain.

In this teleological account, the most important elements and characters were granted a most direct connection to the present. As such, William Stubbs, probably the most popular constitutional historian of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, could depict Edward I as a 'great king' because 'the constitution of parliament which was developed under his hands remain[ed] with necessary modifications and extensions the model of representative institutions' in Stubb's own time.²⁷¹ Fifteen years later, Gardiner would support Stubb's evaluation by judging that 'Edward I worked for the future as well as for the present. His constructive legislation served his country for generations after his death. Even his mistaken attempt to unite England and Scotland was, to some extent at least, an anticipation of that which was done by the Act of Union four hundred years after his death'.²⁷²

In many cases, the establishment of such linear connections between the ancient past and the restored present paved the way to anachronical thinking, and for this reason Whig historiography suffered an steady flux of accusations, especially after 1890.²⁷³ Its critics argued that the portrayal of a developmental process of the constitution towards its present fulfilment was often mediated in Whig accounts by the depiction of this past in too modern terms. The main reason for this rested not in mere ignorance about historical details -although, as we will see, in some cases it was certainly a factor-, but in a narrative necessity to bridge the distance between the two positive periods over the middle, negative one. After all, the closer the Great Charter of 1215 could be presented as the forerunner of the 1832 Reform Act, or Edward I's parliaments described as the predecessors of the Imperial Parliament sitting in turn-of-the-century-Westminster, the clearer the validity and legitimacy of the Whig tripartite periodisation.

²⁷¹ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development*. Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 157.

²⁷² Gardiner, *A Student's History of England*. Vol. I, 298.

²⁷³ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, XI.

However, such anachronistic interpretations of the past had their own pitfalls. In this Whig periodisation, the broad narrative structure was always more important than the particular identity of the past. Because of this, the British constitution appeared to be something totally external to the passing of time, always ready to be recovered and vindicated by national heroes and institutions. In turn, such an understanding resulted in an almost hagiographic tendency to explain the actions of these characters as being motivated by the inner necessity of restoring older freedoms. For instance, these accounts presented how Earl Simon de Montfort had 'fought stoutly like a giant for the liberties of England'²⁷⁴, or how the English Church at the time of the Norman conquest in the eleventh century had 'trained the English people for the time when the kings should court their support and purchase their adherence by the restoration of liberties that would otherwise have been forgotten'.²⁷⁵ After all, detached from their direct historical contexts, these actors could better play the role of symbols and models as the paladins or forerunners of an ahistorical English freedom.

The second main feature of the historical consciousness resultant from Whig tripartite periodisation was its progressive nature. As has been observed, the present was identified, in this version, with the recovery and culmination of a course of national development that buried its roots in the ancient past; at the same time, it also envisioned modern England as the ideal towards which this process was directed. Thomas Macaulay, the most well-known whig historian of the mid-century decades, had emphatically stated that the history of England was 'the history of progress',²⁷⁶ and such a claim he -and many later historians- equated with the growth and

²⁷⁴ Smith and Mowat, *The Oxford History of England for Schools in India*, 78.

²⁷⁵ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development. Vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), 268.

²⁷⁶ Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1835), quoted in Benedikt Stuchtey, "Literature, Liberty, and the Life of the Nation: British Historiography from Macaulay to Trevelyan", in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe Since 1800*, eds. Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (London-New York: Routledge, 1999), 33.

maturing of what he perceived to be the best qualities of the English.²⁷⁷ Even when such idealist tendencies were later criticised, the belief in the progressive evolution of the English national constitution was still maintained:

It is true more or less, of the whole of our early history; the march of constitutional progress is so steady and definite as to suggest everywhere the idea that it was guided by some great creative genius or some great directive tradition. Yet it is scarcely ever possible to distinguish the creative genius; it is impossible to assign the work to any single mind or series of minds, and scarcely easier to trace the growth of the guiding tradition in any one of the particulars which it embodies.²⁷⁸

This progressive faith infused the teleological account of history, from the remote past through the tyrannical times up to modern Britain, with a sense of completion. Under this light, later epochs embodied the fulfilment of all the best aspects of the ancient eras. Simultaneously, the recovery of the past could also be portrayed as a process of purification from the harmful influence of the middle age. Liberated from the 'theological influence of the Reformation, the monarchical influence of the new kingship, the feudal influence of the Middle Ages, [and] the yet earlier influence of tradition and custom', modern England was at last gaining back its ancient liberties and pushing them further upon the path of progress.²⁷⁹

As in the case of the traditional tripartite model, the tendency towards Manichaeism was also a consequence of the Whig tripartite framing of national history. If the history of England told indeed a tale of progress, it was then

²⁷⁷ Peter Yeandle, "Lessons in Englishness and Empire, c.1880-1914: Further Thoughts on the English/British Conundrum", in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, eds. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 279-280.

²⁷⁸ Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, vol.2, 511.

²⁷⁹ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 587.

possible to present those who tried to stop it as its enemies. As Benedikt Stuchtey has defended, this meant that 'because the Protestants were good the Catholics had to be bad' and that 'the conflict of the Roundheads versus the Cavaliers [during the civil wars of the seventeenth century] was essentially the same as the struggle between defenders and opponents of the Reform Bill'.²⁸⁰ This entailed that the belief in progress lay at the heart of a moral interpretation of the past which essentially divided historical actors between those in favour and those opposed to constitutional development. Paradoxically, such an idealist lecture of national history tended to eliminate any 'ambiguities, ironies, subtleties, losses and regrets' in favour of ever-repeating structural roles that produced moral examples out of historical characters.²⁸¹ These models, in turn, provided moral imperatives such as self-sacrifice, devotion, responsibility, and duty, that coincided with the conduct ideals envisioned by Victorian upper-class elites.²⁸²

The last characteristic of the Whig tripartite periodisation was its marked evolutionism and its aversion for revolutionary change. Revolutionary experiences in Europe during the nineteenth century, and especially in 1848, had led many English scholars to be convinced of the exceptionality of their country and of the 'naturalness' of the evolution of the English constitution.²⁸³ As a result of this pattern of interpretation, national histories were prone to stress the unbroken thread of continuity with the ancient past and to establish direct connections with the present:

The reason why we like to read English history is because it tells the story of our [English] own ancestors. You all know of

²⁸⁰ Stuchtey, "Literature, Liberty, and the Life of the Nation", 33. 'Roundheads' was the common name for those who had supported the Parliament during the Civil War against the Stuart monarchy and its followers, often referred to as 'Cavaliers'.

²⁸¹ Reba Soffer, "Nation, Duty, Character and Confidence: History at Oxford, 1850-1914", *The Historical Journal* 30, no.1 (1987): 80.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸³ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 116-117.

your fathers and grandfathers, and you must remember that each of these had grandfathers and grandfathers before them, and so on backwards as far as we can go; so that forefathers of every English child who reads this book must have been living at every time in the history of the English People. English History, therefore, is the history of our families as well that of our nation.²⁸⁴

Such a stress on continuity, one of the main principles of national historical consciousness, was not free of its own limitations. Whig historians had to face the reality of having to account for the manifold drastic changes that had occurred during the historical journey of the English nation. Among these they found, to cite a few, the English invasion, the Norman conquest, the establishment of the Tudor dynasty, or the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The latter one, being the closest to contemporary times and also due to its position at the threshold between the negative Stuart period and modern England, was the most important one to correctly interpret. The solution devised by Whig authors was simply to diminish the revolutionary aspects of the 1688 Revolution. In the hands of major mid- and late-nineteenth-century historians, this event was presented as a vindication of older rights and as the restitution of the English constitution to its natural evolutionary path after the parenthesis of personal monarchism.²⁸⁵ As the best-selling *A Short History of the English People* summarised:

What the Great Rebellion in its final result actually did was to wipe away every trace of the New Monarchy, and to take up again the thread of our political development just where it had been snapt [*sic*] by the Wars of the Roses. But revolutionary as

²⁸⁴ *Cassell's Historical Course for Schools* (1884), quoted in Yeandle, "Lessons in Englishness and Empire", 277.

²⁸⁵ Stuchtey, "Literature, Liberty, and the Life of the Nation", 31.

the change was, we have already seen in their gradual growth
the causes which brought about the revolution.²⁸⁶

Another consequence of this inclination towards evolutionary thought was the propensity of historians to use evolutionist and organicist vocabulary to refer to political systems, with expressions such as 'Rise of the People and Growth of Parliament'²⁸⁷, 'The Growth of the Personal Development of Charles I'²⁸⁸, 'The Evolution of the Cabinet and Prime Minister'²⁸⁹, or 'External Development and the Growth of the Second British Empire'²⁹⁰.

The aforementioned aversion towards revolutionary change had profound implications for political and historical debate. As the superiority of modern England was seen to emanate from its perfect constitution, and given that this had been the product of a long progressive evolution, the British public came to understand that political stability stemmed from the long-term development of tradition and custom.²⁹¹ No artificial 'paper-constitution' could match the tempered perfection of a system evolved through the ages and adapted to the character of its people. In turn, this tendency to reject political 'inventiveness' rendered projects for mild reform more acceptable than more comprehensive and far-reaching proposals.²⁹² As we will observe later when we talk about Greater Britain, the widely-held interpretation of

²⁸⁶ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 284.

²⁸⁷ James Rowley, "Rise of the People and Growth of Parliament", in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 187-282.

²⁸⁸ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England From the Earliest Times to the Death of Queen Victoria. Vol II: A.D. 1509-1689* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), 502-519.

²⁸⁹ Frederick Bradshaw, *A Short History of Modern England from Tudor Times to the Present Day* (London: University of London Press, 1915), 118-139.

²⁹⁰ Trevelyan, *History of England*, 658-678.

²⁹¹ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 116-117.

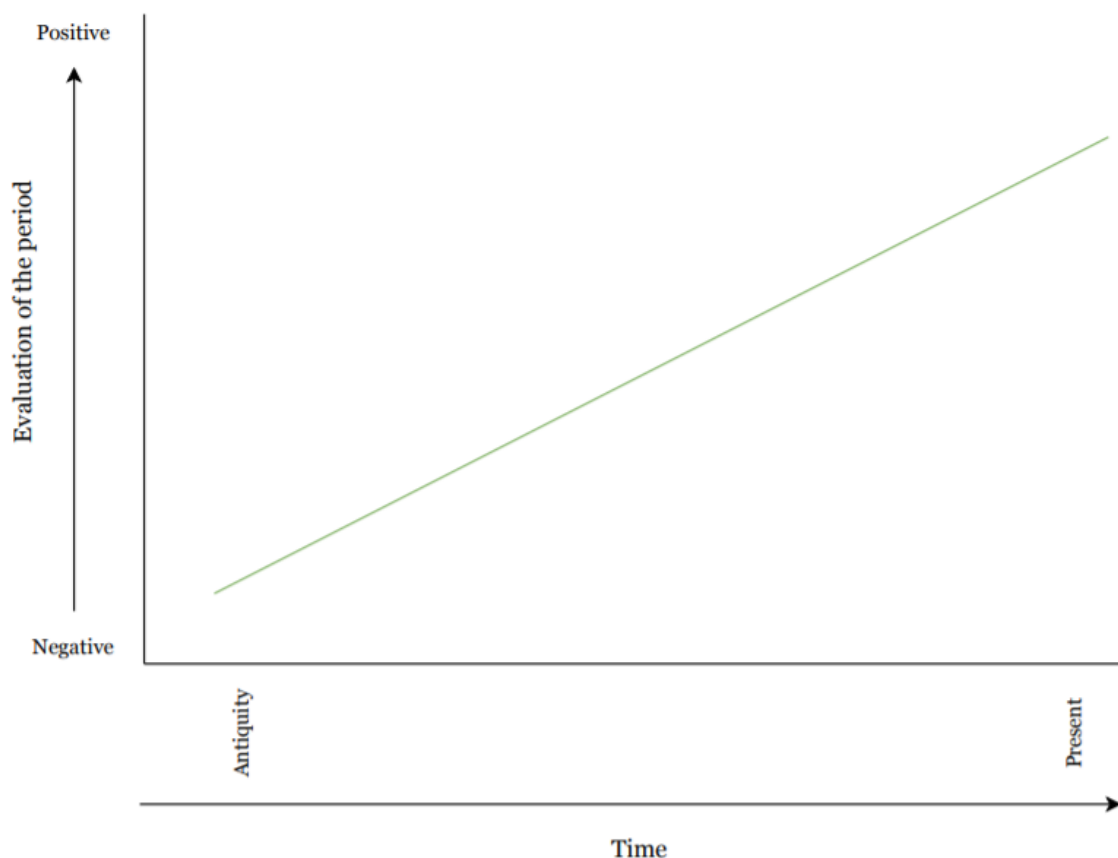
²⁹² Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 137.

the constitution as the result of organic and evolutionary growth limited the space in which ambitious schemes could be displayed and accepted. This resulted in the necessity of presenting reform projects as schemes for the restoration or further completion of older liberties, or to be condemned, otherwise, as 'wholly foreign to [British] instincts.'²⁹³

B. Progressive periodisation and the correction of Whig history

We have already detailed the three patterns of periodisation -politico-dynastical, traditional tripartite, and Whig tripartite- which coexisted and influenced

Fig. 4. Progressive evolutionary periodisation model



²⁹³ Trelawny Saunders (1879-80), quoted in Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 132-133.

national histories in Britain from 1880 to 1930. However, the main development of this period was the merging of these three models under the dominant, overarching framework of national historical subjecthood and its culmination in the Whig progressive pattern of periodisation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the main principles of the national historical consciousness was an ever-progressing portrayal of national development (see *Fig. 4*). In reality, however, historians found such a pure, undisturbed progression difficult to reconcile with their historical sources and traditional interpretations. As a result, the challenge they faced was a daunting one: to transform earlier periodisation schemes, defined mainly by historical ruptures and by the existence of periods of rise and decline, into a narrative of continuous national progress.

In this regard, unsurprisingly, there were two periods that required extensive reinterpretation and re-evaluation: the Middle Ages and the Tudor-Stuart period. Both represented the low points of two periodisation patterns (the traditional tripartite and Whig tripartite) and in both cases they played an antithetical role in relation to the modern age. Traditionally, they had been defined in terms of absence and irrationality, and as lacking those aspects which characterised modern England. But, starting in the 1870s, and pushed by the necessities of constructing a national history according to a progressive pattern, some leading scholars made new proposals to interpret these periods in their own terms, and to recognise their contribution to the development of the nation. In short, they aimed at correcting what they saw as a misinterpretation that impeded the presentation of England's (and, therefore, Britain's) history as the progressive evolution of the English nation over time.

In relation to the Middle Ages, many European historians had increasingly abandoned the negative implications of the term in the early nineteenth century due to a raising interest on the period. This revival was pioneered by the foundations of the *École Nationale des Chartes* (1821) in France and the *German Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (1819-1824), two societies dedicated to the publication of new materials concerning medieval history.²⁹⁴ These Romantic currents manifested in

²⁹⁴ Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, 15-16.

Britain in a call for better documentation and detail in historical accounts. In this regard, Sir Francis Palgrave's (1788-1861) contributions to the study of the medieval parliament from the 1820s to the 1850s are paradigmatic, even if his conclusions had little influence on the main historiographical currents of the second half of the century.²⁹⁵ Despite approaches such as these, however, the traditionalist thought and the reverence for the past that pervaded Whig tripartite history prevented the apparition of a strong movements *ad fontes* in the likeness of the post-revolutionary French and German examples.²⁹⁶

Apart from Palgrave, the most prominent Whig historians of the early and mid-nineteenth century were not very interested in the Middle Ages and focused instead on other topics such as the Civil War, the personal traits of Thomas Cromwell, the Glorious Revolution, or the Whig opposition to the king George III. In their books, generally, the medieval past appeared as a promising offset for England's parliamentary tradition, but one which was ultimately condemned to fail with the arrival of the absolute monarchy.

It was the Oxford historian William Stubbs (1825-1901) who contributed the most, however, to a new interpretation of the constitutional importance of the Middle Ages. His two most important works on the topic, published during the 1870s - *The Early Plantagenets* (1876) and *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development* (1875-1878)- challenged many of the assumptions of the Whig historical orthodoxy as understood in his times. In them, he emphasised the undeniable relevance of the period between Henry II's (1189-1199) and Edward I's (1272-1307) reigns. The best summary of his stance was provided by Stubbs himself in the *The Early Plantagenets*:

The history of England under the early kings of the house of Plantagenet unfolds and traces the growth of that constitution

²⁹⁵ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 76-83.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

which, far more than any other that the world has ever seen, has kept alive the forms and spirit of free government. It is scarcely too much to say that English history, during these ages, is the history of the birth of true political liberty. For, not to forget the service of the Italian republics, or of the German confederations of the middle ages, we cannot fail to see that in their actual results they fell as dead before the great monarchies of the sixteenth century, as the ancient liberties of Athens had fallen; or where the spirit survived, as in Switzerland, it took a form in which no great nationality could work. It was in England alone that the problem of national self-government was practically solved; and although under the Tudors and Stewart sovereigns Englishmen themselves ran the risk of forgetting the lesson they had learned and being robbed of the fruits for which their fathers had laboured, the men who restored political consciousness, and who discovered the endangered rights, won their victory by argumentative weapons drawn from the storehouse of medieval English history, and by the maintenance and realisation of the spirit of liberty in forms which had survived from earlier days.²⁹⁷

This excerpt reiterates important commonplaces of the Whig interpretation, particularly the evaluation of the past as a forerunner to the present and the equation of revolutionary change with a restitution of older liberties. Regarding the reigns of the early Plantagenets, this traditional understanding had tended to present the reign of Edward I as marking the beginning of the parliamentary tradition in England. Stubbs, however, defied this consensus, and argued instead that the events of those

²⁹⁷ William Stubbs, *The Early Plantagenets* [1876], in: Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 158.

years represented not the start, but the culmination of the founding process of the constitution.

According to Stubbs, the idealisation of the Anglo-Saxon period as the origin of the liberties of England had produced a break in national history after the 1066 Norman invasion. Although he held in high regard the older institutions of Anglo-Saxon England, Stubbs was also certain of the fact that 1066 had had a positive impact upon the development of English liberties. He went to defend that, thanks to the exclusive control of William the Conqueror and his heirs, Anglo-Saxon institutions had become more centralised and had avoided the risk of political fragmentation. This new synthesis of older liberties with a stronger rulership had ultimately paved the way for a true 'national' political system. This was, Stubbs believed, the true significance of 1066:

The effect of the Norman Conquest on the character and constitution of the English was threefold. The Norman rule invigorated the whole national system; it stimulated the growth of freedom and the sense of unity, and it supplied, partly from its own stock of jurisprudence, and partly under the pressure of the circumstances in which the conquerors found themselves, a formative power which helped to develop and concentrate the wasted energies of the native race. In the first place it brought the nation at once and permanently within the circle of European interests, and the Crusades, which followed within a few years, and which were recruited largely from the Normans and the English, prevented a relapse into isolation. The adventurous and highly-strung energy of the ruling race communicated itself to the people whom it ruled; its restless activity and strong political instinct roused the dormant spirit and disciplined even while it oppressed it. For, in the second place, the powers which it called forth were

largely exercised in counteracting its own influence. The Normans so far as they became English added nerve and force to the system with which they identified themselves; so far as they continued Norman they provoked and stimulated by opposition and oppression the latent energies of the English. The Norman kings fostered, and the Norman nobility forced out the new growth of life. In the third place, however, the importation of new systems of administration, and the development of new expedients, in every department of government, by men who had a genius not only for jurisprudence but for every branch of organisation, furnished a disciplinary and formative machinery in which the new and revived powers might be trained: -a system which through oppression prepared the way for order, and by routine educated men for the dominion of law; law and order which when completed should attest by the pertinacious retention and development of primitive institutions, that the discipline which had called them forth and trained men for them, was a discipline only, not the imposition of a new and adventitious polity. (...) Only the vigour and vitality which it had called forth was permanent.²⁹⁸

In Stubbs's view, this process of 'fusion of races', Anglo-Saxon and Norman, was already culminated by Henry II's reign. From that moment on, up until the time of Edward I, the constitutional history of England witnessed the formation of a parliamentary system. The summoning of the 'Model Parliament' of 1295 by Edward represented, in this interpretation, the completion of a process already started in Anglo-Saxon times and later directed by Norman and Plantagenet rulers. Rather than

²⁹⁸ Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, vol.1, 270.

the birth of English liberty, Edward's reign had marked, to Stubbs, the end of the development of the English constitution.

Stubbs' thesis provided a much needed continuity between Anglo-Saxon and medieval England. By trying to correct the role played by the Norman Conquest and the Norman and Plantagenet kings, he also erased the problem that the complex interrelation between the pre- and post-1066 periods had produced in English constitutional history. His solid argumentation -which we sadly cannot reproduce due to space constraints- offered a unitary thread that linked them as subsequent stages that climaxed in the completed parliamentary system of England.

However, Stubbs also believed that some of the demands made by the Commons during the parliaments of the Middle Ages (from Edward I to the beginning of Tudor times) had only been attained in the seventeenth century. The conclusion to which Stubbs arrived was that the existence of a complete parliamentary system during the Middle Ages had ultimately made possible the success of the parliamentary revolutions of the modern period. As such, and unsurprisingly if we consider our periodisation models, his rehabilitation of the Middle Ages as a fundamental period for constitutional history did not directly challenge the main tenets of Whig periodisation. However, his work by and large eliminated the image of a medieval period barren of interest and any national development.

Stubbs' rehabilitation of the Middle Ages during the 1870s coincided with that effected by other Oxford historians of great success: Edward A. Freeman (1823-1892) and John Richard Green. Freeman supported the idea of a continuous development between Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman and Plantagenet period as defended by Stubbs. However, his view of the 'restoration of liberties' was much more radical than that of his colleague. He argued that the parliamentary system founded by Edward I represented a return to the ancient Anglo-Saxon assembly of the *Witenagemot*, and he went as far as to suggest that all later parliamentary achievements could be traced to this primordial institution.²⁹⁹ Therefore, his view

²⁹⁹ The *Witenagemot* or *Witan*, from the Old English terms *witan* (wise) and *gemot* (assembly), was an Anglo-Saxon advisory institution that helped the king in the

stressed a presentist and anachronistic evaluation of the past, wholly compliant with previous Whig historiography. On the other hand, Green's main contribution to the debate was the concept of 'New Monarchy' by which he described the system of the Tudor dynasty in his best-selling *A Short History of the English People*. In his view, the establishment of this royal family had effected a rupture in England's constitutional development that would not be amended until the end of the Civil War of the seventeenth century. For this reason, he spared no criticism for it:

No words could paint with so terrible a truthfulness the spirit of the New Monarchy, which Wolsey had done more than any of those who went before him to raise into an overwhelming despotism. All sense of loyalty to England, to its freedom, to its institutions, had utterly passed away.³⁰⁰

As with Stubbs', both Freeman's and Green's ideas, although they helped in proving the importance of the Middle Ages and the existence of an evident continuity between Anglo-Saxons and Normans, posed no challenge for the main principles of the Whig tripartite periodisation because the interpretation of the tyrannical phase of Tudor and Stuart times remained intact in their accounts.³⁰¹ Up until the turn of the century, their ideas about the development of the medieval constitution would enjoy great acceptance among academics, and even after that they kept being reproduced in school and university curricula and making their way into the writing of other influential authors.³⁰²

administration of the kingdom. At the same time, it also possessed other attributions, such as the capacity to elect, confirm, or depose a ruler.

³⁰⁰ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 324.

³⁰¹ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 193.

³⁰² Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*, 24. Also Cannadine, "British History as a new Subject", 15.

The ultimate transition from the prevalent Whig tripartite periodisation towards the Whig progressive model was the work of a series of authors whose main common feature was their dislike for the periodisations devised by previous scholars. This reaction was fuelled, to a great degree, by the institutional crisis of the Commons around 1880 (which entailed, for example, the obstruction of parliamentary proceedings by Irish representatives and the debate about the Irish Home Rule), in the face of which the pristine and traditional value of parliamentary tradition could not be easily maintained. These anti-Whig authors attacked the presentist and finalist nature of older Whig accounts, while also aiming at correcting the main rupture between medieval and Tudor England that historians such as Green had previously emphasised. In so doing, they paved the way for a more coherent and uninterrupted interpretation of national history that was better adapted to the principle of the nation's historical subjecthood.

The loss of glamour of traditional parliamentary ideas opened the door to historiographical attempts aimed at liberating the present from the unbearable burden of older example. In this regard, the work of Frederick William Maitland (1850-1906) played a central role, as he was the main advocate for the separation of historical practice from the necessities of legislative interpretation that considered history useful only to the degree to which it could provide useful legal precedents. Maitland argued that the lawyer's interpretation of English Common Law had up until that point required a simplified and de-contextualised version of the past, which neglected fundamental facts, in order to more easily command authority over the present.³⁰³ Because of this, the past had been adapted to accommodate better to present circumstances, and as a consequence the borders between history and valuable legislative example had become blurred. He saw in this type of instrumentalisation of the past the foundation of the anachronistic interpretations so common to Whig historiography. Consequently, his studies were aimed at dismantling this connection between 'history' and 'law' by emphasising the importance of historical context and combating the 'immemorial' origin of the

³⁰³ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 259.

inherited legislative corpus.³⁰⁴ The result of such an endeavour, in his opinion, would not merely involve the liberation of the present from previous -no longer relevant- examples, but also the emancipation of this very past from the anachronistic gaze of a present in search of useful precedent:³⁰⁵

I get more and more wrapped up in the middle ages, but the only utilitarian justification that I ever urge *foro conscientiae* is that, if history is to do its liberating work, it must be as true to fact as it can possibly make itself; and true to fact it will not be if it begins to think what lessons it can teach.³⁰⁶

Therefore, Maitland's works from the late 1880s onwards, that would result in a *Constitutional History of England* (1908) published after his death, tried to unmask the scarce evidential support that previous Whig finalist notions had possessed. He did so by emphasising the 'unplanned' nature of the events that had led to the constitutional advancement of England while criticising the idealistic patterns we have seen exemplified in the Whig tripartite periodisation. As he himself put it, he had come to see that the constitutional progress of the Middle Ages, when analysed and traced 'step by step', could not 'conform to any such plan as a philosopher might invent in his study', and that very often the attained results did not comply to the intentions of those who had provoked them.³⁰⁷ Moreover, following Stubbs, Maitland also attacked previous constitutional historiography for being solely interested on 'the

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 252.

³⁰⁵ As Reba Soffer explains, '[n]arrative English history demonstrated continuity between traditional standards of thought and behaviour and the past and future. The teaching of history began and continued with a reverential study of English heroes, laws, institutions and politics'. The destruction of this 'reverential study' was at the heart of Maitland's work. See Soffer, "Nation, Duty, Character and Confidence", 83.

³⁰⁶ Frederick William Maitland (1896), quoted in Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 247.

³⁰⁷ Frederick William Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 197.

showy side of the constitutions, the great disputes and great catastrophes', to which he proposed a closer study of the evolution of political institutions. This aspect of Maitland's historiography would later be further developed by Thomas Frederick Tout (1855-1929) and his research about state administration.

If Maitland can be considered as the inaugurator of the anti-Whig reaction that took place from the turn of the century on, the central figure in the rehabilitation of the Tudor period in Whig historiography was Albert Frederick Pollard (1869-1948). We have observed that Whig historiography had little problem in adapting to changes in the interpretation of the Middle Ages such as those brought by scholars like Stubbs or Green during the last decades of the nineteenth century. After all, as late as the 1910s many constitutional historians still followed these authors and their ideas about the continuity between the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman and Angevin England. For instance, John Howard Bertram Masterman (1867-1933) echoed Stubbs when he wrote in his *A History of the British Constitution* (1912) that '[t]he Norman Conquest [was] the most important turning-point in English constitutional history till we reach the Revolution of 1688' and that '[b]oth were important for the same reasons -that they brought into definite form constitutional principles that had been growing up gradually in the preceding period'.³⁰⁸ The rapid and effortless inclusion of these views in liberal historiography should not surprise us, as they stemmed from a traditional tripartite periodisation which could co-exist -but was by no means necessary- to the Whig tripartite model.

Pollard's interpretation of Tudor times, however, attacked the nucleus of the Whig tripartite periodisation: its negative stance towards what Green had named the 'New Monarchy'. Traditionally, as we have seen, liberal historiography in Britain had displayed a critical attitude towards the Tudors, especially Henry VIII. How could it be otherwise, considering that the period was described as having given rise to absolutist rulership and to the loss of the parliamentary liberties gained since the times of Edward I? To any Whig historian interested in tracing constitutional advancement over time, the Tudor monarchs clearly represented a retrogression after

³⁰⁸ John Howard Bertram Masterman, *A History of the British Constitution* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 20.

a bright promise of progress. Their merits were limited to their anti-Roman policy during the Reformation and their defence against the Spanish monarchy; in the rest, they had been mere tyrants. In addition, these scholars earnestly believed that it had not been until the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution that the liberties of medieval England had been ultimately restored and the country once again had, once again, been put back on the track of development. And this Whig historiography, being as it was so close to a historical orthodoxy in nineteenth-century Britain, had been capable of imposing this negative vision of the period on top of any voice of disagreement.³⁰⁹

Green's elevation of the Middle Ages as a fundamental period for the development of the English parliamentary system only broadened this judgment. He, as Stubbs, also believed that the parliaments of the House of Lancaster had represented the greatest triumph of medieval constitutional progress – '[a]t no time had Parliament played so constant and prominent a part in the government of the realm. At no time had the principles of constitutional liberty seemed so thoroughly understood and so dear to the people at large' – and that the period after the War of the Roses was one of 'constitutional retrogression in which the slow work of the age that went before [was] rapidly undone'.³¹⁰ But Green did not imagine the establishment of the Tudor as part of the natural development of the English political system, but rather as 'something wholly new' in English history, something that had come into being only as a result of a revolutionary change and that could only disappear, due to this very reason, by means of another revolution – meaning that of 1688.³¹¹ By emphasising absolutism and discontinuity – two anathemas of Whig historical imagination – Green had summarised and extended the liberal pejorative interpretation of the period and, although not all Whig historians felt at ease with this

³⁰⁹ Some non-Liberal authors, such as James Anthony Froude, had already tried to rehabilitate Henry VIII's figure. However, his depiction was more focused on offering a heroic perspective of the Reformation and its followers, rather than with providing an account of the constitutional progress of England. As such, his views did not have a great following in Whig historiography, although Pollard himself certainly admired some aspects of Froude's work. See Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 292-293.

³¹⁰ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 283.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

purported lack of continuity between the Tudor period and the Middle Ages, his ideas enjoyed widespread acceptance.³¹²

Conversely, Pollard, the main Tudor specialist in Britain at the turn of the century and a liberal himself, shared with Maitland and other anti-Whig writers a critical stance against historical anachronism. His work, as he conceived it, had to be one of 'demolition' of the idealistic and presentist Whig history he saw embodied in Green's writings. In its stead, he wanted to situate past events in their historical environment and, by doing so, explain 'the conditions which made things possible to him [in reference to Henry VIII] that were not possible before or since and are not likely to be so again'.³¹³

Pollard's main thesis concerning the New Monarchy diametrically opposed the foundations of the Whig historiography of the nineteenth century by defending that the parliamentary system had survived in the sixteenth century thanks, and not in spite of, Tudor policy.³¹⁴ In his interpretation, 'England could not have done without the Tudors and all their works; for they gave us law and order. They prepared the way of liberty'.³¹⁵ This was so because, contrary to Green's -and other author's-³¹⁶ impression, the system of medieval parliamentarism had led to an antagonistic relationship between the monarch and the assembly that had resulted in the lack of an effective government:

³¹² Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 192-193.

³¹³ Albert Frederick Pollard, *Henry VIII* (London-New York-Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), 4.

³¹⁴ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 288.

³¹⁵ Albert Frederick Pollard, *Factors in American History* (1925), quoted in Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 291.

³¹⁶ Such, as for example, James Franck Bright's *History of England*: 'For a time, therefore, the constitutional advancement of the preceding century was lost, and government of England was practically despotism'. See Bright, *History of England. Period I*, 340.

Nowhere was the king more emphatically the saviour of society than in England. The sixty years of Lancastrian rule were in the seventeenth century represented as the golden age of parliamentary government, a sort of time before the fall to which popular orators appealed when they wished to paint in vivid colours the evils of Stuart tyranny. But to keen observers of the time the pre-eminent characteristic of Lancastrian rule appeared to be its "lack of governance" or, in modern phrase, administrative anarchy. There was no subordination in the State. The weakness of the Lancastrian title left the king at the mercy of Parliament, and the limitations of Parliament were never more apparent than when its powers stood highest.³¹⁷

This endemic problem rendered the system, in Pollard's account, far less ideal than what Whig historiography had portrayed up until that point. Tudor monarchs, with their focus on effective government, had provided a necessary correction of the failures of these parliamentary institutions. By taking the task of destroying feudal powers and establishing the sovereignty of the state, the New Monarchy had opened the way for the development of individual freedom and religious toleration. 'A powerless state means a helpless community; and anarchy is the worst of all forms of tyranny [...]. So long as the state was weak, it was cruel [...]. Political liberty and religious freedom depend upon the power of the state, inspired, controlled, and guided by the mind of the community'.³¹⁸ No matter how much Whig historians such as Green or Stubbs would uphold the grand triumphs of medieval parliamentarism, Pollard defended that modern England could never have stemmed directly from them. Far from stealing the nation's sovereignty, the Tudor had made it effective and equal for all:

³¹⁷ Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 32-33.

³¹⁸ Albert Frederick Pollard, *The History of England. A Study in Political Evolution* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 246.

The idea of a single all-embracing national sovereign was still in the making [before the Tudor], and lords still regarded themselves as princes enjoying sovereign liberties. The destruction of these liberties was the great service rendered by the Tudors to the cause of English liberty. Parliament in the middle ages had failed to nationalise liberty; with the help of the crown that nationalisation was achieved in the sixteenth century. Liberty was made more common by redistribution; the great liberties of the few were diminished, the meagre liberties of the mass increased; and dukes and serfs make a simultaneous disappearance from the England of William Shakespeare.³¹⁹

The recognition of national sovereignty over a divisive feudalism, the equalisation of the community, and the development of state institutions: those were the main contributions of the Tudor to national progress. In addition, Pollard also stressed the continuities that existed between the Tudor parliaments of the sixteenth century and those which struggled against the Stuarts in the seventeenth.³²⁰ In so doing, he highlighted the apparent necessity of the role played by the Tudors to the wider development of the constitution. After all, as P. B. M. Blaas has aptly summarised, Pollard's main argument remained that 'if there had been no despotism, English liberty would never have become what it had become'.³²¹

The consequences of Pollard's momentous attack on Whig interpretations of the Tudor monarchy were multiple. First, by showcasing that parliamentary constitutional institutions presented direct continuities with an allegedly unfree and

³¹⁹ Albert Frederick Pollard, *The Evolution of Parliament* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920), 173.

³²⁰ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 312-313.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

despotic system, Pollard fuelled the discussion about the extent to which history was accidental, an approach also propounded by other historians such as Maitland or John Bagnell Bury (1861-1927). As a result, he supplied new arguments with which to attack Whig finalism and liberate the past from the excessive burden of the present. Given that in his eyes history was not a mere repetition, the future had now a chance of being imagined without the restrictions imposed by the need of following past examples. As Pollard himself wrote in 1920:

We are not obliged to fix our vision on the depths from which we have risen, and the future may lie in aversion from the past. The growth of the state in parliament has been in vain if it is still to be bound to the conditions from which it has won emancipation. The essence of its success has been its constant adaptation to circumstance, and a fresh orientation of the state in response to moral development is not less feasible to-day than it was yesterday and the day before. It is a childish mind which only sees in history its superficial repetitions.³²²

The second result of Pollard's works was that they paved the way for a progressive and more continuous account of national history by filling the unbridgeable gap that Whig tripartite periodisation had opened between medieval and Tudor times. By presenting these monarchs as contributors to the broader constitutional becoming of modern England, Pollard shattered the basic notion of the Whig tripartite model that portrayed 1688 as a restoration of older liberties after a period of despotic rule; instead, he proposed that this period had to be reinterpreted as another necessary step towards this achievement. Consequently, and by belittling any direct influence of medieval parliamentary tradition on modern England, Pollard

³²² Pollard, *The Evolution of Parliament*, 352.

was able to place the Tudor in a progressive, evolutionary thread that emphasised the superiority of later political systems over those of previous times.

But, what about the Stuarts? If the Tudor period had marked the beginning of the detested New Monarchy, the dynasty that struggled with the parliaments of the seventeenth century had signalled, in Whig tripartite terms, the lowest point in English constitutional terms. Paradoxically, this historiographical orientation also considered that it had been during these times, which witnessed the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, when English liberties had started to be awakened from their despotic slumber. As a result, the period was portrayed, simultaneously, as one of tyranny -if the ruling dynasty was considered- and as one of struggle and progress - if attention was paid to its parliamentary opposition.

Within this broad framework, Pollard's rehabilitation of the Tudor presented a problem for the construction of a national history. If the New Monarchy had not been, as Green had stated, a 'constitutional retrogression' but just another necessary stage in the course towards the liberties of modern England not in spite but thanks to its absolutism, could not the same be told about its successor, the Stuart dynasty? How could one be regarded positively for its despotism while the other was harassed and its fall celebrated for the same reason? How was the role of representative of the nation, that as Pollard himself described had been bestowed upon the monarchy during the sixteenth century, passed to the Parliament in the seventeenth? And, if despotism was not necessarily negative, how could the parliamentary struggle be presented as the nation's fight against oppression? These questions evidence the extent to which Pollard's success threatened not only the integrity of the Whig tripartite periodisation, but of any liberal interpretation of British history altogether.

However, historians found a way of solving these issues, and they did so within the narrative framework of national history and the limitations it imposed. After Pollard's work, as we have seen, to condemn the Tudors or the Stuarts for their absolutism was no longer sufficient. Nevertheless, a negative assessment of the latter remained fundamental for those who wanted to emphasise the necessity of the revolutions of the seventeenth century and the establishment of parliamentary

government. In other words, English historians needed to find a way to differentiate the (positive) Tudor from the (negative) Stuart. And this they did by highlighting the 'native' origin of the Tudor system, and the 'foreignness' of the Stuart. Let us evidence this by comparing these three excerpts from George Macaulay Trevelyan's *A History of England* (1926) concerning the two dynasties:

To Henry [VIII] it seemed intolerable that the interests of England should be subjected, through the Pope, to the will of the Emperor. In his anger at this personal grievance, he came to see what many Englishmen had seen long before, that England, if she would be a nation indeed, must repudiate a spiritual jurisdiction manipulated by her foreign rivals and enemies. The full-grown spirit of English nationalism, maturing ever since Plantagenet times, asked why we should look abroad for any part of our laws, either matrimonial or religious. Why not consult our own churchmen? Why not act through our own Parliament?³²³

For England [under Elizabeth I] was not a despotism. The power of the Crown rested not on force but on popular support. The people still wished the Crown to exercise these coercive powers in the public interest.³²⁴

England had found in the Tudor monarchs adequate representatives of her own spirit and policy; but the Stuarts, while claiming yet greater powers from a higher source than English law and custom, adopted policies at home and abroad

³²³ Trevelyan, *A History of England*, 301.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 366.

which were in some of their main lines opposed to the wishes of the strongest elements in English society.³²⁵

We can observe here that Trevelyan presented the Tudor as English monarchs, who saw 'what many Englishmen had seen long before' and whose power rested 'on popular support'; as such, his evaluation broadly follows Pollard's. Unlike the previous dynasty, however, Trevelyan thought that the Stuarts had not been the 'representatives' of England's 'own spirit and policy' (i.e. they were not representatives in the terms exposed in the previous chapter). Such a fact was not caused by their despotic tendencies, but it was instead a consequence of the neglect with which they treated national sources of law, custom, and English society at large by claiming that their powers emanated from an alleged 'higher source' -God Himself. Trevelyan's emphasis on the foreign aspects of the Stuart dynasty would be even more clearly expressed in a history of England published two years before his own:

Courtly flatterers maintained that 'the king is above the law by his absolute power' and at liberty to alter or suspend any particular law considered by him to be injurious. Such sentiments, *however proper for Turkey, were strange to Englishmen* whose fathers had so often won precious liberties by resisting and even deposing kings. (...) James I [r. 1603-1625], *a foreigner devoid of respect for English traditions*, went further, maintaining that a king was not bound by any law save the guidance of his conscience, and claiming to exercise authority as absolute and arbitrary as that of Chinghis Khan or Jahangir. Such a claim could not possibly be accepted by the English nation, nor did either James or his son possess

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 381. This refers to the Stuart political doctrine which claimed that the powers of the king were authorised by God, and therefore that the ruler should not be held accountable for his actions by earthly institutions such as parliament.

the exceptional personal qualities needed to give a plausible appearance to demands so outrageous. The penalty for making them, deferred until the reign of Charles [I, r. 1625-1649], had then to be paid.³²⁶

These two examples demonstrate that the principle of purity, by which a nation should avoid foreign influence and control, offered a pathway for English historians who wanted to provide opposing evaluations of the two dynasties. By bringing to the front the foreignness of the Stuarts and their rule, the revolutionary parliament could be once again pictured as an embodiment of the will of the nation in its struggle against these damaging tendencies. Consequently, this interpretation perpetuated the traditional Whig connection between these episodes and modern England while allowing national history to be constructed as an ever-progressing account without deep retrogressive periods.

Curiously, however, anti-Whig reaction also produced a paradoxical result. Maitland, Pollard, and especially Thomas Frederick Tout were the leading figures of a movement that aimed at recovering the true nature of the past by fighting anachronism and fomenting the specialisation of historians. Tout's administrative history was paradigmatic in the pursuit of such an ideal, as he defended that 'to imagine the past correctly we must picture it in its minutest detail, because it is only by studying it in such a fashion that we can rightly obtain a sound conception of the structure and functions of bygone human society as a whole'.³²⁷ By paying attention to the pettiest aspects of the past, anti-Whig historians intended to debunk the presuppositions and anachronisms that, as we have observed, allowed Whig tripartite historiography to function and reproduce. However, the amount of disconnectedness between these details contributed to the idea of accidentalism and made it much more difficult to imagine continuities between periods or to develop broad interpretations

³²⁶ Smith and Mowat, *The Oxford History of England*, 169-170. Italics mine.

³²⁷ Thomas Frederick Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England*, I, 26 (1920-1929), quoted in Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 347.

about the meaning of historical change. Faced with such a difficulty, many historians simply opted for not introducing the results of these investigations in their most general outlines of English history and came back instead to interpretative models that, once again, opened the door to the baseless application of contemporary notions and concepts to the past.³²⁸ In short, the specialisation supported by anti-Whig authors did not produce a more autonomous and true interpretation of the past; instead, and paradoxically, it fostered a new propensity for anachronistic perspectives in most wide-ranging generalisations.

C. The transformation of classical and dynastical periodisation in the Late Qing

Chinese historiography suffered alterations more profound than the British: not only its starting point was, in relative terms, much more distant from the later progressive national history, but the context of urgency and threat in which these occurred deeply affected both its goals and its methods. In such an unstable environment, national history had to be adapted to the necessities of the times, and periodisation schemes elaborated by Chinese historians plainly displayed this trend. Long-standing ideas about the nature of the flow of time were re-evaluated and discarded, whereas novel ones were adopted and developed. However, the consequences of these reinterpretations were not constrained, as in the case of Britain, to the rehabilitation of certain events or periods; they were seismic changes located at the heart of a wave of radical understandings that would have direct consequences on historical consciousness, identity, politics, and on how the relationship between past and present was conceived in the first place.

Official historical writing, which dominated the historical consciousness of imperial China for millennia, had possessed two main functions. On the one hand, it occupied a fundamental position in Confucian thought, and remained, after the elevation of the Confucian books to the category of 'classics' during Western Han

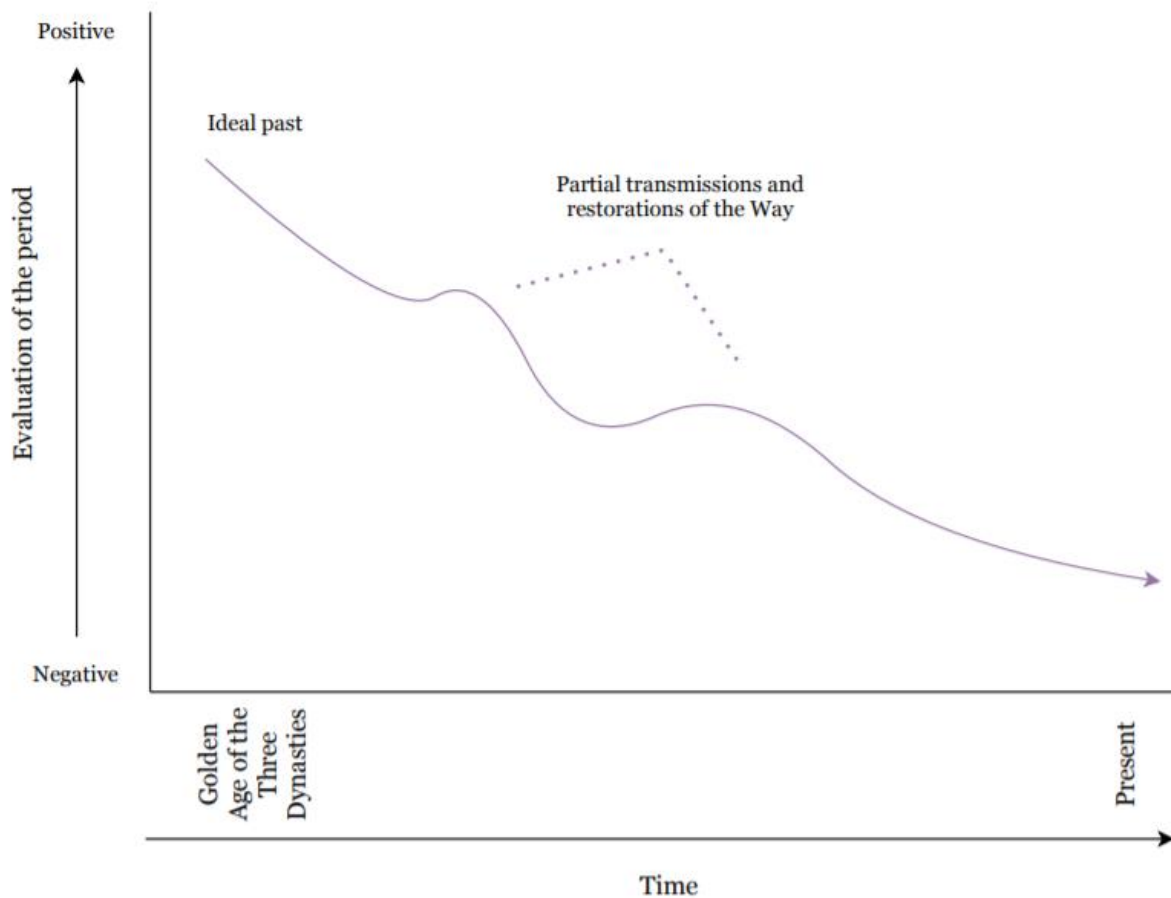
³²⁸ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 372.

times (206 BC – 220 AD), the closest in status to them.³²⁹ The hierarchical subordination of history to the Confucian classics did not denote, however, a lack of interest on it by Chinese scholars. On the contrary, many of them supported that ‘although the classics [were] superior for discussions of the Way (*dao* 道) and its laws, history [was superior] for understanding the words and deeds of the people of the past’.³³⁰ In practice, this essentially meant that both disciplines offered a complementary understanding of the Way, the natural and normative order of the universe. After all, although history could shed light upon the teaching of the classics, it could only have true meaning when properly analysed from the standpoint of classical notions. Even if the relationship between these two fields remained unequal, especially during Qing times, the belief in that a faithful study of the past was capable of enlightening transcendent and normative aspects of the world still maintained its appeal.

³²⁹ Luo Zhitian, “The Marginalization of Classical Studies and the Rising Prominence of Historical Studies during the Late Qing and Early Republic: A Reappraisal”, in *Transforming History: The Making of a Modern Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 48.

³³⁰ Su Xun (1009-66), quoted in Luo, “The Marginalization of Classical Studies”, 48.

Fig. 5. Classical periodisation model



On the other hand, official historical consciousness in China up until the last years of the nineteenth century was very linked to imperial institutions. As the legitimacy of a dynasty or the legacy of greatness of a monarch were constructed via the historical record of their reigns, successive emperors generally tried to ensure that historians told a favourable account of their deeds.³³¹ The integration of these scholars in the imperial bureaucracy and the establishment of a History Bureau in times of the Tang dynasty (618-907) are but two of the most obvious landmarks within this overarching process of liaison between empire and literati. Although these scholars amassed plenty of documents as part of their service in the History Bureau, to write the official history of a dynasty was only allowed once the latter had lost political

³³¹ Mary G. Mazur, "Discontinuous Continuity: The Beginnings of a New Synthesis of "General History" in 20th- Century China", in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, eds. Tze-ki Hon and Robert J. Culp (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 111-112.

control. This was because, according to custom, it was the task of the following dynasty to compile these records and narrate a veritable account of the previous reigns in order to posit itself as its rightful successor. Consequently, official historical writing manifested a direct preoccupation with the orderly transmission of power (*zhengtong* 正統) as well as with the dynastic cycle.

In spite of this, imperial scholars and historians also maintained a tradition of criticism and accurate accounting that makes it difficult to categorise them as mere propagandists. To offer a moral judgement of the past, based on a tradition that went as far back as to Confucius' 'pen-law of the *Spring and Autumn*' (*Chunqiu bifa* 春秋筆法)³³², remained a fundamental part of the task of those writing history. By allotting praise and blame according to the ethical parameters of the Confucian classics, scholars were expected to transform the past into a series of exemplary episodes from which to extract universal moral teachings. In short, they produced a useful past, a 'mirror', that was aimed at offering guidance and precedent for the management of present affairs to rulers and bureaucrats.³³³

These two main functions were decisive for conceptions about the flow of time that stemmed from imperial historical records. The connection of history with Confucian classicism produced the picture of an ancient, idealised Golden Age which had perfectly exemplified both Confucian virtues and the harmony between man and Heaven. These historical accounts told the story of the fall from this superior era to the present, as well as of those who had tried to conserve and restore the customs of this perfect past and to bring back its former glory. In parallel to this framework, the

³³² "Discriminating use of terminology" referred to the fact that Confucius, after weighing the various connotations and implications of available synonyms, would settle on the one that best described the nature of the event. "Arranging and comparing events" pointed to his attempt not only to arrange events in the right chronology but also to juxtapose them so as to facilitate comparison. (...) In Chinese historiography this came to be known as the '*Spring and Autumn's* law of the pen' (*Chunqiu bifa*). That is, by recording history in a particular manner and employing the most felicitous language, the moral significance of the past might be brought to bear on the present.' See Ng On-Cho and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 25-26.

³³³ Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 49.

relationship between this historical thought with the imperial institutions and the needs of the dynasty gave rise to the production of the dynastic cycle: a conception that envisioned history as a succession of cycles during which dynasties rose and fell, and between which the legitimate transmission of power was completed. In the following pages we will analyse the implications and influence that these two broad periodisation patterns had in the ability of late Qing and early Republican Chinese scholars of making sense of their past.

Let us start with what we may call the 'classical periodisation model' (see *Fig.5*). As Ng On-Cho and Q. Edward Wang have argued, conceptions of temporality in Confucian thought were mainly framed around three central assumptions: classicality, caducity, and continuity.³³⁴ The principle of classicality stated that the past -in particular the Golden Age period identified with the Three Dynasties (Xia [c.2205 BC-c.1766 BC], Shang [c.1600 BC-c.1046 BC], and Zhou [c.1046 BC-256 BC])- had provided an unsurmountable example for the following ages. During these times, as it was told, the normative Way had been perfectly manifested in society and political institutions. Because of this, it was believed that to study these norms and rituals of this period, which would later be compiled by Confucius in a series of books widely known as the 'classics', was, in essence, tantamount to studying the Way.³³⁵ The concept of caducity, in turn, defended that any present was, by definition, inferior to this golden past and that the flow of time was therefore degenerative. Finally, the idea of continuity offered a unifying framework for the past and the present. By stating that they both shared the same uniform character and by emphasising their timeless similarities and regularities over the particularities of a given period, this conception opened the door to a direct transposition of past examples to present circumstances. Despite this fact, this purported resemblance was not directly opposed to the idea of a degenerative history: although the present was seen in fact as a deterioration of the classical past, there existed after all a single universal Way, and

³³⁴ On-Cho and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, XVIII-XIX.

³³⁵ Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-Kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1971), 194.

the attainment of harmony with it would necessarily mean a return to the perfect institutions of the ancient Golden Age.

As we can see, this pattern produced a degenerative history in which the ultimate cause for the differences between the Golden Age and the present were due to the latter's failings in moral and ritual terms. Given that the *dao* was a universal norm, and that it had been manifest in the Golden Age to serve as an example for all times, the shortcomings of the present in such a comparison were the result of the lack of adequate morality and knowledge of those living in it. This enshrined the idea that it was the task of scholars to keep alive the memory of the *dao* of the Golden Age, as Confucius had done when he had compiled the classics, and to strive to re-establish a perfect society based on its precepts. In this manner, via such a successful 'transmission of the Way' (*daotong* 道統), humans would be capable of bringing back harmony with the universal, transcendent norm and restoring the virtue of ancient times.³³⁶

This periodisation scheme, based on the principle of the transmission of the Way, was attacked during the nineteenth century by a succession of scholars who tried to push reform programs in the Qing court. Although they were still convinced of the transcendence and superiority of the *dao*, they confronted the idea that the only way to reach harmony with it was the restoration of the late-Zhou institutions. Instead, they argued that the Way was bound to evolve over time, and that it was therefore necessary for Chinese scholars to also adapt to the new circumstances. This approach included the rehabilitation of the legacy of the eighteenth-century scholar Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801), who had asserted that the classics were historical records of antiquity and that therefore they were timebound. By doing so, Zhang had implied that the Way 'that resided in them was not universal but temporally circumscribed',³³⁷ and thus Zhang's ideas opened the door to political reform without having to abandon the belief in a transcendental Way. Late Qing reformers took advantage of this by trying to push the adoption of Western learning and technology

³³⁶ On-Cho and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, XX.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 247-248.

during the Self-Strengthening movement developed from 1860 onwards, as evidenced by one of the main reformers, Xue Fucheng (1838-1894):

Sometimes in the succession of one sage to another there cannot but be changes in the outward forms of government. Sometimes when a sage has to deal with the world, sooner or later there must be changes made (...). Now there is rapid change in the world. It is my opinion that with regard to the immutable Way we should change the present so as to restore the past [the Way of the sages]; but with regard to changeable laws, we should change the past system to meet present needs. Alas! If we do not examine the differences between the two situations, past and present, and think in terms of practicability, how can we remedy the defects?³³⁸

In this manner, steadily, a sense of anachronism was raised in Chinese historiography, as historians increasingly concluded that the examples of the Golden Age were not directly and uncritically applicable to the current circumstances of China. From their perspective, the transcendent Way was still manifest in the classics, but it had to be grasped and then combined with a thorough knowledge of the present context in order for changes to lead to harmony. In the minds of these reformers, in short, the Golden Age had not lost its status as a source of normativity, but it is undeniable that their attacks undermined the conceptual sameness between the past and the present and the appeal of an inflexible emulation of the classics.³³⁹

³³⁸ Xue Fucheng, "Chouyang Chuyi" (Suggestions on Foreign Affairs 籌洋芻議, 1879), quoted in *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, eds. William Theodore De Bary and Richard Lufrano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 243.

³³⁹ On-Cho and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 248-249.

In terms of periodisation patterns, official imperial historiography also imprinted on historical consciousness its long-standing connection with political power. After all, one of the most important tasks that a new dynasty had to undertake when it accessed the throne was to create state calendars and almanacs that would guide daily rituals and other wide array of frequent activities.³⁴⁰ For longer expanses, likewise, dynastic periods and imperial reign names (*nianhao* 年號) remained the most common means of measuring time.³⁴¹ As in the case of the politico-dynastical pattern described for the case of British historiography, these schemes offered a cyclical and continuous account of the rise, development, and decline of political rulership, without any sense of accumulated evolution or progress. Instead, they presented time as a sequence of never-ending legitimate successions (*zhengtong* 正統) that possessed not only political but cosmical significance as moments of restoration of the harmony between humans and Heaven and other elemental forces.

The late-nineteenth century witnessed dramatic changes in these two traditional patterns of understanding the flow of time. On the one hand, the Qing court faced almost-continuous challenges to its authority from the second part of the century onward, both internally -as in the case of the Taiping Rebellion- and externally -such as the two Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) or, most importantly, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95-. Although the dynasty had resisted, many officials and scholars grew preoccupied with the situation of the empire and tried to push ambitious programs of reform to strengthen the Great Qing. On the other hand, the authority of classical knowledge, and alongside with it the whole idea of a Confucian emperorship, faced a deep challenge. We have already mentioned how Qing historians had developed a sense of anachronism that confronted the alleged universality of the example of the Golden Age. These indigenous attacks were coetaneous with an increasing introduction of Western concepts and ideas via the translations of Christian missionaries and Japanese reformers of the Meiji era, with

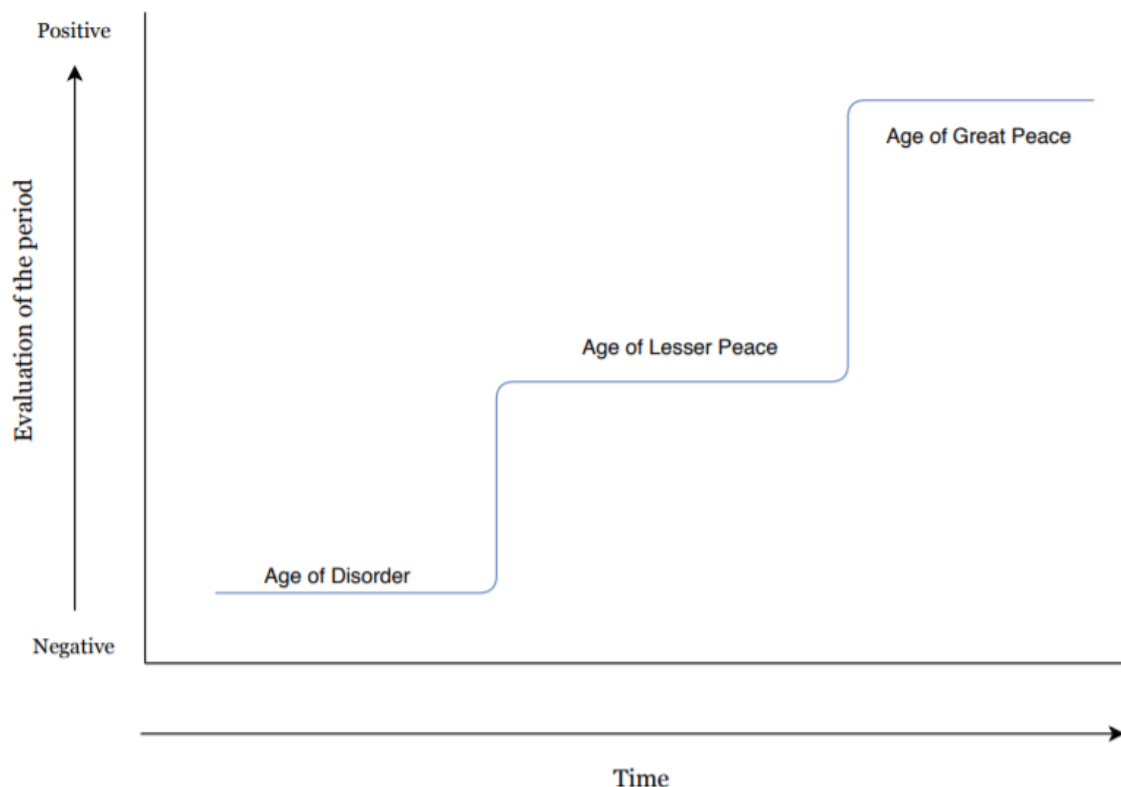
³⁴⁰ Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham, MA and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 214.

³⁴¹ On-Cho and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, XXI.

which they co-existed and merged.³⁴² The combination of these two factors provoked, among many members of the Chinese intelligentsia, the coalescence of a conviction in the necessity of adapting the Qing to the novel and changing environment of a more connected world in which the pre-eminence of the Central Kingdom (*zhongguo* 中國) was no longer assured, a fact that threatened the self-understanding of the Chinese and claimed for a critical re-evaluation of China's past.

Regarding periodisation, the most important of these reformist approaches was that of Kang Youwei (1858-1927). Kang was a scholar from Guangdong that had been the mouthpiece of the reformist party since his philological studies of 1891. Moreover, he was also the head of the most ambitious reform program of the late Qing, the unsuccessful Hundred Days Reform of 1898, that ended in the abortion of his projects to create a constitutional monarchy in China and in his exile.³⁴³ Despite

Fig. 6. Kang Youwei's Three Ages periodisation model



³⁴² Luo, "The Marginalization of Classical Studies", 47.

³⁴³ Federico Brusadelli, "'Poisoning China': Kang Youwei's *Saving the Country* (1911) and his Stance Against Anti-Manchuism", *Ming Qing Yanjiu*, XVIII (2014): 134.

these reformist political stances, Kang saw himself as a Confucian sage and as a transmitter of the Way, appointed with an almost divine task to strengthen China: in this regard, at least, he envisioned his identity within the previous classical framework.³⁴⁴ Apart from this, Kang was also the most vocal supporter of the New Text school of interpretation of the classics, which bestowed an esoteric and prophetic quality onto the texts of Confucius and especially onto the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, in which he -as other New Text scholars- believed that resided the key to understand the meaning of all historical change.³⁴⁵

The New Text school had traditionally endorsed the idea that Confucius, in his *Spring and Autumn Annals*, had encoded the idea of a history divided in Three Ages (*sanshi* 三世). The text itself merely offered a dry chronicle of the events of the State of Lu in which Confucius had lived; however, New Text scholars followed the *Gongyang Commentary* tradition (公羊傳) of interpretation, which 'aimed at illuminating the moral meanings and political messages that Confucius invested in the original classical text'.³⁴⁶ In their analyses, they came to the conclusion that the sage had described how the world had originally witnessed an 'Age of Disorder' (*juluan shi* 居亂世), then an 'Age of Lesser Peace' (*shengping shi* 升平世) and, finally, an 'Age of Great Peace' (*taiping shi* 太平世) during the Golden Age and up until the times of Confucius. As can be observed, the periodisation entailed a progressive perspective of the flow of time, albeit only applicable to the ancient past.³⁴⁷

Kang was the first that turned this vision on its head and defended instead that Confucius had described the complete progressiveness and linearity of *all* history (see *Fig. 6*). In his view, the cosmos was not cyclical; quite the contrary: it had a clearly defined goal, a *telos*, and, if looked closely, 'surely we can see in the overall direction

³⁴⁴ Prasenjit Duara, "Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945", *The American Historical Review* 102, no.4 (1997): 1035.

³⁴⁵ Iggers, Wang and Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, 135.

³⁴⁶ On-Cho and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 44.

³⁴⁷ James Reeve Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 30.

in which the world is moving that the goal of the future can be nothing less than Great Unity (*datong* 大同).³⁴⁸ As he himself described,

The meaning of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* consists in the evolution of the Three Ages: the Age of Disorder, the Age of Order, and the Age of Great Peace (...). The Way of Confucius embraces the evolution of the Three Sequences and the Three Ages. The Three Sequences were used to illustrate the Three Ages, which could be extended to a hundred generations. The eras of Xia, Shang, and Zhou represent the succession of the Three Sequences, each with its modifications and accretions. By observing the changes in these three eras one can know the changes in a hundred generations to come. For as customs are handed down among the people, later kings cannot but follow the practices of the preceding dynasty; yet, since defects develop and have to be removed, each new dynasty must make modifications and additions to create a new system. The course of humanity progresses according to a fixed sequence. From the clans come tribes, which in time are transformed into nations. And from nations the Grand Commonality [*datong* 大同] comes about. Similarly, from the individual man the rule of tribal chieftains gradually becomes established, from which the relationship between ruler and subject is gradually defined. Autocracy gradually leads to constitutionalism, and constitutionalism gradually leads to republicanism. Likewise, from the individual the relationship between husband and wife gradually comes into being, and from this the relationship between parent and child is defined. This relationship of parent

³⁴⁸ Kang Youwei (1885), quoted in Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 20-21. Kang defended that the last of the Three Ages, that of 'Great Peace', would be defined by a brotherhood of man that he referred to as the 'Great Unity'.

and child leads to the loving care of the entire race, which in turn leads gradually to the Grand Commonality, in which there is a reversion to individuality.

Thus there is an evolution from Disorder to Order, and from Order to Great Peace. Evolution proceeds gradually and changes have their origins. This is true with all nations. By observing the child, one can know the adult and the old man; by observing the sprout, one can know the tree when it grows big and finally reaches the sky. Thus, by observing the modifications and additions of the three successive eras of Xia, Shang, and Zhou, one can by extension know the changes in a hundred generations to come.

When Confucius prepared the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he extended it to embrace the Three Ages. Thus, during the Age of Disorder he considers his own state as the center, treating all other Chinese feudal states as on the outside. In the Age of Order he considers China as the center, while treating the outlying barbarian tribes as on the outside. And in the Age of Great Peace he considers everything, far or near, large or small, as if it were one. In doing this he is applying the principle of evolution.

Confucius was born in the Age of Disorder. Now that communications extend through the great earth and changes have taken place in Europe and America, the world is evolving toward the Age of Order. There will be a day when everything throughout the earth, large or small, far or near, will be like one. There will no longer be any nations, no more racial distinctions, and customs will be everywhere the same. With

this uniformity will come the Age of Great Peace. Confucius knew all this in advance.³⁴⁹

Although by 1902 Kang's understanding of historical progress was already influenced by Yan Fu's (1853-1924) introduction of Darwinist thought into China, this excerpt remains valuable nonetheless because it highlights the main implications of his theory for the imagination of historical time. First, by proposing that the *dao* evolved in a succession of concrete stages, Kang furthered the sense of anachronism that previous Qing scholars such as Zhang Xuecheng had stressed. He emphasised that each age had to develop its own institutions, and that the norms and rituals of one age could not be uncritically applied to another. This was because, as he claimed, 'the methods and institutions of Confucius aim[ed] at meeting with the particular times'.³⁵⁰ Secondly, Kang imagined the past as a staged and linear progression from the Age of Disorder to the Great Unity. In fact, he provided a teleology which could not be halted nor stopped, and towards which the cosmos was necessarily headed. This 'necessary succession' from one age to the next had fundamental implications for Confucian morality, as the deeds of one period could no longer be judged by the standards of another; as a consequence, the role played by moral virtue and the example of the sages was demoted in favour of a continuous and evolving adaptation to the *dao*.³⁵¹ Finally, by ascribing political and social characteristics to each of the three ages, such as autocracy to the Age of Disorder or constitutionalism to the Age of Order, Kang further legitimised his reformist stance by claiming that they were in tune with the true message of Confucius.

Nevertheless, and despite his strong moral commandment to strengthen the Qing, Kang's historical outlook was not nationalist. The Great Unity offered a model

³⁴⁹ Kang Youwei, "Lunyu Zhu" (Commentary on the *Analects* 論語註, 1902), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 267-268.

³⁵⁰ Kang Youwei, "Zhongyong Zhu" (Annotations to *The Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸註, 1901), quoted in De Bary, and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 268.

³⁵¹ Peter Zarrow, "Old Myth into New History: The Building Blocks of Liang Qichao's "New History"", *Historiography East & West* 1, no.2 (2003): 213-214.

not merely for China, but for humanity as a whole, and the national becoming of China was perceived but as a stage towards the elimination of all the barriers that impeded the path towards the Age of Great Peace. Among these, Kang perceived that national and racial barriers were the most difficult ones to eliminate. He strongly believed that the actual division of the world in different states was only the manifestation of the institutions of the Age of Lesser Peace and, in that regard, he saw the national as simply another stage in his teleology:

There is a common saying: 'One world, one country'. But the existence of small boundaries is a damnation to the establishment of one great boundary. The more small boundaries are established, the greater are the calamities for the world. Having family boundaries to protect individuals, having national boundaries to protect the people – this makes the attainment of Great Unity and Supreme Peace a difficult task. In our China, for example, there are the boundaries of provinces, prefectures, departments, districts, sections, villages, clans and families; and each one of us has developed his sense of membership to his province, his department, his district, his section, his village, his clan, his family, as well as his hostility to other provinces, other departments, other districts, other sections, other villages, other clans, other families. So, although the fulfillment of human happiness is to be attained through the Great Unity, mankind has, from the beginning, pursued self-protection through many divisions and barriers, and it was unavoidable. Now, once we abolish family boundaries and national boundaries, there still remains one enormous boundary obstructing the way to Great Unity

and Supreme Peace: the racial boundary, which also is the most difficult one to abolish.³⁵²

As we will see further along our study, Kang's periodisation took place within a political debate about the role that Confucian thought ought to play in the reform of the empire. As a consequence, its influence on actual historical writing was minor.³⁵³ It shaped the thought of prominent figures, such as his disciple Liang Qichao, but in the end it may have been seen as too millenarian and religious to be accepted by a more scientifically-oriented new generation of historians. Whatever the cause, Kang's periodisation was increasingly abandoned during the first decade of the twentieth century and had almost completely disappeared by the time of the advent of the Republic in 1911.³⁵⁴ However, it remains important as the first thoroughly progressive and linear periodisation model developed in China.

The reception of European and Japanese knowledge was deeply connected to the concrete ways in which this learning was introduced to China. If during the first half of the nineteenth century most of the Western books had been translated by European missionaries that intended to Christianise the Chinese, the second half of the century witnessed an increasing interest on translations of works on applied, natural, and social sciences.³⁵⁵ The Qing dynasty itself took part in this trend, especially after 1895, by favouring institutions whose purpose was to extend Western technological knowledge across the empire and which were modelled in the image of

³⁵² Kang Youwei *Datong Shu* (The Book of the Great Peace 大同書, 1935), quoted in Brusadelli, "Poisoning China", 153-154. For an alternative translation, see Kang Youwei, *Ta Tung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei*, trans. Laurence G. Thompson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 140.

³⁵³ Wang Fan-sen, "The Impact of the Linear Model of History on Modern Chinese Historiography", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 135-136.

³⁵⁴ Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow, "Making History Modern: The Transformation of Chinese Historiography, 1895-1937", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 5.

³⁵⁵ Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, 384.

the recently founded Beijing University (1898).³⁵⁶ The curricula of most of these organisations combined traditional Chinese learning with new subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, or foreign languages, but also had a direct impact on the transformation of Chinese historiography with their inclusion of lessons on Western-inspired world history.³⁵⁷ In addition, the government also encouraged Chinese students to travel to Europe and Japan to complete their formation. From the late nineteenth century onwards many of these former students would be central to the reorganisation of the school education as well as to the introduction of Western knowledge to China, via their official -or unofficial- translations of Western works.³⁵⁸

Private enterprise was also an indispensable element in this process. The Chinese translation industry, pushed forward by the necessities of the modern education system, was very active during the early twentieth century, with major publishers such as The Civilisation Bookstore and, especially, the Shanghai Commercial Press. The latter, founded in 1896, is most relevant for our topic as it provided the most influential history textbooks during Late Qing and early Republican times. Newspaper publication was also a most important contributor to the extension of the new concepts and theories, with dailies and journals of every political camp booming in the decades from the 1890s onward.³⁵⁹ In this regard, the fact that many reformist periodicals were published in Japan and later smuggled into China contributed to the Japanese and European flavour of the concepts included in them. The apparition of such a variety of newspapers, however, not only multiplied the chances for debate around Western ideas and political and cultural reform, but also led to the surge of a new type of journalist-intellectual who emphasised the

³⁵⁶ Iggers, Wang and Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, 212.

³⁵⁷ Li Lin, "Disciplinization of History Education in Modern China: A Study of History Education in the Imperial University of Peking (1898-1911)", *Creative Education* 3, no.4 (2012): 565-580.

³⁵⁸ Renee Yuwei Wang, "Who are the Han? Representations of the Han in Chinese school textbooks in late Qing and early Republican China", AACS Conference (2011): 19-20.

³⁵⁹ 'By the end of the nineteenth century, the rapidly expanding Chinese periodical press had become a potent weapon in the movement for radical reform'. See Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, 384.

implications that public debate would have for the modernisation of China and of which Liang Qichao was but the most obvious example.³⁶⁰ Especially during the 1890s and 1900s, these thinkers played a leading role in the growth of 'science' in China, even if, in general, they lacked any scientific training and were still very influenced by classical scholarly.³⁶¹ This fact notwithstanding, their search for new sources of knowledge that would strengthen China led these authors to translate and propagate Western learning and to plant the seeds for the development of academic disciplines such as history, sociology, and archaeology.

After the Qing empire's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 many of these Chinese intellectuals turned their gaze to Japan in search of ways of strengthening their country. At least since 1868, when the Meiji Restoration had taken place, Japanese historians had been influenced by the works of German authors who emphasised the role that historical thought should play in modern societies.³⁶² Such an influence had in turn produced a historiography that was at the same time more scientific and more socially oriented than the previous official scholarship based on Chinese models. The turn of the century witnessed the reception of these notions in China via the translation of Japanese texts influenced by Western historiographical tendencies, such as Tsuboi Kumezō's (1859-1936) *Shigaku kenkyū hō* ('Historical Research Method') in 1903, or, especially, Ukita Kazutami's (1859-1946) *Shigaku genron* ('Original Theory of History'), first published in 1898 and which became the

³⁶⁰ Liang himself would stress this point: '[T]he more the people read the newspapers, the more educated these people become; the more newspaper companies are established, the stronger the country', quoted in Yang Haiyan, "Knowledge Across Borders: the Early Communication of Evolution in China", in *The Circulation of Knowledge between Britain, India and China: The Early-Modern World to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Bernard Lightman, Gordon McOuat and Larry Stewart (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 194-196.

³⁶¹ Natascha Vittinghoff, "Social actors in the field of New Learning in nineteenth century China", in *Mapping Meanings: the field of New Learning in Late Qing China*, eds. Michael Lacker and Natascha Vittinghoff (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004), 76-77.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

most popular book on historical methodology during the first decade of the twentieth century.³⁶³

However, these Japanese historians did not merely contribute translations of Western historical methodology: they also utilised these new tools to narrate their own history and that of their neighbours. By the 1880s, a historiographical trend based on a narrative structure influenced by nationalist and evolutionist ideas was already more popular in Japan than the traditional chronicles, annals, and biographies which followed the Chinese official historiography.³⁶⁴ It was at this moment when Japanese historians such as Taguchi Ukichi (1855-1905), Naka Michiyo (1851-1908), and Kuwabara Jitsuzō (1871-1931) put themselves to the task of utilising this new methodology to write narrative histories of China that would later project an enormous influence over Chinese historical consciousness.³⁶⁵

In terms of periodisation, the importance of these works was tied to their introduction of a tripartite periodisation model, based on European examples, to Chinese history. For instance, Naka Michiyo's *A General History of China* (1888-1890) offered a historical account from the legendary ancient period up to the thirteenth-century Song dynasty, and divided this expanse of time in three different periods: Antiquity (*jōsei* 上世, before the arrival of the Qin dynasty in 221 BC), Middle Ages (*chūsei* 中世, between the Qin and rise of the Mongols, 221 BC- AD 1207), and Modernity (*kinsei* 近世, after the mid-Song dynasty). This work by Naka was widely considered as the most successful intent of writing China's history in the new narrative pattern and was meant to provide a broad perspective on Chinese historical development by paying attention to various aspects such as religion, culture, and social institutions.³⁶⁶ Kuwabara Jitsuzō, on the other hand, rearranged

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶⁴ Q. Edward Wang, "Narrating the Nation: Meiji Historiography, New History Textbooks, and the Disciplinization of History in China", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 112.

³⁶⁵ Julia C. Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity: Chinese Discourses on History, Historiography, and Nationalism (1900s-1920s)* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 283.

³⁶⁶ Wang, 'Narrating the Nation', 113.

this tripartite model to better adapt it to the Chinese case, and proposed a four age periodisation model in his 1898 *Middle School Eastern History* that skipped Naka's notion of the Middle Ages. Instead, he defended that China's history could be divided in High, Middle, and Recent Antiquity, up until the establishment of the Ming dynasty (1368), and Modernity, that would comprise the period from the Ming to the present.³⁶⁷

Chinese historians became increasingly drawn towards these periodisation schemes mainly for two reasons. For one, because they offered an alternative to the dynasty-centred approach of traditional Chinese historiography and pictured national development in a continuous and linear pattern. However, and probably unintendedly, they also characterised the nation as something that transcended the boundaries of the ruling dynasty.³⁶⁸ Secondly, there was the fact that the reform programs that the Qing court developed after the Boxer uprising (1899-1901) included the creation of a new education system following Western and Japanese guidelines. Given that these new institutions required new materials with which to work, this pushed the production of history textbooks that resembled those written by Japanese sinologists.

Therefore, it was not surprising that the first history textbooks written by Chinese scholars for the modern schools were devised as corrections and completions of these Japanese forerunners. This was the case, for instance, of Liu Yizheng's (1880-1956) *Historical outlines of the dynasties* (*Lidai Shilüe* 歷代史略, 1902), a commission by the Qing official and reformer Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) to translate and adapt Naka Michiyo's *A General History of China*.³⁶⁹

Liu's account adopted Naka's idea of a tripartite periodisation, although he provided different dates to delineate them: Antiquity (*shangshi* 上世) reached, as in

³⁶⁷ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 283-284.

³⁶⁸ Peter Zarrow, "The New Schools and National Identity: Chinese History Textbooks in the Late Qing", in Hon and Culp, *The Politics of Historical Production*, 42-43.

³⁶⁹ Tze-ki Hon, *The Allure of the Nation: The Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Republican China* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 32-33. Also, Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 284.

Naka's book, up until the rule of the Qin emperor in 221 BC, but the Middle Ages (*zhongshi* 中世) were shortened to include the period to the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907, and Modernity (*jinshi* 近世) extended from this date to the establishment of the Qing in 1644. Liu argued that such a periodisation pattern better served his intention of providing a broad overview of the history of China for the young students of the twentieth century.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the Qing itself still remained outside of this periodisation pattern, and as such Liu's scheme did not offer an holistic overview of China's history from the most ancient times up to the present. Likewise, he failed in providing a distinct characterisation of the different periods.³⁷¹ This rendered the tripartite periodisation of Liu's account hardly a true periodisation at all. Without any sense of change between the ages, the *Historical outlines* is not far from being a traditional dynastic history with a fashionable new tripartite temporal frame on top of it.

It would be the historian Xia Zengyou (1863-1924), however, who would make the new periodisation popular among the Chinese with his textbook *The most recent Chinese history textbook for primary school* (*Zuixin zhongxue Zhongguo lishi jiaokeshu* 最新中學中國教科書) published in 1904, two years after Liu's *Historical outlines*.³⁷² In contrast to Liu, who was supervised by Zhang Zhidong and sponsored directly by the Qing, Xia's history was the outcome of a private enterprise. This allowed him to be more innovative with his work, even though it had still to be kept within the guidelines offered by the dynasty in order to be accepted as a suitable material for the modern school system.³⁷³ Xia opted to divide Chinese history in three broad periods: High antiquity (*shanggu* 上古) from ancient times to 221 BC, Middle Antiquity (*zhonggu* 中古) until the end of the Five Dynasties Period (960) and,

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁷² Wu Huaiqi, *An Historical Sketch of Chinese Historiography* (Beijing: Springer, 2018), 425. Also, Tze-ki Hon, "Cultural Identity and Local Self-Government", *Modern China* 30, no.4 (2004): 516.

³⁷³ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, 39.

finally, an unnamed period after it.³⁷⁴ In this sense, it resembled (even if their transition dates did not necessarily match) Naka Michiyo's division in his *A General History of China*.

Although contemporaries of Xia Zengyou such as the intellectual Liang Qichao praised his interpretation as 'a fresh view of Chinese history', and albeit the book itself met with extensive success, Xia's periodisation, as Liu's, bore limited novelties.³⁷⁵ Even if their accounts presented Chinese history as a tale of linear evolution, they both interpreted this continuity within the traditional Confucian framework of the degenerative decline from the idealised past.³⁷⁶ Liu recognised the years following the establishment of the Qin dynasty in 221 BC as the period in which the foundations of China's imperial structure had been laid and emphasised the importance of this era; on the contrary, Xia's account highlighted the period of the Three Dynasties and, especially, that of the Zhou (c.1046 BC-256 BC).³⁷⁷

There was, nonetheless, one aspect in which Xia's contribution was fundamental. If for Liu the tripartite periodisation scheme had been merely another marker of time in his tale of deterioration from the golden age, in the case of the *Zuixin zhongxue Zhongguo jiaokeshu* this scheme was conceived as a fundamental framework to interpret China's past, as it told the story of the development of Chinese civilisation during Zhou times, the decline from this previous perfection during the medieval period, and the return to the virtues of antiquity with the Qing dynasty.³⁷⁸ The problem was that, even if Xia initially projected this framework as his guiding thread -which in essence was very similar to that of the traditional tripartite periodisation model developed during the European Renaissance-, it did not match

³⁷⁴ As Julia C. Schneider has noted, although the second part of Xia's book concluded with the unification of the Sui dynasty (AD 589) and this would seem to mark this date as the end of the period of Middle Antiquity, Xia himself recognised elsewhere that he originally projected this age to conclude in AD 960. See Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 285.

³⁷⁵ Wang, "Who are the Han?", 30-31.

³⁷⁶ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 286.

³⁷⁷ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, 39.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

the division into periods that he would ultimately present in his book.³⁷⁹ In fact, it seems that other periodisation models, mainly politico-dynastical, were still fundamental to Xia Zengyou's account, as well as to those of Liu and the Japanese sinologists.³⁸⁰ However, even if this was the case, the concepts of linear history and of a series of universal stages that every society was bound to experience were increasingly accepted by Chinese historians. As a consequence, the ideas contained in these textbooks contributed to undermine China's claim to a unique and privileged historical development.³⁸¹

D. Historical periodisation in Republican times

It is not surprising, then, that textbooks in the late 1900s and early Republican times were much more prone to progressive interpretations of China's history than those of the late Qing. The infiltration of Darwinian evolutionism, combined with the accelerated disintegration of the imperial institutions, led to the ultimate discredit of the classicism that official imperial historiography had up until that moment taken for granted. Claims for a 'New History', focused on the development of the national community rather than on dynastic succession, became widespread among historians. As Liang Qichao wrote in his famous historiographic manifesto of 1902, 'if an affair has nothing to do with the social group, then no matter how marvellous or strange it may be, it still is not qualified for inclusion in the writing of history'.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Peter Zarrow, "Discipline and Narrative: Chinese History Textbooks in the Early Twentieth Century", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 176.

³⁸⁰ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 287.

³⁸¹ Wang, "The Impact of the Linear Model of History on Modern Chinese Historiography", 142.

³⁸² Liang Qichao, "Xin Shixue" ("New Historiography" 新史學, 1902), 16, trans. Maura Dykstra and Devin Fitzgerald, accessed 07/09/2020, https://www.academia.edu/35963418/Translation_A_New_Study_of_History_%E6%96%B0%E5%8F%B2%E5%AD%B8_by_Liang_Qichao.

During this period, the practice of historiography also suffered important alterations. If during the late Qing period the intellectual debate had been dominated by scholars still educated in the classical tradition such as Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, or Zhang Taiyan and who had addressed their readers in widely circulated newspapers, this sort of intellectual increasingly lost way in favour of a new type of scientifically trained academic. On the whole, this new generation had received, at least, a partly Western education, be it in China or in Japan or the West, and would dominate the newly created field of academic historiography until the decade of the 1930s.³⁸³ The appearance of these trained historians owed much to the institutional reforms developed during the last decades of the Qing and to the creation of departments of history detached from the study of the classics in the new universities.³⁸⁴ Likewise, new debates, in which academics exchanged evidence and interpretations obtained via a critical and scientific analysis of the sources, did much to push forward a modern Chinese historiography.³⁸⁵ By the end of the 1920s, the trend towards an independent and specialised study of history would climax with the opening of the Institute for History and Philology of the *Academia Sinica* (1928), which materially evidenced the long process by which Chinese historiography 'had been transformed from a branch of traditional scholarship, basically subsumed into statecraft concerns, into a modern -and professionally autonomous- academic discipline'.³⁸⁶

In this novel context, scholars increasingly adopted and adapted frameworks inspired on Western and Japanese historians to their own works. These presented the progression of China, for instance, from a 'hunter-gatherer', to a 'nomadic', then to an 'agricultural', and afterwards to a 'clan' society, such as in the case of Liu Shipei's (1884-1919) 1906 *Ethics Textbook* (*Lunli jiaokeshu* 倫理教科書), and displayed the

³⁸³ Axel Schneider, "Between Dao and History: Two Chinese Historians in Search of a Modern Identity for China", *History and Theory* 35, no.4 (1996): 58.

³⁸⁴ Li, "Disciplinization of History Education in Modern China", 578.

³⁸⁵ Iggers, Wang and Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, 215.

³⁸⁶ Moloughney and Zarrow, 'Making History Modern', 27.

rites and institutions of the Golden Age as the result of evolutionary forces.³⁸⁷ Some materials went as far so as to celebrate the fall of the Zhou as a necessary and positive step in the historical development of the nation towards the Republican nation-state, thus trampling on the Confucian idealisation of the Three Dynasties.³⁸⁸

Other textbooks, such as Zhao Yusen's (1868-1945) and Jiang Weiqiao's (1873-1958) widely-used *Chinese History* (*Benguo shi* 本國史, 1913) stressed the importance that periodisation schemes had in making China's history comparable to that of the West. In order to render these comparisons more direct, these authors developed a scheme that, even if it made some concessions to China's own particular history, was on the main based on Western transitional dates.³⁸⁹ As such, antiquity was to be divided in three distinct eras: high antiquity prior to the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420), coinciding with the fall of the Western Roman Empire; middle antiquity up to the fall of the Yuan in 1368; and a late antiquity period that would end with the deposition of the Ming in 1644. After these, there would come modern history (*jinshi shi* 近世史), equated with Qing times, and, finally, contemporary history (*xiandai shi* 現代史) after the advent of the Republic.

Such a framework certainly emphasised the novelty of Qing and Republican times in comparison with the previous long antiquity and, at the same time, presented the differences between each period as embodying changes that had affected a putative Chinese nation. From the nation's origins in high antiquity, through the fusion with other races, the development of a unified and large state during the Qing, and the ultimate attaining of self-consciousness in Republican times, Zhao and Jiang's account tried to position the nation at the centre of history, even if their periodisation scheme still remained deeply indebted to the dynastic periodisation inherited from imperial times.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁸⁸ Zarrow, 'Discipline and Narrative', 188.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

The coexistence of these two modes of periodisation was not unique to the *Chinese History*. One year after the publication of Zhao and Jiang's book, another historian, Zhong Yulong (1880-1970), displayed a similar model in his *Chinese History Textbook* (*Benguoshi jiaoben* 本國史教本, 1914). Zhong's periodisation also utilised a five-fold progressive pattern that corresponded to stages of national development; however, it also included sub-divisions which accorded to the traditional dynastic rise-and-fall succession scheme. Each of these dynastic chapters presented sections about social and cultural developments which evidenced that Zhong's approach to history was not merely reduced to court politics. However, by temporally confining these developments to dynastic periods, his approach undermined the continuity and sense of evolution that his progressive periodisation seemed to promise.³⁹⁰ As we have seen, this was a problem also faced by late Qing historians. It seems to point out, essentially, that even though progressive historical frameworks were widespread during the first years of the Republic, Chinese historians still felt the necessity of bracketing the stages of this development according to the main assumptions of the dynastic cycle.

It was a young student of the University of Beijing, Fu Sinian (1896-1950), later to become one of the most important historians of early twentieth-century China, who most directly confronted these incoherencies. In 1918, Fu published an article in the Beijing University Daily (*Beijing Daxue rikan* 北京大學日刊) in which he attacked the periodisation models that previous historians, and especially Kuwabara Jitsuzō with his fourfold division, had developed to interpret Chinese history.³⁹¹ In his view, for a periodisation pattern to be explanatory, it had to possess a hierarchy of criteria by which to define when a period had concluded and given way to the next. When he considered late Qing and early Republican Chinese historiography as a whole, Fu saw instead that these divisions were often made in accordance to disparate criteria even within a single account, and this was problematic because, Be it 'racial change', or 'political reform', the same measure stick should be

³⁹⁰ Culp, "'China-The Land and its People'", 24.

³⁹¹ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 288.

used consistently throughout the text. In order to remedy these inaccurate practices, he proposed to establish the change and rise and fall of China's race (*Zhongguo zhongzu* 中國種族) as the most adequate criterion from which to interpret Chinese history:

To divide history today, one has to choose one aspect as a criterion. It seems that it is most suitable to take the change and the rise and fall, of the Han [Chinese] ethnicity as this criterion. If one analyses the history of one state, one has to divide its races first. One really must take one aspect of history, not only take the sum of mutual invasions of races and places [as Kuwabara *Jitsuzō*]. Races have their racial character, also called Racial colour. Everyone masters certain abilities. As soon as a race changes, history must suddenly change its face, too.

Now we take the change and the rise and fall of the Han [Chinese] ethnicity as a standard for dividing the eras. (. . .) It seems to bring the quintessence of the change of China's history to the fore. Compared to this, Mr. Kuwabara suddenly speaks about the rise and fall of the Han [Chinese] ethnicity and suddenly about Europeans coming East. He wrongly thinks that this is simply the same.³⁹²

The process of rise and fall to which Fu referred was ultimately framed, as we will see, by a continuous succession of phases of foreign ethnic influence and periods of re-purification of the Han Chinese ethnicity. Nonetheless, the periodisation according to political developments was still fundamental in determining these

³⁹² Fu Sinian, 'Zhongguo lishi fenqi zhi yanjiu' (Analysis of the periodisation of China's History 中國歷史分期之研究, 1918), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 291.

transitions, as exemplified by the advent of modernity (*jins*hi 近世) in 1279 coinciding with the accession the Yuan dynasty, or that of the contemporary age (*xians*hi 現世), which corresponded to the establishment of the Republic in 1912. Despite these minor points, by highlighting the significance of these phases in the broader account of the 'rise and fall' of the Han ethnicity, Fu developed a system by which these divisions acquired a new significance outside of the original dynastic periodisation model. Under this light, epochs that had previously been fundamental to the interpretation of Chinese history, such as pre-Qin times or the Three Dynasties, could no longer be considered landmarks in the process of national development.³⁹³ The influence that Fu's proposal would have in his fellow Chinese historians evidences the extent to which the classicism of the previous era had lost its appeal for early Republican scholars.

During the 1920s, historians and textbook writers increasingly favoured models of progressive national development instead of the older framework of the politico-dynastical model. These new patterns emphasised social and cultural trends, and their authors were not hesitant in grouping dynasties together to emphasise the temporal extent of these changes. In this regard, it was a middle-school textbook published in 1923 under the title of *Chinese History* (*Benguoshi* 本國史) which would provide a definite example of this new form of interpreting Chinese history. Its authors, Wang Zhongqi (1880-1913) and Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), were supporters of the Doubting Antiquity School that we will discuss in a later chapter, a movement that attacked the historical veracity of the traditional Confucian accounts about early Chinese history. Not surprisingly, these iconoclast tendencies were manifest in Wang and Gu's textbook, in which they questioned the historicity of fundamental characters of Confucian orthodoxy, such as the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of ancient times. In their account, the history of these characters represented 'in fact only a myth

³⁹³ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 294.

created by late-Zhou era scholars' and were merely 'lies they create[d to] make later people believe that it was true.'³⁹⁴

Wang and Gu's critical stance was also transposed to the dynastical periodisation model, which they considered utterly inappropriate for understanding the national development of the Chinese. In its place, they followed a five-fold division not dissimilar to that used by Zhong Yulong in his 1914 book, dividing history between remote antiquity, medieval period, recent antiquity, modernity, and contemporary age. In this regard, they continued the trend towards a progressive periodisation that we have observed taking momentum during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

However, Wang and Gu's textbook was revolutionary in its topical approach to the sub-divisions within these longer periods. Instead of utilising a dynastical periodisation, as earlier scholars such as Zhong or Zhao had done, Wang and Gu framed their account around thematically oriented chapters. These themes were sometimes political ('The Qin Unification and the Establishment of a Central Government'), but in other cases were framed around cultural ('The Influence of Revering Confucianism'), religious ('The Influx of Buddhism and the Rise of Daoism'), social ('The Five Dynasties' Disputes and Society during that Period'), or ethnic developments ('The Assimilation of Other Peoples and the Four New Barbarians').³⁹⁵ In some cases, as can be seen, these topics fell within the scope of a single dynastic period, but in most others they encompassed broader chronological outlines.

The thematic approach sketched in Wang and Gu's *Benguoshi* would become very popular, especially during the 1930s. However, dynastical periodisation did not,

³⁹⁴ Gu Jiegang and Wang Zhongqi, (*Xiandai chuzhong jiaokeshu*) *Benguoshi* ([Modern lower middle school textbook] Chinese History (現代初中教科書)本國史, 1923), quoted in Qian Jiwei and Ryan Ho, "'Chineseness' in History Textbooks: The Narrative on Early China", in *Chineseness and Modernity in a Changing China: Essays in Honour of Professor Wang Gungwu*, eds. Zheng Yongnian and Zhao Litao (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2020), 105.

³⁹⁵ Gu Jiegang and Wang Zhongqi, (*Xiandai chuzhong jiaokeshu*) *Benguoshi* ([Modern lower middle school textbook] Chinese History (現代初中教科書)本國史, 1923), quoted in Culp, "China -the Land and its People", 27.

by any means, disappear from Chinese historical accounts. The same year of the publication of Wang and Gu's book, another scholar, Lü Simian (1884-1957), still followed the main tenants of the older periodisation models that Wang, Gu, and Fu had criticised. As he himself confessed, Lü utilised the models of progressive periodisation without any in-depth consideration, and simply for the sake of 'research convenience'.³⁹⁶ In this regard, his approach to historical interpretation does not seem so different from that of late Qing textbooks such as Liu Yizheng's, and may evidence the limited reflectiveness with which these periodisation models were adopted by many Chinese scholars. Nonetheless, Lü, as Fu Sinian, also considered that to narrate the development and interactions of the Chinese ethnicity was the fundamental function of a national history:

China's history has many relations with all kinds of Southeast and Central Asian countries and ethnicities. If one wants to understand China's history deeply, one generally also has to narrate those countries' and people's histories.³⁹⁷

Despite the divergences on dates and the lack of a widely-accepted periodisation scheme in Chinese historiography during late Qing and early Republican times, the broad changes that took place between the decades of 1880 and 1930 in the role and function of history cannot be sufficiently stressed. In terms of periodisation, the three tenants of classical Confucian historiography -classicality, continuity, and caducity- lost their unassailable place in the minds of historians. Increasingly, classicality was attacked by a sense of anachronism and the introduction of Western concepts and alternatives, whereas continuity and caducity were substituted by the belief in a progressive and evolutionary history. In the face of such momentous changes and without the guidance of the classics, historians struggled to

³⁹⁶ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 295.

³⁹⁷ Lü Simian, *Baihua benguoshi* (Vernacular history of our country, 1923), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 362.

develop an overarching approach from which to interpret Chinese history. Most of them adapted Western historiographical models and, at the same time, tried to salvage what they could of the previous periodisation schemes. In this regard, the dynastic cycle fared much better than the classical periodisation, probably because it had an easier correspondence in Western historical thought. Other authors, writing after the Qing had ceased to exist, abandoned those previous frameworks voluntarily and tried to find instead a new meaning to Chinese history by completely embracing modern Western historiographical trends. In both cases, these accounts positioned China in a global historical imaginary in which every society had to develop along universal lines (broadly speaking, antiquity, middle ages, and modernity) while at the same time tacitly accepting that those lines had been embodied in the example of the Western nations.³⁹⁸ The resultant cleavage between Western universalism and Chinese particularism would have deep implications for the development of a historically continuous Chinese national identity.

E. Comparison and balance

As we have seen in this chapter, the positioning of the nation as the subject of narrative history posed multiple challenges both in China and Britain. Given that, in most cases, older modes of historical interpretation could not be easily translated into the new linear and progressive national histories, the tension between the narrative necessity of displaying the continuous historical journey of the nation and traditional perspectives on particular periods or events grew considerably. This issue was further complicated due to the fact that, as the principle of global international spatiality underscored, all national communities had to develop along a similar path of progress. This limited the creative possibilities to stress the particularism and uniqueness of a nation's own history as a solution to bridge the worries of these authors.

³⁹⁸ Li, "Disciplinization of History Education in Modern China", 575.

In China, as in Britain, the establishment of progressive history was undertaken via two different strategies. For one, it entailed the qualitative demoting of previously idealised golden ages. In the Chinese case, late Qing and early Republican intellectuals increasingly historicised and limited the significance of the traditionally highly esteemed Three Dynasties period. Although this was not true for every author, it is undeniable that the trend was towards a desacralisation and relativisation of the Confucian classics. In Britain, on the other hand, the period witnessed the devaluation of the Anglo-Saxon period from its status as the cradle of England's liberties to being described as another stage, fundamental but still primitive, in the road to the completion of the national constitution.

The second strategy that these authors utilised can be seen as a the mirror image of the first one. Here, history writers provided positive interpretations for periods that had been previously despised according to the values and assumptions of established periodisation schemes. This was the case for the rehabilitation of the Middle Ages by Stubbs, Green, and Freeman, or that of the Tudor monarchy in the case of Pollard. In China, this re-evaluative tendency can be illustrated, for instance, in the judgement offered by Xia Zengyou on the first emperor of the Qin dynasty, Qin Shihuang (r.221 BC-210 BC). This character, traditionally loathed by Confucian orthodoxy as a tyrant, had unified the various Chinese kingdoms into a single imperial state. For this reason, Xia, a classically trained historian, found himself torn between two very distinct interpretations of Qin Shihuang; on the one hand, he could not accept Qin's immoral actions but, from the perspective of the progressive national history he was writing, he could not deny the benefits he had brought.³⁹⁹ As time went on and a traditionally educated intelligentsia gave way to a new generation of professional historians proficient in Western and Japanese historiographical methods, this type of objection became less and less common and the evolutionary criterion became more popular.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Wang, "The Impact of the Linear Model of History on Modern Chinese Historiography", 152.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

Another shared aspect of the Chinese and British experience was the pervasiveness of the idea of 'restoration' and of cyclical ways of imagining the flow of time. Although the content of these ancient virtues was very different in the two cases, Whig and Chinese Confucian historiographies were both similar to the extent to which they could not conceive progress but as a return to the past. In the two contexts, moreover, attacks to this mode of interpretation came from authors who intended to liberate the future from the burden of previous example and anachronism, such as Kang Youwei or Frederick William Maitland. This did not mean, however, that the idea of the restoration of the past disappeared from subsequent national histories, but these approaches undoubtedly undermined the portrayal of the connection between past and present in too direct terms. Although the ancients -be them the Zhou political institutions or the Anglo-Saxon 'constitutional' system- could have advanced certain features of the future, historians in 1930 were less prone to imagine the present and the past as one and the same thing.

Instead of this restorative ideal, scholars thoroughly embraced the principle of a continuous and evolutionary historical development. In the case of Britain, these theories were already manifest in the displeasure of Whig historians for revolutionary, drastic change. Such a tendency became much more marked when historians 'corrected' the non-progressive interpretations of the Middle Ages and the Tudor period to include them as necessary steps of the national historical development. In China, on the other hand, these ideas led to a thorough re-evaluation of the ancient past, previously believed to have been a creation of the sages, as the result of the interaction of evolutionary 'forces'. Simultaneously, these authors also pushed the search for a suitable criterion by which to evaluate national history. Seen under this light, Fu Sinian's advocacy of a racial interpretation of Chinese history is but one example of the strategies developed by Chinese historians to frame their nation's history in progressive and evolutionary terms.

Finally, the new identification of history with national history led, in both examples, to the particularisation and nationalisation of previously universal frameworks and values. As the signifier 'Civilisation' became more and more identified with normative and transcendent Western principles and institutions, other

universalising discourses, such as Chinese Confucian classicism or British constitutional progress, came to be increasingly portrayed as particular varieties of it. This entailed both a qualitative demotion of these discourses as well as their inclusion in a new imaginary of universalising notions which allowed for the comparison of thoroughly disparate societies.⁴⁰¹ Unsurprisingly, the Chinese example was much more dramatic in this regard, given the position that the Chinese were thought to occupy within this new hierarchy of peoples, in which they were often considered as 'half-barbaric'.⁴⁰² In this situation, Chinese historians found themselves facing the difficult task of constructing a progressive national history that emphasised the continuous development of the Chinese nation and its claim to be considered a civilised people while, at the same time, acknowledging the striking differences between their history and that of the normative West.

However, there also existed certain major differences between the Chinese and British cases. For one, the evolutionary and linear model of history already existed in Britain by 1880, whereas this kind of framework was novel in the case of imperial Chinese historiography. This evidently made it easier for British historiography to be adapted to the necessities of the new national discourse than for its Chinese counterpart. Secondly, periodisation schemes developed by Chinese historians were deeply influenced by those of Western and Japanese authors and were, therefore, often hardly applicable to the Chinese context. The tripartite periodisation, as we have seen, had been developed in origin to mirror particular historical developments that had occurred in (Western) Europe. Its uncritical application to the Chinese context led to difficulties to interpret what medieval even meant in a country in which the period from the fifth to the fifteenth century had witnessed some of the most successful -in terms of longevity and territorial expansion- political entities of the world. The successive corrections made by scholars, such as the five-fold division of Zhong Yulong or Wang Zhongqi and Gu Jiegang, did not completely conceal the fact that

⁴⁰¹ Prasenjit Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism", *Journal of World History* 12, no.1 (2001): 105.

⁴⁰² James Franck Bright, *A History of England. Period IV: The Growth of Democracy* (London: Rivingtons, 1888), 71.

these periodisation schemes made little sense as interpretative tools for China. No surprise, then, that there came to exist few historians specialised in 'medieval' or 'modern' Chinese history, and that most academics remained focused on dynastic periods.⁴⁰³

However, the main difference that existed between China and Britain in terms of their approach to historical periodisation rested on the relative position of the two nations in the imaginary hierarchy that such a global discourse produced. Given that the British nation was considered to be part of the select group of developed and civilised peoples, the historiographical transformation towards progressive, linear national history took place, generally, within an environment of confidence and self-satisfaction with the previous historical tradition. Although turn-of-the-century British historians could no longer feel so at ease as their mid-century counterparts due to the increasing competition of other Western powers, they were still certain that Britain remained one of the leading actors in the world. As such, historical progressiveness required minor tweaks to present the evolution of the country towards this content present and, hopefully, promising future.

In the case of China, on the other hand, the situation was almost the inverse. A series of defeats against foreign powers, political instability, and internal conflict had left the Chinese less than convinced about their claim to superiority over other peoples; the attacks on Confucian classics were only the cherry on top of this process. Consequently, Chinese scholars had to face the challenges imposed by the portrayal of national history as a history of progress at a time in which this progress seemed less evident to them. As a result, they found themselves trying to describe the progress of the national community while they lacked, at the same time, the confidence in the usefulness of the bonds that had defined, up to that point, that very community. In the debates that followed, some intellectuals emphasised the importance of the Confucian classics, as did scholars such as Kang Youwei, Zhang Taiyan, or Liu Shipei; others opted instead for rejecting the traditional system as a whole and embracing Western concepts and principles by picturing them as universal

⁴⁰³ Moloughney and Zarrow, 'Making History Modern', 18.

and common to all societies. In essence, both groups tried to construct a new progressive and linear tale for the nation while defining, at the same time, what this Chinese nation even was. The multiplicity of periodisation patterns explored in this chapter clearly evidences the lack of consensus that they attained in this regard.

V

The nation as a homogeneous community

In a simultaneous process to the development of new interpretative patterns for national history, the idea of nation in China and Britain was also framed in new terms. Due to the influence of the core national assumption of community, historians and intellectuals in both countries increasingly accepted and spread its description as an ample demographic group. In turn, this had major and unexpected consequences for national historical imagination. As the nation became the main actor of history, the implications of such a broadly defined protagonist decisively affected the ways in which the past and the present were conceived and evaluated. Once the idea of the national community became widespread, previous events and actors that had been held in high esteem in traditional historiography lost their appeal due to their alleged narrow importance for the new national history; by the same token, other episodes, portrayed as having possessed a deep influence in the evolution of the national group as a whole, rose in significance.

But, as these scholars and politicians would soon discover, legitimising the existence of a broad national community was no easy task. National assumptions also imposed the necessity of imagining an overarching connection that linked members of the nation with each other; a bond so central and fundamental as to have arisen to represent the most powerful feature of the national group. As will be explained in the following pages, these authors offered varied approaches to the portrayal of this source of unity that would feature, for instance, allegedly unique political qualities, languages, or racial stocks. Whatever their choice, however, they struggled to present

a national community that was not only collective and demographically inclusive, but which had resulted from natural (as opposed to man-made or artificial) forces and was objectively discernible from others.

Simultaneously, the intent to find such a connecting bond was one to delineate boundaries between an imagined 'us' and the outside world.⁴⁰⁴ This was because the criterion that was portrayed to unite the nation internally was, invariably, what made it supposedly unique from the rest. Once this principle was accepted, it became possible to trace a line that divided 'national' from 'foreigner', a categorisation that would have multiple, and sometimes tragic, consequences internationally as well as within a single society. National purity became an ideal that was thus constructed upon an essentialisation of the national community and its characteristics; as such, it required broad generalisations and the erasure of any nuance in order to be applied.

However, another fundamental feature of this process of imagining the nation as a tightly connected community was that it was not constrained to the present. Given that the source of unity was imagined to be the result of a natural development, this framework ought to be readily transposable to past times. This, of course, entailed major consequences for the evaluation of historical characters and events. Conquest dynasties in particular became suspicious, as they came to represent the most obvious examples of the interference of foreign nations on the autochthonous communal development. As a result, debates about the evaluation of the role played by these foreigners were to feature prominently both in Britain and China during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth.

Due to this whole array of factors, ideas of community, unity, and purity became increasingly central to the imagination of the nation. As the broad framework of national narratives extended in our two analysed contexts, the allegedly simple objective of transforming political history into the history of the 'people' led to the much more difficult task of determining what defined this group and of locating it in history. The responses provided to these questions and the implications that these

⁴⁰⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A cultural approach* (London-New York, 2009), 25.

proposals entailed would turn out to be fundamental for the development of national identities, but also for the ultimate establishment of the national narrative pattern on historical practice.

a. *The nation as a collective subject*

In 1874, the Oxford historian John Richard Green published *A Short History of the English People*. It was an account that followed the late-Victorian trend of replacing extensive histories by single-volume books conceived to be of better use for schools, universities, and general readers alike.⁴⁰⁵ This kind of publication seems to have had a broad audience, and the *Short History* was to be the most wide read of these, being constantly reprinted, updated, and re-edited during the following fifty years. However, Green's was not intended to be just a shortened imitation of previous well-liked histories: he projected it from the beginning as a revision of those older accounts, in which he would present a 'larger and grander conception (...) of the organic life of a nation as a whole'.⁴⁰⁶

Such a broader ambition was manifest in the *Short History* from its preface, in which the reader was warned that this was a history 'not of English Kings or English Conquests, but of the English People'.⁴⁰⁷ Not for Green to linger on unimportant details that only concerned a few of the powerful and noble, or to emphasise the anecdotal and eye-catching in history; the protagonist he had in mind for his account were the masses, and therefore only that which affected this collective subject merited

⁴⁰⁵ David Cannadine, "British History as a new Subject: Politics, perspectives and prospects", in *Uniting the Kingdom? The making of British history*, eds. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (London-New York: Routledge, 1995), 15.

⁴⁰⁶ John Rigby Hale, *The Evolution of British Historiography: From Bacon to Namier* (London-Melbourne: Macmillan, 1967), 63.

⁴⁰⁷ John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), V.

to be included in it. For this reason, he 'preferred to pass lightly and briefly over the details of foreign wars and diplomacies, the personal adventures of kings and nobles, the pomp of courts, or the intrigues of favorites, and to dwell at length on the incidents of that constitutional, intellectual, and social advance in which [he] read the history of the nation itself'.⁴⁰⁸

Green was not, however, a pioneer in this intent. In the decade prior to the publication of his *Short History*, for instance, a multi-volume history of England had already claimed that the time had come to establish the people as the focus of historical narration.⁴⁰⁹ But it was also true that most historians usually paid little attention to the popular classes towards which Green was drawn, and that these 'democratic' qualities of the text, in combination with the author's literary talents, no doubt helped in making his approach much more successful than it had previously been.⁴¹⁰ He himself seems to have acknowledged this, and recognised: '...I have drawn greater attention to the religious, intellectual, and industrial progress of the nation itself than had, so far as I remember, ever been done in any previous history of the same extent'.⁴¹¹

The statements made by Green in his preface had direct continuation in the rest of the *Short History*. In terms of the structure of his account, he offered a dual criterion of organisation. First, there was division on chapters. In it, Green followed the Whig interest on constitutional history, with headings such as the 'Great Charter', 'The New Monarchy', or 'The Revolution' and which, in his opinion, represented an actual social development by the people of England. Much more interesting, however, were the criteria he utilised for the sub-sections contained within such broad titles. Many of these were still framed according to the politico-dynastical tradition and bore, as a result, the name of kings, queens, or central political actors. But it is

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, V.

⁴⁰⁹ Robert Livingston Schuyler, "John Richard Green and his *Short History*", *Political Science Quarterly* 64, no.3 (1949): 340.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁴¹¹ Green, *A Short History*, VI.

remarkable, nonetheless, that a dozen or so of these sub-sections were devoted to social and cultural topics that matched Green's intentions as expressed in the preface. Among these it was possible to find, for instance, 'English literature', 'The Universities', 'The Friars', 'The English Town', 'The New Learning', 'The England of Elizabeth', or 'The Elizabethan poets'. Likewise, Green did not hesitate in dedicating sections to non-English peoples which were believed to have had a direct influence on English history, such as 'Britain and the English', 'Normandy and the Normans', or the segment devoted to the French under the heading 'Joan of Arc'.

Green's intention of placing the English people at the centre of his history was not limited, however, to thematic selection: it was also manifest in the text itself. As we will see in the following pages, he was a Teutonist, a position he shared with other famous Oxford historians of his generation such as Edward Freeman or William Stubbs. Unsurprisingly, his *Short History* recognised the racial and collective qualities of the German peoples that had invaded England in ancient times and, in doing so, he widened and democratised these features as central to the identity of the English people. He even went to the extent of beginning his narration with a description of the society of these German peoples in Saxony, and only later accounting for their invasion of Britain. To him, the process of maintenance and development of these racial qualities by the commoners and the people was the crucial thread that pieced England's history together. This assumption was made clear in an inspiring paragraph he devoted to the survival of Teutonic liberties during the reigns of the first Norman kings:

In the silent growth and elevation of the English people the boroughs led the way: unnoticed and despised by prelate and noble, they had alone preserved the full tradition of Teutonic liberty. The rights of self-government, of free speech in free meeting, of equal justice by one's equals, were brought safely across the ages of Norman tyranny by the traders and shopkeepers of the towns. In the quiet, quaintly named streets,

in town-mead, and market-place, in the lord's mill beside the stream, in the bell that swung out its summons to the crowded borough-mote, in the jealousies of craftsmen and guilds, lay the real life of Englishmen, the life of their home and trade, their ceaseless, sober struggle with oppression, their steady, unwearied battle for self-government.⁴¹²

Few fragments in the whole *A Short History* can exemplify better than this one Green's perspective about the importance of the people for the development of English constitutional and social greatness. This was, in his account, the true protagonist of England's history, one who silently -yet stubbornly- had opposed the tyrannical and un-representative procedures of monarchs and executives. A perspective such as this provided him with an authoritative position from which to attack the perceived narrow interests of princes and courts, as when he condemned the Stuart king Charles II (r.1660-1685) for opposing with his policies the common feeling of the nation: 'He had made war against the will of the nation, and he had refused to make war when the nation demanded it. While every Englishman hated France, he had made England a mere dependence of the French king'.⁴¹³ By emphasising the dissimilarities that existed between 'every' Englishman and the Stuart monarch, Green demonstrated how the collective concept of the nation could be put to use as a weapon to evaluate and interpret the role played by historical actors and events.

Green's *A Short History of the English People* was an immediate editorial success and would remain so for decades. This does not mean, however, that there existed no one to oppose his ideas about the historical role of the people. A reviewer, for example, criticised Green's book on the basis that it was democratic propaganda that presented a portrayal of the English nation always in opposition to its rulers, thus

⁴¹² Green, *A Short History*, 89.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 638-639.

demoting the status of these.⁴¹⁴ The same position was shared by another well-known historian, John Sherren Brewer (1810-1879), he himself an expert in Tudor times and the author of a revised edition of David Hume's *History of England*. 'Mr. Green's assumption of a democratical element in our earliest constitution colors his whole history, and affects his treatment of it throughout'.⁴¹⁵ Given that Brewer perceived this as a dubious claim, to say the least, he remained unconvinced of Green's anti-monarchical and anti-elite narrative.

Yet it is also true that, despite these criticisms, Green's account made its way into mainstream culture and seems to have been widely read by the general public. Even though his popular perspective of the nation was strongly tied to his belief in the racial qualities of the English as a branch of the Teutonic race, the attacks on Whig historiography that would later tear down the depiction of the Anglo-Saxon period as a moment of democracy and liberty could not, on the main, erode the position presented in this his book. Even Pollard's criticism to Green's concept of the 'New Monarchy' does not seem to have shaken the conviction in that the constitutional and political advance of England was ultimately connected to the progress of its people. We find echoes of the claims made in Green's preface in later authors and histories, and although the degree to which these are direct responses to the influence of the *Short History* cannot be measured, they certainly seem to have been produced in a cultural environment in which these ideas commanded meaningful strength. John Richard Seeley, the author of the best-selling *The Expansion of England*, wrote that '[t]o us England will be wherever English people are found, and we shall look for its history in whatever places witness the occurrences most important to Englishmen'.⁴¹⁶ Likewise, in a similar vein to Green's earlier excerpt, some authors chose to dwell on the portrayal of the laborious English people and their virtue:

⁴¹⁴ Schuyler, "John Richard Green and his *Short History*", 339.

⁴¹⁵ John Shelley Brewer, quoted in Schuyler, "John Richard Green and his *Short History*", 346.

⁴¹⁶ John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan & Co. 1883), 121-122.

We have brought the History of England and the English folk down through six hundred years. And we see that our forefathers were very like the English of today. There was the lord, like the squire and rich folk of today; and the yeoman, like our farmer, and the thralls and landless men, like our labourers and workmen. (...) The cities, also, by the time of the Norman Conquest, were filled with folk, for the English as they became less rude began to live in towns, and to trade more with foreign countries. (...) But the great change that took place during the time we have written of is, that the Englishman became the citizen of a great nation instead of merely the member of a tribe, that he was learning to care for the good of the whole state and of every other Englishman.⁴¹⁷

And there was also those who followed Green's advocacy for an anti-elite history and emphasised the community and the collective aspects in their accounts, such as did *The Growth of the English Nation* (1894), which manifested the intentions of its authors by stating that,

Industrial prosperity, intellectual development, the victory of the moral and spiritual over the brute elements in race temperament – these, and not war or dynastic intrigue, are the determining factors in national progress.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ Frederick York Powell, "Early England", in *Epochs of English History*, ed. Mandell Creighton (London-New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889), 114.

⁴¹⁸ Katharine Coman and Elizabeth Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation* (New York: Flood and Vincent, 1894), III.

These fragments seem to support the idea that, by the turn of the century, there existed a strong position in favour of popular approaches to English history, and that this choice fundamentally shaped them in thematic as well as in methodological aspects. Green's history had served to popularise the idea of the centrality of the masses in political and constitutional history, the most prestigious and popular historical narrative of the period; later attacks appear to have left this assumption untouched. The idea of the nation as a collective united by common features and with a unique character would have a long life, and latter criticisms to Green would come not from the camp of those who supported a narrowing of the national group, but instead from those who believed that a true history of the people had not been told yet.

One of these authors was Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936), a prolific writer of novels, poetry, literary criticism, plays, journal articles, essays, and history. In his *A Short History of England* (1917) Chesterton attacked Green's popular tendencies for being insufficient in their references to the masses. As he exposed,

The answer is that I know just enough to know one thing: that a history from the standpoint of a member of the public has not been written. What we call popular histories should rather be called anti-popular histories. They are all, nearly without exception, written against the people; and in them the populace is either ignored or elaborately proved to have been wrong. It is true that Green called his book "A short history of the English people"; but he seems to have thought it too short for the people to be properly mentioned.⁴¹⁹

Although he certainly was in favour of a popular history of England, Chesterton perceived the connection that Green -and many after him- had established

⁴¹⁹ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (New York: John Lane Company, 1917), 9.

between constitutional history and the people's development to be an artificial one. In his opinion, there was little in those histories that had been of importance to the commoners at all. In his view, most of them were elite discourses written to justify elite privileges, and he vehemently advocated that a people's history of England ought to not only address the existence and centrality of the community, but also be of use and interest to it:

It is exactly the popular story that is left out of the popular history. For instance, even a working man, carpenter or cooper or bricklayer, is taught to-day about the Great Charter, as something like the Great Auk [a species of sea bird that became extinct in the mid-nineteenth century], save that its almost monstrous solitude came from being before its time instead of after. He is not taught that the whole stuff of the Middle Ages was stiff with the parchment of charters; that society was once a system of charters, and of a kind much more interesting to him. The carpenter heard of one charter given to barons, and chiefly in the interest of barons; the carpenter does not hear of any of the charters given to carpenters, to coopers, to all the people like himself.⁴²⁰

A Short History of England espoused this creed, with a tendency to emphasise popular historical conceptions and traditional, oral accounts. As Chesterton put it, 'wild as would be the results of credulity concerning all the old wives' tales, it would not be so wild as the errors that can arise from trusting to written evidence when there is not enough of it'.⁴²¹ Armed with this methodology, Chesterton produced a history which only barely touched on political or military conflict, and which was structured,

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

instead, around what would be maybe best described as changes in collective consciousness. For instance, he, a converted and fervent Catholic, emphasised the role played by religion during the Dark and Middle Ages and warned his readers that they 'must support the tedium of frequent references to the religious element in this part of English history, for without it there would never have been any English history at all.'⁴²²

But probably the most important contribution of Chesterton's book, and which evidences best his focus on the collective subjectivity of the nation, is his over-arching emphasis on the productive role played by the masses in the development of England.

For the tale told in a book like this cannot touch on mediaeval England at all. The dynasties and the parliaments passed like a changing cloud and across a stable and fruitful landscape. The institutions which affected the masses can be compared to corn or fruit trees in one practical sense at least, that they grew upwards from below. There may have been better societies, and assuredly we have not to look far for worse; but it is doubtful if there was ever so spontaneous a society. (...) The mediaevals not only had self-government, but their self-government was self-made.⁴²³

As he conceived it, English constitutional liberty was not the result of a racial predisposition of the Teutonic race, even less a conquest wrested by Parliament from the hands of tyrants; instead, it was the spontaneous creation of the commoners and the community as a whole. In a somewhat paradoxical shift, to Chesterton it was Parliament which had betrayed these mediaeval promises of complete freedom for the masses by becoming an aristocratic institution during late medieval times, and

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

therefore preventing England from having 'as happy a history as is possible to human nature'.⁴²⁴

We will not dwell excessively on Chesterton's account and in the particular ways in which he described how the liberty of the masses had been trampled over the ages. What remains interesting to us is that, even when Green's and other Whig authors' connection of the idea of the people and constitutional history was criticised, it was done not by narrowing the role played by the masses in this process, but instead by broadening it even more. The idea that fundamental change had its origin -as well as its utmost consequence- in alterations within the community at its broadest, and was not thus the result of the actions of heroic individual figures or the occurrence of almost-miraculous episodes, had already taken root in historical thought.

Specialised studies also mirrored this interest on society as a whole. From the 1870s onward, and influenced by developments in German economic tradition, some British economists embraced a position usually known as 'Historical school'. This was 'a policy oriented empirical economics which viewed history as an essential source of data and knowledge and the national past as the principal inspiration for understanding patterns of change for devising appropriate policies to accommodate that change'.⁴²⁵ In the words of one of its most important representatives -and the first chairman in economic history in the world-⁴²⁶, William James Ashley (1860-1927), this current was no longer interested in analysing the relations between individuals but on discovering 'the laws of social development -that is to say, generalisations as to the stages through which the economic life of society has actually moved'.⁴²⁷ To the study of such large groups these economic historians contributed

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

⁴²⁵ Erik Grimmer-Solem and Roberto Romani, "In search of full empirical reality: historical political economy, 1870-1900", *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 6, no.3 (1999): 334.

⁴²⁶ Established in Harvard University in 1892. See Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 164.

⁴²⁷ William James Ashley, *An Introduction to English Economic History and Theory* (London: Rivingtons, 1888), XII-XIII.

statistical methodologies, which stressed the regularities and tendencies that made these populations significant objects of study, and which they perceived as being the key to a deeper understanding of society.⁴²⁸

Even when after the 1900s the particular foundations of this 'Historical School' were attacked, the collective perspective was not abandoned. From the 1920s onward, economic history began to take an important role in academic historical discourse, caused in no small measure from the latter's recently-gained independence from political and constitutional history and the attack against long-held Whig historiographical ideas.⁴²⁹ In this context, the previous fixation with large groups and institutions retained its appeal. A relevant exception was Eileen Power (1889-1940), lecturer at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and who in 1924 published a short book called *Medieval People*. In it, Power advocated for a more personal approach to social issues, and did so by assuming most of the arguments that Green and Chesterton had utilised against anti-elite historical accounts:

Up to the middle of the last century the chief interest of the historian and of the public alike lay in political and constitutional history, in political events, wars, dynasties, and in political institutions and their development. Substantially, therefore, history concerned itself with the ruling classes. 'Let us now praise famous men', was the historian's motto. He forgot to add 'and our fathers that begat us'. He did not care to probe the obscure lives and activities of the great mass of humanity, upon whose slow toil was built up the prosperity of the world and who were the hidden foundation of the political and constitutional edifice reared by the famous men he praised.

⁴²⁸ Grimmer-Solem and Romani, "In search of full empirical reality", 341.

⁴²⁹ P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 44.

To speak of ordinary people would have been beneath the dignity of history.

Today the new history (...) has come. The present age differs from the centuries before it in its vivid realisation of that much-neglected person the man in the street; or (as it was more often in the earliest ages) the man with the hoe. To-day the historian is interested in the social life of the past and not only in the wars and intrigues of princes. (...) We still praise famous men, for he would be a poor historian who could spare one of the great figures who have shed glory or romance upon the page of history; but we praise them with due recognition of the fact that not only great individuals, but people as a whole, unnamed and undistinguished masses of people, now sleeping in unknown graves, have also been concerned in the story.⁴³⁰

As this fragment of *Medieval People* evidences, Eileen Power took on the same arguments that Green and Chesterton had utilised to criticise previous historiography. To all of them it seemed obvious that history could not be understood simply by paying attention to a few selected individuals and leaving the masses of the people unattended. However, what in Green and Chesterton had resulted in a perspective that emphasised the study of the people as a group and its collective features, Power interpreted as a justification for a more personalised and humanised approach to the commoners. In this regard, the assumption of the historical centrality of the community seems to have led to divergent -and almost opposite- methodological approaches.

Interpretations that stressed the importance of the community both in the past and in the present owed much of its appeal to the general extension of Darwinian arguments applied to societies in the decades around the turn of the century. These tendencies tended to manifest in Britain in two different ways. First, in the portrayal

⁴³⁰ Eileen Power, *Medieval People* (London: Methuen & Co., 1926), 1-2.

of the global system as a competitive arena in which the principle of the survival of the fittest reigned supreme. According to this conception, history told the account of 'the struggle of race with race',⁴³¹ which produced a hierarchy of peoples by endowing them essential characteristics and relative positions in the scale towards civilisation, which often meant Western values and traditions. Darwin himself had recognised this imagined order in *The Descent of Man* (1871), in which he had advanced that even if civilised nations used to not totally eliminate each other in the process of competition, they would in the end be responsible for the extinction of savage races.⁴³² Secondly, Darwinian ideas of natural laws tended to appear in the debates about the alleged internal decay of the British race. Stemming from a perception of this nation/race as an organism of which each national was a constituent part, this line of argumentation went on to assert that, if Britain represented the apex of human development, the British masses also had to rank at the head of natural human progress.⁴³³

Both types of assumption were in reality very close to each other. The main way of remaining 'fit' in the face of constant change involved, invariably, the process of pushing forward the best qualities of the national/racial stock and minimising its weaknesses. Many British intellectuals, when faced with this logic, could not but admit that foreign competition was making it increasingly difficult to present the British as the fittest of peoples; whereas others were 'ever becoming better equipped in the world struggle', they perceived that back home relaxed attitudes threatened 'internal collapse and decay' by deflecting 'vigour and intellectual energy to irrelevant standards and pleasures'.⁴³⁴ As we will expose in chapter VII, these anxieties led some of them to advocate in favour of programs of imperial reconfiguration to ensure British survival and power; others, conversely, directed their efforts towards the

⁴³¹ Karl Pearson, "National Life from the Standpoint of Science" (1900), quoted in Anthony Lyons, "Social Darwinism: an Undercurrent in English Education, 1900-1920" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1996), 20-21.

⁴³² Ray Hall Byrd, "Social Darwinism and British Imperialism, 1870-1900" (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1971), 13.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴³⁴ Charles Frederick Gurney Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), 62.

investigation of eugenics or education, by which they intended to produce new generations of nationals that were more prepared for the challenges posed by the Darwinian model. What is hardly deniable, despite their obvious differences, is that both postures shared the conviction that the reasons behind Britain's problems, as well as their solutions, were tied to the condition of the masses of population.

The interest in Darwinian interpretations and collective subjects owed much to the works of the philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who apart from coining the expression 'survival of the fittest' was also the main advocate in favour of the application of the Darwinian model to the interpretation of society. In his influential *The Study of Sociology* (1873), Spencer pushed forward his idea that societies resembled living organisms, and that therefore the social life of man, and not just his life *qua* animal, were subject to the laws of nature. As he put it,

In the first place, all social actions being determined by the actions of individuals, and all actions of individuals being vital actions that conform to the laws of life at large, a rational interpretation of social actions implies knowledge of the laws of life. In the second place, a society as a whole, considered apart from its living units, present phenomena of growth, structure, and function, like those of growth, structure, and function in an individual body; and these last are needful keys for the first. (...) That there is a real analogy between an individual organism and a social organism, becomes undeniable when certain necessities determining structure are seen to govern them in common.⁴³⁵

By way of this resemblance, Spencer proposed a detachment from the artificial preservation of those incapable and unfit, on the basis that this would lead to the

⁴³⁵ Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), 330.

degeneration of society, both in physical and moral terms.⁴³⁶ The fitness of each individual had, in his opinion, a direct influence on the fitness of the nation as a whole, and thus the way to ensure a beneficial evolution for the people was to eliminate any barrier blocking the fullest application of free competition.⁴³⁷ Although other Darwinist authors, especially Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), felt uncomfortable with the brutal logic of Spencer's dissociation of morality from the evolutionary process, his understanding of society as a basic unit of Darwinian struggle achieved widespread success, both in Britain and abroad. Even Huxley, in his anti-Spencerian lecture *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), did not deny the central role allocated by the latter to large communities and even conceded that 'the influence of the cosmic process of the evolution of society is the greater the more rudimentary its civilisation', thus acknowledging that evolutionary trends affected these groups. However, Huxley did not share the conclusions of Spencer regarding philanthropy and morality and defended, instead, that modern societies ought to evolve their ethical systems against, and not in favour, the principle of the survival of the fittest.⁴³⁸

So, why are all these developments important for our research? They are significant because they evidence the extent to which the idea that change in the world was mostly caused -and most acutely affected- by the masses of population was an already popular one in Britain by the decade of the 1880s thanks to the historical works of authors such as Green and the more general advocacy of Social Darwinist intellectuals. From that moment on, the trend was towards allocating these large groups a greater importance in the historical process, especially by exposing the deficiencies of previous elite discourses. In some cases, such as that of Eileen Power, the notion of the collective importance of the nation could lead, paradoxically, to the emergence of detailed biographies of commoners aimed at providing a more personal

⁴³⁶ Liu Kuan-yen, "The Animal-Human Analogy and the Order of Things: A Comparative Study of Victorian British and Late-Qing Chinese Darwinism(s)" (PhD diss., University of California, 2016), 96.

⁴³⁷ Malcolm Smith, *British Politics, Society, and the State since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke-London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 7-8.

⁴³⁸ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics: Delivered in the Sheldonian Theatre, May 18, 1893* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33.

approach to these masses. However, these strategies remained scarce; in broader terms, the study of large communities as historical subjects -be it in political, social, or economic histories- remained mostly intact. In this context, the national assumption of community experienced a continuous broadening, and increasingly led to the marginalisation of historical studies considered to deal only with the deeds of elites and selected individuals.

As in the case of historical periodisation schemes, the Chinese development of the idea of the nation as a demographically ample group was deeply influenced by the circumstances in which this process took place. Since the mid-nineteenth century, imperial officials had tried to find ways in which to consolidate the Qing empire after the conflictive episodes of the Opium wars and the Taiping rebellion. Most of these intents focused on the introduction of Western technology and weaponry into China and were still framed around centuries-old interpretations of Chinese centrality, even if the example of Meiji Japan was taken as an influential model from the 1870s onwards. This 'Self-Strengthening Movement' (*zhiqiang yundong* 自強運動), that spanned approximately from 1861 up until 1895, emphasised the need of China to build modern shipyards and arsenals, in addition to educational institutions that could train students in the use of modern Western machinery.⁴³⁹ As one of its pioneering and most prominent figures of the movement, Feng Guifeng (1809-1874), explained, this approach to reform did not challenge the traditional supreme stature of the Chinese imperial state: 'what we have to learn from the barbarians is only the one thing, solid ships and effective guns'.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ Jin Xiaoxing, "Translation and Transmutation: The *Origin of the Species* in China", *British Journal for the History of Science* 52, no.1 (2019): 120.

⁴⁴⁰ Feng Guifeng, quoted in Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 120.

In terms of agency, these reformists endowed the task of saving China to governmental elites. Their views make clear that it was the ruling dynasty which had to consolidate the empire and make it strong via the adoption of Western technology, and historical scholarship seemed to support their opinions. According to the classics and to dynastic histories, the decisive action of virtuous and notorious individuals had brought change and benefit to the country in the past, and only with such a guidance could the empire expect to survive its current challenges. Such was the perspective, for instance, of Wang Tao (1828-1897), a reformer during the 1870s and 1880s who framed Chinese history as a series of political and technological breakthroughs effected by the legendary sage rulers and imperial dynasties:

First, Youchao, Suiren, Fuxi, and the Yellow Emperor cleared the wilderness and gave China governmental institutions. Then, Yao and Shun, following in their footsteps, styled China the center of the firmament and provided it with the attributes of civilisation.⁴⁴¹ From the Three Dynasties to the Qin [c.2205 BC-221 BC] there was another complete change and from the Han [206 BC-220 AD] and Tang [618-907] to the present yet another complete change.⁴⁴²

The defeat of the Qing in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 spelled the end of the Self-Strengthening movement. If Wang Tao and his fellow-reformers had previously inquired how China could 'be on par with the great nations of Europe and

⁴⁴¹ The Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, of which Yao and Shun were the last, were a series of semi-historical figures that had allegedly governed China prior to the establishment of the Three Dynasties. Great debates ensued, as we will explain in the next chapter, around the factuality of these figures and their role in early Chinese history.

⁴⁴² Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* (Addition to the collection of writings from Taoyuan 弢園文錄外編, 1883), quoted in Paul A. Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving perspectives on the Chinese past* (London-New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 36.

compare with them in power and strength',⁴⁴³ the question posited by a new generation of intellectuals, shocked by the empire's external setbacks, was much more extreme: how would China survive? While former intents were aimed at ensuring that the country retained its self-proclaimed title as the Middle Kingdom, the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth witnessed the shattering of this belief and the increasing preoccupation of scholars with the 'death of the state and the extinction of the race' (*wangguo miezhong* 亡國滅種).⁴⁴⁴

One of such worried scholars was Yan Fu (1853-1921). Yan had been a student at the Fuzhou Naval College, one of the main hubs for the reception of Western knowledge and technology devised by the Self-Strengthening Movement. In 1877, the young Yan was dispatched, alongside eleven students more, to attend the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, and would only return two years later in order to join the ranks of the instructors of the Fuzhou Naval College, first, and of the Northern China Naval College in Tianjin, after 1880.⁴⁴⁵ As a consequence of his background, Yan Fu was one of the few voices in Chinese intellectual circles with a first-hand knowledge of the West. After the humiliating reverse of the Sino-Japanese War, Yan was certain that it was necessary for China to modernise in more than superficial aspects such as technology or weaponry; instead, the solution for the empire rested on abandoning useless educational traditions that were impractical for the current situation of China, and fostering a better knowledge of what made Westerners powerful, both in material as in political, economic, moral, and organisational ways.⁴⁴⁶ In order to do so, he devoted the following years to deliver translations of fundamental Western texts such as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, John Stuart

⁴⁴³ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* (Addition to the collection of writings from Taoyuan 弢園文錄外編, 1883), quoted in *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, eds. William Theodore De Bary and Richard Lufrano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 253.

⁴⁴⁴ James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (New York-Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30.

⁴⁴⁵ Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 122.

⁴⁴⁶ Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2000), 586.

Mill's *On Liberty*, Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois*, or Edward Jenks' *History of Politics*.⁴⁴⁷ However, his most famous undertaking was the introduction of Darwinian thought into China via the works of Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer, and was this aspect of his production which would have the deepest impact on the historical consciousness of his fellow scholars.

It is true that a few mentions to diverse aspects of the Darwinian thought had already been published in some reform-oriented newspapers in the treaty-ports since at least the early 1870s. These fragments usually stressed the notion of the shared origin of man and animal and seem to have exerted a very minor influence on the general public.⁴⁴⁸ However, what prompted Yan to translate Darwinian works was not this interest on the biological foundations of the theory of evolution or its implications for the conception of man and its relationship with the animal world. His preoccupation was the survival of China, and thus his research sought to find in Darwinian competitive evolutionism some notion that could explain why some peoples were strong while others were weak.⁴⁴⁹ For this reason, he did not translate *The Origin of the Species* for his introduction the Darwinian theory to China, and opted instead for focusing on the Social Darwinist approach of Huxley and, especially, Spencer.

From 1895 on, Yan increasingly slipped references to Darwinian concepts in his texts. After having tried to introduce some of Spencer's scripts, Yan Fu abandoned them -he felt that they could 'not be hastily translated'⁴⁵⁰- and turned instead to what would be his most successful work: *On Evolution* (*Tianyan lun* 天演論, lit. The Theory of Heavenly Evolution), a translation and commentary of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* circulated in manuscript since at least 1896 and which was

⁴⁴⁷ Yang Dayong, "Yan Fu's Philosophy of Evolution and the Thought of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi", *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* 24, no.1 (1992): 56.

⁴⁴⁸ Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 121.

⁴⁴⁹ Liu, "The Animal-Human Analogy and the Order of Things", 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Yan Fu, quoted in Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 98.

finally published in 1898. The book rapidly gained immense popularity, with more than thirty editions published in the following years and fundamentally influencing the thought of hundreds of scholars and students.⁴⁵¹ It seems paradoxical that Yan Fu, who was interested in introducing Social Darwinian theories, and especially Herbert Spencer's doctrine about the natural law of competition and the survival of the fittest applied to humans, would choose one of the major critics of the Spencerian moral approach for his first thorough translation. But, as in his other renditions of Western texts, Yan's was no mere transcription, and his approach to translation, his selection of words, and the neologism he came up with all fundamentally shaped the meaning of his versions and the ways in which these works were received and interpreted by Chinese scholars and intellectuals.⁴⁵² In the case of the *Tianyan lun*, his translation reads as an Spencerian criticism of Huxley's perspectives merged with Yan's own takes on the debate, which constituted close to half of the total extension of the book.⁴⁵³

In the preface to the text, Yan praised Huxley for creating 'a theory on the basis of the theory of the natural transformation of things through natural evolution (*tianyan* 天演)' and for having succeeded 'in joining the realms of Heaven, Earth, and humankind with the same principle'. This directive was simple: 'species (...) compete with one another for survival, and only the most optimal remain standing. So it is with animals and plant life; so, too, shall it be with government and systems of education or religion'.⁴⁵⁴ Yan Fu went on to explain that this new theory by Huxley (or at least, which Yan presented as Huxley's) was not unheard of in China and was in accord with the teaching of the ancient Chinese sages. He cited Sun Zi, author of *The Art of War*, and explained that this sage had exposed 'that man is nobler than all

⁴⁵¹ Yang Haiyan, "Knowledge Across Borders: the Early Communication of Evolution in China" in *The Circulation of Knowledge between Britain, India and China: The Early-Modern World to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Bernard Lightman, Gordon McOuat and Larry Stewart (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 197. Also, Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 125.

⁴⁵² James Reeve Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 64.

⁴⁵³ Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 123-124.

⁴⁵⁴ Yan Fu, *Tianyan Lu* (On Evolution 天演論, 1898), quoted in Yang, "Yan Fu's Philosophy of Evolution", 76-77.

the animals because he can group (*qun* 群), and that it was this ability to group which made him strong.⁴⁵⁵ Following Spencer's idea of society as a living organism, Yan Fu inferred that if the Chinese would strengthen themselves morally and materially they would be able to produce a stronger *qun* -a united group or collective- that, in turn, could succeed in the struggle for existence.⁴⁵⁶ Looking as he was for useful knowledge to improve China's international situation, he did not entertain the thought that this competition could have been already decided. Quite the contrary, as he was certain that if the right actions were taken and the principle of the survival of the fittest was thoroughly applied, it was possible to avoid the 'death of the state and the extinction of the race'.⁴⁵⁷ As a result, the theory of Darwinian evolution was transformed in his hands into a motivator for deep reform that stressed the survival of the *qun* and superseded the interest of individuals to this overarching cause.⁴⁵⁸

Yan Fu's introduction of Darwinism had the fundamental consequence of framing the debate about China's survival in terms of a collective agency. 'If a people is stupid and afraid, with each individual out for himself, then its *qun* will fall apart, and, if a *qun* that is falling apart meets a people that is fierce and has much knowledge, that loves its country and protects its race, then at very best it will be enslaved; at worst -it will be exterminated'.⁴⁵⁹ Therefore, this led him to the conclusion that it was necessary to 'take the people's might, knowledge, and virtue' as the standard by which any measure taken to reform China ought to be evaluated: 'whatever will advance these three things we must carry out with all our strength. Whatever is to their detriment we must abolish'.⁴⁶⁰ This collectivisation of agency was similarly transposed to historical thought, which would make Yan Fu criticise the role played

⁴⁵⁵ Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 63.

⁴⁵⁶ Yang, "Knowledge Across Borders", 190.

⁴⁵⁷ Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 141. Also, Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 69.

⁴⁵⁸ Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 71.

⁴⁵⁹ Yan Fu, quoted in Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 65.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

by the ancient sages in the evolutionary progress of the nation. In the next chapter we will deal with the implications that this attack had for the downfall of the officially sanctioned tradition and the imperial ideology, but Yan's portrayal of the agency of the people also contributed to expanding the protagonism allotted to the people in historical accounts. For instance, he explained, following Western contractual theories such as Rousseau's, that it had been the people which had first discovered agriculture, the production of tools, and trade without the intercession of any sage. Analogously, the establishment of the first government had been the product of a contract signed by the commoners, and Yan went as far as to suggest that a ruler ought to be deposed if he could not protect the people.⁴⁶¹

The notions exposed in *Tianyan lun* and other works by Yan Fu conduced to a series of difficult questions. As we have seen, he had brought Darwinian thought in the hope that it would help in making China strong and had identified that the recipe for this progress was to be found in the improvement of the group. There was one question, however, that many scholars would ask themselves after reading Yan's theories: how was it possible that China, with its own long-history of empire and power, had become unfit and weak in comparison to Westerners? Had the *qun* been frail since its conception, or had it been deteriorated by harmful internal or external influences? To scholars in late Qing times, finding an answer for this question was not simply an exercise on historical causality nor an enterprise motivated by curiosity; it was a matter of the utmost importance for the survival of China. For, if the causes that had made the Chinese unfit could not be grasped, how could there be any chance of reforming the *qun* adequately and bringing it back to strength?

The practice of historical recording in China had never been interested in the masses as more than a receptacle for benevolent or damaging influences, be them from sages and moralists or from imperial dynasties. For this reason, when intellectuals trained in traditional scholarship turned to history in search of explanations for the weak state of the Chinese *qun* or united collective, they suddenly realised that they could find little that satisfied their interest. Official histories, with

⁴⁶¹ Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformations of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 85.

their focus on rulers and prominent individuals, seemed to have completely missed the point of what Yan Fu had told the Chinese were the true foundations of society and inter-human relationships. To some, as we will see, this served as the irrefutable evidence of the necessity of producing a new historical practice if China was to survive.

In 1902, the intellectual Liang Qichao, exiled in Japan after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform program led by his mentor Kang Youwei in 1898, published a manifesto in which he stressed the necessity of a major historiographical revolution in China. Although many of Liang's ideas were heavily indebted to authors of 'civilisational history' from Meiji Japan such as Ukita Kazutami (1859-1946), it is undeniable that they were also responses to China's own internal debates stemming from Yan Fu's work.⁴⁶² The article, titled 'New Historiography' (*Xin shixue* 新史學), was a direct attack against the official historical tradition that had been developed in imperial China for centuries. Over the long years of their uncritical application, these practices had given birth, in Liang's opinion, to four key inadequacies that prevented them from being useful for the present situation of China. The first one was that they equated dynasty with nation:

As we often say: the twenty-four [dynastic] histories are not histories; they are the family genealogies of twenty-four surnames, and that is all. Perhaps this saying is a bit excessive. But, taken in light of the true spirit of those who make history, in fact it is not a baseless allegation. The historians of our country are under the impression that all-under-heaven is the property of one: the ruler. This is why they are the subject of history. But how is any such dynasty won? How is governance established? How is the dynasty lost? These things you'll never

⁴⁶² Q. Edward Wang, "Narrating the Nation: Meiji Historiography, New History Textbooks, and the Disciplinarization of History in China", in *Transforming History: The Making of a Modern Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 117-118.

hear a hint of. [...] For all those who have written histories all take the lords of the dynastic courts as their liege, to whom they are subservient. There has never been a book written for the nation.⁴⁶³

The whole discussion about the orderly succession of dynasties, the dynastic cycle, the judgemental portrayal of heroes and villains: all these central topics seemed to Liang simple anecdotes that could not help the Chinese make sense of their past nor their present as a *qun*.

The second main flaw of traditional histories according to Liang was that they focused on individuals, instead of on society. Although he acknowledged that 'few histories can do without heroes', he criticised Chinese historians for having taken these characters as the subjects of their accounts. Because of that, their histories resembled 'a collection of countless tomb inscriptions'.⁴⁶⁴ How different it was in Western historiography, continued Liang, where they utilised such characters 'as material' by which to represent their epochs and societies. These foreign scholars had grasped the true significance of history – 'to describe the interactions, competitions, and coming together of a group of people' – and therefore had produced accounts that had helped in fostering a sense of patriotism towards their communities.

The third inadequacy was that Chinese historians had not produced a knowledge about the past that could be useful for future readers. In this regard, for instance, Liang criticised the practice of prohibiting the writing of a dynasty's history until it had been deposed. As a consequence, the most recent centuries, which to Liang were the most necessary ones to thoroughly analyse and comprehend, were paradoxically the most unknown. This related to the last major flaw of imperial

⁴⁶³ Liang Qichao, "Xin Shixue" ("New Historiography" 新史學, 1902), 4-5, trans. Maura Dykstra and Devin Fitzgerald, accessed 07/09/2020, https://www.academia.edu/35963418/Translation_A_New_Study_of_History_%E6%96%B0%E5%8F%B2%E5%AD%B8_by_Liang_Qichao.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

historical practice; that is, that it only dealt with facts, and provided little explanatory principles and ideas that could help in making sense of the passing of time. The combination of these factors resulted in accounts that were difficult to read, difficult to understand, and which ultimately failed in exciting patriotism and inspiring 'the masses to unite, which must be behind any action taken today to place China upon the stage of nations'.⁴⁶⁵

Having presented the flaws of traditional historiography, Liang Qichao went on to propose the tasks that a new approach to historiography ought to tackle. First and foremost, it had to contribute to the survival of the Chinese group:

In this day and age we must strive to promote national-ethnic interests. How can our millions of compatriots establish themselves and take a stand in this world of competition of the fittest? There must be education in the nation's history. So that truly no elder, no youth, no boy, no girl, no intellectual, no ignoramus, no sage, no wicked man, in the conduct of affairs, may [fail to] see it as nourishment and sustenance. Not even a moment can be delayed. (...) Alas! If the field of history cannot muster a revolution, then truly we are without hope. Of all the myriad affairs, this is uniquely important.⁴⁶⁶

In order to achieve this goal, history had to be focused on what was most important for the *qun*. In Liang's words, it ought to describe the phenomena that constituted the evolution of a society by looking for deep principles and explanations; in this he followed Yan Fu, who in turn was inspired by his reading of Spencer. Because an individual's life was so short, little change could be found within a single lifetime; only if we focused on society as a whole could we perceive human

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

progress.⁴⁶⁷ In this sense, a person's actions and relations were only important to the extent to which they 'influence the dynamics of a society' as members of an Spencerian social organism.

But Liang's project for a new history of China also included an international dimension in which history had to describe 'the development and competition of the races of mankind'.⁴⁶⁸ As he stated, there existed two types of races: races with history (similar to what Hegel had labelled 'world historical races') and races without history.⁴⁶⁹ Races with history, because they could unite, became stronger over time and dominated those peoples who could not group. Liang identified that there existed only two races with history, the yellows and the whites. According to his classification, the yellow race would comprise the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, the Mongoloid nomads of northern Asia and Turkish, Hungarians, and other yellow peoples of Europe, whereas the white race, on the other hand, was divided among three great groups: the Hamitic (Egyptians), Semitic, and Aryans, the latter of which was made up of Latin, Celtic, Teuton, and Slavic peoples.⁴⁷⁰ However, these two large groups were not equal, and Liang admitted that certain peoples had been capable of influencing the whole world and aid in the development and progress of others. In this regard, he conceded that only the colonialist and imperialist Aryan states of the West had possessed this kind of true historical significance.⁴⁷¹ Taking this categorisation as the foundation, he went on to offer a broad Eurocentric account in which the torch of civilisation had been transmitted between groups of the white race until the present, when it rested with the Teutons and the Slavs.

Liang's approach thus comprised two distinct yet interrelated projects: For one, it aimed at transforming China's history into the history of the Chinese nation by

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶⁹ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 11.

⁴⁷⁰ Liang, "Xin Shixue", 21,

⁴⁷¹ Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 77.

stressing the role played by the community at large: '[f]or history does not record the actions of one man, or the affairs of one house. It must bring together the actions, the changes, the evolution, the digressions of an entire people, and illuminate the reasons behind them'.⁴⁷² History, Liang believed, was produced by the action of the masses, not by that of virtuous or wicked individuals, and thus historians ought to stress this point by explaining the deep reasons behind the 'progress and stagnation' of the *qun*. But, at the same time, his proposal also intended to re-position this national history within a broader narrative of international evolutionism and competition, in which the races of mankind were described to struggle incessantly. In such interpretation, only when the people at large took full responsibility for China's future and stopped blaming individual rulers and ministers for their current circumstances there would be any chance of overcoming the enormous challenges faced by the country. In other words, only with the union and strengthening of the community, fostered by this new history, could there be any chance of survival for the Chinese. The rest, Liang thought, was to utterly miss the point.

Although Liang himself did not write a history of China based on the principles of the new historiography, in the years after the publication of his manifesto more and more historians paid attention to his ideas and became influenced by them. For instance, late Qing history textbooks, although still framed around the dynastic cycle and the deeds of prominent rulers and generals, increasingly implied the existence of a nation distinct from the dynasty and that had evolved over time without directly acknowledging it.⁴⁷³ Surprisingly, such politically-centred accounts continued being prevalent among early Republican textbook authors up until the 1920s, even if they tended to pay a closer attention to cultural history.⁴⁷⁴ As we have observed when dealing with historical periodisation patterns, early Republican historical accounts

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁷³ Peter Zarrow, "The New Schools and National Identity: Chinese History Textbooks in the Late Qing", in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, eds. Tze-ki Hon and Robert J. Culp (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 32-33.

⁴⁷⁴ Peter Zarrow, "Discipline and Narrative: Chinese History Textbooks in the Early Twentieth Century", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 195.

were often situated between two disparate interpretative schemes: for one, they intended to present the stages of evolutionary progress of the social and cultural community; on the other hand, they still framed these stages according to previous frameworks of dynastical periodisation. To some extent, this also fragmented the sense of continuity of the portrayed Chinese nation.⁴⁷⁵

In addition to this, most of these materials also supported a notion of international society defined as a Darwinian contest between races. As such, it was not uncommon to find interpretations like the following one in primary school readers:

Mankind is divided into five races. The yellow and white races are relatively strong and intelligent. Because the other races are feeble and stupid, they are being exterminated by the white race. Only the yellow race competes with the white race. This is so-called evolution [...] Among the contemporary races that could be called superior, there are only the yellow and the white races. China is the yellow race.⁴⁷⁶

Textbooks during the first two decades of the Republic also followed Liang's tale of 'Europeanisation', by which European civilisation had become the standard and direction of historical development. Although these paradigms, as in the case of Liang's, offered the Chinese a possibility of catching up with European powers, they

⁴⁷⁵ Robert J. Culp, "'China-The Land and its People': Fashioning Identity in Secondary School History Textbooks, 1911-1937", *Twentieth Century China* 26, no.2 (2001): 24.

⁴⁷⁶ Hien-Hien (1921), quoted in Frank Dikötter, "Racial Discourse in China: Continuities and Permutations", in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, ed. Frank Dikötter (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 21.

simultaneously entailed the risk of making them despise and abandon their own cultural tradition.⁴⁷⁷

Yan Fu's and Liang's contribution to the historical debates and perceptions of late Qing and Republican China can hardly be overstressed. Motivated by their search for the causes of China's weakness and for solutions to it, these authors introduced Darwinian evolutionism as an all-embracing interpretation of the world and of the nation's role in it. The community, the *qun*, became the main subject of historical progress; a shift also propitiously supported by the timely translation of John Richard Green's *A Short History of the English People* during the late 1890s, which provided, alongside other similar Western and Japanese histories, useful examples for Chinese national accounts.⁴⁷⁸ The focus on collective subjects, defined in ethnic, cultural, or racial terms, became increasingly prevalent in historical discourse during Republican times. For example, Fu Sinian's 1918 claim, presented in the previous chapter, in which he defended that it was the rise and fall of the Han (Chinese) ethnicity which seemed 'to bring the quintessence of the change of China's history to the fore' met with widespread support among other historians.⁴⁷⁹ Similarly, Liu Yizheng's *History of the Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhua shi* 中國文化史, 1928), the first of its kind to be produced by a Chinese author and a widely read book during the 1930s and 1940s, also defended that the 'Chinese national character' (*guomin xing* 國民性) had resulted from a creative 'big grouping' (*daqun* 大群) of previously disparate communities.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Robert J. Culp, "'Weak and Small Peoples' in a 'Europeanizing World': World History Textbooks and Chinese Intellectuals' Perspectives on Global Modernity", in Hon and Culp, *The Politics of Historical Production*, 212.

⁴⁷⁸ Wang, "Narrating the Nation", 115.

⁴⁷⁹ Fu Sinian, "Zhongguo lishi fenqi zhi yanjiu" (Analysis of the periodisation of China's History 中國歷史分期之研究, 1918), quoted in Julia C. Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity: Chinese Discourses on History, Historiography, and Nationalism (1900s-1920s)* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 291.

⁴⁸⁰ Tze-ki Hon, *The Allure of the Nation: The Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 88. Also, Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 33.

Such a preoccupation with the group and its conditions would go on to fundamentally affect most political and historiographical debates during the following decades, and to frame the positions of a multitude of intellectuals and ideologies, from the radical reformers of the New Culture movement to the traditionalist authors of the National Essence circle. But once the importance of the group as a crucial element to understand historical and political advancement was thus emphasised, the question of what group this referred to could not be side-lined any longer.

b. The bond of the nation

The process of defining the community ran parallel to the latter's gaining of importance as a historical subject. Authors who emphasised the role played by the people in the past and the present, unsurprisingly, could not but be bothered to explain, albeit superficially, what group they were discussing. However, a nation could not be imagined in whatever way; as Liang Qichao had exposed in one of his reformist articles, '[t]here must be something that runs through a group and ties it together before the actuality of a group can appear'.⁴⁸¹ Something ought to unite the people, a deep historically produced connection, that justified speaking about it as a unique and continuous historical subject. Both in Britain and in China, the constraints and limitations that this necessity imposed paved the way to particular approaches that stressed the common features of the group while underlining the differences between it and other peoples. We will discuss here only a handful of the most significant trends that tried to provide an answer to these issues, and the impact these had on the historical consciousness of both societies.

⁴⁸¹ Liang Qichao, "Xinmin shuo" (Discourse on the New Citizen 新民說, 1902), quoted in Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 238.

Two of the most publicised strategies for group-definition in Britain in the last decades of the nineteenth century were Anglo-Saxonism and Teutonism. The first one presented the nation's development as having been fundamentally shaped by the racial character of the Anglo-Saxon peoples that occupied Britain in the wake of Roman withdrawal from the island. Teutonism, on its part and in narrow connection with the latter, linked the virtues of this group with its belonging to the family of the German races, of which it was frequently portrayed as the utmost example.⁴⁸²

Although Anglo-Saxonism certainly took a racial meaning, in terms of biological and physiological sense, it was also often enlarged to include all peoples of English blood or descent.⁴⁸³ Because of that it could usually make reference, apart from Britain, to the United States and to the settler colonies of Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand, and was constructed as a discourse of privilege, in which its members typically occupied the apex of categories such as racial quality, civilisational achievement, or territorial expansion. Influenced by German historians and folklorists such as Friedrich von Savigny (1779-1861) or Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), Anglo-Saxonist historians, politicians, and intellectuals went on to underscore the importance of racial development, as well as the significance of language, custom, and political institutions.

At least from the mid-nineteenth century there had already existed a trend towards interpreting the racial qualities of these Anglo-Saxon peoples as a crucial element for the development of English uniqueness. Thus, for instance, the prominent historian Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859) explained in 1848 that 'the mixture of three branches of the great Teutonic family [Anglo-Saxon, Danish, and Norman] with each

⁴⁸² Maïke Oergel, "The redeeming Teuton: nineteenth-century notions of the 'Germanic' in England and Germany", in *Imagining Nations*, ed. Geoffrey Cubitt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 76.

⁴⁸³ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 206.

other, and with the original Britons' had given way to the appearance of 'a people inferior to none existing in the world'.⁴⁸⁴ However, as can be observed, although he stressed the importance of these Germanic peoples in the production of the English nation, Macaulay did not totally relegate the Britons out of the picture. From his perspective, it was the particular mixture of these different lineages that lay at the heart of the English nation's unique development.

Once the revolutionary cycle of 1848 was over, and radical socio-political movements such as Chartism were weakened, to emphasise the existence of essential Anglo-Saxon liberties became less problematic for conservative and non-revolutionary intellectuals. From this moment on, this idea was progressively transformed from a source of criticism against the current political system into a legitimising discourse aimed at naturalising the constitutional *statu quo*.⁴⁸⁵

However, it was the Oxford historians of the last decades of the century who gave widespread strength to such interpretations. Edward Augustus Freeman's monumental and multivolume *A History of the Norman Conquest* (1867), for instance, provided an account of the extirpation of Celt influences and their total substitution by Anglo-Saxon traditions by the end of the sixth century.⁴⁸⁶ In his model, the native race had been thoroughly replaced by that of the Teutonic invaders.⁴⁸⁷ Freeman would re-edit a smaller version of his work in 1880, following the trend of single-volume histories popular in late-Victorian times, and this made his interpretations of early-medieval English history more accessible for students and for the wider public. In this *Short History of the Norman Conquest* Freeman held firm to his belief in that the Norman Conquest of 1066 had not represented a break with the essential character of the Anglo-Saxon race. As he explained,

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas Macaulay, *History of England* (1848), quoted in Oergel, "The redeeming Teuton", 82-83.

⁴⁸⁵ Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, 90-91.

⁴⁸⁶ Schuyler, "John Richard Green and his *Short History*", 343-344.

⁴⁸⁷ Simon John Cook, "The Making of the English: English History, British Identity, Aryan Villages, 1870-1914", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no.4 (2014): 636.

It might have seemed at the time that the English people had altogether lost their national life, their freedom, their laws, their language, and everything that was theirs. But in truth the Norman Conquest, which at the time seemed to destroy all these things, has actually preserved to us all these things -except our language- more perfectly than we could have kept them if the Norman Conquest never happened.⁴⁸⁸

The conservation of the old Anglo-Saxon traditions via the action of the Normans allowed Freeman to maintain that it the crucial features of the latter -their laws, institutions, and customs- were what had ultimately defined the unique development of English history. 'All the changes', he wrote, 'have been really returns, under new forms, to our oldest ways of all'.⁴⁸⁹ Anglo-Saxon qualities, rejuvenated and preserved by the intrusion of the Normans –a 'kindred nation' in Freeman's terms⁴⁹⁰- had paved the way for the subsequent constitutional and national advancement of England.

Such an interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon period and the Norman Conquest was seamlessly connected with Freeman's broader ideas about history as a whole. Almost a decade earlier, following Hegel, he had stressed the world-spanning importance of the Teutonic race. Like the Greeks and the Romans before them, this group had 'reached the highest stage alike of power and civilisation'.⁴⁹¹ And, if it was the Teutons who finally had risen at the head of the rest of the Aryans, it seemed only natural to Freeman that it was the English which were most successful among the

⁴⁸⁸ Edward Augustus Freeman, *A Short History of the Norman Conquest of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880), 134.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁹¹ Edward Augustus Freeman, lectures on *Comparative Politics* (1873), quoted in Oergel, "The redeeming Teuton", 83.

Teutons themselves. No other people among them could display such a continuous existence, as no radical changes had affected its natural and gradual development. Language and law, the two great symbols of national identity according to Romantic standards, could hardly have supported better Freeman's conviction in the racial purity of the inhabitants of England. 'When the Englishman kneels before his God', he acknowledged in 1888,

when he bows before his king, when he weds his bride, when he greets his friend, when he welcomes his child into the world or follows his father to the grave, he still speaks the speech of the old days and needs not to borrow a word from any tongue beyond the sea. The law of England is still the old law, the law which our fathers brought with them; it has changed indeed not a little through the growth of the other laws beside it, but it has never been put aside for the law of any other people'.⁴⁹²

Freeman was not alone in his assumptions. John Richard Green, the author of the best-selling *Short History of the English People* and an Oxford historian like Freeman, shared in the same broad Anglo-Saxonist principles as him. When his account faced him with the problematic question of exposing the origins of the English people, Green decided to by-pass the British Isles altogether and chose to focus on describing the settlements of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in far-off Saxony instead. Like Freeman, he referred to this land as 'Old England': a place where the Englishmen (as he labelled them) lived within a 'political and social organisation which must have been that of the German race to which they belonged'.⁴⁹³ He went on then to explain how, in the following centuries after the arrival of these peoples to Britain, the

⁴⁹² Edward Augustus Freeman (1888), quoted in Marilyn Lake, "'Essentially Teutonic": E.A. Freeman, liberal race historian. A transnational perspective", in *Race, nation and empire: making histories, 1750 to the present*, eds. Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 62.

⁴⁹³ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 2.

primordial qualities of the racial character of the Anglo-Saxons had remained mostly untouched. Although it was possible that a few elements of the vanquished native race had co-existed with the Anglo-Saxon invaders and had even superficially affected their language and customs, it seemed undeniable to Green that the main result of the invasions had been that the 'English conqueror reigned without a rival from Essex to the Severn, and from the British Channel to Firth of Forth'.⁴⁹⁴ Unlike elsewhere in Europe, where the age of migrations had resulted in the mixing of the invaders with the already settled populations, England was 'the one purely German nation that rose upon the wreck of Rome'.⁴⁹⁵

The rest of *The Short History* followed on the whole the Anglo-Saxonist outline we have observed at work with Freeman. Like him, Green also believed that the English were the purest out of all the Teutonic peoples, and that the successive invasions and migrations that had taken place during the first centuries of Anglo-Saxon presence in Britain up until the Norman Conquest had done little to change their racial stock. In his view, these struggles had been battles 'no longer between men of different races', but fights between members of the 'same people in blood and speech', and as a consequence their effect had not been the dissolution of the racial purity of the Anglo-Saxons and their customs, but their reinvigoration and temperance through continuous struggle.⁴⁹⁶

Both Green and Freeman's success and reputation, as well as their frequent inclusion in school reading lists, did much to extend the Anglo-Saxonist interpretation of the history of England among a whole generation of historians and students. Unlike previous Whig historiography, this new model emphasised a racialised sense of the national community, in which Englishness became increasingly defined in terms of a historically traceable racial stock.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁹⁷ Lake, "'Essentially Teutonic'", 70.

Such a perspective on English identity was often reproduced during the last decades of the nineteenth century, both within the academia and in materials aimed at the greater public. William Stubbs, the well-known constitutional historian, recognised in his most famous work that the English were 'people of German descent in the main constituents of blood, character, and language' and that this was most important for constitutional history because they had originally possessed 'the elements of primitive German civilisation and the common germs of German institutions'.⁴⁹⁸ As he summarised, after having evaluated and compared the distinct and branching progress made by the various peoples of Teutonic origin all over Europe, if the history of the English people was 'not the perfectly pure development of Germanic principles, it [was] the nearest existing approach to such development'.⁴⁹⁹ Louise Creighton (1850-1936), author of a history of England directed at school students, similarly exposed the main arguments of Anglo-Saxonism under the heading 'Our German Forefathers':

We belong to the German peoples. Whilst the Romans were ruling in our land [Britain], our forefathers, the English, were living in the northern part of Germany round the mouth of the river Elbe. They were called Angles and Saxons then, and the name English is the same as the name Angle. They were a free folk, who had never been conquered by the Romans, and, like English people ever since, cared more for their freedom than for anything else.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development. Vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), 2.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰⁰ Louise Creighton, *A First History of England* (London: Rivingtons, 1881), 14-15.

Freedom bred on racial descent, correspondence between Anglo-Saxons and Englishmen, and uninterrupted continuity: those were the three fundamental elements that were manifest in Teutonic interpretations of English history.

In some cases, the influence of racial character upon the historical development of the nation was thought to have been attenuated by external factors, such as geographical or climactic determinants. An 1894 national history stated that it was 'the national traits inherited from ancestral races and the tendencies impressed by the physical features of the country [which] give to a people its peculiar character'.⁵⁰¹ In the case of the English, for instance, the geographical location of the British islands, almost inaccessible to invaders but not wholly cut off from neighbouring lands, was what had provided the Anglo-Saxons with 'the rare privilege of a free and natural race development'.⁵⁰² In other cases, the ambition of establishing a too-direct continuity between the Anglo-Saxons and the modern Englishmen gave way to paradoxical statements. One *Elementary History of England* (1908) written by the medievalist Thomas Frederick Tout indicated that the language spoken by the first Anglo-Saxon invaders was 'very different from the English which is used nowadays' because it had 'changed more than most' and that therefore it had to be learnt like a foreign speech in order to be understood; at the same time and in spite of this, it went on to proclaim that it 'remained the same tongue'.⁵⁰³ In general, and these nuances notwithstanding, the idea that the qualities and history of England could be explained in accord to the features of the racial descent of its population became a widespread one.

An interesting aspect of this turn-of-the-century Anglo-Saxonism was its focus on the local and popular, influenced by the works of German historians and folklorists. It was no longer clear to these authors that Parliament or the high court were the *locus* in which Teutonic virtues were best exemplified; on the contrary, historians became increasingly attracted to the study of local institutions such as 'the

⁵⁰¹ Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 9.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁰³ Thomas Frederick Tout and James Sullivan, *An Elementary History of England* (New York-London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 9-10.

hundred, the shire, the folk-moot and the village community' in which the fundamental elements of English freedom were supposed to reside.⁵⁰⁴ The constitutional order of England, it was thought, had evolved from 'the traditions of the shire-moot or the Witenagemot⁵⁰⁵, where men met to consult together': the Parliament, in this understanding, was but an outgrowth of the spirit of the race for self-government on a larger scale.⁵⁰⁶

Historical interpretations were often buttressed by the novel and popular approach provided by Darwinian sociology. Among these, Benjamin Kidd's (1858-1916) *Social Evolution* (1894) best embodied how Teutonic ideals could be translated into the fields of biology and Darwinian evolutionism.⁵⁰⁷ In his view, the German peoples possessed certain essential qualities -a combination of individualism and religious and ethical superiority- which had rendered them better suited than other groups in terms of social efficiency.⁵⁰⁸ In the present age, Kidd's contemporaries were witnessing how the Anglo-Saxons -a people famous for their 'political genius'⁵⁰⁹- were 'overflowing [their] boundaries, going forth to take possession of new territories, and establishing [themselves] like [their] ancestors in many lands'. This, he asserted, was but a result of the principle of the survival of the fittest.⁵¹⁰

Anglo-Saxonist interpretations of English history also modelled similar Anglo-Saxon conceptualisations of English spatiality. This, in an empire which

⁵⁰⁴ Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 205-206.

⁵⁰⁵ The shire-moot was an Anglo-Saxon institution, tasked with the maintenance of order and tax recollection at the local level. The Witenagemot, on its part, was an advisory assembly that helped the king in the administration of the kingdom.

⁵⁰⁶ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England From the Earliest Times to the Death of King Edward VII. Vol I: B.C. 55-A.D.1509* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 88.

⁵⁰⁷ Byrd, "Social Darwinism and British Imperialism", 85.

⁵⁰⁸ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The history of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2006), 120.

⁵⁰⁹ Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (New York-London: Macmillan & Co., 1894), 299-300.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

boasted territories in every continent, populated by peoples catalogued as members of different racial descents, language families, and religious traditions was bound to result in problematic assertions. To determine who was a member of the group and who was not, and to define the relationship between this community and others -both in the past and in the present- became an inescapable task of Anglo-Saxonist intellectuals.

First there were a series of projects that aimed at the foundation of a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon state, a Greater Britain, that would comprise the imperial metropolis as well as the settler colonies of Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand. At the same time, this idea was also constructed as a 'racial-exceptionalist bridge' that connected the United States and Britain as the two main representatives of the race.⁵¹¹ These notions were widely supported by the intellectual ties that linked political, professional, and academic elites at both sides of the Atlantic and which allowed these discourses to be extended via joined publishing ventures and institutions. We will discuss these projects in more detail in chapter VII.

But Anglo-Saxonism raised issues within the British Isles as well. England, and maybe the Scottish Lowlands, were the only territories that could boast a convincing claim over the inheritance of the Anglo-Saxon race, whereas Irish, Welsh, and Scots, identified with the Celtic group, were excluded from sharing in the qualities that nineteenth century intellectuals attached to the Anglo-Saxons.⁵¹² Once it was clear, contrary to what was once believed, that the Celts were not a branch of the Teutons, to provide an explanation as to how the most advanced and successful among the German nations had come to share its archipelago with these inferior groups became an inescapable question.

Yet the strategy that most Anglo-Saxonist utilised was not to address the matter, but quite the opposite. British histories of the period became, almost without

⁵¹¹ Paul A. Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880-1910", *The Journal of American History* 88, no.4 (2002): 1326.

⁵¹² Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 207.

exception, histories of England: that is, they adopted a very Anglocentric point of view, which historically followed the gradual expansion of the English over their neighbour populations.⁵¹³ From this perspective, the unification of the British Isles under England's control was presented not merely as a historically traceable, but also as a natural and desirable process.⁵¹⁴

A prominent manifestation of this was the common confusion, existent even today, between the terms 'English' and 'British'. Nineteenth and early-twentieth century historians seem to have paid little attention to this, constantly interchanging their references to England and to Britain - or to the English and the British, to the Anglo-Saxons and the British- as different names for the same country. A superficial look to histories which, in their scope, aimed at accounting for the history of the British, reveals that most of them made reference to England and the English: *A Short History of the English People* by Green, *The Constitutional History of England* by Stubbs, James Franck Bright's multivolume *A History of England*, *A Student's History of England* by Samuel Rawson Gardiner, or Trevelyan's *A History of England* are only but a few famous examples of this trend. In comparison, texts like Masterman's *A History of the British Constitution* are remarkable for their relative exceptionality. As David Cannadine has summarised, these historians took England as their subject, whereas 'the history of Britain was merely the history of England as and when it took place elsewhere'.⁵¹⁵

As British became an alternative name for English, and as the Anglo-Saxon subject was transformed into the protagonist of British history, England's voice -or at least a historical voice from England's perspective- became the dominant one in

⁵¹³ David Cannadine, "British History as a new Subject: Politics, perspectives and prospects", in Grant and Stringer, *Uniting the Kingdom?*, 16

⁵¹⁴ Keith Robbins, "An imperial and multinational polity", in Grant and Stringer, *Uniting the Kingdom?*, 245.

⁵¹⁵ Cannadine, "British History as a new Subject", 16.

British historical discourse.⁵¹⁶ As a History reader claimed in 1901, 'the English were different from the three other peoples [Scots, Welsh, and Irish], who were all a good deal alike, and some of the differences between them continue to this day'.⁵¹⁷ The result of this approach was that these other groups only featured in these accounts in relation to the action of the English and were evaluated and interpreted according to English values and criteria.

The Scottish case is paradigmatic in this regard. As far back as the eighteenth century, historical accounts produced in Scotland had already accepted the inferiority and uselessness of the Scottish past in comparison to England's constitutional development.⁵¹⁸ Enlightenment Scottish intellectuals, such as David Hume, rejected the notion that there existed any benefit in studying Scotland's history, a reason why he may have decided to rename his 'History of Great Britain' into a 'History of England'. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the explanation to these historical limitations of the Scots in comparison to the English were attributed to religious and symbolic factors which had chained the Scottish imagination.⁵¹⁹

However, as Anglo-Saxonist interpretations became more widespread in England, and the idea of Teutonic freedom came to be more associated with racial arguments, many historians both in England and Scotland advocated a new racial construction of Scottish identity. According to it, the inhabitants of the Lowlands were to be recast as a Teutonic people, and thus somewhat agglutinated with the also Teutonic Anglo-Saxons.⁵²⁰ Such union would then be opposed to the portrayal of the

⁵¹⁶ Peter Yeandle, "Lessons in Englishness and Empire, c.1880-1914: Further Thoughts on the English/British Conundrum", in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, eds. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 286.

⁵¹⁷ *Britannia History Readers* (1901), quoted in Yeandle, "Lessons in Englishness and Empire", 278.

⁵¹⁸ Colin Kidd, "The Strange Death of Scottish History Revisited: Constructions of the Past in Scotland, c.1790-1914", *The Scottish Historical Review*, LXXVI 1, no.201 (1997): 87.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵²⁰ Colin Kidd, "Teutonist Ethnology and Scottish Nationalist Inhibition, 1780-1880", *The Scottish Historical Review*, LXXIV 1, no.197 (1995): 48.

peoples in the north as pure Celts. Some authors chose to stress the similarities between Scotland and England: '[s]o men came to call themselves *Scots* who were really as much of English blood as the men of Kent. Their speech was English, their form of government was like that of the English'.⁵²¹ Others, on the other hand, opted for underscoring the distinction between the Celts that inhabited the lands north of the Firth of Forth from those south of it. So, for instance, George Macaulay Trevelyan celebrated that Scotland had finally 'settled her Highland question' during the eighteenth century, as 'an Afghanistan could no longer be tolerated within fifty miles of the "modern Athens"'.⁵²² That this had not been done in the most adequate manner, as was usually the case with the 'civilised man in his dealings with a primitive society' did not totally taint his own positive evaluation of the events.

The identification of parts of the Scottish population with the Teutons allowed these groups to share on the global mission of the Anglo-Saxons, both within the framework of the British isles -as in the taming of the wild Highlanders Trevelyan referred to- as well as in the broader global struggle of the race and the civilising enterprise of the empire.⁵²³ However, and simultaneously, it also meant the demotion of ideas of Scottish uniqueness by presenting the Celtic character of Scotland, the main difference that separated it from England, as a barbaric element that brought it closer to backward peoples such as the Afghans than to the leading European racial stock.⁵²⁴

The situation was different for the Irish, as they did not have, like the Scottish people did, the chance of being reframed as Anglo-Saxon. For this reason, Ireland and its peoples were represented in British historical accounts as the unruly objects of

⁵²¹ James Rowley, "Rise of the People and Growth of Parliament", in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 214.

⁵²² George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1926), 538.

⁵²³ Kidd, "Teutonist Ethnology", 50.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

Anglo-Saxon subjecthood and civilising mission.⁵²⁵ The history of the country, when it was accounted for, was that of a land 'broken into two halves, whose conflict ha[d] never ceased. The barbarism of the native tribes [...] only intensified by their hatred of the civilised intruders'.⁵²⁶ The tale of a struggle between the civilised Anglo-Saxon and the barbaric Celts at the other side of the Pale was the main contribution of Ireland to the British historical narratives of the period.

The narrative of Anglo-Saxon superiority was underpinned in these histories by a constant allusion to anti-Celt rhetoric. Thus, for instance, authors often emphasised the fractiousness and lack of unity of the Irish and inferred that this was the result of a fault in the people's character:

The native Irish, mainly Kelts [*sic*] by race, and speaking Keltic tongue akin to the Gaelic of the Scotch Highlands, were divided into many clans or tribes, somewhat like the tribes of the Afghan frontier, engaged in constant rude war one with the other, and living in a rough, semi barbarous fashion.⁵²⁷

Here, as in the case of the Scottish Celts, the identification with a people widely perceived as barbarous like the Afghans served, by contrast, to rise the claim of Anglo-Saxon superiority.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 207.

⁵²⁶ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 433-434.

⁵²⁷ Vincent A. Smith and Robert Balmain Mowat, *The Oxford History of England for Schools in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 67.

⁵²⁸ The direct reference to the Afghans may be interpreted as a legacy of the First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-1842), in which a large British force from India was annihilated. Although the empire would send a punishment expedition in 1842, the portrayal of the Afghans as unruly and barbaric lingered on. The second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880), although much more favourable to the British, may have helped rekindle this kind of discourse.

Another aspect widely brought forth in these English-centred perspectives was the connection of Ireland with violence and conflict. As many would agree, '[o]nly in the English Pale, as the counties round Dublin were called, was there anything like order. Outside that the Irish and the English settlers were perpetually at war'.⁵²⁹ Such an unruly state of affairs seemed not to have been pernicious just for the Celts, but to have subdued the whole country in a state of barbarism to which not even the advanced Anglo-Saxons were completely immune. These colonists, 'in a way very unusual among conquering races', one historian regretted, 'had been gradually adopting the manners and law of the conquered race around them'.⁵³⁰ Other accounts of the historical connection between England and Ireland also echoed how 'the English settlers fell into the ways of the Irish and were as lawless as they'.⁵³¹ In short, they considered that the Celt racial character was not -and had historically been not- only the source of the backward status of Ireland, but also the cause of the failure of the intents of the Anglo-Saxons to introduce civilisation to the island.

Such claims had much to do with a third attack on the Celts, which described them as less rational and more 'passionate', 'impulsive' and 'sanguine' than other peoples.⁵³² In some exceptional cases, Anglo-Saxonist thinkers could describe these as positive qualities, especially when manifested in idealist thought and artistic expression.⁵³³ However, many conceded that the Celts were not a group gifted for practicality, an element central both for the development of material civilisations as

⁵²⁹ Mandell Creighton, "The Tudors and the Reformation", in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 349-350.

⁵³⁰ James Franck Bright, *A History of England. Period I: Mediaeval Monarchy* (London: Rivingtons, 1877), 250.

⁵³¹ Creighton, "The Tudors and the Reformation", 349-350.

⁵³² James Franck Bright, *A History of England. Period III: Constitutional Monarchy* (London: Rivingtons, 1880), 1202.

⁵³³ Kidd, *Social Evolution*, 276-277.

well as for the construction of powerful states.⁵³⁴ By opposing the rational, practical, and orderly Anglo-Saxon to the emotional, idealist, and unruly Celt, these authors increasingly constructed Irish (and to a certain extent, Scottish) identities as the Other of the English. Consequently, this justified their own views about the historical right of England to civilise and rule these groups and their lands.

As we have seen, the cases of Scotland and, especially, Ireland evidence the extent to which stressing the Anglo-Saxon racial constituency of the British nation could lead to problems when dealing with peoples who could hardly fit this framework. History, in both cases, served the purpose of justifying Anglo-Saxon superiority and its legitimate right to speak for the whole of Britishness. This, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the political preponderance of the debate around the Irish Home Rule, was a task whose significance can hardly be overestimated.⁵³⁵ By paying attention to Ireland's history only as a distorted reflection of England's, these authors and their accounts contributed a great deal to the disputes that finally led to the political partition of the island.⁵³⁶

If within the metropolitan archipelago Anglo-Saxonism was a contested and debated doctrine, the British empire outside of it was an even harder space to address. Here, as well as in the case of the British Isles, English Anglo-Saxonism was constructed as a discourse that legitimised the superior position of this group over the colonised. Unlike in the latter, however, the relationship between the Teutonic race and the rest lacked the historical continuity that the dealing with the Celts had possessed. As a consequence of this, alternative strategies had to be developed to justify it.

⁵³⁴ Matthew Arnold (1866-67), quoted in Philip Dodd, "Englishness and the national culture" in *Englishness: politics and culture, 1880-1920*, eds. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.) (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 12.

⁵³⁵ Byrd, "Social Darwinism and British Imperialism", 74.

⁵³⁶ Benedikt Stuchtey, "Literature, Liberty, and the Life of the Nation: British Historiography from Macaulay to Trevelyan", in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe Since 1800*, eds. Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (London-New York: Routledge, 1999), 35.

The first of these was the depiction of the Anglo-Saxons as a group endowed with the necessary qualities for rule and imperial expansion. If internally the history of the English had been one of restoration and defence of essential liberties and institutions, it was thought that when they expanded outwards, they did so to liberate others.⁵³⁷ These 'empires of liberty' were, to central Anglo-Saxonist figures such as Green, the main consequence of English historical development:

From the moment of the Declaration of Independence [of the United States, 1776] it mattered little whether England counted for less or more with the nations around her. She was no longer a mere European power, no longer a mere rival of Germany or Russia or France. She was from that hour a mother of nations. In America she had begotten a great people, and her emigrant ships were still to carry on the movement of the Teutonic race from which she herself had sprung. Her work was to be colonisation. Her settlers were to dispute Africa with the Kaffir and the Hottentot, to wrest New Zealand from the Maori, to sow on the shores of Australia the seeds of great nations. And to these nations she was to give not only her blood and her speech, but the freedom which she had won. It is the thought of this which flings its grandeur round the pettiest details of our story in the past. The history of France has little result beyond France itself. German or Italian history has no direct issue outside the bounds of Germany or Italy. But England is only a small part of the outcome of English history. Its greater issues lie not within the narrow limits of the mother island, but in the destinies of nations yet to be. The struggles of her patriots, the wisdom of her statesmen, the steady love of

⁵³⁷ Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons", 1322.

liberty and law in her people at large, were shaping in the past of our little island the future of mankind.⁵³⁸

In these accounts, the empire was pictured as an instrument of 'peace and civilisation',⁵³⁹ a power which governed its territories 'honestly, justly, and carefully'.⁵⁴⁰ No wonder that, amidst the tendencies towards essentialisation and racialisation of the age, the virtues of the empire were often described as virtues of the people who had founded it, and, for instance, British national histories tended to stress the advantages that the Anglo-Saxons had brought to the colonisation process. Louise Creighton, with no little satisfaction, acknowledged in 1881 that 'no other country has so many rich and fertile colonies' and that 'it seemed that of all the peoples of Europe none are so able as the English to make their home in strange lands'.⁵⁴¹ The responsibility of the Anglo-Saxon race towards the less developed peoples of the empire was also similarly depicted as a consequence of the racial character of the English people; because 'Liberty ha[d] of course been a leading characteristic of England as compared with continental countries', it seemed but natural that the empire would be, in essence, an instrument for the extension of freedom.⁵⁴² As Benjamin Kidd suggested, this was because the Anglo-Saxon race had been more deeply affected by the 'altruistic influences of the ethical system upon which our Western civilisation is founded' than other colonists,⁵⁴³ others, however, agreed with the view that George Macaulay Trevelyan would espouse in the late-1920s and which attributed the perfect balance between orderly control and personal freedom struck

⁵³⁸ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 762-763.

⁵³⁹ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *A Student's History of England from the Earliest Times to the Conclusion of the Great War. Vol. 3: A.D. 1689-1919* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920), 859.

⁵⁴⁰ Osborne W. Tancock, "England during the American and European Wars", in Creighton, *Epochs of English History*, 556.

⁵⁴¹ Creighton, *A First History of England*, 329.

⁵⁴² Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 7.

⁵⁴³ Kidd, *Social Evolution*, 45-46.

by the English 'to the instincts and temperament of her people'.⁵⁴⁴ In both cases, nonetheless, the Anglo-Saxon race was portrayed as being especially fit not merely for establishing and sustaining great empires, but also to rule them with a virtuous mixture of power and freedom.⁵⁴⁵

Historians also utilised a second strategy to underscore that the creation of a global empire represented the logical conclusion of English history. According to this vision, the Anglo-Saxon past was reframed as the source of England's position as the 'Mistress of the Seas',⁵⁴⁶ and the readily available comparison between these ancient examples and the modern imperial enterprise seems unlikely to have gone unnoticed.⁵⁴⁷ So, for instance, King Alfred (r.881-889), who built a fleet to combat the invading Danes, figured prominently in some of these accounts as 'the founder of England's greatness on the sea' and as the promoter of 'English sea power'.⁵⁴⁸ The Anglo-Saxon invaders were re-purposed as settlers not unlike those of modern times, a group of adventurous travellers who manifested 'the daring spirit of their race (...) in the careless glee with which they seized either sword or oar'.⁵⁴⁹ Although not every author seemed comfortable tracing so far back the maritime power of England, and opted for stressing other turning points (such as the sixteenth or the seventeenth centuries) instead,⁵⁵⁰ it appears undeniable that the imagination of the early Anglo-

⁵⁴⁴ Trevelyan, *History of England*, XVII.

⁵⁴⁵ Kramer, 'Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons', 1322.

⁵⁴⁶ The term comes from Creighton, *A First History of England*, 127.

⁵⁴⁷ Darwin, John, "Empire and Ethnicity", *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no.3 (2010): 394.

⁵⁴⁸ Tout and Sullivan, *An Elementary History of England*, 23. Also, Smith and Mowat, *The Oxford History of England*, 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Green, *Short History of the English People*, 7.

⁵⁵⁰ See, for instance, Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 125. Also, Coman and Kendall, *The Growth of the English Nation*, 186.

Saxon settlers in Britain as a race of sea-faring colonists had an important presence in schools materials and in widely circulated works.⁵⁵¹

All these things considered, it is striking, then, that there does not seem to have existed a broad ideology that justified the right of the Anglo-Saxons to rule colonised peoples in Social Darwinist terms.⁵⁵² It is certainly true that Benjamin Kidd, in his famous *Social Evolution*, had admitted that the Anglo-Saxons had extended globally and that he lingered satisfied -and even proud- on the fact that they had 'exterminated the less developed peoples with which [they have] come into competition even more effectively than other races have done in like case'.⁵⁵³ Yet this was only 'a destiny which work[ed] itself out irresistibly'. There was no hint that the elimination of inferior peoples in the struggle with the Anglo-Saxons represented a triumph for moral progress. Herbert Spencer and Alfred Russell Wallace (1823-1913), for instance, went to great lengths to show that some ethically positive qualities such as honesty were more prevalent amongst tribal 'primitive' groups than in civilised societies.⁵⁵⁴ Instead, they defended that the substitution of the native populations by Anglo-Saxon settlers was a consequence of the impersonal law of the survival of the fittest, and obeyed nothing to the moral standing of the participants. In this fatalist interpretation, colonised peoples were destined to disappear in the face of Anglo-Saxon expansion, even though this did not necessarily mean any moral progress for mankind:⁵⁵⁵

Wherever a superior race comes into close contact and competition with an inferior race, the result seems to be much

⁵⁵¹ Yeandle, "Lessons in Englishness and Empire", 281.

⁵⁵² Mark Francis, "Anthropology and Social Darwinism in the British Empire: 1870-1900", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 40 (1994): 212.

⁵⁵³ Kidd, *Social Evolution*, 45-46.

⁵⁵⁴ Francis, "Anthropology and Social Darwinism", 206.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

the same, whether it is arrived at by the rude method of wars of conquest, or by the silent process which we see at work in Australia, New Zealand, and the North American Continent, or by the subtle, though no less efficient, method with which science makes us acquainted, and which is in operation in many parts of our civilisation, where extinction works slowly and unnoticed through the earlier marriages, the greater vitality, and the better chance of livelihood of the members of the superior race.⁵⁵⁶

Although such perspectives acknowledged that the Anglo-Saxons were, indeed, the fittest people in Darwinian competitive terms, their main worry remained the equation between fitness with moral superiority. But, because they focused on the moral development of the metropolitan society, these authors were barely interested in promoting changes in the policies that regulated interracial relations in the empire.⁵⁵⁷ This meant, in turn, that the discourse of the civilising mission, based on the extension of Anglo-Saxon freedom and institutions, could still be deployed as a convincing justification for the empire during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth in spite of its lack of academic support.⁵⁵⁸

Anglo-Saxonist interpretations enjoyed widespread support during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. However, by the 1900s, new developments -both within historical practice and outside of it- increasingly eroded the foundations in which Anglo-Saxonist and Teutonist notions rested.

First, there emerged increasing criticism against those who argued that the essential nature of the Anglo-Saxon race was the sustenance of representative

⁵⁵⁶ Kidd, *Social Evolution*, 48.

⁵⁵⁷ Francis, "Anthropology and Social Darwinism", 212.

⁵⁵⁸ Byrd, "Social Darwinism and British Imperialism", 102.

institutions. As we have mentioned above, of course, this was not a novel attack: conservative historians such as Brewer had already expressed, in his critical assessment of Green's *A Short History of the English People*, that 'Mr. Green's assumption of a democratical element in our earliest constitution colours his whole history, and affects his treatment of it throughout'.⁵⁵⁹ However, the work of anti-Whig liberal historians such as Maitland and Pollard, as exposed in chapter IV, did much to spread an alternative interpretation of English history. From this perspective, the Anglo-Saxon tendencies for self-government were pictured to have triumphed only thanks to their temperance by centralised and efficient powers, such as the Normans or the Tudors. As a consequence of this shift, the focal point of the search for English constitutional uniqueness was redirected from the Anglo-Saxon village communities and local institutions to the legal and political documents produced by these medieval monarchies.⁵⁶⁰ Although the racial element was still present in many of the accounts of early English history, this period was no longer understood as the ideal of democratic society that authors such as Freeman or Green had depicted. In 1926, Trevelyan summarised the perspective adopted by a new generation of historians:

There was very little that was slavish in the Anglo-Saxon warrior, But the idea that our 'Teutonic' forefathers when they first came to England were in any formal sense a democracy appears to be erroneous. There were many grades of rank, wealth and freedom among them, and they were ruled by Kings.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ Schuyler, "John Richard Green and his *Short History*", 345-346.

⁵⁶⁰ Cook, "The Making of the English", 644.

⁵⁶¹ Trevelyan, *History of England*, 31.

Secondly, the 1900s also witnessed the apparition of alternatives to the Anglo-Saxon principle of English Teutonic purity, fostered by novel approaches that contested the account of the arrival of the latter as having obliterated any previously existing society in the archipelago. For instance, a lecture in 1905 by Francis Haverfield (1860-1919) and the subsequent publication of an expanded version of it in 1912, opposed the established scholarly consensus which emphasised the limited scope of the Romanisation process of Britain.⁵⁶² Instead, Haverfield proposed that many Britons were influenced by the culture of their invaders, which in turn would come to have an important imprint on later English history. In a similar vein, at least from the late 1880s and early 1890s there had arisen a new current of thought, with roots in anthropological studies, that intended to overcome the problematic inclusion of the Irish and Scottish Celts in the Anglo-Saxon United Kingdom.⁵⁶³ According to this understanding, the population of the British Isles was a 'mixed race', comprised of elements of Teutonic as well as Celt origin, and which resulted from the combination -and not the elimination, as Freeman or Green had defended- of the two groups. This idea, of course, directly opposed the depiction of the English as the purest of all the branches of the Teutonic peoples, and weakened the claims to Anglo-Saxon superiority. No surprise, then, that many English historians, uncomfortable with the implications of such a theory, opted instead for increasingly abandoning racial discourse altogether when trying to explain the unique development of British history.⁵⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the work done by anthropologists, philologists, archaeologists, and others in this regard led to the fall of the invasion model defended by Anglo-Saxonist authors from its paradigmatic status.

In this regard, we cannot fail to address the impact that the First World War would have on the reception of Anglo-Saxonist and Teutonic accounts. On the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon emphasis on the clear-cut superiority of the English over their Scottish, Irish, and Welsh neighbours rendered it difficult to legitimise a united front

⁵⁶² Cook, "The Making of the English", 648.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 636-637.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 631-632.

of the whole United Kingdom. Yet, on the other hand, given that the enemy of the English in this enormous conflict was not a nation stemming from the Celt or the Slav races but a kindred German state, Teutonist discourse was wholly unfit for rallying the nation against this adversary. The context of the moment forced the depiction of the Anglo-Saxons to be thoroughly separated from that of the Teutons if it wanted to survive. As a consequence, the discourse about the 'mixed-races' of the British archipelago became increasingly adopted both in the press, as in political and historical undertakings. So, for instance, explained an article published in the *Scottish Review* in 1915 and titled *The Regeneration of the Anglo-Saxon*:

Here in *Britannia* the Celt never met German civilisation as he did in Belgium. But he encountered Germanic barbarism in the advent of the Jute, the Angle, and the Saxon, when these invaders stamped out British Christianity and civilisation in fire and blood. [...] But [...] 'the ferocious Saxons' did not exterminate the Celtic population of Southern Britain. Art, religion, laws, and language were extirpated, but the mass of the population was merely submerged by the inundation of Teutonism, and as time passed the influence of its gentler blood was unmistakeably shown. The spirit of the original race was slowly refining the coarseness of their Teutonic conquerors, when the country was again invaded, this time by the Celticised Northmen who had been civilised into Normans in France -a valuable succour to the Celtic influences already affecting English character.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁵ Lachlan MacBean, "The Regeneration of the Anglo-Saxon", *The Scottish Review* 38, no.79 (1915): 385-386.

In the words of the author, the Englishman was realising that 'he was slowly becoming a Celt'.⁵⁶⁶ As we can observe, this take on the question of Teutonism represented a complete contraposition with the ideas espoused by Anglo-Saxonist authors: here, the Celt was pictured as the race endowed with the qualities of liberty and toleration, and the Teutons equated with barbarism. Of course, stressing the 'Celtness' of the English allowed to emphasise their connections with their Celt neighbours while at the same time diluting the racial links that had previously been underscored between the Anglo-Saxons and the Teutons. No surprise, then, that this interpretation was published in a Scottish journal and was advocated by a Scottish author, as such ideological shift promised to solve the difficult situation of Scotland, torn in previous views between Anglo-Saxon virtue and world-significance and Celtic backwardness and unruliness.

After the war, this tendency came to be also widely endorsed by English historians, although they hardly demoted the Anglo-Saxon to the degree to which *The Regeneration* had done. 'Nothing like a pure-blooded race, however, exists anywhere in the British Isles', explained a textbook in 1924, and then asserted that 'the special qualities' which had enabled the United Kingdom to take a leading position in the world were, to a large extent, the result of a 'mixture of blood'.⁵⁶⁷ Although this certainly offered a more pan-insular perspective on Britishness, the text did not state that these groups were all equal, and still acknowledged that the character of the English was 'derived mainly from the Anglo-Saxon ancestors' and, therefore, still superior to the others. Similarly, *A History of England* in 1926 also presented the idea of a mixed race as an explanation for British unity and as a unique feature that separated the English from the Germans:

Unlike the German and Scandinavian, the English is a mixed race though mainly Nordic -whatever the exact proportion may be. The Celtic and pre-Celtic blood, which probably flows

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁵⁶⁷ Smith and Mowat, *The Oxford History of England*, 14.

to some extent in the veins of everyone who to-day claims English parentage, may have influenced the English temper. On the other hand, the difference discernible between modern English and modern German or Scandinavian might also be accounted for by the long centuries of residence in the very peculiar climate of Britain, and in the social and political security of an island that was well defended against invasion after 1066.⁵⁶⁸

As the sense of a Teutonic community was shattered as a consequence of the war, the peoples of the empire were also re-presented as kindred races, in a process analogous to that of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons in the metropolitan archipelago. These communities were often reframed as 'allied races', and many messages during the campaign underscored the union that the conflict had brought between the various elements of the empire by affirming that 'colour caste is forgotten in the comradeship of arms'.⁵⁶⁹

We have thus briefly traced the historical path of Anglo-Saxonist and Teutonist versions of English community from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the late 1920s. Although Anglo-Saxonist interpretations were often reformulated and contested, they were crucially shaped by the necessities of nation-building in English society. In this regard, they offered a powerful source of unity that seemed to clearly define who the members of the nation were and to explain the whole development of the community as a consequence of this alleged bond. Anglo-Saxon racial qualities, naturally evolving without great discontinuities thanks to the favourable conditions of Britain and the virtues of its settlers, seemed to be enough to account for the constitutional uniqueness and greatness of England.

⁵⁶⁸ Trevelyan, *History of England*, 45.

⁵⁶⁹ *The War Illustrated* (1915), quoted in Lyons, "Social Darwinism", 131.

However, Anglo-Saxonism, as a branch of Teutonism, was also a source of limitations for the creation of a national identity in an imperial context such as the British. For one, it seemed to have essentially separated the Anglo-Saxon English from their Celt neighbours in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales; in turn, this could not but produce tensions between the claim of the English to represent the British and the inferior status reserved to these peoples under such a discourse. In a political context shaped by the question of Irish Home Rule, this position was certainly a controversial one to take. Secondly, outside the British Isles the Anglo-Saxon peoples had to be reframed as adventurous settlers and capacious and humanitarian rulers in order to justify their right to govern the territories and peoples of the empire. Yet, however, the interest of British Social Darwinist intellectuals on the moral implications of their approaches led most of them to deny that the Anglo-Saxons were in fact morally superior to the races they aimed to control. Finally, if the Anglo-Saxon race was pictured as the explanatory source of the historical development of England, these authors had to define what was the exact relationship that existed between the latter and other Teutonic peoples, such as the Germans, and with other Anglo-Saxon peoples outside the empire, such as those of the United States.

In the years that led to the war and during the conflict itself, these issues arose and led to a thorough reconfiguration of the Anglo-Saxon paradigm. After the war, the focus on the racial origins of the English people was increasingly abandoned; in its place, there appeared a tendency to interpret the uniqueness of the Empire as a consequence of British culture.⁵⁷⁰ In the new context, such a notion offered an alternative to the previous race-centred discourse that allowed to redirect the loyalties of the various communities, both within the British Isles as in the rest of the empire. By emphasising the idea of a mixed British race, and also by underscoring the community of arms that the war effort had produced out of disparate racial elements, this new bond increasingly substituted previous notions of a pure Anglo-Saxon nation.

⁵⁷⁰ Lyons, "Social Darwinism", 132.

However, this did not mean the complete demotion of the Anglo-Saxonist principles. England still represented -as the frequent conflation of the terms Britain and England in history textbooks of the 1920s evidenced- the main voice in Britishness; similarly, the Anglo-Saxons still remained the rulers and teachers of the 'subject races' in their development out of primitive stages of civilisation.⁵⁷¹ These were not much disputed notions. But the reformulation of Anglo-Saxonism away from Teutonism, in combination with contemporary developments like the devaluation of Whig historiography, allowed other voices previously silenced -such as that of the Celts- to find legitimate expression and to contribute their own arguments to the debate about British national identity.⁵⁷²

In China, Yan Fu's advocacy of the *qun* -the united group- as the fundamental category that would ensure the survival of China obtained widespread validity among political and intellectual elites by the early-1900s. If the Chinese were to survive in the competitive world sketched by Social Darwinian imagery, most thought, the group had to be strengthened and protected. That this reinforcement was to be attained via a process of purification of the nation was also readily accepted: the harmful influences had to be erased, whereas the beneficial ones were to be fostered and cared for. As a result of this, many intellectuals, in the first years of the twentieth century, would have agreed with Liang Qichao's maxim: that 'that which is of benefit to one's *qun* is good, and that which is not of benefit to one's *qun* is evil'.⁵⁷³

But the consensus among most of these scholars and politicians ended right at this point. Although they could readily admit that the group was the hope for China's survival, they hardly agreed on which *qun* they were referring to. Was the Chinese *qun* an amalgamation of all the various peoples that inhabited the Great Qing? Was

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁷² Kidd, "The Strange Death of Scottish History Revisited", 102.

⁵⁷³ Liang, "Xinmin shuo", quoted in: Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 244.

it a reference to the racial communion of all the peoples of Asia, united against Western imperialism? Or, on the contrary, did it refer to a narrower conception of the group which only encompassed the Han Chinese and left all other ethnicities outside? What, then, of the Manchus and the reigning Qing dynasty? Were they to be expelled as foreigners? Or were they to be addressed as members of the nation? These questions, in the turbulent days of early twentieth-century China, shaped political divisions and framed political and ideological debate. Even after the Qing themselves were dethroned in 1912, and thus the problematic rule of a Manchu dynasty had been effaced, developing answers for these issues remained one of the most challenging endeavours for scholars of the early-Republican period.

However, the national assumption of unity was not simply a demarcation line by which a community was rendered different from another. It was not enough for Chinese scholars to divide with a stroke Han Chinese from Manchus, or Qing subjects from the world outside the borders of the empire: if such divisions were to have any success, these categories had to be presented as natural. As Liang himself had stated, there had to be something that united the group and that had allowed the *qun* to appear. As a consequence, the search for a way to strengthen China soon shifted into a pursuit to find the essential roots of the group and the bond that united it together. And, analogously, it also entailed a process of deconstruction of contemporary China, in which the pernicious influences that had affected the nation were to be identified and criticised. To those conducting such a research, it seemed logical that only by understanding the core features that tied the nation together and then fostering those beneficial qualities there could be any chance of restoring China's status on the international stage.

In the following pages we will focus on the development and evolution of one of these approaches, aimed at generating a racial understanding of the *qun* during late Qing and early Republican times. To many intellectuals and students of the age, avid for reform and change in the wake of China's defeat against the Japanese, it seemed simply evident that there was one particular element in the empire that was to blame for the country's weakness: the Qing dynasty and, by extension, the Manchus. If China, as a major polemicist had defended in 1903, meant indeed 'the China of the

Han Chinese', did such a claim not entail, in turn, that the Manchus were foreigners?⁵⁷⁴ What right did they possess then to rule and represent the Chinese *qun*? In the years between the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 and the fall of the dynasty in 1912, these were questions that dominated political and intellectual debate among Chinese reformers and revolutionaries, both in mainland China as in the diaspora of exiles and students in Japan. Yet, at the core of these issues rested even deeper inquiries, questions that would need not just years, but decades, to be answered -if they could even be satisfactorily answered at all-: who were really the Manchus? And, in opposition to them and most importantly for the Chinese, who were the Han?

The Manchus, of course, were the heirs of the Tungusic invaders that, back in the mid-seventeenth century, had defeated and conquered the Ming dynasty and had established themselves as rulers of China. In this regard, they represented the last in a long series of nomadic peoples that had successfully controlled the *zhongguo* (lit. middle kingdom 中國), such as the Mongol Yuan (1279-1368), and that had succeeded in elevating one of their own to the place of the Son of Heaven. The Manchus, ruling over a population that vastly outnumbered them, had been quick to adopt the cultural norms of their subjects. By endorsing neo-Confucian values and institutions, such as the examination system, the Qing rulers had aimed at attaining the support of the great literati and scholarly elite that existed in China.⁵⁷⁵ In the decades after the occupation of the country, such a strategy had already achieved spectacular success: by the 1680s, many seem to have accepted that the Manchus had wholly assimilated to the civilised Chinese and were, therefore, totally legitimate to rule over them.

However, this was just half the story when it came to Manchu rule. To be regarded as the legitimate Son of Heaven by Chinese bureaucratic and official elites was certainly a boost to the dynasty's legitimacy, but it was not less true that there were other aspects of Qing rule that required the fostering of an specific and distinct

⁵⁷⁴ Zou Rong, "The Revolutionary Army", *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 31, no.1 (1999): 36.

⁵⁷⁵ Mark C. Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3.

Manchu ethnicity. The empire they had built, after all, did not only include Chinese populations, but also Mongol, Manchu, or Tibetan peoples. To ensure the loyalty of each of these various groups, the emperor needed to offer them a semblance of legitimacy that, in many cases, was tied to his own character as a Manchu ruler.⁵⁷⁶ After the fall of the empire in 1912, when Outer Mongolia declared itself independent from the Republic of China, this conflation of simultaneous legitimacies was purposefully brought forth by the supporters of Mongolian sovereignty:

Originally Mongolia was not part of China, but because it followed the Ch'ing [Qing] royal house from the first day, it owed that house a great debt. Mongolia has absolutely no connection at all with China. Consequently, today when the Ch'ing court has been destroyed, Mongolia has no natural connection with China and should be independent.⁵⁷⁷

The Qing claimed to be the head, simultaneously, both of a universal and an ethnic empire, and nowhere was this better evidenced than in its institutions. It was certainly true that the reverence for the Confucian classics persisted after 1644, and that the examination system still towered over the selection of bureaucrats for the imperial administration. But it was not less true that there remained political and official spaces -especially those entrusted with the dynasty's relationship with Central Asian peoples⁵⁷⁸- reserved for Manchus or Mongols and, most importantly, that there existed a system that ensured the prevalence and privilege of the Manchu minority

⁵⁷⁶ This was especially true for populations on the northern and western fringes of the empire, but does not seem to have been the case in other areas, such the south-west. See Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2011), 22.

⁵⁷⁷ Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayah, and Eric Van Young (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 242-243.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

within the empire. This system, embodied in the institution of the Eight Banners (*baqi* 八旗), would become the main marker of Manchu identity in late Qing and early Republican times, both to themselves as well as to others.

The Eight Banner organisation, which dated back to the times immediately prior to the conquest of China, was an institutional framework that separated the invaders from the conquered population. It constituted a hereditary military caste, endowed with the task of ensuring the Qing dynasty's control over China. To this end, this group was expected to preserve what some scholars have termed the 'Manchu Way', an ideal of life that prominently featured the knowledge of the Manchu language and the practice of mounted archery.⁵⁷⁹ Although this military aspect of the Banner system diluted over time, other elements of it remained strong until the end of the dynasty, and even beyond. For instance, the banner people (*qiren* 旗人) lived in their own neighbourhoods, physically separated from those of the rest of the population, and as linguistic studies have evidenced, many of them rarely interacted with non-bannermen.⁵⁸⁰ Additionally, they were banned from marrying non-banner peoples, and enjoyed a separate legal status, which often involved lesser penalties and punishments than those of common civilian justice. Economically, they received a stipend directly from the dynasty, but in exchange they could not occupy themselves in any other profession than those of soldier, clerk, or official.⁵⁸¹ In summary, all these restrictions and privileges ultimately meant that, for these banner peoples and their households, membership in a banner was a fundamental element that shaped both their identities and their everyday lives.⁵⁸²

Despite what would be later claimed, the banner was not, originally, an ethnic institution: within the system there existed enormous heterogeneity, prompted by the

⁵⁷⁹ Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus & Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 52.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 42.

⁵⁸¹ Elliot, *The Manchu Way*, 350.

⁵⁸² Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 24.

way in which the invasion of the Ming empire and the later occupation of it had taken place. There were Mongol, Han, and (from the 1770s onward) even some Tibetan bannermen apart from those of Manchu descent, and among the latter there also existed a division between an Old Manchu core and later New Manchu additions.⁵⁸³ As time went on, however, the multi-ethnic character of the institution was increasingly reduced. By the late eighteenth century, Chinese bannermen almost disappeared after a governmental reaction to the massive intrusion of Han that falsified their lineage in order to access the bannerman status. As a consequence of this process, the equation of Manchuness with the Banner system was made easier both for those within and without the organisation.⁵⁸⁴

Yet the purges of intrusive elements did not prevent the Manchus from displaying little ethnic identity during late Qing times. True, they still maintained the customary Manchu hairstyle, and their women did not, unlike the Han, bound their feet; but in general, the process of acculturation seems to have been too strong to resist. Many of them could not speak Manchu language, and even less seem to have lived up to the ideals of mounted archery. On the contrary, it looks like that the main marker that in later times signalled a person as a Manchu turned out to be its privileged status as a banner person. 'In this way', as Mark C. Elliot aptly summarised, 'the organisation originally only responsible for ordering Manchu life became also the repository of Manchu identity'.⁵⁸⁵ In contrast, and in direct opposition to the Manchu ethnicisation process, the non-banner peoples came increasingly to be identified with the mirror image of this group, the Han. In such a division, Manchu bannermen (*qiren* 旗人) were constituted as the reverses to Han civilians (*min* 民).⁵⁸⁶

If the dynasty had taken steps over the centuries aimed at patently evidencing the ethnic uniqueness of the Manchus, anti-Manchu discourses such as those displayed by late Qing revolutionaries also enjoyed a respectable pedigree. Available

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 67-69.

⁵⁸⁴ Elliot, *The Manchu Way*, 352.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁵⁸⁶ Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 269.

to them was a long tradition of resistance and opposition to Qing rule that could be traced back to those literati like Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) or Wan Sitong (1638-1702) who, back in the years of the first establishment of the Qing after 1644, had rejected to serve what they viewed as an usurpation of the throne of the Son of Heaven. Wang went as far, for instance, as to describe these barbarians as being inferior to humans, and therefore to justify any violence exercised against them by the Chinese.⁵⁸⁷ Such radical interpretations were clandestinely preserved for centuries in secret societies that belittled the right of the Qing to rule the Chinese, and which would have a direct implication in the anti-Manchuism displayed by the Taiping rebels of the mid-nineteenth century and in the first revolutionary intents of Sun Yat-Sen.⁵⁸⁸ After the Taiping rebellion was pacified, the publication of a new edition of Wang Fuzhi's works allowed the extension of these Ming loyalist principles among the g generation of reformers and revolutionaries of late Qing times.⁵⁸⁹

The intrusion and enormous impact of Darwinian thought after 1895, however, provided these new Chinese scholars and politicians with new opportunities to push forward their proclaimed goal of expelling the Qing. As nationalism entered the Chinese political discourse, the term nation (*minzu* 民族) acquired increasingly more racialised undertones: some scholars such as Zhang Taiyan and Liu Shipei (1884-1919) went to the extent of studying ancient Chinese sources, such as the Zuo zhuan commentary to Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* (c. 4th century BC), in order to showcase that the traditional understanding of *zu* (ethnic lineage 族)

⁵⁸⁷ Ng On-cho and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 234.

⁵⁸⁸ James Leibold, "Positioning "minzu" within Sun Yat-sen's Discourse of Minzuzhuyi", *Journal of Asian History* 38, no.2 (2004): 166. One of these intents took place in 1895, in the midst of the Sino-Japanese war, when Sun tried to provoke an anti-Qing upheaval in mainland China in the belief that it would extend rapidly thereafter. However, a series of events –mainly the interception of an arms shipment directed to the revolutionaries and the discovery of the plot by the authorities of Guangzhou- led to the collapse of the attempt and to Sun's own exile. See Michael Gasster, "The republican revolutionary movement", in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 11: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 468.

⁵⁸⁹ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 55.

actually entailed a racial logic.⁵⁹⁰ So, for instance, they quoted a famous passage from this work – ‘if he is not of our kin, he is sure to have a different mind’- as an evidence for the insolvable racial distinction that existed between Manchus and Han. By introducing racial connotations to this motto, authors like Zhang and Liu contributed to essentialise the characteristics of the diverse ethnicities and to undermine the Confucian and imperial world-order that had allowed for non-Chinese to become part of the Chinese community.

The work of Liang Qichao, no fervent anti-Manchuist himself, was nonetheless crucial to this process of racialisation of the idea of *minzu*. In 1898, briefly after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform, Liang wrote an essay in which he framed Manchu-Han relations in Social Darwinist terms. In this work, he criticised the dynasty’s policy of segregation between the two groups on the grounds that the laws of competition and evolution favoured those races that intermingled and amalgamated with each other. The Han Chinese, via this process of absorbing other ethnicities, had ‘gradually advanced to civilisation and [had] become a superior race’; the Manchus, on the contrary, by putting obstacles to this beneficial process, were planting the seeds of their own extinction: ‘Because if they do not amalgamate, they must struggle; and when they struggle, one side must lose. Victory or defeat depends entirely upon who is superior or inferior. Today, as between the Manchus [*Manren* 滿人] and the Han [*Hanren* 漢人], it takes no expert to establish which is the superior race and which the inferior.’⁵⁹¹

In addition, Liang also explained that, if the Manchus continued with their policies, they would not only produce a Han upheaval, but would also condemn the yellow race to subjection by the whites. In this context of oppression, the superior Han Chinese would endure and would ultimately be able to shake their own shackles; the prospects for the Manchus, according to Liang, were on the whole less optimistic:

⁵⁹⁰ Marc A. Matten, “‘China is the China of the Chinese’: The Concept of Nation and its Impact on Political Thinking in Modern China”, *Oriens Extremus*, 51 (2012): 74-75.

⁵⁹¹ Liang Qichao (1898), quoted in Rhoads, *Manchu & Han*, 4.

The Manchus [on the other hand] have for the past two centuries eaten without farming and been clothed without weaving. Not one among their five million people is capable of being a scholar, farmer, artisan, or merchant.⁵⁹² When partition occurs and their political, financial, and military powers have all fallen into the hands of the white race, if they want some food or lodging then, will they still get it? Therefore, what the Manchus themselves have decided to do is precisely a self-chosen road to destruction.⁵⁹³

With such a proclaim Liang added more fuel to the attacks of the anti-Qing revolutionaries. The dynasty's rule had gone from being considered illegitimate, according to the ideas exposed in the Ming loyalist tradition, to becoming harmful for the chances of the yellow race to survive. The portrayal of the Manchus as an 'inferior race' (*liezhong* 劣種) was easily adopted as a scientific justification for the revolution of the Han, not in terms of narrow vengeance, but in the name of natural law.⁵⁹⁴ Also, Liang's pioneering utilisation of *Manren* and *Hanren* instead of traditional cultural or social pairs of terms like civilised-barbarian (*xia/yi* 夏/夷) or bannerman and civilian (*qi/min* 旗/民), helped in spreading a racial interpretation of the differences between Manchus and Han.⁵⁹⁵

In a similar vein, Zhang Taiyan, one of the most important classical scholars of the period, also embraced anti-Manchuist racial rhetoric in the years following the failure of the Hundred Days Reform and searched for the roots of the difference between Manchu and Han in ancient sources. From this study he concluded that '[the people from] China and Manchuria are of a different race, whereas [the people from

⁵⁹² Here Liang's equation between *Manren* and the Banner people is evident.

⁵⁹³ Liang Qichao (1898), quoted in Rhoads, *Manchu & Han*, 4-5.

⁵⁹⁴ Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 183.

⁵⁹⁵ Rhoads, *Manchu & Han*, 291-292.

China and] Japan are of the same race'.⁵⁹⁶ After the defeat of the Boxer rebellion, Zhang's anti-Qing tendency solidified: he abandoned the support he had provided to the reform party of Kang Youwei and, in 1903, published a direct response to the latter in which he emphasised the racial antagonism that existed between the Manchus and the Han:

Today, have the Manchus assimilated to the Han people? Or have they conquered the Han people? Manchu shamanism is not the orthodox imperial religion; queues and jewelled necklaces are not the Chinese caps; and the documents of the Qing in its own language are not traditional Chinese characters. The Manchus merely respected Confucius, followed the ways of Confucianism, and presented a false picture as a technique for claiming the emperorship and fooling the people. Their talk of the "same race" is not to turn the Manchus into Han people but to make the Han people Manchus! [...] Today five million Manchus rule over more than four hundred million Han only because rotten traditions make the Han stupid and ignorant. If the Han people should one day wake up, then the Manchus would be totally unable to rest peacefully here, like the Austrians in Hungary or the Turks in the former Eastern Roman Empire. It is human nature to love one's own race and to seek gain for oneself.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁶ Zhang Taiyan, "Zheng jiang lun" ('On proper borderlines' 正疆輪, 1899), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 147.

⁵⁹⁷ Zhang Taiyan, "Kang Youwei lun geming shu" (Letter opposing Kang Youwei's views on revolution 康有為論革命書, 1903), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 310-312.

As can be seen, Zhang criticised the reformers for their slave mentality and because they tried to defend the dynasty on the grounds that the Manchus had been assimilated. He blamed this type of submission for the oppression that the Han had suffered at the hands of the 'inferior ethnicity' of the Manchus.⁵⁹⁸ For this reason, he concluded, an anti-Manchu revolution was necessary. If such an uprising did not occur and the Han grew accustomed to Manchu domination, the ultimate consequence of not expelling the Manchus and prioritising the Han Chinese *qun* would be the transformation of the Chinese into 'the slaves of the Westerners'. As such, the removal of the dynasty and the Manchus was a necessary step if the Chinese were to survive; for 'if bad seeds are not removed', he summarised, 'the good ones will not grow'.⁵⁹⁹

Zhang's harsh attack on the Manchus, which combined the traditional anti-Qing stance of denying their legitimacy as civilised rulers with Liang's amoral Social Darwinism, was popularised in anti-Manchu pamphlets such as Zou Rong's (1885-1905) *The Revolutionary Army* (1903).⁶⁰⁰ Given that Zhang often wrote in a particularly obscure and difficult style, which meant that many of his younger contemporaries 'could not even punctuate the sentences let alone understand the theme' of his texts,⁶⁰¹ this kind of simplified approach was instrumental in the extension of the anti-Manchu discourse among the Chinese youth.⁶⁰²

In *The Revolutionary Army*, the eighteen-year-old Zou Rong advocated the necessity of violent revolutionary action against the Qing. In his opinion, 'China should be the China of the Chinese', which in turn he equated to the 'sacred Han race',

⁵⁹⁸ Zhang Taiyan, *Qishu zhongdingben* (Book of Urgency, definitive edition 尙書重訂本, 1904), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 173-174.

⁵⁹⁹ Zhang, "Kang Youwei lun geming shu", 356.

⁶⁰⁰ Leibold, "Positioning "minzu"", 169.

⁶⁰¹ Lu Xun (1956), quoted in Joshua A. Fogel, "Race and Class in Chinese Historiography: Divergent Interpretations of Zhang Bing-Lin and Anti-Manchuism in the 1911 Revolution", *Modern China* 3, no.3 (1977): 347.

⁶⁰² Esherick, "How the Qing became China", 236-237.

which descended from the legendary Yellow Emperor in a direct and unbroken sequence.⁶⁰³ Throughout the ages, he explained, the rights of this people had been trampled and usurped by autocrats and 'inferior, nomadic races' like the Manchus; therefore, the goal of the revolution he advocated was to overthrow the Qing and restore the sovereignty of the Han Chinese. This would free China, simultaneously, from the double oppression it suffered: domestically, at the hands of the Manchus, and externally, from the imperialist ambitions of the Western powers.

Even if the manifesto was not only focused on anti-Manchuism, and although a great part of it was devoted to the exposure of a republican ideology, its conceptualisation of the Chinese nation in accordance to racial criteria was nonetheless a pervasive topic. Among the measures that had to be taken for Zou's revolution to succeed he listed, for instance, that 'no alien race shall be allowed to trample on the slightest rights' of China, and that 'all the obligations to the Manchus should be abolished'. Moreover, he aimed at purifying the Han *qun* and emphasised the racial homogeneity of the future republic. This objective would be achieved through the most dramatic as well as the most effective measure imaginable: 'all Manchus residing in China shall be driven out or killed as revenge'.⁶⁰⁴

Disagreeing with these radical developments, Liang Qichao abandoned republicanism and argued that China, for the present, would need an authoritative government instead of a revolutionary change. In his view, an anti-Manchuist ideology such as that expressed in Zhang's or Zou's texts risked obscuring the obstacles that existed before the Chinese because they identified China's weaknesses solely with the Manchus:

To change our country in the present situation, we have to devote ourselves to cultivating popular intelligence, morality, and strength. If we do not so, not only will be impossible to

⁶⁰³ Zou Rong, "The Revolutionary Army", 34.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

construct the new, but even destruction will also be unattainable. If we indulge in boosterism, very likely we will bring about many devilish obstacles to the cause of public education.⁶⁰⁵

Liang's call for limited political reform had also a mirror image in his opinion about the Chinese nation. As we will see in a later chapter, Liang had already started by this time to become influenced by the political philosophy of the Swiss thinker Johann Caspar Bluntschli (1808-1881), who argued that nation-states required the existence of one core ethnicity to guide and dominate other smaller ones.⁶⁰⁶ Liang found this perspective attractive because it allowed him to propose the Han Chinese as the dominant people in the future Chinese nation-state without having to renounce, as extreme Han nationalism seemed to do, to inheriting the territories of the Qing empire. Thus, in his view, the 'lesser nationalism' (*xiao minzuzhuyi* 小民族主義) of many Han revolutionaries and their revanchist spirit against the Manchus posed a great risk for the creation of a powerful Chinese nation-state in the future.

Liang's argument for a future China that would comprise the whole Qing geobody will be acknowledged in detail in chapter VII. However, it is important to note that this plan made him very aware of the problems of equating the Qing dynasty with the whole Manchu group. Abandoning the clear-cut racial division that he had sketched in 1898, Liang claimed now that the Manchus were completely assimilated to the Han.⁶⁰⁷ As he explained, '[t]oday, the Manchus inside the borders of China proper who can understand Manchu script and speak Manchu language are [as rare as] a phoenix's feather and a unicorn's horn. [...] Therefore, one can say that the

⁶⁰⁵ Liang Qichao, "Da Feisheng" (Response to Feisheng 答飞生, 1904), quoted in Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 144.

⁶⁰⁶ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 85.

⁶⁰⁷ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 32.

Manchus have already totally changed towards Han [Chinese] people's traditions'.⁶⁰⁸ As can be observed, Liang went back to defining cultural elements as the most important ones for considering a people assimilated to the Han and capable of inclusion in the Chinese nation. The fact that there was no evidence to support the Manchu ethnic dissolution, and that there still existed obvious and readily observable differences between Han and Manchus troubled him not a bit.⁶⁰⁹

Unsurprisingly, this change of heart did not help in making Liang more popular among the revolutionaries. In 1905, a disparate assembly of radical groups founded the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenhui* 同盟會) in Tokyo with the intention of fostering an anti-Qing movement and extending revolutionary ideals. Among them towered figures such as Sun Yat-sen and, after he was freed from imprisonment, Zhang Taiyan.⁶¹⁰ The editorial instrument of the movement, the People's Journal (*Minbao* 民報), engaged during the following years on a fruitful debate with Liang's own newspaper, the New People's Periodical (*Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報) in which discussion about the racial question and anti-Manchuism featured prominently.

Although there was no common programme which all members of the *Tongmenghui* agreed upon, increasingly Sun Yat-sen's own vision of a revolution defined by anti-Manchuism, republicanism, and agrarian reform gained support

⁶⁰⁸ Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo" (Teachings of the great political scientist Bluntschli 政治學大家伯倫知理之學說, 1903), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 92.

⁶⁰⁹ This was a point that anti-Manchuist revolutionaries opposed to Liang often made, but recent research has also endorsed this conclusion. See, for instance, Mark C. Elliot, "Reinventing the Manchus: An Imperial People in Post-Imperial China", Lecture in The Australian National University, June 20, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38ArKRnEwLQ&t=2719s> [accessed 08/09/2020].

⁶¹⁰ After the publication in 1903 of *The Revolutionary Army* by Zou Rong, the Qing authorities tried to arrest everyone involved in this widely circulated piece of anti-Manchu propaganda. Zhang, who had written a foreword for the manifesto, was condemned to three years of prison. Zou Rong, on his part, was to spend two. However, he died while in prison, and was subsequently made into a martyr for the revolutionary and anti-Manchu cause. See Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 148-149; also, Leibold, "Positioning "minzu"", 169.

within the movement.⁶¹¹ Wang Jingwei (1883-1944), a follower of Sun and a later leader of the Nationalist Party, defined the nation as 'a human collective who share the same similar nature', which in turn encompassed social and cultural aspects such as language and script, territory, social customs, religion, and spiritual essence. However, the prime and most important of all these requisites remained the existence of a common blood.⁶¹²

From 1906 on, after being freed from his incarceration and joining the *Minbao*, Zhang Taiyan publicly opposed Liang's claims about the assimilation of the Manchus. He denied that their status as a minority necessarily meant that they were condemned to be assimilated to the Han; on the contrary, he argued that revolution was crucial because otherwise the two populations would remain distinct. This was because, as he put it, 'it is only possible to allow alien races to assimilate with us when sovereignty is in our hands'.⁶¹³ In his opinion, only once the Han had expelled the Qing and had established themselves as the rulers of China, there was to be any possibility of merging together the two groups. Interestingly, although he still nominally favoured a racially pure nation-state that would comprise not only China proper but also Vietnam, Korea, and Burma, Zhang increasingly shifted away from this position. Instead, he, similarly to Liang, started to picture the geo-body of the empire, which included non-Han territories such as Manchuria, Xinjiang, or Tibet, as assimilable by the Han if the latter remained indisputably in control.

As the meaning of *minzu* became increasingly racialised, culture itself was transformed to be intrinsically tied to ethnicity. Respected classical scholars such as Zhang Taiyan, Liu Shipei, or Huang Jie (1873-1935) became ardent defenders of the concept of 'national essence' (*guocui* 國粹), a notion that had been made available to them via the Japanese translation of the German concept of *Die Deutsche Seele* ('The

⁶¹¹ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 183.

⁶¹² Wang Jingwei, "Minzu de guomin" (A nation of citizens 民族的國民, 1905), quoted in Matten, "'China is the China of the Chinese'", 79.

⁶¹³ Zhang Taiyan, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", trans. Pär Cassel, *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies*, 8 (1997): 25-26.

German Soul').⁶¹⁴ According to these scholars, 'the people of one ethnicity must have the special character of one ethnicity', a character that, sadly for the Chinese, had been lost after long centuries of intermingling with foreign ethnicities.⁶¹⁵ For this reason, they aimed at restoring the cultural and social values of the society of Western Zhou times (c.1045-771 BC), the epitome of the uncontaminated Chinese national character, through the careful and critical study of a *corpus* of classical literature.⁶¹⁶ In some cases, as for instance Liu Shipei's, this led to a strong and exclusive Han-ethnocentrism that went as far as to explain the alleged lack of civilisation of foreigners in terms of their descent from 'raptors and wild beasts'.⁶¹⁷

What is most interesting for our study, however, is the way in which this national essence was connected to the expansion of the Han race in the past and how this *qun* was constructed as legitimated to establish its own nation-state. In this sense, the National Essence group, through its editorial branch the *Guocui xuebao* (National Essence Journal 國粹學報), was the first and fundamental vehicle for the extension of Sino-Babylonianist theories in China.⁶¹⁸ These proposals had been originally devised by the French orientalist Albert Terrien de Lacouperie (1844-1894) and, based on philological comparison, concluded that the Han were the descendants of a tribe who had migrated from Mesopotamia to China in prehistoric times. Made available in the pages of the *Guocui xuebao* from 1903 onward by Jiang Zhiyou (1866-1929), Sino-

⁶¹⁴ Lin Xiaobing, "Historicizing Subjective Reality: Rewriting History in Early Republican China", *Modern China* 25, no.1 (1999): 8.

⁶¹⁵ Liu Shipei, *Zhongguo minzu zhi* (Record of China's ethnicities 中國民族志, 1905), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 243.

⁶¹⁶ Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow, "Making History Modern: The Transformation of Chinese Historiography, 1895-1937", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 9-10.

⁶¹⁷ Liu Shipei, *Rangshu* (Book of Expulsion 攘書, 1903), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 253-254.

⁶¹⁸ Tze-ki Hon, "From a Hierarchy in Time to a Hierarchy in Space: The Meanings of Sino-Babylonianism in Early Twentieth-Century China", *Modern China* 36, no.2 (2010): 141.

Babylonianism rapidly became an important element in the discourse of these National Essence scholars.⁶¹⁹

But, why were these classically-trained intellectuals interested in accepting a theory such as this in the first place? For one, it was a European state-of-the-art theory which, like Darwinism or nationalism, seemed to possess the key for understanding China's role in the modern world. By linking the Chinese to the Mesopotamian ancestors of the Westerners, the Chinese were able to take pride on their achievements in the past and be sure that they were not, being of the same stock as them, condemned to be wiped out by the whites. Secondly, and most importantly for some contributors of the *Guocui xuebao* such as Liu Shipei, it offered an opportunity for stressing the enormous differences that existed between the superior Han race and neighbouring peoples such as the Manchus or the Mongols.⁶²⁰ To achieve such an objective, these scholars identified the eastward movement of the ancestors of the Chinese from Mesopotamia with the legendary figure of the Yellow Emperor Huang Di. This character had previously been revered by the Ming and even the Qing as one of the great rulers of the ancient past and as a cultural symbol of the Chinese tradition; now, it was transformed into the racial ancestor of the Han -and only the Han.⁶²¹

Only the Han [Chinese] ethnicity descends from Yan [Di]⁶²²
and Huang [Di]. Outside the Nine Provinces [China proper]
everything was remote and desolate.⁶²³

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶²⁰ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, 59-60.

⁶²¹ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 172-173.

⁶²² A mythical ruler, coetaneous with the Yellow Emperor, who after being defeated by the latter merged his kingdom with that of Huang Di.

⁶²³ Liu, *Rangshu*, 253.

In this interpretation, the Yellow Emperor became an embodiment of the racial difference between Manchus and Han. Interestingly, this character came to be framed as a representative of the essential qualities of the Chinese nation -a demotion from the universal cultural value it had held before- which in turn serves to evidence the triumph of the assumption of national community exposed at the beginning of this chapter. Sino-Babylonianism offered the opportunity of casting the Han as a world-historical race of the same kind as the whites, while depicting, simultaneously, their mixture with foreign and inferior peoples as the fundamental explanation for the current decadence of the Chinese. Such a perspective led Liu to assume that the best possible future for China was a racially homogeneous nation-state that completely gave up the non-Chinese territories of the Great Qing.⁶²⁴ Although this position was not widely shared, as evidenced by the positions of leading intellectuals such as Liang Qichao or Zhang Taiyan, the idea of the Western origin of the Chinese achieved major success by making its way into late Qing and early Republican educational materials.⁶²⁵

Unsurprisingly, in 1911, when open rebellion against the Qing finally occurred, the image of the Yellow Emperor as a representation of the superior Han was ostentatiously paraded. As one combative chant demonstrates, more than a decade of increasing racialisation of both Manchu and Han groups directed many revolutionaries to easily picture the utmost solution for China: 'Raise the Han, raise the Han, / Raise our great Han. / Destroy the Manchu, destroy the Manchu. / Destroy the thieving Manchu. / The spirit of the Yellow Emperor / helps us to kill the thieves'.⁶²⁶ The threat of racial annihilation, to Manchus trapped in their banner garrisons, must have seemed a very real prospect after the outburst of violence that erupted in the wake of the Wuchang uprising.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 268.

⁶²⁵ Renee Yuwei Wang, "Who are the Han? Representations of the Han in Chinese school textbooks in late Qing and early Republican China", AACS Conference (2011): 24.

⁶²⁶ *Minlibao*, military anthem (1911), quoted in Esherick, "How the Qing became China", 238.

⁶²⁷ Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 187.

However, although racial struggle was a powerful symbol to mobilise the Han against the Qing dynasty, revolutionaries rapidly understood that it was not free of its own problems. When Mongolian and Tibetan representatives declared themselves independent after the abdication of the dynasty, few among the revolutionary leaders considered these to be legitimate claims. After all, what good was a purely Chinese nation-state if it was too weak to maintain its own sovereignty against Western intrusion? A position such as Liu Shipei's, who had advocated a Han-exclusive country, was no longer, in the eyes of many former radicals, one that suited the ambitions of the newly born Republic.⁶²⁸

Thus, when Sun Yat-sen became the provisional president of the Republic in 1912, he proclaimed the new state not as a Han nation-state, nor did he mention the superior qualities of this race. Instead, he acknowledged that the ambition of the new policy was to establish a 'Republic of the Five Races' (*wuzu gonghe* 五族共和) and to combine 'the lands of the Han, Manchu, Mongolians, Tungusic tribes and Tibetans into one state'.⁶²⁹ As we will see in chapter VII, Liang Qichao's theory of the assimilative power of the Chinese ethnicity, which had gained support in the last years of the previous decade, had succeeded in expanding the claims of the revolutionaries beyond the 'narrow nationalism' of a Han nation-state. However, how could this new ideology be combined with the pre-1911 emphasis on the racial unity of the Chinese people?

Some, at first, opted for underplaying the racial differences that had been sketched by previous intellectuals. So, for instance, one of the first history textbooks of the Republican period that went by the self-explanatory title of *Xin zhi benguooshi jiaoben* ('The Newly Edited History Textbook' 新知本國史教本) presented the former Han, Mongol, Manchu, Muslim, and Tibetan subjects of the Qing as descendants of

⁶²⁸ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 268-269.

⁶²⁹ Ge Zhaoguang, "Absorbing the "Four Borderlands" into "China": Chinese Academic Discussions of "China" in the First Half of the Twentieth Century", *Chinese Studies in History* 48, no.4 (2015): 336.

the same Western tribe that had arrived to China in prehistoric times.⁶³⁰ In this interpretation, all of them shared a common racial origin as members of the yellow race and were only distinguishable because, over the ages, they had had to adapt to different climates and environments. Curiously, this kind of geographic determinism also helped in explaining the preponderance of the Han over the rest of their neighbours:

The Han, the Manchu, the Mongol, the Hui and the Tibet commonly belong to the yellow race, and shared the same origin. They were all immigrated from the West by groups, among which the Han was brought by the Yellow Emperor... Compared to the other four nations, the Han owned the best location of territory and the most brilliant culture, which can be never reached by any other minority groups.⁶³¹

So, by connecting the preponderance of the Han to the geographic and climatic conditions of China proper, the textbook found a middle way to emphasise, at the same time, Han national superiority and the homogeneous racial unity of the broader Yellow race.

The discourse of a 'Republic of the Five Races', which seemed to have acknowledge the formal equality of the Han with other non-Chinese peoples of the former empire, remained problematic to many leading intellectual and political figures. So, for instance, Sun Yat-Sen himself imagined the creation of a single *zhonghua minzu* ('Chinese race') with the Han at its core not unlike that sketched by Liang Qichao following Bluntschli's ideas.⁶³² Similarly, Li Dazhao (1889-1927), one

⁶³⁰ Culp, "China-The Land and its People", 35.

⁶³¹ Zhong Yulong, *Xin zhi benguoshi jiaoben* (The Newly Edited History Textbook 新知本國史教本, 1914), quoted in Wang, "Who are the Han?", 44.

⁶³² Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 43.

of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, advocated the disappearance of all the existing divisions between Manchu, Han, or Mongol, 'smelted together in forming a single *zhonghua minzu* that eliminated all previous boundaries and blood lineages'.⁶³³

Consequently, and as we will observe when we analyse Liang Qichao's assimilation theory and their implications for the nation-building projects in early Republican China, the tendency seems to have been one in favour of abandoning the racial distinctions between the different groups that had composed the Qing empire. In its place, there stood a new ethnicised relationship, in which cultural and social assimilation were stressed.⁶³⁴ This, of course, did not entail an equivalence between the Han and other previously despised groups such the Manchus or the Mongols; quite the contrary, as the concept of *zhonghua minzu* acknowledged the cultural superiority of the Han and the expected assimilation of the rest of groups to them.

However, after 1912, no major policy or ideology would claim any essential, biologically embedded dissimilarity between the Han and those peoples, or defend the ultimate impossibility of their assimilation and merging together. Even archaeological findings such as the Peking Man in 1929 were interpreted as evidence for the monogenesis of the yellow race and their shared connection from the remotest of times.⁶³⁵ Unlike in the late Qing era, historians took the main tenants of the assimilation theory for granted, and historical debates, at this point, became interested in how such a process of intermingling and mixture had taken place in the past.⁶³⁶ In this new context, the internal opposition between Han and Manchu came

⁶³³ Li Dazhao (1917), quoted in Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 41-42.

⁶³⁴ Matten, "China is the China of the Chinese", 92.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*, 94. The Peking Man was a sub-species of *Homo erectus* whose remains were first discovered in the archaeological site of Zhoukoudian, southwest from Beijing. At the moment of its excavation, it acquired relevance due to the claim that it was the first example of the 'missing link' between humans and the rest of hominids. The bones were lost in 1941, although pictures, replicas, and descriptions of it remained.

⁶³⁶ Culp, "China-The Land and its People", 34.

to be increasingly replaced by the external contrast between the yellow and the white races.⁶³⁷

c. Comparison and balance

In this chapter we have observed the extent to which the two principles of national community and national unity became central to the development of nation-building projects both in China and Britain during this period. A close comparison between the ways in which these notions were adopted and introduced in political and historical discourse in the two cases offers us, moreover, certain interesting conclusions and reflections.

First, it seems that the principle of community, which establishes that ample groups are the fundamental subjects and interest of historical and political action, was strongly advocated during these years. In Britain, the publication of Green's *A Short History of England* in 1874 and its following success seem to have encouraged historians to pay a closer attention to the development of the nation at large. This interest, in turn, would seamlessly combine with Social Darwinist notions of society as a living organism and with economic and social disciplines that emphasised the role played by the group instead of that of the individual. Similarly, in China, the introduction of Darwinian thought in his Spencerian variant by Yan Fu and Liang Qichao's advocacy of a New Historiography contributed to redirecting Chinese historical and political discourses out from their traditional elitist forms and towards broader subjects. In this sense, the importance of the term *qun* ('group' 群) is evident if we look at the multitude of neologisms that referred to it during late Qing and early

⁶³⁷ See, for instance, the previously presented Hien Hien (1921), quoted in Dikötter, "Racial Discourse in China", 21.

Republican times, such as sociology (*qunxue* 群學)⁶³⁸, human societies (*renqun* 人群)⁶³⁹, or group solidarity (*qunzhuyi* 群主意).⁶⁴⁰

Secondly, our analysis has evidenced that the authors of these discourses in Britain and China were deeply preoccupied with the question of national unity. That nations ought to be composed of homogeneous peoples which shared a strong and profound connection was an idea that faced increasingly less challenging opposition. The realities of obvious and self-explanatory difference, however, such as in the case of the legal and social segregation between Manchu and Han or between Anglo-Saxon and non-white inhabitants of the British empire, were a constant headache that required from these authors ceaseless revision and re-framing in historical and political terms.

In this regard, the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was especially ill-suited for an easy portrayal of the whole nation as a united body. The reason for this was the extension of Social Darwinist thought and of essentialised racial theories that presented differences between groups as the result of evolutionary processes. The racial connection, as the cases of the Anglo-Saxons or the Han evidence, offered a readily available solution for the question of defining who was a member of the nation by linking these answers to allegedly scientific knowledge. However, racial essentialism, although it helped in boosting a sense of superiority over their neighbouring populations among these groups, was bound to be problematic not only for its intrinsic contradictions (like the evident lack of any 'pure' and uncontaminated racial stocks) but in the context of the two multi-racial polities which these two communities intended to construct. Even if there existed voices in Britain and China which advocated for abandoning the imperial territories and the establishment of racially homogeneous nation-states, these voices never represented a majority. However, even those in favour of keeping the imperial connection could

⁶³⁸ As in the translation of Herbert Spencer's *A Study of Sociology* as *Qunxue siyan* (群學肆言). See Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 64.

⁶³⁹ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse*, 73.

⁶⁴⁰ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 30.

not duck the challenge posed to nation-building by these minorities, which were increasingly framed as sources of instability.⁶⁴¹

In this process, historical discourse played an interesting role. In both cases, it seems to have initially celebrated the difference between the superior race and its neighbours. In this sense, portrayals of the Irish or the northern Scots as uncivilised, unruly populations mirrored the construction of Mongols and Manchus as barbarous and dangerous nomads.⁶⁴² These discourses, as we have seen, stressed the superiority of the English and Han and their legitimacy to rule themselves (and others). However, in a later phase, when such a divisive narrative was deemed inadequate, the clear-cut racial essentialism became increasingly abandoned in favour of a more culturally-defined ethnic identity. This process can be observed in the attitudes towards a mixed British race that became prominent in the wake of the First World War, but also in the development of the Republic of the Five Races and the notion of a wide-ranging yellow race that followed the fall of the Qing. In both cases, the threat of foreign imperialism seems to have been a potent motivator for the development of more inclusive national identities. However, and despite the oft-claimed racial mixture and intermingling, these newly minted communities would remain defined in terms of the 'superior' ethnicity (English or Han) and their alleged racial features, now extended over a larger population.

However, although the prior centrality of these groups still towered over the new ethnic conceptualisations of national belonging, the de-essentialisation of their most 'backward' tendencies allowed the influence of other groups to be acknowledged. No longer threatening a contamination of the superior race by the inferior, peoples such as the Celts or -even more strikingly- the Manchus could be now presented to

⁶⁴¹ This seems to have been a global trend, which obtained institutional sanction in the international stage after the First World War. See, for instance, Asier H. Aguirresarobe, "National Frameworks: Reflections on the Construction of National Interests and Political Agendas in Interwar Europe", *Studies on National Movements*, 5 (2020): 80-114.

⁶⁴² Nomadism, in Chinese traditional historiography, was the most evident marker that signalled a group as uncivilised. Therefore, historians who intended to emphasise the inadequacy of the Manchus to rule often remarked the original nomad organisation of this people. However, evidence for such a claim seems to have been non-existent. See, for instance, Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 263.

have contributed, even in the slightest, to the formation of the hybrid British or Chinese ethnicities. This new shift away from racial essentialism offered support for the imperial (or post-imperial) ambitions of the two leading communities; however, it simultaneously opened the stage for a more challenging debate in which their superiority over other groups, unlike in the previous racialised narrative, was not to be taken at face-value.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴³ Culp, "China-The Land and its People", 34. Also, Kidd, "*The Strange Death of Scottish History Revisited*", 102.

VI

The quest for national continuity

Continuity is a curious concept. For one, it encompasses the meaning of permanence and stability, of direct correlation between two moments or events; however, embedded within this notion is also the representation of endless, incessant, and inevitable change. After all, it is only in the face of such ceaseless transformation that continuity as permanence can be even grasped in the first place. As we have pointed out in chapter III, nations are fully connected to this seeming paradox. They are imagined as homogeneous, deeply internally connected communities which can be observed in the present, but their connecting bond is also pictured as extendable to the remote past and into the foreseeable future. The 'historical permanence'⁶⁴⁴ of these nations is at odds, however, with an acute perception of change and anachronism which, as we have seen in previous chapters, were two of the main conceptual developments which took place in the historical practice of the moment in Britain as well as in China.

We have already analysed some of these transformations. First, the nation was being constructed as the subject of history, a fact which turned the narration of the past into an account of national development and becoming. Secondly, this imagined community was also being identified with the population at large and not with some elites or particular, definite groups. Finally, the tie which was thought to connect these groups internally was contested, debated, and framed in agreement with previous –

⁶⁴⁴ Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 89.

and re-configured- self-identifications. All in all, in combination with a shift in methodology and in the social status of the historians, these changes produced a thorough transformation of historiography and historical consciousness.

Unsurprisingly, such a fundamental alteration in the imagination of the past was surely going to produce a certain degree of self-doubt. After all, national communities do not represent simply momentary, time-bound unions of individuals: they are conceived, as Geoffrey Cubitt put it, 'as things enduring –endowed with origin, tradition, memory, heritage, history, [and] destiny'.⁶⁴⁵ If that is indeed the case, the greater the perceived distance between this inheritance and the present, the more acute the sense of detachment and broken continuity of those who imagine themselves as members of the nation. What may happen if the bond which connected the nation to its very past was shattered? What if an individual felt that he shared nothing in common with his immediate –or imagined- forefathers? The national community would simply be no more. Thus, the ultimate conclusion of the radical change in historical consciousness caused by the new nationalist framework was somewhat paradoxical: even though the perception of the critical difference between past and present was increasingly interiorised to emphasise national development, this ultimately resulted in a growing necessity to stress what was essential and timeless in the national community in order to sustain a stable collective identity.

If we agree, thus, on imagining that the progress and extension of the nationalist outlook towards history was simultaneous and tantamount with a 'transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning [...], chance into destiny', it is not difficult to explain why such a quest for an essential bond connecting the nation to its past took place far more vigorously in China than in Britain.⁶⁴⁶

In the latter, the Whig historiographical tradition, although it was -as we have seen- increasingly criticised and transformed during the years between the 1870s to

⁶⁴⁵ Geoffrey Cubitt, ed., *Imagining Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 8.

⁶⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London-New York: Verso, 2006), 11-12.

the 1920s, offered a continuous thread to interpret national history through the lens of the development of representative institutions. This connection was thought to link, in an unbroken succession, the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the Dark Ages, through the medieval Parliaments and the struggling revolutionary assemblies of the absolute monarchs, with the present constitutional system of Britain. It was widely believed that this institutional framework was the 'living chain' which bound together 'the past with the present, the living with the dead',⁶⁴⁷ as such, it is not strange that this interpretation was regarded with reverence and pride as the main legacy of British history.⁶⁴⁸

The deferential outlook towards British national history, with its heroes and fundamental documents, maintained its strength during our whole analysed period.⁶⁴⁹ Just as William Stubbs, in his monumental *The Constitutional History of England* (1874), could claim that 'the continuity of national purpose never fails' and that even the great moments of trial for the constitution left it 'unbroken in its conscious identity'⁶⁵⁰, so could the historian George Macaulay Trevelyan, some fifty years later, be convinced of the fact that the history of the English had developed 'without [them] forfeiting their ancient liberties or breaking the continuity of their national life'.⁶⁵¹

And, why would they have believed otherwise? After all, even though an increasing sense of foreign threat or internal weakness, as we will see in the following chapter, preyed on the minds of many British intellectuals, it remained an

⁶⁴⁷ William Edward Hartpole Lecky (1892), quoted in Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The history of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2006), 123-124.

⁶⁴⁸ Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870-1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19-20.

⁶⁴⁹ Reba Soffer, "Nation, Duty, Character and Confidence: History at Oxford, 1850-1914", *The Historical Journal* 30, no.1 (1987): 83.

⁶⁵⁰ William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development. Vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), 681-682.

⁶⁵¹ George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1926), 275.

uncontested fact that the Empire represented the peak of global civilisation. 'One may be pardoned for thinking that no people has a nobler or more inspiring history', claimed the Provost of Eton College and later tutor of Queen Elizabeth II, Clarence Henry Kennett Marten (1872-1948), and then added, seemingly proud of the comparison, that

The medieval, the Elizabethan, and, we hope, the modern Englishman all show the same individuality, the same initiative in action, the same independence in thought and speech, the same practical sagacity and, on the whole, the same power of conduct. The men who drew up Magna Carta were guided by the same practical wisdom, the same desire to avoid abstract questions, and to deal with proved abuses only as the men who drew up the Petition of Rights in 1628 or the Declaration of Rights in 1688. [Francis] Drake and [Horatio] Nelson showed the same glorious self-confidence, the same daring and initiative, and the men who won Crécy, and Poitiers, and Agincourt were not essentially different from the men who won the many victories of the Peninsular war, or who endured the hardships of South Africa.⁶⁵²

Such a sense of contentment was not, however, free from stain. It was an obvious fact that many saw the unbroken development of the constitution, a canonised 'great tradition' of English literature, and the international position of the

⁶⁵² Clarence Henry Kennett Marten (1905), quoted in Raphael Samuel, "Continuous National History", in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Vol 1: History and Politics*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London-New York: Routledge, 1989), 12. With regard to the facts alluded, the Magna Carta has already mentioned in this research. The Petition and Declaration (or Bill) of Rights are fundamental documents for the constitutional history of England meant to protect civil and individual liberties against excesses effected by the monarch. Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt are the sites of important victories of the kings of England during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453).

Empire as the main symbols which decisively connected the past of the nation to its present.⁶⁵³ But it was no less true that some others, especially aesthetically-minded Romantics, turned their gaze to an idealised rural England which they saw close to extinction.⁶⁵⁴ Their writings did not try to offer responses to the problems of overcrowding in the cities or to rural depopulation; instead, they presented a distorted and romanticised perspective on a lost paradise in which life was simpler and people more honest. This 'Merrie England' could be grasped in particular landscapes and regions, unspoilt heirlooms which maintained their identity away from the turmoil of modern life; in fact, these locations came to be imagined not just as remnants of a vestigial or primitive England, but as the repositories of an altogether more authentic version of the nation's spirit.⁶⁵⁵

The romanticised outlook towards the countryside experienced a marked decline during the interwar period, as increasingly more people was forced to live in the suburbs which surrounded the big urban conglomerates. In this context, the literature about rural England became less interested on idealised portrayals and escapist attitudes, and focused instead on the possibilities of transformation of this landscape for the needs of the modern British society.⁶⁵⁶ Despite the ultimately limited impact of this pre-1914 literature on rural Englishness -its readership was distant from elite discourses of the nation and mostly comprised consciously anti-establishment individuals-⁶⁵⁷ it evidences that even in those instances, such as England, where stability and continuity seemed most strongly affirmed, the

⁶⁵³ Krishan Kumar, "Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective", *Theory and Society* 29, no.5 (2000): 592.

⁶⁵⁴ Peter Mandler, "Against 'Englishness': English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (1997): 164.

⁶⁵⁵ Catherine Brace, "Looking Back: The Cotswolds and English National identity, c.1890-1950", *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no.4 (1999): 504.

⁶⁵⁶ Mandler, "Against 'Englishness'", 173.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

disconnection of the nation from its essential past remained a constant preoccupation for those who identified themselves as members of it.⁶⁵⁸

In the light of this example, it is not surprising that China suffered more than Britain from the question of national continuity. After all, the circumstances of the empire were far from ideal: faced with frequent military defeat, internal insurgents, anti-Manchu ideologies, and the constant intrusion of Western technology, culture, and political meddling, it is easy to imagine that the perspective of many scholars and intellectuals was far from optimistic. It seemed to them that China was, at least in certain aspects, lagging behind; that it had become self-content or had not been capable of meaningful adaptation. Such a thought process invariably cast a shadow of doubt over the past, as increasingly more historians and literati tried to find the answer for China's present circumstances in a flaw in its former development.

As we have pointed out in Chapter II, the decades following the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion up to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 bore witness of a tendency towards the introduction of reform in the governance and the military and educative structure of the empire. Although, as has been mentioned, such measures were often limited in their scope and lacked the more radical nature of the transformations advocated during the late 1890s and 1900s, it is nonetheless true that the ideals of the Self-Strengthening movement introduced certain strategies by which to make their proposed changes more palatable and acceptable.

The most curious and striking of these approaches claimed that every meaningful innovation that required imitating the West –be it guns, ships, engineering, or natural science- had, originally, been first developed in China: in this interpretation, the ancient Chinese knowledge had reached the West by means unknown and there it had developed in an autonomous manner.⁶⁵⁹ It might be true that foreigners had perfected these systems, from technology to democracy, and even that they were superior in their use -at least temporally- to the Chinese, but this

⁶⁵⁸ Brace, "Looking Back", 513.

⁶⁵⁹ Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformations of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 21.

'exercise in intellectual gymnastics'⁶⁶⁰ allowed to keep intact the hierarchy of traditional culture as the source and apex of civilisation even in the face of increasing influence from outside.⁶⁶¹

The *xixue zhongyuan* (Chinese origin of Western learning 西學中原) theory thus offered reassurance about the relative positions of the Qing and the West. In this regard, many researchers have tended to interpret it as a 'psychological recompense for victimisation at the hands of Western imperialists', or as a comforting self-deception by which to maintain the long-held claim of China to cultural superiority.⁶⁶² However, it has also been pointed out that it may have been not so much a shared belief as a tactical approach to the problem of introducing thoroughly alien concepts and vocabulary into political debate, or even an argument to present these projects as more attractive and easier to apply to Chinese circumstances. Somewhat paradoxically, this attitude might not even have been unique to reformers, but could also have been embraced by more conservative or traditionalist groups in order to block more radical transformations.⁶⁶³ In turn, this could also explain why the Self-Strengthening officials found it easier to gather support for the establishment of military academies and armament industries rather than for other projects closer to the core of the imperial and Confucian tradition, such as the complete transformation of the examination system.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶⁰ Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 24.

⁶⁶¹ Werner Meissner, "China's Search for Cultural and National Identity from the Nineteenth Century to the Present", *China Perspectives* 68 (2007): 6-7, <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/3103>.

⁶⁶² Zarrow, *After Empire*, 21. Also, Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 24-25.

⁶⁶³ Paul A. Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving perspectives on the Chinese past* (London-New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 42.

⁶⁶⁴ Yen-P'ing Hao, "Changing Chinese views of Western relations, 1840-95", in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 11: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 200-201.

This sort of limited reform, as well as the theory of the Chinese origins of Western learning, fell out of grace after the debacle of 1895.⁶⁶⁵ The sense of failure fostered more radical outlooks to China's problems, and with them came a more critical interpretation of the idealised tradition. One of the leaders of a new generation of provincial reformers, Xu Renzhu (1863-1900), attacked in the late 1890s the *xixue zhongyuan* strategy as 'a series of forced interpretations to show how all of Western learning had its origins in China' and concluded that it was 'a nonsense', the last example of the Chinese 'habit of pumping up [their] self-esteem'.⁶⁶⁶ It seems that, to those preoccupied with the situation of the empire during the 1890s, the claim that China had 'to learn from the barbarians [...] only the one thing, solid ships and effective guns', had become a symbol of the naivety of previous reformers as well as of the unfitness of the imperial officials to manage the current threats to the Great Qing.⁶⁶⁷

But, if it was neither ships and guns, nor factories and arsenals, which the Chinese had to introduce to face these foreigners, what was it then that had to be done? If the previously prevalent paradigm of considering 'Chinese learning as essence, and Western learning for application' (*Zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong* 中學為體, 西學為用)⁶⁶⁸ was ill-suited as a remedy for China's weakness, was it not clear, argued the reformers, that more drastic steps had to be considered?⁶⁶⁹ As we have already seen, it was this call that would prompt Yan Fu to introduce Social Darwinism to China, or Liang Qichao to revise the foundations of traditional historiography. Yet, in accepting the science, political concepts and aspirations, cultural trends, historical outlook, and technology of the Westerners, was not China risking becoming a mere imitator of them? What would remain of the empire's own self after such a colossal

⁶⁶⁵ Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 24-25.

⁶⁶⁶ Xu Renzhu, quoted in Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*, 39.

⁶⁶⁷ Feng Guifeng, quoted in Jin Xiaoxing, "Translation and Transmutation: The *Origin of the Species* in China", *British Journal for the History of Science* 52, no.1 (2019): 120.

⁶⁶⁸ Meissner, "China's Search for Cultural and National Identity", 4.

⁶⁶⁹ Jin, "Translation and Transmutation", 123.

overhaul? The circumstances seemed to lead directly to a dead end: if China was to survive, it would have to adapt itself to the Eurocentric global order; but, in doing so, would it not be so thoroughly transformed as to not being China anymore?⁶⁷⁰

To preserve a semblance of continuity between their radical projects and the traditions of the empire became one of the main preoccupations of the reformist generation of the 1890s. This was not simply due, however, to their persistent concern about China's loss of uniqueness, but had also to do with the connection many of these individuals felt in regard to the traditional system. After all, many of them held official posts and had achieved success or relevance due to their participation in the examination system which selected bureaucrats for the empire; the foundation of their social and political status, their 'cultural capital', was thus intrinsically connected to the main principles of classical learning.⁶⁷¹ This apparent tension would come to shape their approach to national continuity: while they believed that certain aspects of the ideal past may not have been so perfect when observed from the perspective of China's newly discovered weakness and were, as a result, in need of drastic reformation, this did not have to lead any of them, necessarily, to advocate the dismissal of the whole traditional system, most commonly identified with the imperial state and Confucius' teachings. Instead, they tried to prove that it was the corruption of this very tradition, the confusion, misinterpretation, and shameless appropriation of classical learning for selfish goals, which had condemned the Chinese nation to its present declining position.

Kang Youwei's was a paradigmatic approach to this problem. As we have mentioned before, Kang was a master of the New Text, an interpretation which considered that there were transcendent and hidden messages within Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals*. This would lead him, as we have exposed in chapter IV, to developing an understanding of temporality based on the progression through Three Ages towards the period of the Great Unity. However, Kang was also to become

⁶⁷⁰ Tze-ki Hon, *The Allure of the Nation: The Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 5-6.

⁶⁷¹ Tze-ki Hon, "Cultural Identity and Local Self-Government", *Modern China* 30, no.4 (2004): 511.

an influential and pivotal figure in the debates about national continuity due to its portrayal of Confucius himself.

Confucius had been traditionally regarded as the sage who had compiled and preserved the history and rituals of the Golden Age. As shown in chapter IV, this was an act of fundamental significance, given that his texts were believed to be the most important link connecting the present to the ideal society of the late Zhou dynasty (r.1046-256 BC). As such, the correct interpretation of these works became the fundamental task of scholars and literati, and in turn they constituted the bedrock of the canon of classical learning as encoded in the examination system.⁶⁷² Kang confronted this established picture, and argued instead that “Confucius was the founder of a doctrine” and “a godlike sage king” who had directly written –rather than compiled or transcribed- all the major classical texts.⁶⁷³ An almost divine figure, he had been endowed with the ability to grasp the great historical scheme of the Three Ages and had been responsible of offering a program of political and social reform to renovate Chinese society.⁶⁷⁴

This apotheosis of Confucius had fundamental implications. For one, it was certainly instrumental to Kang’s own project of transforming the empire into a constitutional monarchy following the example of Meiji Japan and which would elevate the New Text interpretation of Confucius and the Three Ages to the status of state religion.⁶⁷⁵ After all, Kang considered that he had provided enough evidence to

⁶⁷² Brian Moloughney, “Myth and the Making of History: Gu Jiegang and the *Gushi Bian* Debates”, in *Transforming History: The Making of a Modern Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 241.

⁶⁷³ Kang Youwei, *Kongzi Gaizhi kao* (Confucius as a Reformer 孔子改制考, 1897), quoted in *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, eds. William Theodore De Bary and Richard Lufrano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 266-267.

⁶⁷⁴ Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-Kang and China’s New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1971), 45-46.

⁶⁷⁵ In 1898, Kang himself would advocate for the establishment of a Ministry of Religion and a Religion Association to ‘change all provincial academies and evil shrines into new schools’

prove what the Self-Strengthening reformer Wang Tao, fifteen years earlier, had already grasped: that 'if Confucius lived today, [...] he would not cling to antiquity and oppose making changes'.⁶⁷⁶ Scholars such as Zhang Taiyan tried to oppose Kang's a-historical image of the sage, and thus both sides became entangled in a debate to show the extent to which Confucius had been merely a transmitter of the accounts of antiquity with no transcendental lessons for posterity. In this regard, the struggle between those who claimed that Confucius was closer to a prophetic and god-like figure and those who denied him any intrinsic importance did much to demystify his character.⁶⁷⁷

But, apart from that, Kang's depiction of the ancient sage as an 'uncrowned king' entailed an implicit –and maybe accidental– devaluation of the monarchical institution. As other reformers and revolutionaries such as Kang's own pupil, Liang Qichao, would quickly understand, it was clear that, in this interpretation, it had been the creative impulse of Confucius, and not the example of the Golden Age of the Three Dynasties, which had preserved China's civilisation and unity from the worst excesses of aristocratic oppression via the recruitment of a virtuous national bureaucracy'.⁶⁷⁸ As a result, Confucius' example was elevated as a measuring stick to which emperors had to comply, an ideal of kingship that opened the door to radical reforms of the imperial institution if the latter was considered to be immoral or stagnant. The monarchs were still almost omnipotent, and Kang himself stressed their superiority,

to this end. See Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2000), 593-594.

⁶⁷⁶ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* (Addition to the collection of writings from Taoyuan 弢園文錄外編, 1883), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 253.

⁶⁷⁷ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 282-283. Also, Charlotte Furth, "The Sage as Rebel: The Inner world of Chang Ping-lin", in *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China*, ed. Charlotte Furth (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 113-150.

⁶⁷⁸ Peter Zarrow, "The Reform Movement, the Monarchy, and Political Identity" in *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, eds. Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Asia Center & Harvard University Press, 2002), 34.

but the source of their power had been thoroughly transformed.⁶⁷⁹ Others may call themselves emperors, but there was only one 'being of divine intelligence, who would be a sage-king, a teacher for all the ages, a protector of all people, and a religious leader for the whole world': Confucius.⁶⁸⁰ By thus stretching the classical canon and separating it from the institution of the emperorship, Kang paved the way for more radical approaches. After all, if the monarch could be understood as the representative of Confucius, it was only a small step to imagine him, not as the *locus* of sovereignty, but as a symbol of the nation.⁶⁸¹

It would be the arrival of Western evolutionary thought to China, especially through the translations of Yan Fu, which would offer a new framework by which to interpret the institution of the monarchy. Yan himself, in his works, had condemned the emperors as having taken the reins of the state away from the people, and he denounced that it was the machinery these monarchs have developed to perpetuate this spoil, by dividing the natural social bonds uniting the nation, which lay at the root of China's present weakness.⁶⁸² In this interpretation, the state was strongly conceived as the creation and possession of the community at large –taking deep inspiration from Western social-contractual currents- instead of the gift of semi-divine sages as postulated in the traditional cosmology. Although Yan would not go as far as to advocate the elimination of the monarchy, concluding that for the time being the Chinese group or *qun* was not yet fit for self-government, it is hard to deny how much his claim of a tactical or instrumental preservation of the institution fundamentally challenged its previous legitimacy.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁹ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 27-28.

⁶⁸⁰ Kang Youwei, *Kongzi Gaizhi kao* (Confucius as a Reformer 孔子改制考, 1897), quoted in Zarrow, *After Empire*, 51.

⁶⁸¹ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 54.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 86. Also, Y. C. Wang, "The Influence of Yen Fu and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao on the *San Min Chu I*", *Pacific Historical Review* 34 (1965): 166.

Liang Qichao whole-heartedly embraced Yan Fu's arguments after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform of 1898 and his own exile to Japan. Now it seemed clear to him that he had been deceived by Kang Youwei's notion of the Three Ages and the promised advance towards an ideal period of Great Unity: the world was instead one of endless and brutal struggle, in which the unfit were doomed to disappear and the strong preyed on the weak. He began to look dispassionately at the historical evolution of China, and pictured the empire as only one necessary stage in the process of development, the product of a series of confrontations between aristocratic leaders and which had given rise to a centralised government. Protected by the mantle of this omnipotent monarchy, the Chinese nation had been capable of slowly developing; by Liang's own time, it was finally starting to arise to its full-measure and to begin to claim its collective powers and rights.⁶⁸⁴ We can clearly see the extent to which Liang's conceptualisation adjusted to the model of historical journey of the nation as described in Chapter III. China had arrived at the stage of political unification much earlier than the Westerners, but it seemed that it had struggled to advance further, maybe –although Liang did not state it directly- precisely due to the effectiveness of this intermediate social articulation.⁶⁸⁵ In his works of the early 1900s the emperorship became, to an extent to which it had never been before, a historically situated institution: a higher and more positive stage than the preceding aristocratic rule, yet a negative and obscurantist system in comparison with the coming age of national democracy.⁶⁸⁶

In the face of these radical reinterpretations and challenges to the traditional order, Qing officials doubled in their intents of buttressing the dynasty's legitimacy.

⁶⁸⁴ Peter Zarrow, "Old Myth into New History: The Building Blocks of Liang Qichao's 'New History'", *Historiography East & West* 1, no.2 (2003): 221.

⁶⁸⁵ Liang might have been inspired by the works of the Japanese philosopher Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), in which he claimed that it was easier for Japan to embrace Western civilisation due to its historical balance between the military and the theocratic elements in its society. In China, however, the ultimate triumph of the theocratic emperorship meant that 'China has never once changed' and was thus ill-suited for accepting the new knowledge. See Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, trans. David A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst III (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 29.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 229-30.

Zhang Zhidong, one of these high-ranking Qing magistrates, authored in 1898 *An Exhortation to Learning* (*Quanxue pian* 勸學篇), a widely disseminated work in which he supported the monarchy and the classical learning while advocating, at the same time, the necessity of reform.⁶⁸⁷ In his words,

If we wish to make China strong and preserve Chinese learning, we must promote Western learning. But unless we first use Chinese learning to consolidate the foundation and to give our purpose a right direction, the strong will become rebellious leaders and the weak, slaves. The consequence will be worse than not being versed in Western learning. (...) Scholars today should master the classics in order to understand the purpose of our early sages and teachers in establishing our doctrine. They must study history in order to know the succession of peace and disorder in our history and the customs of the land, read the philosophers and literary collections in order to become familiar with Chinese scholarship and fine writing. After this they can select and utilise the Western learning that can make up for our shortcomings and adopt those Western governmental methods that can cure our illness. In this way, China will derive benefit from Western learning without incurring any danger.⁶⁸⁸

Zhang Zhidong's proposal of considering classical learning as the 'substance' (*ti* 體) and Western learning as the 'function' (*yong* 用) was extensively publicised by the Manchu court. The latter would promulgate an edict on January 1901 in which it

⁶⁸⁷ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 122.

⁶⁸⁸ Zhang Zhidong, *Quanxue pian* (An Exhortation to Learning 勸學篇, 1898), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 248.

made its stated objective to devote 'to China's revitalisation, to suppress vigorously the use of the terms *new* and *old*, and to blend together the best of what is Chinese and what is foreign'.⁶⁸⁹ The most criticised aspects of the examination system were done with, and the new exams featured an increasing presence of topics related to Western science and technology. However, the phrasing of these questionnaires, by claiming, for instance, that 'much of European science originated in China' or by asking the candidates to 'use Chinese learning to critique Western learning'⁶⁹⁰, betrayed their whole-hearted embrace of the hierarchical *ti-yong* formula as sketched by Zhang.⁶⁹¹ Unluckily for the dynasty, the introduction of Western learning, even in this type of controlled environments, was not separable from notions of nationalism, racist thinking, or constitutional ideas; in this regard, even Zhang's formula unintentionally contributed to providing grounds of criticism against the Qing.⁶⁹²

The preoccupation with the excessive importation of foreign elements pushed some literati to look at the past in search of a national essence (*guocui* 國粹) which had to be addressed, preserved, and carefully taken care of in order to foster China's possibilities for the future. These scholars, most prominently Liu Shipei, Deng Shi (1877-1941), or Ma Xulun (1884-1970), did not share the radical and thoroughly negative interpretation of the historiographical tradition of China presented by Liang Qichao in his *New Historiography* (1902); instead, they often emphasised the quality

⁶⁸⁹ Reform Edict of January 29 (1901), quoted in De Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol II*, 286.

⁶⁹⁰ These examples come from the metropolitan examinations of 1902. See Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham, MA and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 393-394.

⁶⁹¹ Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations*, 595.

⁶⁹² Li Lin, "Disciplinization of History Education in Modern China: A Study of History Education in the Imperial University of Peking (1898-1911)", *Creative Education* 3, no.4 (2012): 577.

of these texts, and put themselves to the task of producing a veritable history of China out of these records that could serve as a foundation for a future Chinese identity.⁶⁹³

This group of cultural nationalists offered an alternative perspective on the historical role played by Confucianism to that of reformers such as Kang and Liang or Qing officials like Zhang Zhidong. Most of them accepted Terrien de Lacouperie's theory of Sino-Babylonianism, and it was this belief, in conjunction with their study of ancient sources, which led them to imagine that that of the Three Dynasties (Xia [c.2205 BC-c.1766 BC], Shang [c.1600 BC-c.1046 BC], and Zhou [c.1046 BC-256 BC]) had been the social order first established by the Yellow Emperor, the true forefather of the Chinese.⁶⁹⁴ In this interpretation, Confucius had been not, as Kang Youwei had argued, the originator of the true Chinese civilisation; quite the opposite, it became identified with the ossification of the vitality which up until that point had marked the development of the Chinese ethnicity. Liu Shipei, between 1905 and 1907, tried to emphasise this point: he outlined a pre-Confucian age defined by equality, solidarity, and communal property, which disappeared with the advent of the imperial system sanctioned by Confucius.⁶⁹⁵ Rather than the 'founder of the doctrine' that would save China, as the New Text scholar Kang Youwei thought him to be, Confucius became, in this interpretation, the main cause for the loss of the country's national essence.⁶⁹⁶

The disintegration of the imperial system and its sources of legitimacy marked the first decade of the twentieth century. The New Policies (*xinzheng* 新政) program developed by the dynasty after the defeat in the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901 at the hands of the imperialist alliance involved major changes in the governance of the

⁶⁹³ Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow, "Making History Modern: The Transformation of Chinese Historiography, 1895-1937", in Moloughney and Zarrow, *Transforming History*, 9-10.

⁶⁹⁴ Lin Xiaobing, "Historicizing Subjective Reality: Rewriting History in Early Republican China", *Modern China* 25, no.1 (1999): 31.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁹⁶ Martin Bernal, "Liu Shih-p'ei and National Essence", in Furth, *The Limits of Change*, 104-105.

empire which seem to have only accelerated the rhythm of transformation.⁶⁹⁷ Of all the undertaken measures, the dismantling of the imperial examination system and its substitution for a nation-wide school system in 1905 was certainly the most striking one in terms of its implications for the imagination of national continuity. The results of the measure were not those expected by the Manchu court: if their ambition was to simultaneously secure what could be salvaged from the previous system while gaining control over the local and provincial schools founded by the Han Chinese gentry in the constituencies they served, this strategy seems to have utterly failed.⁶⁹⁸ Although the abolition of the traditional examination system certainly mobilised the local and provincial elites for the cause of the new national education system, this local activism was not transformed into a more direct control by the dynasty of the new institutions.⁶⁹⁹

Yet the most profound consequence of the closing down of the imperial examinations was the desacralisation and loss of status of the classical canon. For a new generation of historians and intellectuals this would not be –as it had been for the reformers of the 1890s and 1900s such as Liang, Zhang, or Liu- one main defining element of their own identity, but a conglomerate of historical sources now open to academic discussion.⁷⁰⁰ After all, the previous system had been central to define elite status and intellectual orthodoxy, as well as for formulating the roles of history and tradition; now that these guiding frameworks were gone, the educated class was faced with the often traumatic task of having to define its social, cultural, and political functions and obligations.⁷⁰¹

Even after the fall of the Qing in 1912, the inertia of many authors writing national histories of China still reserved a forefront space for the foundational myths

⁶⁹⁷ Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2011), 24.

⁶⁹⁸ Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations*, 616.

⁶⁹⁹ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, 32.

⁷⁰⁰ Schneider, *Ku Chieh-Kang and China's New History*, 53-54.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6. Also, Bernal, "Liu-Shih-p'ei and National Essence", 110.

and core elements of these traditional accounts.⁷⁰² Yet, increasingly, as younger and more academically-trained historians were put to the task of making sense of China's historical journey, these classics came under deeper suspicion. For this reason, we consider the 1910s a transitional decade in the search of continuities between the nation's present and its past, which is better understood as a bridge between the crumbling –yet still standing- imperial world of the 1900s and the definitely post-imperial horizon opened from 1919 onwards.

On May 4th 1919, after knowing that the treaties between Great Britain, France, and Japan at the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles had granted the latter the possession of the previously-German territorial concessions in China, over 3,000 Chinese students gathered to protest in Beijing against this violation of national sovereignty and Wilsonian principles. The demonstration was seconded in over 200 other cities throughout the country, and although hundreds of protesters were incarcerated, the encroachment of the marches obliged the government to ultimately set them free.⁷⁰³ This incident, often referred as the 'May Fourth' (*wu si* 五四), gives its name to an era of political and intellectual transformation, fostered by the increasing strength and relevance of the university system –with institutions such as the Beijing University (also known as *beida* 北大).

Although the intellectual currents which arose on the wake of the May Fourth movement share no unitary or programmatic nature, it is however possible to identify certain trends in the context of their debates. First, being as it was a movement developed mainly by university students and their teachers, youth became a positive –and often revolutionary- value to uphold. We may find the roots of this idea on Liang Qichao's reformist texts of the early 1900s, in which he claimed that the Chinese nation was divided into two groups: the old and worthless conservatives and

⁷⁰² Robert J. Culp, "China-The Land and its People": Fashioning Identity in Secondary School History Textbooks, 1911-1937", *Twentieth Century China* 26, no.2 (2001): 23.

⁷⁰³ Benjamin Schwartz, "Themes in intellectual history: May Fourth and after", in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 12: Republican China 1912-1949, Part I*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 407.

the creative and progressive youth.⁷⁰⁴ Secondly, these academics were much more in tune with international ideologies and concepts than the immediately precedent generation, a fact that often emphasised their position as cultural 'creoles' trapped between denying the value of the past on the grounds of foreign methods and ideas and their emotional attachment to it.⁷⁰⁵ Finally, there existed an optimistic and combative stance which characterised their discussions and which, due to their common appeal to speedy action, could foster social and political unrest and violence –as the May Fourth incident itself had aptly summarised-.⁷⁰⁶

Furthermore, we cannot deny the impact that the First World War had for the relative imagined positions of China and the West. If prior to the war Western civilisation had been widely considered by revolutionaries and reformers as positive and superior to the Chinese, many were now arriving at the realisation that this might not be so true. After all, had not the West almost imploded in a violent strife for power, victim to its own selfishness, killer instincts, lack of integrity and shamelessness? Could this, in fact, mean that Europe and America were 'corrupted utterly'?⁷⁰⁷ In the face of such a thought, some of the main proponents of Westernisation, like Yan Fu or Liang Qichao, started to acknowledge that, even if modernisation was still essential, this did not necessarily mean following the exact example of the West.⁷⁰⁸ To main figures of the new movement, like Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), it now seemed possible to solve the dichotomy

⁷⁰⁴ Joseph Richmond Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959), 93.

⁷⁰⁵ Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 7.

⁷⁰⁶ Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

⁷⁰⁷ Yan Fu (1916), quoted in Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: the Intellectuals who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012), 275.

⁷⁰⁸ This pushed forward the discourse of an Eastern civilisation as the cure for the excesses of -or even as superior to- Western civilisation, which was to develop between the 1910s and 1945. See Prasenjit Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12, no.1 (2001): 112.

between China's historical continuity and its need for modernisation, as long as the nation's past was revisited, purified from errors and inaccuracies, and brought back as a useful knowledge for the people of the twentieth century.⁷⁰⁹

Among the variety of ideological currents and discussions of this time, one debate exemplifies better than any other the disconnection that the new methods of history as well as the intellectual trends of the last decades had effected on the minds of Chinese scholars. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this work, Chinese historical accounts traditionally began by telling the stories of a series of semi-legendary rulers known collectively as the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors and who allegedly had reigned during the third millennium BC. These monarchs, among whom featured the Yellow Emperor, the claimed ancestor of the Chinese, were imagined to have provided humans with skills and knowledge such as medicine, the calendar, or the characters of script. Wang Tao, one of the leading reformers of the Self-Strengthening movement during the 1870s and 80s, still proclaimed that these sages had 'cleared the wilderness and [given] China governmental institutions [...], styled China the centre of the firmament and provided it with the attributes of civilisation'.⁷¹⁰

It was this reverential inertia, still present in Republican textbooks⁷¹¹, that the historian of the Beijing University Gu Jiegang made his task to attack. In the early 1920s, Gu was introduced by his mentor Hu Shi to some books which dealt with the topic of book forgery in regard to these ancient accounts. From this study, he learnt that many of the allegedly classical books which referred to the period of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors were not, in fact, originals.⁷¹² Struck with such a revelation, Gu started to entertain a most radical idea: if so many of the texts which referred to China's ancient history were fake, how could one even be sure that there was such an ancient history at all? What was necessary, as Gu perceived it, was to

⁷⁰⁹ Schneider, *Ku Chieh-Kang and China's New History*, 54.

⁷¹⁰ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* (Addition to the collection of writings from Taoyuan 弢園文錄外編, 1883), quoted in Cohen, *China Unbound*, 36.

⁷¹¹ Culp, "'China-The Land and its People'", 23.

⁷¹² Wang, *Inventing China through History*, 64.

search for a scientifically demonstrable Chinese antiquity, and to rescue what might be useful, if there was something, from these honest accounts.⁷¹³ The struggle against historical anachronism and the ‘repudiation of false history’ became the guiding principles of Gu’s career, as well as of the Doubting Antiquity School (*yigu bai* 疑古派) of which he became one of the leading personalities.⁷¹⁴

In 1923, as we have mentioned in Chapter IV, Gu Jiegang published a history textbook titled *Chinese History* (*Benguoshi* 本國史) alongside his fellow colleague Wang Zhongqi (1880-1913). In this work, the stance of the Doubting Antiquity movement was already apparent, as the book claimed that the traditional accounts of ancient China were to be understood simply as ‘lies’ created by late-Zhou scholars to mislead the masses and justify the rule of their own dynasty.⁷¹⁵ Three years later, the first volume of the results of his own investigation on the topic were made available in a more thorough manner in *Critiques of Ancient History* (*Gushi bian* 古史辨, 1926), in which he boldly claimed that ‘properly speaking, there is no history [in China] before the Eastern Zhou dynasty [770-256 BC]’.⁷¹⁶ With a single stroke, Gu cast a shadow of doubt not only over the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors, but also over the Three Dynasties, the Golden Age upon which, as we have observed, much of the traditional historical consciousness had previously rested.

A provocative notion like this was bound to produce radical opposition. For one, Gu and Wang’s textbook was banned by the government in 1929, on the grounds

⁷¹³ Schneider, *Ku Chieh-Kang and China’s New History*, 8.

⁷¹⁴ Ge Zhaoguang, “Absorbing the “Four Borderlands” into “China”: Chinese Academic Discussions of “China” in the First Half of the Twentieth Century”, *Chinese Studies in History* 48, no.4 (2015): 340.

⁷¹⁵ Gu Jiegang and Wang Zhongqi, (*Xiandai chuzhong jiaokeshu*) *Benguoshi* ([Modern lower middle school textbook] Chinese History (現代初中教科書)本國史, 1923), quoted in Qian Jiwei and Ryan Ho, ““Chineseness” in History Textbooks: The Narrative on Early China”, in *Chineseness and Modernity in a Changing China: Essays in Honour of Professor Wang Gungwu*, eds. Zheng Yongnian and Zhao Litao (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2020), 105.

⁷¹⁶ Gu Jiegang, *Gushi bian* (*Critiques of Ancient History* 古史辨, 1926), quoted in James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenous Became Chinese* (New York-Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 123.

that, by denying the existence of a common ancestor to all the inhabitants of the Republic, it shattered the self-confidence of the *minzu* and was, thus, 'harmful for the state'.⁷¹⁷ To this, Gu retorted by stating that there was no need for the government to maintain the lie of previous historians, given that the Chinese were united by common interest and not by the deceiving tale about their common ancient forefathers.⁷¹⁸ Secondly, Gu's audacious claim prompted other historians to go back to the source material to disprove his thesis. Some of them, like Wang Guowei (1877-1927), did not share the thoroughly iconoclast version that Gu Jiegang endorsed, but conceded that 'much that pretends to be historical fact has undoubtedly been embellished, while much that appears legendary is grounded in historical fact'.⁷¹⁹

However, it would be Fu Sinian (1896-1950), the author that in 1918, as a mere student, had criticised Japanese historians' periodisation models for Chinese history, who would provide hardest proof against Gu's ideas. After having spent seven years in Europe, Fu came back to China and established the Institute of History and Philology in 1926. It was under the umbrella of this institution that Fu conducted archaeological excavations in Anyang, the capital of one of the Three Dynasties of the Golden Age, the Shang (c. 1600-1046 BC), and was able to confirm that this state had not only existed, but that it had enjoyed a thriving society.⁷²⁰ By 1929, while Gu was working on the second volume of his *Gushi bian*, even those who had previously endorsed his relentless attack on Chinese tradition such as Hu Shi had already become convinced that, after the findings in Anyang, there was no point in denying the reality of the Three Dynasties.⁷²¹

Although the Doubting Antiquity movement may seem to have confirmed, paradoxically, the veracity of the classical accounts on a scientific basis, it is

⁷¹⁷ Dai Jitao, quoted in Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 125.

⁷¹⁸ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 124.

⁷¹⁹ Wang Guowei (1927), quoted in Moloughney, "Myth and the Making of History", 253.

⁷²⁰ Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 216.

⁷²¹ Moloughney, "Myth and the Making of History", 260.

undeniable that it tells us much about the centrality that the search of a historical continuity for the Chinese nation had for the historians of the 1920s. The banning of Gu and Wang's textbook by the Republican government offers but an obvious example of the extent to which threats to the continuous image of the national community were imagined as menacing for society as a whole. Radical claims and proposals, such as those of the Doubting Antiquity School, were not uncommon during the May Fourth era: many of the new authors tried to promote vernacular Chinese as a valuable tool for nation-building, in contrast to the difficult traditional literary style, which, nonetheless, had been employed for centuries,⁷²² while Western tendencies and ideas were appropriated and wielded simultaneously by those who demanded the erasure of the whole edifice of tradition as well as by their opponents who tried to elevate Confucius' figure as the humanist sage of China.⁷²³

In short, by the end of the period the past was no longer a place of divinely-sanctioned example, nor a canon of knowledge sanctified by tradition and official endorsement; instead, it had become a battlefield for academic intrusion, partial appropriation, methodological innovation, and reasoned debate. This might be the most long-lasting historical consequence of the Doubting Antiquity debates and of the May Fourth era as a whole.⁷²⁴

⁷²² Wang, *Inventing China through History*, 54-55.

⁷²³ The mentioned debate was conducted by contributors to two journals, *New Culture* and *Critical Review*, during the 1920s. Whereas *New Culture* embodied the impulse to develop a new Chinese society by embracing the methods of the West, *Critical Review* authors, influenced by the Harvard professor Irving Babbit (1865-1933) and his New Humanism, tried to elevate Confucius as a humanist symbol paragon to the sages of the West. For more details on the debate, see Lydia H. Liu, "Rethinking Culture and National Essence", in Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 239-256.

⁷²⁴ Moloughney, "Myth and the Making of History", 261-262.

We have analysed in this chapter some developments, approaches, and debates related to the search for continuity in national histories. If we agree with Renee Yuwei Wang in that 'History provides us with narratives that tell us who we are, where we came from and where we should be going' and that '[i]t defines a trajectory which helps construct the essence of a group's identity', the significance of these attempts can be better understood as a series of strategies to reconstruct a perceived broken historical continuity.⁷²⁵

We have argued that, due to the circumstances in which these national histories were produced, the acknowledgement of a rupture with the past was much more acute in China than it was in Britain. Although there existed critics who claimed that modern England had lost its soul and that the latter resided in places of memory in the English countryside, the main principle of the Whig interpretation of history – that of the progressive development of the political institutions through the ages- did not shatter despite the criticisms it sustained as sketched in chapter IV.

Such a sense of contentment could not exist in China. Increasingly, the need to introduce foreign innovations and ideas to manage the precarious international position of the empire pushed to the limit the faith of officials and scholars in the example of the Golden Age and in Confucius' own teachings. As the call for reform became more widespread, the issue turned to the fundamental question of what should be altered and what should remain. At first, these programs focused mainly on technology and weaponry, but as the situation of the Qing became direr, a new generation proposed a much more ambitious set of changes which affected education, government, and bureaucracy. Given that these three elements were central both to the traditional cultural system sustained by the literati elite as well as to the prerogatives of the imperial state, these transformations fundamentally altered the basis of legitimacy of both. Kang Youwei's portrayal of Confucius as an 'uncrowned emperor' or Yan Fu and Liang Qichao's conception of the emperorship as a necessary yet time-bound stage in the evolution of the nation are only but two examples of this.

⁷²⁵ Renee Yuwei Wang, "Who are the Han? Representations of the Han in Chinese school textbooks in late Qing and early Republican China", AACS Conference (2011): 4.

The problematic position of a culturalist or dynasty-led nationalism opened the gates to an alternative imagined community based on the Han race and the allegedly common descent of the Chinese ethnicity as explained in Chapter V. These ideas offered firm ground from which to criticise the reigning Qing as foreign Manchu, while relegating Confucian tradition to a second ground in comparison to the more natural bond of race that united the nation. Of course, many Republican authors would still take pride on classical literature and would prominently feature characters such as the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors or Confucius himself in their national histories. Yet these figures were demoted to semi-mythological ancestors of the Chinese ethnicity, and were no longer believed to have set examples for all humanity. The case of the Yellow Emperor offers the most obvious evidence of this trend.

When the May Fourth movement questioned why the Republic had not brought strength to China as it had been thought by the reformers of the 1890s, many intellectuals and historians turned to tradition as the source of China's weakness. It was not the nation's essence that they aimed to destroy, but only those ideas and practices that had co-opted and harmed the community's bond. In this context, Gu Jiegang's attack on the historical accounts of the Three Dynasties can be portrayed, as he himself did, as a 'work of destructive criticism' whose ultimate goal was to offer a true history of ancient China in contrast to the false one provided by traditional scholars.⁷²⁶ That Fu Sinian's excavations would ultimately endorse the traditional version must not obscure the fact that confidence and respect on the classics had only been buttressed by their confirmation through historical methods imported from the West.

What does this tell us, then, about nationalism at large? First, it seems clear that national continuity is a fundamental pillar of the national outlook at the past. The imagined community cannot bear its own novelty, or its recent birth: this is what prompted those Romantics enamoured of England's rural landscapes to reject modern England, or Chinese reformers to argue that the new ideas they were importing into

⁷²⁶ Gu Jiegang (1926), quoted in Moloughney, "Myth and the Making of History", 259.

the country were, in reality, of indigenous origin. When this novelty is apparently being accepted -such as when Liu Shipei attacked the towering position of Confucius or the Qing rulers' foreignness- this means, in reality, that the conception of the bond connecting the nation internally has been shifted. Liu was not writing as a scholar who imagined his identity as defined primarily by his possession of a series of cultural attributes: he had come to conceive China as a racial community, and this conception freed him from paying unambiguous respect to the Manchu dynasty as well as to Confucius. In short, he did not betray the principle of national continuity; he just offered an alternative version of the nation itself.⁷²⁷

Secondly, it evidences the importance of the national historical framework exposed in chapter III to the process of building national self-understandings. After all, even those elements who were central to previous notions of communal identity, such as the Confucian tradition or the Whig interpretation of history, had to be ultimately adapted to the main principles of national discourse. Instead of divinely sanctioned commandments, they were transformed into representations of the nation's own sovereignty and genius; rather than moments of primeval perfection, they became entrenched in a pattern of evolutionary and staged development. On the surface, it may even look that not much have changed, as Confucianism or the constitutional advancement of Britain were able to keep its place as powerful symbols in some national histories. However, the whole reasoning behind their presence in these accounts was completely different from that of histories produced decades before. Their own identity had become subsidiary to the existence of an imagined community, the nation, and their significance was now tied to the latter's development and progress. The search for national continuity, rather than to the ossification of the past, seems to have led, paradoxically, to its complete and utter transformation.

⁷²⁷ This has been noted by Lin Xiaobing when he acknowledged that, in this sense, '[a] change in historical narratives [...] also means a change in the moral values inscribed onto historical events'. See Lin, "Historicizing Subjective Reality", 30.

VII

One empire, one nation: (re)defining the nation in space

In the 1880s, China and England rested at the political and symbolical core of two imperial systems. In the case of China, the main centre of power rested in Beijing, where the Manchu Qing dynasty had established its residence. It ruled over a majority of Han Chinese subjects, who comprised close to the 90% of the population of the empire and who inhabited 'China proper', a conglomerate of eighteenth provinces whose borders 'followed the Great Wall in the north and ended in the foothills of the Tibetan plateau in the west'.⁷²⁸ However, the territories subject to the dynasty included large extensions of land west and north of this region as well, such as Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, or Manchuria. The situation of the British Empire, on the other hand, was peculiar because, although its largest constituent lands (such as Canada or Australia) were inhabited by peoples who mostly recognised a connection with the metropolitan population, the majority of the subjects of the empire were found in India, a colony in which the presence of individuals of English descent was almost insignificant.

In both contexts there were few elements that connected the various imperial possessions with each other, apart from their readily evident subjection to the same imperial centre. They can be considered to have been only 'loosely in contact with one

⁷²⁸ Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayah and Eric Van Young (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 230.

another', as some author put it, because in imperial systems 'the metropolis seeks to direct all flows of information and decision making through the eye of the imperial needle'.⁷²⁹ This type of centralisation meant, in reality, that empires such as the Qing and the British were more prone to encouraging vertical, hierarchical connections between core and periphery, rather than the horizontal solidarity between territories which we tend to identify with nation-states.

The mental construction of these territories as imperial peripheries was one of the main results of such a conception of political control. Here, this term will be used to refer to those regions in which the effective control of the imperial centre was more tenuous, and, as a result, could be less directly applied. Usually, they corresponded to those lands furthest away from the imperial core, such as in the case of Mongolia, Xinjiang, or Tibet; but there are circumstances in which a territory closer to the metropolis could also be regarded as a periphery of empire, as evidenced by the case of Ireland. It must be reiterated, however, that this imagined peripheral position can only make any sense if we, as researchers, take the standpoint of those at the centre of these imperial systems. In other words, we must de-naturalise the idea that these lands and their inhabitants could only be represented as mere appendixes to the core imperial regions.

Given their very nature, these peripheries were uneasily controlled in a delicate equilibrium between imperial and local interests. As Pamela Kyle Crossley has noted for the case of Qing emperorship, the affairs involving the 'metropolitan' government and the subjected peoples in frontier territories were conducted by stressing local and distinct cultural modes of interethnic interaction and by symbolically positioning the new ruler at the centre of older institutional or religious frameworks.⁷³⁰ A long-lasting consequence of this type of indirect interaction with

⁷²⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 427.

⁷³⁰ Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1999), 11. This 'universal emperorship', as some authors have noted, seems to have been more common in the north on the empire than in its southern frontier regions. See Thomas S. Mullaney,

the peripheries was that the ties which united the latter to the Qing were more personal (to the emperor and the dynasty) than institutional (to the state).⁷³¹ A similar strategy was followed by the British Empire in India, where the collaboration of native elites and troops was fundamental in order to maintain a semblance of continuity and legitimacy for the colonial order.⁷³²

However, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed important changes in the integrity of these two great imperial entities, with a sharp acceleration of decentralising processes taking place between 1880 to 1930. In the British case, the grant of self-governing Dominion status to various settlement colonies -those in which most of the colonists was of Western origin- started in Canada (1867), and was later extended to Australia (1901), New Zealand and Newfoundland (1907), and South Africa (1910). These territories would finally achieve total equality with the metropolis in the Balfour Declaration of 1926 (later confirmed in the Statute of Westminster of 1931) and would remain politically connected to the United Kingdom only through the loose ties of the British Commonwealth. After decades of debates and conflict, Ireland, on the other hand, became divided in 1922 between the independent Irish Free State, which also ranked as a Dominion, and the British Northern Ireland, although its particular circumstances would suffer further alterations in the following decades.

The historical development of the Great Qing (*da Qing* 大清) during the period is even more striking than that of the British. After a very difficult mid-nineteenth century, marked by the defeat in the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) and by the internal strife of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the Qing government spent the decades from 1860 to the 1890s trying to strengthen its imperial

Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2011), 22.

⁷³¹ Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 231-232.

⁷³² Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, 427-428. The orientalist viewpoint offered by some contemporary intellectuals when they claimed that the title 'Empress of India' taken by Queen Victoria in 1876 made British rule more 'intelligible' for Indian natives is also interesting to note in this regard. See Frederick Bradshaw, *A Short History of Modern England from Tudor times to the present day* (London: University of London Press, 1915), 309.

institutions. The defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895, however, amplified the call for deeper and more structural reforms. The Hundred Days Reform program of 1898, led by the scholars Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, was, thus, a response to the dire situation faced by the Qing Empire. Although this project, which intended to transform China into a constitutional monarchy, was aborted by the action of conservative forces, the rhythm of transformation accelerated after yet-another defeat of the Qing in the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) and the promulgation of the 'New Policies' (*xinzheng* 新政) program in 1901.⁷³³

These circumstances underscored some major issues regarding the production of an agglutinative national narrative, not to say for the creation of a cohesive national history in both empires. How was it possible, from the standpoint of the principles referred to elsewhere in this work and which identified national communities as coherent, homogeneous peoples, for example, to imagine a nation that encompassed such disparate territories and populations? Could it be true that sub-imperial divisions -be them ethnic, racial, territorial, linguistic- were, in fact, so 'natural' that, as a consequence, any attempt at binding these human groups together was to be condemned from the start as 'artificial'? And, ultimately, was it even possible to produce a discourse of nationhood that could transform the exposed centre-periphery dynamics into a horizontal solidarity between equal territories as befit a nation-state?

Surprisingly, whereas the British Empire as a centralised entity would largely decompose into a number of effectively independent states after the late 1920s, the borders of the Qing empire remained mostly controlled from China despite the various turbulences and conflicts that the region suffered. The years of the ruling dynasty ended in 1912, and yet, as some scholars have noted, China 'kept its territory basically intact as the Qing Empire was transformed, in 1911, into the Republic of

⁷³³ Tze-ki Hon has argued that '[t]here were two expected outcomes of this mobilization. The first was that members of the local elite, encouraged to actively manage local affairs, would take over much of the local administration at their own expense. The second outcome was that local activism would be linked to national programs such that the central government would have direct control over local affairs without incurring extra costs'. See Tze-ki Hon, *The Allure of the Nation: The Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 32.

China, and, in 1949, into the People's Republic'.⁷³⁴ Although control of the outermost peripheries of the empire was lost for decades -such as in the case of Tibet-, or for good -as in the case of Outer Mongolia-, it is still remarkable the extent to which subsequent political projects, ultimately based on the existence of a community called the Chinese nation, were still capable of claiming sovereignty over territories which had only been part of this 'China' since, at most, the Qing conquests of the eighteenth century.⁷³⁵

Therefore, the fundamental question which arises from this brief comparison between the historical development of these two imperial geo-bodies is the following one: how was it possible for the Qing territorial possessions to be transformed conceptually into part of the 'Chinese' national territory, and why Britain (the metropolitan centre of the British empire) was not capable of producing the same kind of transformation out of its colonies?

In this chapter, we will compare two distinct political projects: Greater Britain and Greater Nationalism in China. We refer as Greater Britain to a historical and political perspective which intended to merge Britain and its colonies more tightly into a political union and which, although it appeared in the 1860s and 1870s, would acquire most relevance during the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s. The idea of Greater Nationalism, on the other hand, included different projects aimed at integrating and assimilating the peripheries of the Qing Empire -fundamentally Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Manchuria- and their populations into the Chinese nation-state and which were developed by Han scholars and intellectuals from the 1890s to the 1920s.

We will focus our attention on various aspects of these two phenomena. First, we will analyse the broad ideological environment in which these ideas were produced and consumed in both societies. Secondly, we will study the ways in which these endeavours manifested as concrete projects, and how they both were inseparable from the creation of national histories for the imagined communities they intended to produce. Finally, we will describe some of the opposition that these ideas encountered,

⁷³⁴ Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 229.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

both internally -from within the discourse of the nation they represented- as well as externally -from those groups, such as the colonies or the inhabitants of border regions, who developed their own alternative national identities. In doing so, we try to better understand the causes which determined that the territorial borders of the Qing Empire would be ultimately considered as a shorthand for the limits of the Chinese nation, whereas projects of a Greater Britain were not capable of achieving a similar success in the British Empire.

a. Background and causes

Both Greater Britain and the Chinese Greater Nationalism (*da minzu zhuyi* 大民族主義) were projects of imperial reconfiguration. That is, they were political schemes aimed at the creation of a nation-state for a nation that would include all (or a large part of) the population and territories of their respective empires. As such, they were projects marked from the start by the latent tension that existed between the inner dynamics of empire control, embodied in hierarchically organised centres and peripheries, and the requirements of the new national framework, defined, among others, by the main principles of national unity, community, and sovereignty.

Faced with such a complex task, we must ask ourselves why it was necessary for these empires to transform into nations. The tireless intents of the advocates of these two projects to present their accordance to the terms of national discourse, as we will see, seems to evidence that their mental horizons were deeply framed by the main assumptions of this national framework. For instance, they claimed that their purported nations were united by powerful natural bonds which rendered their inhabitants (defined ethnically or otherwise) members of a homogeneous group, despised any division of these communities as signs of 'provincialism', and recognised in these political projects the inevitable and natural outcome and embodiment of the historical development of the nation. Their overall positions denoted a tendency to see nations as the natural units of mankind, and, as a consequence, to imagine that the only legitimate justification for the closer political union of the various imperial

territories came from presenting them as constituent parts of a single, undivided national community. In other words, the goal of these 'imperialists' -as the advocates of Greater Britain were often referred to- and of those Chinese intellectuals who defended Greater Nationalism can be considered essentially the same: to buttress the acceptability of their respective empires by transforming them into nations.

Projects of Greater Britain and the Chinese Greater Nationalism were not strictly coetaneous. The term 'Greater Britain' came originally from the title of a 1868 book by Charles Wentworth Dilke (1843-1911), although the political movement of the same name would only acquire relevance during the period from the 1880s to the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷³⁶ After these years, the idea of creating a super-state that would encompass the British metropolis and its colonies was increasingly abandoned in favour of new approaches such as a looser alliance between nominally independent and equal states. In the case of China, however, the overarching discussion about the integration of the Qing peripheries into the Chinese nation was not undertaken seriously until the 1900s and only peaked in the years that followed the collapse of the dynasty in 1912.

It is striking to observe, then, that despite they not being contemporary processes, many of the reasons which ultimately pushed authors in both contexts to develop their political projects were very similar. They obeyed, to a large extent, to a series of perceived circumstances: threatening external competition, weakening internal division, the necessity of being represented in a great state, the international vulnerability of smaller entities, and the need for immediate, decisive action if the union with the peripheral territories was to be maintained. They were responses to - as well as reconfigurations of- previously existing views about identity and belonging and, at the same time, were often influenced by concepts and notions stemming from Social Darwinism, imperialist thought, and debates about the widespread impact of mass politics.

⁷³⁶ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 457-458.

External competition, for instance, was a fundamental factor that fundamentally contributed to producing discourses of imperial reconfiguration. In the case of Britain, for instance, the ruling elites of the empire had started to grow dubious, by the 1870s, about their future in the international stage and to feel that the pre-eminence which the British Empire had enjoyed in the mid-century was gone for good. As one author claimed,

The close of the nineteenth century has brought us in England some cause for reflection. Our Empire has continued to grow, and our trade has continued to expand; but everywhere, abroad and at home, we are faced by a competition of which our forefathers knew nothing.⁷³⁷

This external opposition was identified, first and foremost, with a group of states often identified as a threat for British interests. First among these rivals was Germany, a recently created political entity that had defeated France in 1870 and which menaced to destabilise the European balance of power that British politicians had tried to preserve throughout the century. This state 'was now ascendant on the continent: a country admired previously for its cultural dynamism, its biblical and historical scholarship, its sublime music, romantic poetry, and arcane philosophy, was transfigured into a menacing competitor'.⁷³⁸ Nevertheless, and as we have seen when we analysed Teutonist currents, the suspicion about German power was sometimes mediated by the belief of some intellectuals which considered that British and Germans were not a threat to each other given their common racial stock.

Russia was, however, a wholly different matter, and one which did not fail in constituting a source of anxiety for British elites. There had already existed an

⁷³⁷ Richard Burton Haldane, "Education and Imperial Policy", in *The Empire and the Century: A Series of Essays on Imperial Problems and Possibilities by Various Writers*, ed. Charles Sydney Goldman (London: John Murray, 1905), 161.

⁷³⁸ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 37.

animosity towards this empire since at least the mid-century war in Crimea (1853-1856), and this had been combined, by the last decades of the century, with an increasing distrust of its imperialist intents of expansion towards India. After all, the so-called 'Great Game' that Britain and Russia were playing in Central Asia was described by many contemporaries as the most likely source of a military conflict between the Empire and another one of the Great Powers. This notion of 'Russian peril' was often paired with its depiction as a military state, whose aggressive stance was usually contrasted to a moderate, civil view embodied by the British Empire. This type of identification of the enemies of the Empire, especially its European rivals, as warmongers was a commonplace of British self-understandings. Back at home, the existence of these threatening competitors seemed to justify the imperialists' intent of creating a more powerful state out of the imperial structure. As one of them explained, 'both Russia and Germany [were] the European argument for Imperial Federation'.⁷³⁹

Apart from these two countries, there was a third state towards which British elites were simultaneously suspicious and sympathetic. Although the United States was hardly an imperialist state (even if this could also be disputed considering its Western expansion and its 1898 war with Spain), it was also a competitor that the British took into account. Given its economic as well as territorial spread, its close (too close, as we will see, to the liking of some imperialists) relationship with the Dominion of Canada, and its novel and seemingly successful political system, the United States offered to many -both at home and abroad- an attractive alternative to the British Empire. A readily available evidence of this fact was the constant flux into the country of peoples migrating from imperial territories, especially Ireland.⁷⁴⁰ However, as in the German case, suspicions about the United States were balanced by its status as a member of the so-called Anglo-Saxon race, and elites -and non-

⁷³⁹ William Gresswell, *The Imperial Federation League* (1889-90), quoted in Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 38.

⁷⁴⁰ This emigration surge was often considered problematic by advocates of Greater Britain. See, for example, James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or England and Her Colonies* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1886), 12; also, Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 1.* (London-New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 27.

elites- in Britain usually perceived that there existed a great degree of common understanding between the two countries based on their shared ancestry, customs, and political principles.

Economic competition represented an additional source of concern. Britain was the main global advocate of free trade, but this was not the case of its rivals, which in the last decades of the century had tended to establish high tariffs to protect their industries from British competition. That was the case of Germany in 1879 and 1885, of France in 1882, and of the United States in 1891 and 1897. Likewise, many other European states, such as Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia also took part in these protectionist policies.⁷⁴¹ As a consequence, the threat of international conflict and economic exclusion played a fundamental role in prompting increasingly more authors to imagining that a large entity such as Greater Britain would grant military and economic security to the empire and, fundamentally, to Britain.⁷⁴²

If international competition was a source of anxiety for British elites, in China it was the challenge to Qing sovereignty by Western and Japanese imperialism which sparked the debate about the national reconfiguration of the empire. From the 1860s onward, plans to adopt Western technology and weaponry had been developed by reform-minded officials, such as Wang Tao (1828-1897), who saw them as a vehicle to strengthen the international position of the Qing. He reflected, in the late-1860s, that

Heaven's motive in bringing several dozen Western countries together in the single country of China is not to weaken China but to strengthen it, not to harm China but to benefit it. Consequently, if we make good use of [this opportunity], we can convert harm into benefit and change weakness into strength. I do not fear the daily arrival of the Westerners; what I fear is that we Chinese will place limits upon ourselves. We

⁷⁴¹ Ray Hall Byrd, "Social Darwinism and British Imperialism, 1870-1900" (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1971), 77-78.

⁷⁴² Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 2.

have only one alternative, and that is to undergo complete change (*yibian* 易變).⁷⁴³

The following decades would witness the struggle between the supporters of this often-limited reform and the traditionalist camp. After the crushing of the Taiping, the Qing government, however, tended more and more towards the adoption of Western technology, although deep institutional reform was still, in general, out of question. This policy of 'ships-and-guns', as it is often referred to, was a fundamental part of the Self-Strengthening plan by which Qing elites tried to navigate the rapidly changing environment of late-century East Asia. Among its main constituents, it included the upholding of the unequal treaties signed with imperialist powers in exchange for international recognition, the creation of a modern army and navy, and the formation of young Qing subject students abroad.⁷⁴⁴

Ultimately, however, these projects did not provide the Qing with the strength the dynasty required to contain foreign ambitions. In 1894-1895, in a rapid campaign over Korea, Japan defeated the empire and subjected it to a series of draconian clauses contained in the Treaty of Shimonoseki.⁷⁴⁵ It was this defeat, not against a Western power, but against a former tributary state, which embedded the impression among officials and subjects of a Qing empire in dire need of deeper reform if it wanted to survive as an independent entity.⁷⁴⁶ As a result, there arose a political climate charged

⁷⁴³ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* (Additional essays of Wang Tao 弢園原文錄外編, 1883), quoted in Paul A. Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving perspectives on the Chinese past* (London-New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 31.

⁷⁴⁴ James Reeve Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 6.

⁷⁴⁵ Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformations of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 27-28.

⁷⁴⁶ Peter Zarrow, "The Reform Movement, the Monarchy, and Political Modernity", in *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, eds. Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Asia Center & Harvard University Press, 2002), 18.

with alarm and pessimistic prospects about the chances of the empire to resist Western and Japanese aggression. The words of the famous and reform-oriented intellectual, Yan Fu, well-known as we have seen for introducing Darwinism to China, can offer a glimpse of the gloomy state of mind that reigned in the aftermath of the disaster of 1895. 'They [the Whites] will enslave us and hinder the development of our spirit and body. The brown and black races constantly waver between life and death, why not the 400 million Yellows?'.⁷⁴⁷ As in Britain, so in China, the search of an empire-wide national entity was, in no small part, a by-product of fear.⁷⁴⁸

The perception of internal division and weakness was another factor that motivated the development of these projects of imperial reconfiguration, an idea that was very connected to that of international competition in the minds of the advocates of these Greater nations. Their point was, essentially, that it was due to the disunion and misguidance that reigned among the various peoples that inhabited these empires that the latter were not capable, at the moment, of managing the aforementioned threats posed by foreigners.

In Britain, the advent of parliamentary democracy, alongside the debates about the Irish Home Rule and the suspicious rise of socialism, was portrayed by many backers of Greater Britain as a factor that had fostered internal divisions and weakened the prospects of success for the Empire in the international stage. Although ideas of Greater Britain had been circulating since at least the late-1860s, the increase in public interest for the concept in the 1880s and 1890s had much to do with the extension among many British intellectuals of this kind of pessimistic conception about metropolitan internal affairs.⁷⁴⁹

Debates about how the imperial territories ought to be administered also contributed to these perspectives. One of the most reiterated goals by the supporters

⁷⁴⁷ Yan Fu (1895), quoted in Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: the Intellectuals who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012), 161.

⁷⁴⁸ W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 9.

⁷⁴⁹ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 5.

of Greater Britain, after all, was to counterbalance the neglect with which they thought the Parliament and the Government of the United Kingdom had been treating the imperial possessions. This was a reaction to a mid-century intellectual and political current, very connected to the Manchester school and which found one of its most vocal representatives in the Prime Minister William Gladstone (1809-1898), that defended that Britain would not be able to indefinitely maintain control over its colonies. Such a claim was supported by their particular interpretation of the causes of decline of ancient empires, such as the Roman, but also by an understanding of contemporary socio-economic trends which defended that the newly enfranchised working and middle-classes would be ultimately less and less interested in maintaining the unity of the empire. In response to this tendency, which imagined the eventual independence of the territories of the empire as a given fact, authors like James Anthony Froude (1818-1894) wrote impassionate texts that declared that this view was not shared by many Britons, neither in the metropolis nor in the colonies:

We ourselves -the forty-five millions of British subjects, those at home and those already settled upon it- are a realised family which desires not to be divided. (...) We and the colonists have lived apart and have misunderstood one another. They require to be convinced that the people of England have never shared in the views of their leaders. We have been indifferent, and occupied with our own affairs; but we, the people, always regarded them as our kindred, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. They will never submit again to be ruled from England.⁷⁵⁰

Froude, as we will see in more detail, only made reference to the inhabitants of 'white' stock of the settlement colonies of Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. But he would denounce that even these members of the British nation,

⁷⁵⁰ Froude, *Oceana*, 15.

'united by the bond of nature', complained about 'the coldness of tone and almost estrangement with which they have been hitherto addressed' by Britain, which prompted him to argue that it was necessary to immediately show these colonists 'that the heart of England was with them'.⁷⁵¹

For its part, debates over internal division in the Qing empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century were almost-totally dominated by the question of the racial distinction between the Manchus and the Han. As has been exposed in chapter V, the Qing were of Manchu origin, and to uphold and preserve the Manchu language and customs of the dynasty was an established imperial policy.⁷⁵² This was achieved via instruments such as the 'Eight Banners' (*baqi* 八旗), a military institution that gradually evolved into a privileged military caste and which regulated the life of those peoples subjected to its jurisdiction. Although the Eight Banners were multi-ethnic in origin, the development of a categorisation according to a patrilineal descent in taxonomical terms, the competition for resources caused by demographic pressure, and the popularity of anti-Manchu ideologies among Han revolutionaries and radical reformers combined to produce the ultimate conflation between the terms 'bannerman' and 'Manchu'.⁷⁵³

Although these topics have been dealt with previously in this work, it is necessary, nonetheless, to always keep in mind the impact that this ideology had in the possibilities of imagining any imperial reconfiguration project. Given that the Qing were not Han, any ethnic understanding of the community had to give up the idea that the Manchu dynasty was a representative of the nation and that there could be any direct continuity between the empire and the future nation-state. However, as

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 221-222.

⁷⁵² Mark C. Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 8-13.

⁷⁵³ As we have seen in chapter V, the Banner System not only included peoples of Manchu ethnic origin, but also Mongols and even Han. See Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus & Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 67-69. Also, Frank Dikötter, ed., *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 14-15.

we will see, although the first position was widely endorsed, the latter was not commonly supported by nationalist intellectuals. The 'foreignness' of the Manchu Qing had to be downplayed, somehow, if the future Chinese nation was to encompass the Manchurian territories north of China proper. The same was true for other peripheral populations, like the Tibetans or the Mongols, who were only tied to the Han via their common subjection to the Qing dynasty. Chinese nationalism, which aimed at strengthening China and ensuring its survival, would have to balance these opposing claims: on the one hand, its repudiation of the Qing rule; on the other, its desire to present itself as the heir to the dynasty's territorial possessions.

Greater Nationalism can be pictured, in this context, as the sum of projects aimed at alleviating this tension. These entailed a simultaneous break with the alleged equivalence between the Qing dynasty and the Manchu ethnicity, and an extension of the qualities of the Chinese national identity over the non-Han populations of the peripheral territories. To many reformers, who had become accustomed to contemplating the whole empire as their country (*neidi* 內地), this approach allowed to fulfil the requirements imposed by the national framework without having to give up their ambition of strengthening the Qing territorial political entity.⁷⁵⁴ To revolutionaries and anti-Qing nationalists, on the other hand, it offered a way to legitimate their claims over territories whose control they considered fundamental for the chances of survival of the Chinese nation at large.

The fact that survival in the international stage was deeply tied to scale issues was thus a belief shared by imperialists in Britain and greater nationalists in China alike. As they all perceived that the threats that their empires faced were massive and almost impossible to address or confront, they therefore imagined that it was necessary to produce equally massive entities to match them. In the case of Britain, the political greatness of the United Kingdom and its colonial territories seemed to provide a sense of solace and security which assured that this Greater Britain would be 'queen among the nations, from without invulnerable, and at peace and at health

⁷⁵⁴ Julia C. Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity: Chinese Discourses on History, Historiography, and Nationalism (1900s–1920s)* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 48.

within'.⁷⁵⁵ Chinese nationalists, although often less confident about the chances of their own nation to overcome the foreign onslaught in the short-term, tended to emphasise instead the bleak chances that a small and independent states -such as Mongolia, Tibet, or Manchuria- would stand against Western imperialism. Even after Outer Mongolia had declared itself independent after the fall of the Qing in 1912, Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), president of the Republic of China, still replied to the Mongol ruler in these patronising and condescending terms:

My honorable Lama, we know you are merciful to all creatures and are honest and loyal. Therefore, I would like to explain to you the matter of benefits and harm in order to avoid any misunderstanding. If any country in the world wants to be independent it must have enough people, finance, and military power, and effective political and judicial institutions, before it can exist and ultimately become an independent nation. Otherwise it will be annexed by other countries.⁷⁵⁶

What Yuan implied was that Mongols, being such a weak power, ought to merge with the Chinese in a larger political entity if they wanted to survive. By doing so, they would ensure that the Chinese nation as a whole -which, for Yuan, evidently included the Mongols- would have a future as a self-governing state in the international arena. In this way, Yuan voiced the belief shared by other Chinese nationalists, who saw the peripheral Qing territories as 'China's border screen' (*pingfan* 屏藩) which had to be controlled in order to safeguard the inner Han regions.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁵ Froude, *Oceana*, 11.

⁷⁵⁶ Yuan Shikai (1912), quoted in Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 247-248.

⁷⁵⁷ Article published in the *Minlibao* journal (1911), quoted in Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 247.

Supporters of Greater Britain also attacked the lack of viability of independent colonies to boost the attractiveness of their proposals in favour of further imperial unity. One of these authors estimated, for example, that, in the case of settlement colonies such as Canada, Australia, or South Africa, the attainment of political independence before the year 2000 would be unsafe and undesirable, as it would 'tempt the intrusion of other nations'.⁷⁵⁸ In contrast, unsurprisingly, he offered Greater Britain as an attractive prospect even from the selfish standpoint of the well-being of these particular territories. This mirrored the belief, summarised by another advocate of imperial unity, in that 'all qualitative development must have a quantitative basis'.⁷⁵⁹ In short, we can conclude that the two approaches -Greater Britain and Greater Nationalism- seem to have ultimately shared a fundamental perception which stemmed from the geopolitical imagination of the age: that size equalled power.⁷⁶⁰

In addition, there was also an undeniable sense of urgency to these two proposals. As both were the result of a depiction of a perilous foreign context in the face of which the current status quo was failing (or had already done so), it was not surprising that advocates for imperial reconfiguration were convinced that they had to change the course of circumstances as soon as possible.⁷⁶¹

Curiously, this perceived pressure was also further increased by developments in the peripheral territories they included in their national views. In the case of China, for example, the development of the 'assimilation theory', the most long-lasting and successful of the projects for Greater Nationalism, had much to do with the uncertainty about the future of Tibetan, Mongolian, Uighur, and Manchus as members of the Chinese nation-state. In the years which followed the fall of the Qing, many of these territories would declare themselves independent indeed: Outer

⁷⁵⁸ Francis Peter Labilliere, *Federal Britain, or Unity and Federation of the Empire* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1894), 242.

⁷⁵⁹ Goldman, *The Empire and the Century*, XVII-XVIII.

⁷⁶⁰ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 261.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Mongolia in 1911; Tibet in 1912; Manchuria, under Japanese control, in 1932. Seen from this perspective, the fears of these intellectuals seem to have been vindicated by the course of events, and thus were considered justified.

In the case of Greater Britain, it was the growing estrangement between the colonies and the motherland that its supporters feared the most. For one, they believed that one of the causes for such an anxiety was the alleged cold position that the governmental elites in London displayed towards the colonies. But these projects embodied, at the same time, a reaction to the development of any sense of independent identity among the settler colonists. If Greater Britain was to become a real nation, in the terms outlined by the main principles of the nationalist framework, it was impossible for those advocates of Greater Britain to accept the idea that there existed a particular bond which connected Canadians or Australians with each other and which decisively separated them from the rest of the inhabitants of the empire.

To this end, one of the strategies to which these two groups of intellectuals resorted to was presenting such regional identities as by-products of the failure of the current status quo. Sometimes they blamed peripheral groups for this, because they were incapable of recognising the benefits which membership of a great nation would grant them and seemed content, instead, with a more limited existence. For example, Liang Qichao wrote in 1913 that 'Mongolia and Tibet are anti-Han [Chinese] and establish their own governments. This is nothing but an expression of *tribal thinking*'. Nonetheless, he also defended that this was not a reaction to the fact that the Chinese nation was being imposed upon them: 'So, is it only that the Mongols and Tibetans are not to have a state [of their own]? [No], it means that in the country not one inch of territory is to have a state [of its own]!'.⁷⁶² Sun Yat-sen, also reflecting on this fact, would conclude that Mongols and Tibetans, given that 'their education is still not sufficient', could not easily be made to join the Chinese and had to be gradually helped to assimilate.⁷⁶³ Similarly, imperialist authors often listed, among the advantages of

⁷⁶² Liang Qichao (1913), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 140. Italics mine.

⁷⁶³ Sun Yat-sen (1912), quoted in Leibold, James, "Positioning "minzu" within Sun Yat-sen's Discourse of Minzuzhuyi", *Journal of Asian History* 38, no.2 (2004): 185-186.

Greater Britain, that such a state would at least prevent 'the growth of a hopeless provincialism in the colonies'.⁷⁶⁴

In some other instances, the rise of these new identities was portrayed as a response by the colonists and peripheral populations to the misguided actions and perceptions of the metropolis. Froude, in his *Oceana* (1886), equated the national claims of the colonies with the feeling of a child 'who was trying to do his best, and was conscious that the family had no wish to keep him, and that the sooner he took himself off the better'.⁷⁶⁵ Another imperialist author, Francis Peter Labilliere (1840-1895), likewise claimed that such a circumstance was the result of the overly materialistic, monetary-mindset of some 'narrow provincialists'⁷⁶⁶ in Britain, and angrily lamented that

Should the Decline and fall of the British Empire have to be recorded by some future Gibbon, shall it be told to our perpetual shame that such a catastrophe was occasioned by a petty, peddling, penny-wise, pound-foolish policy?⁷⁶⁷

But imperialist intellectuals, even when they framed the situation in these terms, were also careful to present it as a reversible one. In their view, the natural ties which bound the nation of Greater Britain together still persisted, although they were being artificially loosened and stretched, and it was expected that they could be restored and mended as soon as a reasonable policy was undertaken. This remedy, to Froude and Labilliere, would invariably need to include the active maintenance and

⁷⁶⁴ Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 2.* (London-New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 581.

⁷⁶⁵ Froude, *Oceana*, 103-104.

⁷⁶⁶ Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, 27.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

development of 'the great Imperial spirit and warm affection for the great principle of unity' throughout the empire.⁷⁶⁸ That is, the fostering of a common national identity.

However, and despite the fact that some of these imperial reconfiguration projects were imaginative and novel approaches to these problems, many of them were nonetheless heavily influenced by previously dominant models of dealing with diverse human populations and imperial peripheries. For example, it is indeed telling that most of these projects took for granted the political (or symbolical) centrality of the imperial metropolis, Britain and China proper, and their populations. Even if they were publicised as programs of federation or internal solidarity, they were also prone to advocating a comprehensive extension of the metropolitan culture and its values over the peripheral territories. In this sense, some terms that became widespread in the political vocabulary of these movements, such as 'the expansion of England' (the title of the famous book by John Robert Seeley) or 'China's assimilative power' (*Zhongguo tonghuali* 中國同化力), betray the persistence of the politico-symbolical hierarchy of the previous imperial system. This ideal, unsurprisingly, seems to have been far more appealing for those intellectuals in the metropolitan circles, whereas it might have been less easily acceptable by colonial and peripheral audiences.⁷⁶⁹

At the same time, it is necessary to always keep in mind that, despite their origins, both projects and their authors were profoundly influenced by the pervading ideological trends of the time. It can hardly be overstated, for example, the effect that Social Darwinist ideas had upon the ways in which Chinese intellectuals framed the question of collective imagination and inter-ethnic relationship from the 1890s onward.⁷⁷⁰ As much can be said about the pseudo-scientific racial thinking that pervaded much of the imperialists' descriptions of Greater Britain.

However, it is still remarkable the degree to which the projects of imperial reconfiguration in the British Empire and in the territories of the Qing, although

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁶⁹ Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 246-247.

⁷⁷⁰ Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 449.

developed at different times and in societies in which the circumstances faced were certainly wildly different, shared in a lot of their assumptions and narrative strategies. Although the experiences of international competition in England or in the treaty-ports of eastern and southern China were bound to be, obviously, very different, it is indeed striking that the rhetorical elements and approaches developed by these intellectuals for the two cases were often analogous. As both groups tried to create a nation out of imperial territories, they found in the magnificent size of their states a safeguard for the future. Yet, at the same time, they also discovered that the main principles of the national framework were not so easily established on top of previously prevalent conceptions of communal identity and imperial governance.

b. Projects of Greater Britain

The 1860s and 1870s witnessed an arising interest in the idea of creating a nation-state that would encompass Britain as well as its settler colonies. It was not until the 1880s, however, that this interest coalesced into a widespread debate about the future of the empire in the minds of an 'elite class of academics, businessmen, lawyers, politicians, and journalists' in England which had its most potent hub in the Imperial Federation League founded in 1884.⁷⁷¹ The League was active until 1893, and was very involved both politically and culturally, participating extensively in the creation of institutions such as the Imperial Institute in 1887.⁷⁷²

Probably the most influential work about Greater Britain was produced at the beginning of the 1880s. John Robert Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1883), even if it offered a historical account and not a political, programmatic treaty, rapidly became, nonetheless, the go-to sourcebook for those who supported projects of

⁷⁷¹ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 6. Also, Andrea Bosco, *The Round Table Movement and the Fall of the 'Second' British Empire (1909-1919)* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 2.

⁷⁷² Bosco, *The Round Table Movement*, 70.

imperial unity.⁷⁷³ The book was an instant editorial success, selling 80,000 copies in the two years after its release,⁷⁷⁴ and its title soon became a catchphrase in the hands of advocates for a tighter connection between Britain and the colonies. So extensive was its impact that a fellow historian, writing in the event of Seeley's death in 1895, looked back and wondered 'whether any historical work [had] exercised so great an influence over the general political thinking of a nation'.⁷⁷⁵

Seeley wrote a history focused on the process of expansion of England around the world that had resulted in the creation of Greater Britain, and when he compared this later event with other previous models of expansion, such as the Greek or the Roman, England's seemed to have introduced certain novel characteristics. Seeley argued that the Greeks had extended along the Mediterranean Sea as a nation and that they had founded independent city-states which shared no common political allegiance to each other; on the other hand, traditional empires, like that of the Romans, had only enlarged their states, governing authoritatively over wholly subjected populations. In contrast, Greater Britain was different to both because it was an expansion, simultaneously, of the English nation *and* of the English state:

But Greater Britain is a real enlargement of the English State; it carries across the seas not merely the English race, but the authority of the English Government. We call it for want of a better word an Empire. (...) But yet it is wholly unlike the great Empires, of the Old World, Persian or Macedonian or Roman or Turkish, because it is not in the main founded on conquest, and because in the main the inhabitants of the distant

⁷⁷³ Byrd, "Social Darwinism and British Imperialism", 62.

⁷⁷⁴ Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 336.

⁷⁷⁵ H. A. L. Fisher, "Sir John Seeley" (1896), quoted in: Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 150.

provinces are of the same nation as those of the dominant country.⁷⁷⁶

Nevertheless, Seeley did not obscure the fact that the British Empire which had resulted from such a process was not a totally homogeneous entity, and explained that it comprised two different -and in certain aspects, opposite- halves. The first one, the Greater Britain that was an extension of the English race and government, included the United Kingdom and also the settler colonies and Dominions with a large white colonist population, such as Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. According to Seeley, these communities formed a single nation, stretched over huge distances, and could therefore be conceived as being part of 'an ordinary state' rather than of a traditional empire.⁷⁷⁷ This was because, from his perspective, these territories possessed in common the 'three ties by which states are held together': community of race, community of religion, and community of interest.⁷⁷⁸ The second constituent half of the Empire, in contrast, was entirely unlike this Greater Britain, and encompassed a land 'subject to the Crown and ruled by English officials, but inhabited by a completely foreign race': India.⁷⁷⁹

To Seeley, this British Empire had been the main result of the historical development of England from the sixteenth century onwards. This expansion had followed a series of successive stages, during which the English had fought against their competitors for the control of the newly discovered territories overseas: first against the Spanish, later against the Dutch in the seventeenth century, and finally against the French in the 'Second Hundred Years War' of the eighteenth century which

⁷⁷⁶ John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1883), 42-43.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10. Seeley does not make any reference to other smaller dependent territories and colonies such as Hong Kong, the West Indies, or Singapore.

had culminated in the struggle against Napoleon.⁷⁸⁰ The main consequence of these conflicts had been, in Seeley's opinion, the extension of the English race over North America, South Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Such an interpretation, which would be endorsed by many during the following decades, presented colonialism as the result of the natural expansion of the English people, and not as an imposition upon alien populations of metropolitan institutions and values.⁷⁸¹

Yet this Greater Britain -the territories of the empire inhabited by the Anglo-Saxon race- was not merely the result of a series of past developments, but also a promise for the future. As the product of a simultaneous expansion of a single nation and a single state, it was in Seeley's eyes 'on the whole free from that weakness which has brought down most empires, the weakness of being a mere mechanical forced union of alien nationalities'.⁷⁸² Additionally, although it was extended over enormous expanses of the globe, it was, unlike previous empires -'that have been of very large extent [but] have been of low organisation'-, inhabited by the most progressive branch of European civilisation.⁷⁸³ A perfect balance of quality and quantity: its natural evolution had endowed Greater Britain with the capacity to surpass all the empires of the past and to become a world-state.

At the present moment, however, this was a simple promise. Even if the foundations for such a colossal entity were already established, Greater Britain was not yet a reality. For one, it was still widely believed that a state could not enjoy any stability if its territories were separated, as in the case of Greater Britain, by long geographical expanses. Seeley himself recognised that this had certainly been a problem in the past, but one that in recent decades had been 'abolished by science', which in turn meant 'that political union over vast areas ha[d] begun to be possible'.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁸¹ Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 101.

⁷⁸² Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 46.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

In his eyes, the eastward expansion of the Russian empire and, more importantly, the federation of the United States bore testimony to this fact, and he even admitted that the American country, after having suffered a civil war, had finally 'found the solution of that great problem of expansion on a vast scale'.⁷⁸⁵ Such a solution would entail, in his opinion, a 'system under which an indefinite number of provinces is firmly held together without any of the inconveniences which have been felt in our Empire' and, therefore, the American example offered indisputable proof that supported that 'those inconveniences are not inseparable from a large Empire, but only from the old colonial system' of the British.⁷⁸⁶

The second reason that hindered the creation of Greater Britain, however, had to do with the collective consciousness of its inhabitants. For instance, Seeley argued that the common usage of the term England was an obstacle for the realisation of any project of Greater Britain, and thus he defended that,

We must cease altogether to say that England is an island off the north western coast of Europe, that it has an area of 120,000 square miles and a population of thirty odd millions. We must cease to think that emigrants, when they go to the colonies, leave England or are lost to England. We must cease to think that the history of England is the history of the Parliament that sits at Westminster, and that affairs which are not discussed there cannot belong to English history. When we have accustomed ourselves to contemplate the whole Empire together and call it all England, we shall see that here too is a United States. Here too is a great homogeneous people, one in

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

blood, language, religion, and laws, but dispersed over a boundless space.⁷⁸⁷

Seeley agreed with other imperialists in that to imagine the empire as merely an economically beneficial enterprise was a fundamental impediment for any project of imperial federation. At the same time, he also denounced that English political elites had incorrectly assumed, after the independence of the United States, that all colonies were destined to be independent sooner or later. Once again, the federal system of the American state offered him the confirmation he needed to evidence that this was a damaging and ultimately mistaken idea.⁷⁸⁸ After all, his portrayal of the -white- inhabitants of the metropolis and the settler colonies as members of a single nation stood in direct opposition to any conception of their connection as one shaped by 'considerations of profit and loss'.⁷⁸⁹ Quite the opposite: it was a family bond that, if acknowledged appropriately, would result in the ultimate acknowledgement that the colonies were unalienable parts of the whole. For such an imagination to take grip, however, it was crucial that the colonies should be united more tightly to the metropolis, and that this connection rested mainly on shared and common interest.⁷⁹⁰

Seeley was also very critical of previous historiography, which he saw as having contributed to the creation of this obstacle. After all, he had initially conceived his *Expansion of England* as a response to the provincialism he had observed in contemporary accounts on English history, especially when these dealt with the events of the eighteenth century. By arguing that 'in that century the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia',⁷⁹¹ Seeley attacked those who were always tempted 'to write the history rather of the Parliament than of the State and

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁷⁸⁸ Bosco, *The Round Table Movement*, 48.

⁷⁸⁹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 63-64.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

nation'.⁷⁹² This criticism echoed the denounces of other imperialists who also believed that there were not enough 'imperial' texts available for the wider public and that the fact that British history was still being narrated as a succession of domestic events relegated the empire to a secondary position.⁷⁹³

On the whole, it is easy to see how the Greater Britain depicted in *The Expansion of England* was on the whole shaped by racial notions. As has been mentioned, it comprised the four 'white' territories (Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand) as well as the United Kingdom, but not, remarkably, the largest colony of the empire: India. Whereas the former territories were mainly comprised of Anglo-Saxon populations, and even if the presence of French, Dutch, Caffres, or Maori inhabitants, when mentioned, was taken as easily assimilable without fundamentally altering the racial composition of these territories, India faced Seeley with quite a different challenge.⁷⁹⁴

For one, there was an evident fact: under Indian climate, he argued, 'English children cannot grow up'.⁷⁹⁵ Additionally, given their lack of national feeling and union, Indians were in dire need of tutelage, and it was the responsibility of England to rule this foreign people, 'the least capable of evolving out of itself a stable Government'.⁷⁹⁶ It was this sense of duty what kept the English in India and prevented them from abandoning the colony altogether, as England would do 'if our own interest alone were considered'.⁷⁹⁷ As he pointed out with a note of pride, the British played in India the same role as the Romans had played in the West and had taken the

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁹³ Bernard Porter, "Empire and British National Identity, 1815-1914", in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, eds. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 270.

⁷⁹⁴ Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, 339.

⁷⁹⁵ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 185.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

responsibility of spreading civilisation over the conquered, even if in any other matter these two empires remained considerably different.⁷⁹⁸

In summary, it is probably best not to describe Seeley's *The Expansion of England*, despite its title, as a national history of England, but to see it rather as one of the first national histories of the Greater British nation. Although its narrative had the British Isles at its centre, and even if it shared on many of the commonly repeated tropes of English history, Seeley interpreted these events under the light of what they had meant to the process of imperial expansion. He went as far as to claim, for instance, that 'the modern character of England, as it has come to be since the Middle Ages, may also be most briefly described on the whole by saying that England has been expanding into Greater Britain'.⁷⁹⁹ In this sense, although he advanced no concrete political project for the construction of this world-state, Seeley provided later imperialists with an alternative way of interpreting the history of England, one which pointed out towards an eventual unification with its colonies. In doing so, he developed a powerful counterbalance to the well-established Whig historical narrative of the evolution of Anglo-Saxon liberties and relocated the origins of the modern national character of the British to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸⁰⁰

The success of Seeley's book, in combination with other factors like the increasing perception of foreign competition and the heated discussion about Irish Home Rule, fostered a new wave of support for projects for imperial federation during the 1880s.⁸⁰¹ One of these was developed by James Anthony Froude, a well-known historian and novelist who had been criticising what he saw as a general alienation

⁷⁹⁸ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 227.

⁷⁹⁹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 78.

⁸⁰⁰ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The history of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2006), 116.

⁸⁰¹ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 13.

of the metropolis from imperial affairs since at least the 1870s,⁸⁰² in a work published in 1886 under the title *Oceana*.

What Froude meant by this name was a global state that would be composed by the United Kingdom as well as by the settler colonies of Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. In this sense, it definitely echoed the idea of an ethnically Anglo-Saxon nation-state as we have seen sketched in *The Expansion of England*. In fact, it was because these populations were 'held together by common blood, common interest, and a common pride in the great position which unity can secure' that it was impossible, in Froude's opinion, to control them as subjected peoples under an imperial system.⁸⁰³ To further stress this argument, he emphatically reiterated both the homogeneous nature as well as the shared qualities of this large national community: 'The people of England have made the colonies. The people at home and the people in the colonies are one people'.⁸⁰⁴

However, from Froude's perspective, this natural tie had been the object of incessant neglect by the English ruling elites. He claimed that there had been 'chilly winds which ha[d] blown from Downing Street' towards the colonies, and this was precisely the source of the disaffection that existed between the metropolitans and the colonists.⁸⁰⁵ It was, therefore, the responsibility of the people of England to address the situation and to immediately correct this misunderstanding by convincing the colonial populations that they 'ha[d] never shared in the views of their leaders' and that they had 'always regarded [the colonists] as our kindred, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'.⁸⁰⁶ Such a change, Froude continued, would require for a start a thorough overhaul of the ways of communicating with the colonies, which ought to

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁸⁰³ Froude, *Oceana*, 12. By employing this vocabulary, Froude tried to diminish the tension that existed between previous imperial frameworks of centre-periphery and the language of the nation as a horizontally equal community. See Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 101.

⁸⁰⁴ Froude, *Oceana*, 14.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

acknowledge the existence of Oceana as a *fait accompli*, and which should abandon the current and harmful assumption that 'acknowledged no relationship with [the colonists] except [that] of interest' and that had caused these kinsmen to resent 'such exhuman indifference'.⁸⁰⁷ The subsequent extension of the sentiment of community and solidarity that would result from these actions would be enough for the 'forty-five millions of British subjects' -the absence of the hundreds of millions of Indians is here glaring- to recognise themselves as a family that desired not to be divided.

In addition, Froude also considered that a politically centralised Oceana -his term for Greater Britain- was a desirable prospect; a belief that was supported by his conviction in that such a global entity would have a positive impact upon the physical and mental condition of the Anglo-Saxon race. This was, of course, a particularly important issue for the United Kingdom, where he started to perceive the extent to which industrial cities were causing a profound damage to the new generations. The bleak future of the English was assured 'if they are to be bred in towns such as Birmingham and Glasgow now are, and to rear their families under the conditions which now prevail in those places' and this, to Froude, was not open to debate.⁸⁰⁸ It was evident that 'a race of men sound in soul and limb can be bred and reared only in the exercise of plough and spade, in the free air and sunshine, with country enjoyments and amusements, never amidst foul drains and smoke blacks and the eternal clank of machinery' such as those found in Britain.⁸⁰⁹ For this reason, the vast and almost endless expanses of land available in the settler colonies provided a timely and excellent solution.⁸¹⁰ As he argued,

In the multiplying number of our own fellow-citizens
animated by a common spirit, we should have purchasers for

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁸¹⁰ Froude was very critical of the emigration to the US, which he saw as harmful for the interests of Oceana.

our goods from whom we should fear no rivalry, we should turn in upon them the tide of our emigrants which now flows away, while the emigrants themselves would thrive under their own fig tree, and rear children with stout limbs and colour in their cheeks, and a chance before them of a human existence.⁸¹¹

Therefore, Oceana was not, under this light, merely a state, but also a valve to ensure the vigorous growth of the Anglo-Saxon race. Froude's project combined ideas of personal and communal virtue, stemming from Malthusian and Roman republican traditions, and linked them to geographic and demographic greatness.⁸¹² It was this mixture which made him prone to agree with Seeley in that the existence of a world-state such as Oceana would prevent the apparition of petty interests and provincialism and would, in the long run, morally elevate the people both in England as well as in the colonies.⁸¹³

The nation is but the individuals that compose it, and the wider area over which these individuals are growing, the more there will be of them, the stronger they will be in mind and body, and the deeper the roots which they will strike among the foundation-stones of things.⁸¹⁴

Yet the political unification of Oceana was also desirable for an additional reason: that it would make British territories invulnerable from the threat posed of foreign competition that haunted the imperialists. Against the opinion of the anti-

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸¹² Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 145.

⁸¹³ Froude, *Oceana*, 355-356.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 392.

imperialists and of those who imagined 'a mere manufacturing England', Froude made sure to stress how 'other nations [were] supplying their own necessities, and [were] treading fast upon [Britain's] heels'.⁸¹⁵ It was precisely for this reason that it was necessary to produce a united Oceana which would be 'Queen among the nations' and would tower both politically and economically over any other country in the world.⁸¹⁶ It is not surprising, then, that Froude considered the independence of the colonies as an unlikely and ultimately undesirable event. In his opinion, under the current international climate of power competition, 'an independent Victoria, or New South Wales, or New Zealand, would lie at the mercy of any ambitious aggressor who could dispose of fleets and armies'.⁸¹⁷ The only alternative for the populations of these lands, if they wanted to be something more than 'promising young men' and effect a real impact on the world, was to join in the great power of Oceana.⁸¹⁸

Despite Froude's encouragement, the question of how such an enormous political entity was to be structured still remained. Froude, just like Seeley, approached the problem of imperial federation by taking the United States as a model; after analysing its political system, he concluded that 'the problem of how to combine a number of self-governed communities into a single commonwealth' had already been solved by this American country.⁸¹⁹ In contrast, he criticised the current British imperial system as being wholly unprepared for ruling an empire, and strongly opposed the English political arrangement of two competing parties as being an artificial implementation with no *raison d'être* in the colonies.

When we take into account the steps that he considered had to be taken for the promising foundations of Oceana to grow into a reality, we come to the realisation that Froude was an idealist. Because he thought that the alienating position taken by

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 354.

English elites had been the principal obstacle that had hindered the apparition of Oceana, he was adamant in imagining that a change in the ways in which metropolis and colonies communicated and pictured each other would, naturally and over time, transform Oceana into a united nation-state. Critic as he was of the rigidity of written constitutions, Froude could only conceive Oceana as the final result of the continuous practice of common imperial institutions: the natural tie of blood and interest that connected its population, if taken care of, would eventually lead to such a goal without any need of radical political intervention.⁸²⁰ As he put it, in short, the whole issue could be easily solved if it was 'understood among us, as it is among the Americans, that we are one -though the bond be but a spiritual one- that separation is treason, and [that] the suggestion of it misprision of treason and all is done'.⁸²¹ Once such a shared conception was achieved, every provincial identity -even that of metropolitan Great Britain- would eventually 'fitly lose itself in the Imperial greatness of Oceana'.⁸²²

We have already pointed out that Froude's Oceana owed much to the well-established perception of the existence of an Anglo-Saxon racial community. This led him to imagine, for example that the common sympathies and race ties between Britain and the United States would, in an undetermined future, dissolve many of their differences. Although he did not mention if this would also entail a possible prospect of political connection, he instrumentalised this alleged racial equality between the United States and the British to support its appropriation of the former's federation model. By saying that 'the Americans are the English reproduced in a new sphere' he simply concluded that 'what they have done, we can do'.⁸²³

The wave of interest in the idea of a Greater Britain persisted in the 1890s, and another project for imperial federation was proposed by the historian and member of the Imperial Federation League, Francis Peter Labilliere. Labilliere shared many of the

⁸²⁰ Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 147.

⁸²¹ Froude, *Oceana*, 356.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 225-226.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, 357.

ideas of previous federalists: he thought that Greater Britain would exercise a positive impact upon the character of the people by hindering provincialism, criticised those he labelled 'disintegrationists' as being guided only by the search of economic profit, and held in high regard the position of the Anglo-Saxons as a race destined to extend civilisation all across the world. Likewise, he also considered that the colonies stood no chance of remaining sovereign under the constant threat of international competition and went as far as to predict that it would be 'perilous' for Australia, South Africa, or Canada to declare themselves independent before the year 2000.⁸²⁴

In his book *Federal Britain* (1894), Labilliere would list a series of difficulties that any project of imperial reconfiguration ought to surmount in order to be successful: the enormous distances that separated the imperial territories from each other, the extended economicist interpretation of the empire, the rise of provincial identities as a result of the lack of interest in an education on imperial values, and the accusations of 'political inventiveness' that were often wielded against the imperialists. In the final reckoning, all these questions were resolvable thanks, in part, to scientific and industrial innovations -such as the telegraph⁸²⁵- and to the existence of models to emulate, like, once again, the federal system of the United States.⁸²⁶ As can be observed, then, Labilliere's general approach, as well as his projected solutions, was on the whole very similar to that of previous works like Seeley's and Froude's.

There are two aspects, however, that make *Federal Britain* worthy of further discussion. The first is its take on how to federate the imperial territories. Although Labilliere thoroughly believed that the Empire was already united in a community of sentiment and national affection, the result of the natural expansion of England and its development 'throughout the world', as Seeley explained,⁸²⁷ he went on to argue that no shared identity was enough by itself to maintain a strong state if it was not

⁸²⁴ Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, 242.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

coupled with an efficient political and institutional organisation. This principle was especially true in the present age,

...when success in war never so much depended upon weapons the most deadly and complicated, upon floating machines of Titanic force, upon scientific knowledge the most perfect and precise, and upon the skill, resource, and preparation of every man, from the highest in command to the humblest in our defensive services.⁸²⁸

In opposition to such a crude and violent environment, a federated Greater Britain would constitute an entity of peace 'large enough not to covet its neighbours' dominions, and strong enough not to feel that weakness which sometimes makes nations go to war to test their strength, or to show that they are not afraid to fight'.⁸²⁹ Nonetheless, such a goal would only be attained once national sentiment was transformed into a 'tangible practical shape' that would gather the resources and capacities of the people for defence.⁸³⁰

There were two ways of doing this: Imperial Federation and Imperial Confederation. In the first one, 'the members representing the United Kingdom and the Colonies in the Parliament of the Empire (...) would be elected directly by the people', whereas in the second they 'would be chosen by the English Parliament and the Colonial Parliaments, acting as electoral Colleges'.⁸³¹ Confederation was never a popular opinion to most imperialists, who usually supported federation schemes, but yet some works, such as Bernard Holland's (1856-1926) *Imperium and Libertas*

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*, XI.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

(1901), pushed this idea as a possible intermediate alternative between a robust, full-fledged federation and a loose alliance of independent states.⁸³²

Labilliere was a firm advocate of federation, which he saw as an easier and more adequate way of solving for good the question of imperial reconfiguration. In no small part this was because he could picture the refusal of the colonies to cede any amount of self-government to an inter-colonial organism -as required by a confederation-, whereas it would be far less complex, instead, to convince them of doing so in favour of an imperial -meaning supra-colonial- parliament. In addition, Federation was the response which best matched the English practical character, a reason that supported the adoption -despite the claims of some short-sighted critics- of this 'form of government which has created the greatness of other Powers, and which, were it to be successfully applied to the British Empire, would constitute it the greatest Power which has ever appeared amongst the nations of the earth'.⁸³³

The success of the project of Imperial Federation would provide, according to Labilliere, solution to four questions. First and foremost, it would be a means to create a combined defence force able to protect the British countries as 'one indissoluble nation' from the attack of any other Power.⁸³⁴ Secondly, the 'enlarged ideas and feelings' brought forth by this federation would encourage migratory flows from the United Kingdom -that 'overflowing human reservoir'- to the colonies, by convincing the whole nation 'that in order to develop, and fertilise our splendid new lands, as well as to enrich their sparse inhabitants, those vast territories should be irrigated by a steady stream of people'.⁸³⁵ The extension of free trade between the territories of the empire would be another consequence of the federation policy. Such an event would represent, 'short of universal adoption amongst all nations',⁸³⁶ a spectacular triumph

⁸³² Bernard Holland, *Imperium et Libertas* (1901), quoted in Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 97.

⁸³³ Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, 89.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

for a policy which had been pushed by -and largely identified with- England for more than half a century. Labilliere's general approach, as can be seen, was on the whole indebted to a notion deeply rooted in the works of other imperialists: the conviction in that military, economic, and moral power were, in fact, inextricably connected.⁸³⁷

The fourth and final problem that Imperial Federation would tackle was the complex situation of India and its relationship with Greater Britain. In marked contrast to the United Kingdom and the settler colonies with which his talk of federation -as in Seeley's and Froude's case- was concerned, Labilliere saw India as 'a more fruitful source of danger and disaster to England than the Colonies ever were', and could only imagine this situation persisting and deteriorating in the future.⁸³⁸ Despite these pessimistic prospects, Labilliere did not deny that England had been able to provide 'just rule (...) and splendid administration' to the 'subject races of the East, who first experienced from their conquerors the blessings of peace and justice (...) and of freedom from cruelty and oppression'.⁸³⁹ But, even if this was the case, he also added that it would not be advisable, by any means, to allow this situation to continue if a new federated nation-state was created. If such an entity came to exist, he argued, it would be much better for England to share the advantages and burdens of its Indian administration with the rest of its partners within this Federation. Thus controlled, India would be more easily nourished and pacified, whereas the benefits of its possession 'would strengthen (...) the growing wealth, population, and power of the Colonial dominions'.⁸⁴⁰

The second notorious aspect of *Federal Britain* was its anxiety regarding the role of the United States and the latter's impact on the international position of the British Empire. Based as it was on ethnic concepts of an Anglo-Saxon community, the 'United Empire of Great Britain' pictured by Labilliere was bound to represent an institutional framework which intended to grant to this race a pacific internal

⁸³⁷ Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 242.

⁸³⁸ Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, 50.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

development as well as a prosperous external commerce while simultaneously ensuring its protection and security. This conception led Labilliere to conclude that that of the United States of America was a 'great people whose interests, ideas and sympathies run parallel with our own'⁸⁴¹ and to argue that British and Americans were members of one racial community which shared the same political tradition. With this claim, he tried to overcome, as Froude had done, the accusations of political novelty that he expected his radical approach would provoke. After all, this was a fundamental issue for many imperialists given that the celebration of innovation and revolutionary action, as we have analysed in chapter IV, represented a 'political suicide' in the framework of the contemporary English political debate.⁸⁴² From this perspective, Labilliere's ideas were not very distant from those previously advocated by Seeley or Froude. In essence, even if all of them thought that political union between the two states was unlikely in the present, they also believed that the affection born from the racial bond they shared would be capable of keeping both states in friendly terms.

However, in the case of Labilliere this optimism was dependent on the success of his schemes of Imperial Federation. If the colonies and Britain were united, they would 'stand in a position of equality beside the American Union, or any other great power' but, if that was not the case and they surrendered to petty provincial notions, 'neither England nor any of the Colonies, for generations, will be able to do so'.⁸⁴³ After all, although he never doubted that the Anglo-Saxon race was destined to bring civilisation to the world, he was not so certain of the preminent role that the British were to play in this process. Given that a federation of the empire would stand as a 'friendly rival of the American Union' in this civilising mission, it was better 'that the race form two great nations, than one first-class Power [the United States] and a number of inferior States [the non-federated British territories]'.⁸⁴⁴ In short, if

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁴² Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 127.

⁸⁴³ Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, 46.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

political union was ultimately averted, Labilliere held no hope so as to what fate would await the British: the surrender of the leadership of the Anglo-Saxon race in favour of the United States.

Even if many supporters of federalism such as Labilliere were active during the 1880s and 1890s, there were other imperialists who considered such projects as utopian and favoured a less radical approach to the connection of the United Kingdom to its colonies. Among them was Charles Wentworth Dilke, a Liberal writer who had produced the first imperialist bestseller, *Greater Britain*, back in 1868. This book had been written as a response against anti-imperialist thinking, and its author had gone to great lengths to portray the empire in its pages as 'a geo-political community of races kept together by the supremacy of Anglo-Saxon civilisation'.⁸⁴⁵ Nonetheless, and in contrast to other authors who would later use his famous term, Dilke, even if he agreed with them in that theirs was a 'federal age', was hardly a supporter, in the 1890s, of a strong federation of the empire.⁸⁴⁶

The reason behind this position was his belief in that an imperial federation, rather than uniting and binding the territories of the empire more closely together, would contribute to the opposite. In his opinion, this conclusion was also sustained by the fact that the general feeling of the colonies was, some minor elites notwithstanding, contrary to renouncing the self-government they had so recently acquired. As he put it,

In the chapters on the self-governing colonies it has been shown that many of the leading colonists and distinguished politicians that Greater Britain has produced are in favour of Imperial Federation; but it has been seen that some of the communities they represent on other questions seem on this one disinclined to follow their lead, and that in the last two

⁸⁴⁵ Bosco, *The Round Table Movement*, 77.

⁸⁴⁶ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 1.*, 97.

years there has been in the eastern Australian colonies a marked change in the direction of opposition to the idea of Imperial Federation.⁸⁴⁷

However, this was far from the only problem that Dilke attached to projects of imperial federation. For instance, the tariff question -the debate about whether all the territories of the empire should share on the same custom barriers- posed another tricky question when the relative economic positions of the colonies and of the United Kingdom were taken into account. In addition to this, the imitation of foreign models, like those of the United States or the German Empire, would necessarily entail an extension of the power of the Crown in military and foreign affairs which was unlikely to be supported by the inhabitants of Britain.⁸⁴⁸

Faced with such an unpromising scenario, Dilke proclaimed that the most desirable solution would be to create an alliance 'on equal terms between self-governing states'.⁸⁴⁹ The unlikelihood of such an event in the foreseeable future rendered an alliance in military terms the only reasonable project that could be pushed forward at the present time. This 'connection on grounds of safety' would, of course, be provisional and circumstantial, but, in combination with the strong emotional tie that existed between the Greater British communities, it would offer a chance of gradually developing a tighter alliance. For the moment, joint defence remained the most pressing matter, and Dilke's advocacy for immediate action in this regard would only be intensified as the end of the century drew near.⁸⁵⁰

But not everything was so bleak about Dilke's approach. After all, despite the gloomy perspectives he had drawn for the federation project, he still shared the belief in that the currently existing connection between the United Kingdom and the settler

⁸⁴⁷ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 2.*, 480-481.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁸⁴⁹ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 1.*, 458-459.

⁸⁵⁰ Charles Wentworth Dilke, *The British Empire* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1899), 134.

colonies was a natural and powerful one that would be capable of growing over time as sketched by other imperialist authors.⁸⁵¹ Even if he acknowledged that the complete political independence of the colonies was eventually inescapable, he also assumed that the most prudent policy for Britain was, in fact, trying to keep all these communities as closely linked as possible.⁸⁵² As he explained, Greater Britain constituted

A world-empire, the separate parts of which are being more and more closely linked by the discoveries of science, enjoying in each separate part absolute independence, connected not by coercion or paper bulwarks but by common origin and sympathies, by a common loyalty and patriotism, and by common efforts after common purposes (...).⁸⁵³

Dilke, echoing the view expressed by previous imperialist authors, pondered the counterbalancing influence that this connection would have in preventing the development of 'a hopeless provincialism' and in serving as a positive stimulus for the energies of the English people.⁸⁵⁴ In this regard, it seems likely that he agreed with another imperialist intellectual, William Monypenny (1866-1912), who claimed that Greater Britain was to serve as the 'living embodiment of a new political conception which transcends nationality without dwarfing or disabling it, which preserves all that is good in it, leaves it all its rights, but makes it subservient to a higher and more comprehensive ideal'.⁸⁵⁵ Dilke was certain that the 'racial patriotism'

⁸⁵¹ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 2.*, 496.

⁸⁵² Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 107-108.

⁸⁵³ Dilke, *The British Empire*, 9-10.

⁸⁵⁴ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 2.*, 581.

⁸⁵⁵ William Flavelle Monypenny, "The Imperial Ideal", in Goldman, *The Empire and the Century*, 23.

which existed among the Anglo-Saxons would strengthen the empire even if political unity was not achieved, and also believed that it would help to maintain good terms with the United States, the other 'branch of the English race', in an understanding upon which the 'whole future of the planet depends'.⁸⁵⁶

The particular importance Dilke bestowed upon the improvement of the qualities of the people was founded on his conviction in that the future of the world would be in the hands of three races: the Anglo-Saxon (represented politically by the United States and the British Empire), the Russian, and the Chinese. In his opinion, it was the competition and balance of power between these three communities that was to shape the following century and was to relegate other powers to playing the role of 'pigmies'.⁸⁵⁷ In this regard, thus, Dilke's perception of foreign competition was markedly different from Labilliere's. For instance, he almost completely negated the threat posed by Germany or France to the empire and argued that their relevance for global affairs was to sharply decline in the following decades. By affirming that one's position in the world-hierarchy was therefore decisively related to issues of size and population, Dilke echoed the statement made by Froude almost two decades earlier when he had claimed that

These are not the days for small states: the natural boundaries are broken down which once divided kingdom from kingdom; and with the interests of nations so much intertwined as they are now becoming, every one feels the benefit of belonging to a first-rate Power.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁶ Dilke, *The British Empire*, 139. Also, Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 1.*, 171-172.

⁸⁵⁷ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol 2.*, 582.

⁸⁵⁸ James Anthony Froude, "England and her Colonies (1870), quoted in Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 246-247. The same belief was shared by other imperialist authors, such as Charles Sidney Goldman (1868-1958), who stated that 'the day of the individual and the small nation has gone for England with the advent of rivals. In any era of competition Providence is on the side of the bigger social battalions'. See Goldman, *The Empire and the Century*, XIX.

The position of the British in this future was an ambivalent one. Dilke realised that, even if the prospects of alliance between the territories of the empire were to come to a fruitful end, Greater Britain would be the only state which would share borders with all the powers of the future: the United States, China, and Russia. This increased the chances of a conflict with any of them, and especially with the latter. In addition, the lack of homogeneity between the territories of a future nation-state that encompassed the despotically-ruled India as well as the democratically advanced settlement colonies, made the British position weak in comparison to the more homogeneous and contiguous territories of these three political entities. Yet, in spite of this, Dilke was not a pessimist. Quite the contrary, as he saw in this heterogeneity the main differentiating factor of the British Empire; one which, if properly acknowledged and used to its benefit, would transform the empire into 'the most intelligent as well as the most cosmopolitan of States'.⁸⁵⁹ This conclusion offered a curious contrast to most other imperialist authors, who commonly assumed that successful states were defined by a high degree of social and cultural cohesion.⁸⁶⁰ Sadly, Dilke did not advance any concrete proposal so as to how this transformation of the empire's heterogeneity into an advantage could occur in practice.

From the mid-1890s onward, confidence in projects of imperial federation such as Labilliere's began to falter, due in no small measure to attacks like those exposed above but also because public interest in the topic was not transformed into decisive legislative action.⁸⁶¹ The most famous representative institution of the movement, the Imperial Federation League, had been dissolved in 1893 and, although it had numbered more than 2,000 members and 31 branches around the empire, when considered in insight, its most striking feature was its inability to offer any clear-cut and unified project for federation.⁸⁶² It is easy, of course, to perceive how the fact that

⁸⁵⁹ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain. Vol. 2.*, 583.

⁸⁶⁰ Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 99.

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁶² Bosco, *The Round Table Movement*, 73.

Greater Britain meant many things to many people had allowed it to spread widely in English political debates. However, this ambiguity, when combined with the fact that the empire included 'specimens of almost all races and languages', complicated enormously the possibilities of outlining concrete approaches and policies.⁸⁶³

It is noteworthy to mention that sometimes these imperialist ideas about Greater Britain presented quasi-religious undertones, especially evident in the sense of mission with which they pictured the whole imperial enterprise.⁸⁶⁴ One particularly obvious example of this kind of approach was John Adam Cramb's (1862-1913) *Reflections on the Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain* (1900). Cramb was a Scottish historian and Professor of Modern History in Queen's College, London, and in his account he offered an almost-messianic account in which the Spirit of Empire, which had been naturally developing over time, had been ultimately endowed to the British race. This Spirit, which until recently had remained unaware of itself, had finally taken the front stage and had been transformed into 'the fixed law of existence' for the British.⁸⁶⁵ The main consequence of such a portentous event had been the increasing self-awareness amongst the British population 'of its destiny as an imperial people' and their pursuit in search of 'higher political ends'.⁸⁶⁶

Cramb structured his historical narrative of the evolution of the Spirit of Empire throughout the ages as a series of successive commandments to various peoples like the Persians, the Greeks, or the Romans. Imperial Britain was, from this perspective, the last and most perfect of these repositories, one whose territorial expansion was accompanied by the extension of civilisation and the progress of divinely ordained plans.⁸⁶⁷ In the face of such a manifest destiny, unsurprisingly, no

⁸⁶³ Arthur Mills, *Colonial Constitutions* (1856), quoted in Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 103.

⁸⁶⁴ McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 36.

⁸⁶⁵ John Adam Cramb, *Reflections on the Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), 7-8.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. Also, *ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 301.

other race in the world could compete or compare to the British race: genius of empire in a people was 'innate, but not in all'.⁸⁶⁸

In this sense, Cramb's account was not bound by the limitations of the nationalist narrative framework that we exposed in chapter III, given that it explicitly contradicted the idea that there could exist an equal -in formal terms- to Imperial Britain. After all, the latter would exist in a category all of its own, and would violate the core principle of an international global spatiality. The *Reflections*, however, remains an interesting text because it allows us to observe how alternative alternative, non-national takes on the question of Greater Britain may develop and shows us that, even if national concepts and notions were certainly prevalent among imperialists - and many of these elements are even present in Cramb's work-, these co-existed alongside other ways of representing the past and future of the empire.

Back in our debate, if the 1890s had been a period of ambiguous endorsement, the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a steep decline in the support for the political unity of Greater Britain.⁸⁶⁹ Many causes can be adduced for this: the little legislative success of imperial federation schemes, the widespread criticism against imperialist policies during and after the war in South Africa, or the apparition of new proposals of alliance that were more easily workable and acceptable both in the colonies as well as in the metropolis. Slowly yet steadily, the conviction in a future global dominion of the Anglo-Saxon race was decoupled from the belief that this rule was to be achieved through the union of Greater Britain into a single British nation-state.

From 1908 onward, debates about the relationship between the United Kingdom and its colonies were increasingly dominated by projects that had given up the idea of a united state, a position fostered by the imperial government's policy of granting increasing self-government to the settler colonies in the years following the Boer war. In this context, even the Round Table Movement, founded in 1909 and whose goal was to develop a federal and representative system for the English-

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸⁶⁹ Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain*, 118.

speaking peoples of the empire, would only result in an acceleration of the break-up of the empire after it promoted the creation of a Commonwealth that, in practice, meant the opposite of imperial union.⁸⁷⁰ Left and right, the *dictum* 'consultation rather than commitment in political relations, and voluntary cooperation rather than overall control in defence' became the new keystone to interpret the imperial relationship within Greater Britain.⁸⁷¹

In *The Britannic Question* (1913) by Richard Jebb (1874-1953) we can find evidence of how the projects of federation were increasingly criticised even by authors from imperialist camp. Jebb was a journalist that for more than a decade had advocated some 'system of alliance' as the one he explored in more detail in this work.⁸⁷² Here, he framed the debate about the closer union of the empire as one between two great ideas, both of which were the result of the evolution of British political traditions. The first one, British Ascendancy, upheld the preponderance of the United Kingdom and its interests over the rest of the territories of the empire, whereas the second, British Equality, stemmed from the representative tradition and had as its goal to grant equal rights to all the territories of the empire. Jebb considered that the Imperial Federation of the previous three decades had been, in general, guided more by the idea of British Ascendancy rather than by that of British Equality. This meant, in turn, that, by stressing metropolitan concerns such as the extension of free trade or imperial defence, these approaches had risked the alienation of the colonies. Moreover, their proposals for federation had entailed, most of the times, the practical loss of authority of both metropolitan and colonial institutions.⁸⁷³ As such, Jebb was hardly surprised that support for these schemes was currently in decline.⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷⁰ Bosco, *The Round Table Movement*, 18; also, McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 171.

⁸⁷¹ McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 166.

⁸⁷² For instance, see Richard Jebb, "Imperial Organization", in Goldman, *The Empire and the Century*, 332-348.

⁸⁷³ Richard Jebb, *The Britannic Question: A Survey of Alternatives* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913), 28. Also, 126.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

His alternative approach was to propose a Britannic Alliance in which 'not equality in rights of citizenship but equality in rights of nation-States' would bind the parts of the empire together.⁸⁷⁵ In contrast to the political inventiveness and institutional revolution often required by projects of Imperial Federation, his new project would not need but the 'deliberate continuation of developments already well begun on lines which have pointed to a comprehensive and intimate alliance' between the colonies and the motherland.⁸⁷⁶ The portrayal of this system as a possible step towards a future wholly-fledged federation, which Jebb himself had stressed in previous works, was surprisingly absent from *The Britannic Question*.⁸⁷⁷ Instead, he opened the door to the idea that other independent states, and not simply those considered of Anglo-Saxon descent, would be able of joining this Britannic Alliance in the future.

As we have seen in chapter V, the First World War marked another turning point in the process of evolution of imperial reconfiguration ideas. Many imperialists had doubted, during the previous decades, that the colonies would take part in favour of the metropolis in the case of a conflict between the United Kingdom and another Great Power. When this occurred in 1914, however, the colonies responded and Lionel Curtis (1872-1955), one of the main leaders of the Round Table Movement, wrote in reaction to these developments.⁸⁷⁸ In *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (1916), Curtis criticised the fact that both in imperial institutions as in imperial history, only England had been adequately represented.⁸⁷⁹ He argued that the English, faced with the 'moral response' of the Dominions that had led to their participation in the war and which was 'rooted in the belief that this Commonwealth is the greatest institution in the world for enabling men to realise the duty of governing themselves',

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁸⁷⁷ Jebb, "Imperial Federation", 347-348.

⁸⁷⁸ McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 175.

⁸⁷⁹ Lionel George Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (Toronto: Macmillan & Co. of Canada, 1916), 225-227.

needed to completely revise the imperial relationship. In more precise terms, this meant that they had to grant total self-government to the Dominions.⁸⁸⁰

Curtis's proposal in favour of Dominion self-government was founded in the belief that these communities possessed certain Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic qualities which made it their 'duty' to rise up to total independence and to decide over their own affairs.⁸⁸¹ Such a natural sovereignty was to be attained within or without the imperial framework, but Curtis explained that, in any case, it would invariably entail the effective end of the preponderance of the United Kingdom over the rest of the empire.

Curiously, whereas Jebb's and Curtis' positions are representative of the trend towards considering the settlement Dominions as nations independent from the United Kingdom, their projects still reproduced the previous divisions between Anglo-Saxon 'white' colonies and the Asian and African populations of the empire. So, for example, Jebb still defended that the Britannic States, members of the Britannic Alliance, would need to maintain control over India and that the objective of their rule would be to help in the former's development towards a status similar to that enjoyed by the rest of its Britannic (Anglo-Saxon) allies.⁸⁸² Previously, in 1905, he had even regarded this 'White Man's Burden' as an attractive ideological tool for ensuring the allegiance and participation of the French Canadians and South African Dutch communities in the empire.⁸⁸³ Likewise, Curtis also shared in the notion of a British civilising mission. In fact, he considered that 'the spiritual end for which the Commonwealth exists' was to prepare 'for freedom the races which cannot as yet govern themselves' and described this task as one which should be assumed not only by England, but by all the Dominions fit for self-government.⁸⁸⁴ In this sense, Curtis

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4. Also, 123-124.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13. Also, 123-124.

⁸⁸² Jebb, *The Britannic Question*, 206.

⁸⁸³ Jebb, "Imperial Organization", 345.

⁸⁸⁴ Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, 206-207.

envisioned the Commonwealth as including only those communities to which 'Imperial' relationships could no longer be applied, a shorthand for the settler colonies.⁸⁸⁵ In brief, although what Jebb termed British Ascendancy -the idea of the preponderance of the United Kingdom in the empire- was definitely in decline during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the notion of an Anglo-Saxon Ascendancy -or even a 'White' Ascendancy- was still well-established and continuously reproduced.

The final nail in the coffin for the dreams of a political union of Greater Britain came shortly afterwards. In April 1917, Resolution IX was passed by the Imperial War Conference (the result of the merge of the Imperial War Cabinet and the Colonial Imperial Conferences). It determined that a reconfiguration of the relations of the empire 'based on the full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth and of India as an important portion of the same' was to take place once the war was over.⁸⁸⁶ The events of the conflict, coupled with their impact in the production of national identities in the Dominions, had led to the realisation that it was practically impossible to return to the pre-war situation.⁸⁸⁷ From that moment on, any plan for the creation of a single state out of the territories of the empire was regarded as a utopia. Although further schemes of closer connection between Britain and the Dominions were still developed in the subsequent years, especially in fields such as economy and education, they were mostly abandoned as political projects.⁸⁸⁸ The wind was blowing, instead, in the direction of recognising the complete independence of the Dominions, and the decade of the 1920s would witness the triumph of this policy, embodied in the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and, later, in the Statute of Westminster of 1931.

⁸⁸⁵ McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 6.

⁸⁸⁶ Bosco, *The Round Table Movement*, 16.

⁸⁸⁷ McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations*, 177.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

c. *Greater Nationalism in China*

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a profound transformation of the political organisation of the territories of the Qing empire. As we have pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, major extensions of land, that comprised about half of the total landmass of the empire, were inhabited by populations which could hardly be described as Chinese and that had been incorporated to it only recently.⁸⁸⁹ These included vast regions in which nomadic and seminomadic lifestyles were widespread, and resulted in a sharp contrast with the sedentary and densely populated Han areas of the East and South.⁸⁹⁰ From the standpoint of Chinese intellectuals and empire officials, this imbalance supported the conception of a Chinese centre of the empire with a series of imperial peripheries around it. However, it also posited a major difficulty to imagine a homogeneous nation-state out of the territories of the empire.

Such a stark division between core and periphery was buttressed by a number of ideological strategies that portrayed the inhabitants of these borderlands -which would later be known as Manchus, Tibetans, Mongols, and Uyghurs- as inferior to the Han Chinese. First among them was the idea of *tianxia* (All-under-heaven 天下), by which the emperor, the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子), rested at the centre of a system 'reorganized, or graded, according to levels of moral and cultural development', which in practice always meant conformity with Chinese cultural

⁸⁸⁹ Although these regions had been traditionally inhabited by non-Han populations, the situation was changing rapidly due to massive migration fluxes of Chinese peoples to Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. This demographic shift must be taken into account as a factor that probably favoured the chances of success in including these territories into the imagined nation. See Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 240.

⁸⁹⁰ James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenous Became Chinese* (New York-Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

values.⁸⁹¹ This idea was rooted on the assumption that Chinese civilisation was the 'cultural centre of the universe' and that, around it, in a graded hierarchy away from its core, lived other peoples who were increasingly culturally inferior to the Chinese.⁸⁹² Merely considering this a 'political' system would be an understatement, however, given that the state and its bureaucracy were not only required to rule, but were also expected to be the originators and perpetuators of ethical and aesthetical values.⁸⁹³ In addition, by equating Chinese culture to 'Culture' (with a capital C), the concept of *tianxia* seems to have made it impossible, at least theoretically, to accept the existence of any other culture or state equal to that of the Central Kingdom.⁸⁹⁴

To maintain this conviction in the pre-eminence of the Chinese culture as the only true culture of the world was, unsurprisingly, increasingly difficult in the face of Western imperialism and its impact.⁸⁹⁵ Liang Qichao, in his program for historiographical reform of 1902, seems to have already accepted that the Chinese were but one among many formally equal nations. As he would later recall in 1922,

We Chinese used to believe that the territory of Yu [founder of the Xia dynasty, the first dynasty of China, c. 2123-2025 BC] constituted the 'universe' (*tianxia*). That was a narrow view. But the Europeans shared the same partiality when they thought that the countries around the Mediterranean were the world. The truth is that world history

⁸⁹¹ Q. Edward Wang, "History, Space, and Ethnicity: The Chinese Worldview", *Journal of World History* 10, no.2 (Honolulu, 1999): 285-286.

⁸⁹² Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 131.

⁸⁹³ Laurence A. Schneider, "National Essence and the New Intelligentsia", in *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China*, ed. Charlotte Furth (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 57.

⁸⁹⁴ John King Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 9.

⁸⁹⁵ Q. Edward Wang, "Between Myth and History", in *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*, ed. Stefan Berger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 134.

is the composite product of human achievements from each and every country of culture.⁸⁹⁶

Even if Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century generally accepted that theirs was simply one of the high civilisations of the world, which ranked at the same level as Western civilisation, they did not go to the extent of considering the culture of every people as equally valid. This was particularly evident in the case of those who inhabited the Qing borderlands, who were still believed to be situated in a developmental process towards accepting Chinese culture. This 'myth of emptiness', that is, the idea that these populations were vessels ready to be filled by Chinese cultural influence, emphasised the portrayal of these groups as inferior to the Chinese, and thus offered a fundamental underpinning to later intents of integrating them into the Chinese nation.⁸⁹⁷

A second influence at work in the production of the distinct image of Han Chinese superiority was that between *wen* (culture/civil 文) and *wu* (warfare/military 武). Although in origin these two ideas had been regarded as complementary, Confucian tradition as was commonly understood by late Qing times had come to see *wen* as superior and righteous, and *wu* as a necessary evil and a last resort.⁸⁹⁸ The gradual disappearance of *wu* requirements in exams for official candidates, as well as the elevation of *wen* virtues of rulership as the 'way of the king' (*wangdao* 王道) are but two examples of this process of increasing disparity between the two concepts.

Such a contrast between *wen* and *wu* had acquired, over time, a spatial and ethnological dimension. Whereas Han Chinese usually depicted themselves and their rulers as representatives of *wen* who governed by virtuous example and

⁸⁹⁶ Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa" (Research method for Chinese history 中國歷史研究法, 1922), quoted in Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 214.

⁸⁹⁷ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 389.

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

righteousness, they typically described other ethnicities as examples of *wu* qualities.⁸⁹⁹ As a result, although non-Chinese peoples could conquer the Chinese through the brutal and lesser method of *wu*, they had to ultimately embrace the *wen* 'way of the king' and tacitly accept Chinese cultural superiority if they wanted to rule China proper. In this manner, the Chinese could still believe that they rested at the top of the chain even when they were ruled by non-Chinese dynasties, such as was the case, for instance, of the Qing.

The third assumption that sustained the centre-periphery dynamic between China proper and the Qing borderlands was the contrast between *xia* (Chinese/civilised 夏) and *yi* (barbarian 夷). This notion stemmed from the ancient claim of 'using the Xia to civilise the Yi', and acknowledged the cultural superiority of the Chinese and the eventual assimilation of any foreign dynasty that wanted to rule over them.⁹⁰⁰ This strategy allowed these monarchs to be regarded as legitimate in Chinese historical accounts if only they were able to portray themselves as having been assimilated to Chinese cultural values. Although the complete assimilation of foreigners was a debated topic in some literati circles, especially among those loyal to Chinese dynasties in times of non-Chinese conquest (as we will see later for the Ming loyalists during the Qing invasion), this idea remained a fundamental pillar of the legitimacy of the Manchu Qing to rule over Chinese populations.

In addition to this, some historians have argued, moreover, that there existed by the late Qing period a fuzzy yet distinct 'Sinic' identity which linked together most subjects of the empire in Han inhabited regions.⁹⁰¹ This community was, according to James Leibold, 'loosely bound together by a shared myth of patrilineal descent, [a] sedentary lifestyle, [a] centralised bureaucracy and educational system, [a] standard

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁰⁰ Mencius (c.372-298 BC) was, alongside Confucius, the most famous Chinese ancient sage. This quote came from a passage from the *Mengzi* (Book of Mencius, 孟子) in which he claimed: 'I have heard of men using the doctrines of our great land to change barbarians, but I have never yet heard of any being changed by barbarians'. See Irene Bloom, *Mencius* (New York-Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2009), 58.

⁹⁰¹ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 9.

written language, and [a] common set of ritual practices associated with Confucianism'.⁹⁰² Although the outer limits of this identity were dynamic and porous and allowed for the inclusion of non-Chinese elements, the late nineteenth century witnessed a process of ossification and hardening of its imagined borders. This was the result of two distinct yet intertwined developments: the threat of Western imperialism and the Chinese-led nation-building process.

The integration of the Qing borderlands and their centrality to the process of national imagination for Chinese intellectuals is inseparable from the expansive intents of Western imperial powers in these territories. In 1904, for instance, a British expeditionary force, led by Sir Francis Younghusband (1863-1942), had penetrated as far as Lhasa and had tried to establish a protectorate in Tibet. Although London did not back his project and it had finally come to nothing, it shows the extent to which Qing political control in the region was fragile and indirect.⁹⁰³ While the British aimed at getting a foothold in Tibet to protect their colonial possessions in India, their main rival in Central Asia, the Russian empire, supported secessionist movements in the northern regions of the Qing empire, particularly in Mongolia and Manchuria, and had obtained enormous extensions of land in the latter from the mid-century onwards.⁹⁰⁴ Japan, the rising East Asian imperialist power, had huge territorial ambitions in the Qing borderlands as well. Japanese intelligentsias increasingly constructed the Japanese as the vanguard of an Asian race and advocated the uniqueness and status of Japanese culture as an equal to Western civilisation. As Ge Zhaoguang has argued, 'this caused Japan to regard Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, and even the Tarim Basin and Tibet as "quasi national territory"'.⁹⁰⁵ This interpretation would ideologically sustain Japanese control of Korea and the isle of Formosa after the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War, but would also have further consequences in the

⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁰³ Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, 457.

⁹⁰⁴ Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 344.

⁹⁰⁵ Ge Zhaoguang, "Absorbing the "Four Borderlands" into "China": Chinese Academic Discussions of "China" in the First Half of the Twentieth Century", *Chinese Studies in History* 48, no.4 (2015): 337-338.

following decades, for instance, in the establishment of the state of Manchukuo (*manzhouguo* 滿洲國) in 1932.

After the fall of the Qing, the situation in these peripheral territories became more and more urgent from the perspective of those Chinese intellectuals who intended to absorb the borderlands as part of the imagined national geo-body. Even if it is true that Republican leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen, often described the new state as a China of the 'Five Races/Ethnicities' (*wu zu* 五族), they did so, not to a minor extent, in response to political movements in the borderlands which aimed at severing their connection with China proper.⁹⁰⁶ After all, Outer Mongolia and Tibet declared themselves independent in 1912 with the support of Russia and Britain, respectively, and secessionist intents took place in Inner Mongolia in 1916 and Manchuria in 1917. The latter, which also tried to restore the last Qing Manchu emperor Puyi (1906-1967) to the throne, was supported not only by the Japanese but also by the reformist Chinese intellectual and mentor of Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei.⁹⁰⁷

Despite these unpromising circumstances, Chinese politicians and intellectuals did not renounce their claims of sovereignty over these lands and, making use of clever diplomatic strategies, often obtained from foreign powers nominal acknowledgement of the Chinese ascendancy over the contested borderlands.⁹⁰⁸ Two examples of this could be the tripartite Simla Conference of 1913 between Tibetan, British, and Chinese representatives that recognised Chinese 'suzerainty' over Tibet in exchange for a wide-ranging autonomy, and the Kyakhta Conference (1914-1915) in which Mongolian, Russian, and Chinese envoys defined

⁹⁰⁶ James Leibold has argued that historians have tended to over-emphasise the identification of politicians such as Sun Yat-sen with the principle of the Five Races. He has displayed that, although rhetorical lip-service was paid to this concept, Sun kept manifesting a clear vision of Han centrality even after the establishment of the Republic. See Leibold, "Positioning "minzu"", 179.

⁹⁰⁷ Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 344.

⁹⁰⁸ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 43-44. Also, Zarrow, *After Empire*, 92-93; William C. Kirby, "When Did China Become China? Thoughts on the Twentieth Century", in *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 109.

Outer Mongolia as 'part of Chinese territory'.⁹⁰⁹ Given the lack of resources available to the new Republican regime to enforce its rule over these vast peripheral lands, nominal victories such as these were fundamental to maintain Chinese claims over these territories until they could be more effectively secured. In short, they were fundamental because they allowed to maintain the image of a unified state in the face of dissolution and divisive conflict, and such a conception proved to be powerful and broadly shared amongst Chinese intellectuals and state officials alike.⁹¹⁰

The major shift that occurred in the imagination of the borderland territories and their populations, however, was not simply the result of external intrusion but also of the way in which -Han- Chinese intelligentsias had aimed at overseeing the construction of a nation-state. These intellectuals and politicians, heterogeneous and disparate as their political and social backgrounds were, usually shared the vision of a formidable new China which would encompass the whole geo-body of the Qing. But this, in turn, posed an equally daunting question: how were the inhabitants of the outer regions of the empire, so dissimilar to the Han and, in the eyes of many Han intellectuals, inferior to them, to be included as equals in the Chinese nation and its state?

The complexity of the question can hardly be overestimated. As we have observed, previously existent frameworks to conceive the relationship between the 'core' Chinese territories and the non-Chinese 'borderlands' -such as *tianxia*, *wen/wu*, and *xia/yi*⁹¹¹- were already available both to those who aimed at reforming the Manchu Qing dynasty and to those whose goal was to topple it. Nonetheless, these notions were unfit for the production of a unified, national identity that had to range

⁹⁰⁹ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 43-44. See also Melvyn Goldstein, *A history of modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The demise of the Lamaist state* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 68-88; and Sarah C. M. Paine, *Imperial rivals: China, Russia, and their disputed frontier* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 298-305.

⁹¹⁰ R. Bin Wong, *China transformed: Historical change and the limits of European experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 73.

⁹¹¹ All three strategies display what Richard J. Smith has described as 'a natural Chinese tendency to divide phenomena into two unequal but complementary parts'. See Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham-London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 212.

over all the inhabitants of the newly projected nation-state, be them Chinese or non-Chinese, given that they postulated a hierarchically superior Han as completely detached from the rest of the subjects of the Qing.

If we think that nations can be imagined in any shape and to fit any necessity, a difficult question arises: why did Chinese reformers and revolutionaries (and, later, the Republic of China and the Popular Republic of China) not follow the same strategies as the Qing dynasty to rule the borderlands of the empire? With the notorious exception of Xinjiang, a region which had seen political and military turmoil during the late years of the Qing and was only transformed into a province in the 1880s, most of these territories had been relatively peaceful since their inclusion and had usually recognised their subjecthood to the dynasty. They were governed by their own authorities and laws, and, until the first decade of the twentieth century, this loose autonomy had been respected.⁹¹² If Chinese intellectuals and politicians had followed the example of the Qing, this may have resulted, as Julia Schneider has suggested, in 'a more federalist idea of a modern nation-state'.⁹¹³ However, this project was rarely advocated and most nation-building schemes continued to recognise the preponderance of the Han over the non-Chinese.

There are two reasons that can explain why this lost opportunity was not taken. First, as has been mentioned, the influence of previously existent modes of understanding both their own identity and that of non-Chinese populations made it very difficult for the Han to accept not just practical equality (as had been commonly the case in periods of 'barbarian' conquest and Chinese weakness) but the nominal equality between these groups and the Han.⁹¹⁴ If the former could be imagined as nations, with their own independent institutions, culture, and sovereignty, this would have certainly spelled the end to any claim of the Chinese as superior to them, both in political and, most importantly for Chinese self-identification, in cultural terms.

⁹¹² Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 4.

⁹¹³ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 51.

⁹¹⁴ Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), 60.

Consequently, as we will see, although the discourse of the Five Races was often pushed forward, in very few occasions was it actually interpreted as a full-fledged equivalence of status between all these groups. Transformed into 'minority ethnicities/nationalities' (*shaoshu minzu* 少數民族) in the new nation-state, the peripheral populations were often simply expected to follow and, eventually, to assimilate to the Han.⁹¹⁵

The second main reason for the conceptual centrality of the Han in the projects of reconfiguration was related to the main principles of the nationalist framework. Motivated by some major ideological trends of the political thought of the moment, it was the ambition of reformers and revolutionaries alike to construct a powerful Chinese nation-state that could face and repel foreign imperialism. Among these notions, the idea that there existed a correlation between size and power that we have seen at work in projects for Greater Britain, was a fundamental one. For this reason, the peripheral regions were re-imagined as 'buffer zones' that would ultimately guarantee the independence, security, and stability of the Chinese nation-state. In short, it was this conviction which led most of these authors and politicians to take for granted that the new national political entity was to be composed by the whole Qing geo-body, non-Chinese borderlands included.⁹¹⁶

Given that they had defined the borders of the future nation-state before describing the bonds that united the inhabitants within those limits with each other, Chinese intellectuals found themselves faced with a monumental task.⁹¹⁷ For one, they had to present a convincing account that could naturalise both the borderland regions and China proper as part of a single whole, and find connections that could render this relationship acceptable both internally (in China proper) and externally (in the borderlands and in international society). Yet, in addition, they also had to retrospectively include regions and populations that had been incorporated to the Qing empire as late as the eighteenth century as fundamental spaces and actors of

⁹¹⁵ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 4-5.

⁹¹⁶ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 48.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

Chinese history. And these two tasks had to be undertaken simultaneously because the nation -the ultimate unit that would validate their claim for an independent and sovereign state- could not be imagined outside the main principles of national unity and historical subjecthood. As a consequence, they found that it was not enough for the Han to politically and symbolically rule these territories as the Qing had done; what was necessary, if the borders of China were to match those of the empire, was to make them Chinese.

These pressing questions were behind the development of what Liang Qichao termed 'Greater Nationalism' (*da minzu zhuyi* 大民族主義). In the following pages we will analyse some of the projects that aimed at producing a nation-state out of the imperial geo-body of the Qing and at alleviating the many tensions that these reconfigurations entailed. To begin with, it is important to note that the authors of these projects ranged from reformist positions, such as Liang's, to revolutionary ones like those of Zhang Taiyan or Sun Yat-sen. However, despite this ideological division, their approaches to the national inclusion of borderland populations and territories were strikingly similar. After the fall of the Qing, and especially by the 1920s, theories first outlined by Liang in the first years of the twentieth century were to become widespread and frequent both in political discourse and historical research. In this sense, even if no institutionalised organisation, like the Imperial Federation League or the Round Table Movement, was formed, the notion of 'Greater Nationalism' came to be increasingly seen as the political orthodoxy by most Chinese politicians and intellectuals -regardless of their ideological views- in the decades following 1911.⁹¹⁸

Liang Qichao, the intellectual and journalist who, along with his mentor Kang Youwei, had been one of the leaders of the Hundred Days Reform that had intended to transform the Qing government into a parliamentary monarchy in 1898, was also the first and chief responsible for developing an approach to assimilate the non-Chinese peoples and territories of the empire borderlands into the Chinese nation-state. As a reform-minded intellectual, Liang imagined this future political entity as one that would include all the territories still controlled by the Qing; however,

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 388.

although he rarely indulged in an open anti-Manchu position, his works clearly denote his conviction in the superiority of the Han Chinese in this new China.

Liang's proposals for the inclusion of non-Chinese peoples in the future Chinese nation-state were mainly developed in a series of articles and publications issued between 1901 and 1905, during his period of exile in Japan after the failure of the 1898 political reform. During this time, Liang's thought was influenced by the translations of the works of Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881), a Swiss political thinker, made by the Japanese Katô Hiroyuki (1836-1916) and his ideas about 'people' (*Nation*) and 'nation' (*Volk*).⁹¹⁹ In an article published in 1903 in which he compiled and translated some of Bluntschli's concepts, Liang emphasised this author's distinction between the legal and state-produced notion of 'citizenry/nation' (*guomin* 國民) and the ethnological term 'ethnicity' (*minzu* 民族).⁹²⁰ This division is one of great significance, for whereas 'the main characteristics of *minzu* were certainly flexible factors that could transcend state borders (...) *guomin* (...) on the other hand, was defined as a political construct defined by state borders, the people of a nation-state'.⁹²¹ Liang found in Bluntschli's thought reassurance of the Chinese nation's (*guomin*) capacity of being composed by several different ethnicities (*minzu*), but he also agreed with him in that 'the unity of the state is better secured when the nation can primarily rely on One People as its main component'.⁹²² Naturally, both notions were gladly accepted by Liang, as they seemed to legitimise the project for a -Han-Chinese-led nation-state without having to renounce to include the non-Chinese subjects of the Qing.

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹²⁰ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 33. Also, Zarrow, *After Empire*, 109-110.

⁹²¹ Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo" (Teachings of the great political scientist Bluntschli' 政治學大家伯倫知理之學說 1903), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 82.

⁹²² Johann Kaspar Bluntschli, *Deutsche Statslehre für Gebildete* (1874), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 84.

But, how was it possible to produce a nation out of several ethnicities? Liang argued that the present circumstances required 'to adopt imperialist tactics to unite the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui⁹²³, Miao⁹²⁴, and Tibetan peoples in constituting a single large *minzu* with the Han at its core'.⁹²⁵ This was because he, following Bluntschli, believed that a 'great ethnicity was required to guide and dominate other smaller ethnicities'.⁹²⁶ Liang employed a visual metaphor for supporting this argument:

The civilisations of the world all matured through the mutual teaching and mutual guidance of all kinds of people. Regarding the affairs of a single state they are also often achieved and improved through the help and assistance of other ethnicities. [This is] like the casting of coins: one does not simply use pure gold and silver, but also mixes and adds two cheap metals. Only then are the coins complete and the lines and colours prettier.⁹²⁷

Liang's reasoning implied that non-Chinese peoples (the cheap metals of the example) should merge and assimilate into the Han Chinese (the gold and silver). This would mean that non-Han *minzu* of the empire would have to merge into a greater *minzu*, which in practice was to be defined by Han Chineseness. Given that

⁹²³ A mainly Muslim ethnic group found especially in northwest China. In this case, it refers to the population of Xinjiang.

⁹²⁴ An ethnic group found in southern China.

⁹²⁵ Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo" (1903), quoted in Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 33.

⁹²⁶ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 85.

⁹²⁷ Liang, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo", quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 84-85.

Liang fully accepted previous notions of Han superiority, he did not consider this deeply centralised idea of ethnicity to be problematic by any means. As he put it,

This greater (ethno-)nation [*minzu*] has to take the Han [Chinese] people as its centre and its organisation has to be formed by the hands of the Han [Chinese] people. Regarding this fact, there is nothing to argue about.⁹²⁸

But how was this Greater Nationalism (*da minzu zhuyi* 大民族主義) to be achieved, and how could the various minor *minzu* be made to identify with it rather than with their own 'lesser nationalisms' (*xiao minzu zhuyi* 小民族主義)? Liang responded this question with a momentous answer: 'If one is able to change people so that they become the same as oneself, it is called assimilative power'.⁹²⁹ In his view, as a 'superior ethnicity', the Chinese could assimilate other inferior and weaker groups, just as the metaphor of the coins had suggested. This power he called 'China's assimilative power' (*Zhongguo tonghuali* 中國同化力).

The theory of China's assimilative power presented deep continuities with previous notions of cultural transformation. As we have mentioned above, all three *tianxia*, *wen/wu*, and *xia/yi* frameworks left the door open to the inclusion of the barbarian and the foreign into the civilised community. However, it was Liang's ambition to show how this assimilation had already taken place in the past and, as a result, how it could happen once again in the present. By describing it as a capacity inherent to the Chinese people, this research was aimed at depicting it as an active and viable strategy for nation-building.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹²⁹ This definition, and the theory of 'China's assimilative power', was presented by Liang the previous year in an essay titled "Lun minzu jingzheng zhi dashi" (About the great force of ethnic struggles 論民族競爭之大勢, 1902). See Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 91.

⁹³⁰ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 142.

The quintessential historical nature of Liang's approach to China's assimilative power was crucially connected to his interest in the theory and methods of historiography. As we have seen in chapter V, in his work published in 1902 by the title *Xin Shixue* ('New Historiography' 新史學) Liang had already fervently criticised the traditional practices of history writing in China, especially dynastic histories.⁹³¹ As an alternative to these, he had proposed a new history based on Western models and which would take the national community as its main protagonist. In recent scholarly, this work has been often understood as the inaugurator of the modern practice of history writing in China as well as of the production of national histories of the country.

It is very interesting to note, however, that by advocating the fundamental role of the nation in history, Liang had tried to find evidence for the centrality and superiority of the Chinese nation over the rest of non-Chinese subjects of the Qing. He believed that there were 'races with and races without history' which depended on 'whether they can unite and form a history, or whether they cannot unite and have no history'.⁹³² He stoically recognised that, in terms of world history, the 'white races have been dominant', and that, among them, the Aryans were the most important branch.⁹³³ However, although his claim seemed to surrender any notion of Chinese superiority and to hand it down to Westerners instead, Liang managed to defend that the Chinese were still the most important bearer of culture and civilisation in East Asia:

⁹³¹ 'As China forged a unified empire, dynastic rulers gradually but surely turned the production of history into a routine, bureaucratic business, as evidenced by the appointment of court historians and the institutionalization of the History Bureau in the seventh century. (...) History was a textual manifestation of a new imperium, and control of the past, by imperial fiat, was part of the power and authority of the new regime'. See Ng On-cho and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), vii.

⁹³² Liang Qichao, "Xin Shixue" ("New Historiography" 新史學, 1902), 20, trans. Maura Dykstra and Devin Fitzgerald, accessed 07/09/2020, https://www.academia.edu/35963418/Translation_A_New_Study_of_History_%E6%96%B0%E5%8F%B2%E5%AD%B8_by_Liang_Qichao.

⁹³³ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

The main impetus of the Far East lies totally in China. Therefore the position of the Chinese people among the history of the Far East is exactly like the position of the Aryan ethnicity among the history of the world.⁹³⁴

Although the Chinese were not at the present on an equal footing as the Aryans in terms of global impact, he still pictured them as a 'world-race', and therefore argued that they were capable of claiming a leading role in East Asia. Liang's idea of ahistorical peoples, which fed upon Hegel's notion of 'world-historical peoples' and on Social Darwinist understandings of the 'survival of the fittest', led him to believe that these groups could not endure independently against foreigners and were destined to be excluded and then assimilated by the 'world-races'.⁹³⁵ Therefore, even if he advocated a Greater Nationalism in territorial terms, Liang was capable of upholding, in this way, Chinese culture and ethnic identifiers as the main features of his imagined national community.⁹³⁶

There was, however, another question raised by Liang's concepts of historical and ahistorical peoples. As has been noted, the Chinese had been often governed by non-Chinese dynasties, such as the [Jurchen] Jin (1115-1234), the [Mongol] Yuan (1271-1368), or the [Manchu] Qing (1644-1911). Over the centuries, traditional imperial histories had developed a model to explain the rise and fall of imperial dynasties, also known as the 'dynastic cycle' -see chapter IV-, by which the Mandate of Heaven and the orderly succession of elemental forces bestowed upon a new

⁹³⁴ Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo shi xulun" (Introduction to the History of China 中國史敘論, 1901), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 96.

⁹³⁵ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 11. Also, Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 101.

⁹³⁶ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 95.

dynasty the legitimacy to rule.⁹³⁷ As long as the new ruling family adhered to Confucian values and practices of government, they were able to maintain the Mandate of Heaven; if they neglected these, the Mandate would be removed and the dynasty could be rightfully expelled.⁹³⁸ Given that ethnic markers remained unimportant in this model, non-Chinese dynasties found it easy to adapt it in order to legitimate their rule over Chinese populated areas.

However, even if this paradigm was apt for an imperial political entity, it was not so useful for the nation-state that Liang intended to build. After all, how could the Chinese, a 'world-race' and the leading civilisation of East Asia, have tolerated foreign rule by inferior peoples for so long (and still do so)? National historical narratives, as the one Liang wanted to produce, could not simply accept that the Chinese had renounced their sovereignty and independence to those outer barbarians, as this would weaken their claim to independent statehood in the present.

Instead of acknowledging the weakness of the Chinese nation during those periods, Liang Qichao exposed that these dynasties had only been capable of ruling the Chinese because they had been assimilated. Although he conceded that 'from the angle of outer appearances the Han [Chinese] race often lost', he argued that 'from the angle of inner spirit' they were usually the victors.⁹³⁹ He believed that the power to assimilate non-Chinese, an ethnic characteristic of the Han, was at work even at those moments in which the Chinese were conquered, and that this made them the ultimate superiors.

With his claim about the assimilation of the foreign dynasties, Liang also aimed at including their original territories as well as the populations that inhabited

⁹³⁷ 'In imperial China, the compilation of a dynastic history served the political goal of confirming the legitimate succession of the new regime. The transition from one dynasty to the next was conceived and explicated in terms of the continuation of power and authority by a "proper" (*zheng*) ruler, who successfully forged "unity" (*tong*) -hence the ideal of *zhengtong*, the orthodox and systemic continuation of power. (...) At the service of *zhengtong* history was supposed to set the record straight by affirming orthodox transmissions of power'. See On-Cho and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, xi-xii.

⁹³⁸ Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire*, 37.

⁹³⁹ Liang, "Zhongguo shi xulun", 100.

them in the present into Chinese national history. The process worked in two distinct ways. First, as in the case of the [Mongol] Yuan, Liang often recognised the achievements of these dynasties and their importance for the creation of China. In doing so, he tried to emphasise their role as representatives of the necessary evolutionary progress of the nation towards self-completion. This move also allowed him to legitimise the claims of the future Chinese nation-state to the territorial borders of these imperial entities as essential theatres for Chinese history. Secondly, the purported assimilation of the foreign dynasties offered Liang a precedent to claim that their descendants (e.g. in the case of the Yuan, the Mongols) were also already assimilated -or in the process of assimilating- to the Chinese. These two strategies combined and mixed to present the peripheral territories and their non-Han inhabitants as fundamental elements of Chinese national history.

In addition to this, Liang also described how this assimilative power of the Chinese had been extensively at work during the ancient pre-Qin [221-206 BC] times, helping in the original formation of the Chinese ethnicity.⁹⁴⁰ However, he was quick to recognise that this was not enough for his nation-building projects. If China's assimilative power was to be an effective tool for integrating non-Chinese borderlands and populations into the projected nation-state, Liang had to answer first the questions he himself had raised: 'Does our ethnicity today no longer have the ability to achieve total assimilation? Or does it still have it? If it has it, then what is its method?'⁹⁴¹

That Liang refused to believe that the Chinese Han comprised a unique and separate people in blood terms was clear, if we factor in his example about the original assimilation that had taken place in pre-Qin times.⁹⁴² As an alternative for the source for the unity of the group or *qun*, he extracted from Bluntschli the assumption that 'language, script, and tradition' were the most important criteria to determine ethnic

⁹⁴⁰ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 121.

⁹⁴¹ Liang Qichao, "Lishi shang Zhongguo minzu zhi guan cha" ('Reflections on China's ethnicities in history' 歷史上中國民族之觀察, 1905), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 124.

⁹⁴² Ge, "Absorbing the Four "Borderlands" into "China"", 335-336.

identity, an idea that matched well both his previous Confucian culturalist beliefs and his project of constructing a broad identity for the Chinese and the non-Chinese inhabiting the Qing empire.⁹⁴³ Therefore, if he only could offer some contemporary evidence of how non-Chinese populations within the empire were being assimilated in regards to these three elements, he would also be able to demonstrate that China's assimilative power was still an available tool for building a nation-state.

For this reason, he argued that the Manchu Qing offered a perfect example of assimilation occurring at the present. He suggested that China's assimilative power was capable of acting through Chinese script and language and that these two systems were so flexible and powerful that they could absorb foreign languages easily; at the moment, he continued, they were doing so with the Manchu language.⁹⁴⁴ Given that language and script were two fundamental criteria of ethnic identity, his conclusion was that the Manchu Qing were in progress of merging and assimilating with the Chinese.⁹⁴⁵ If that was the case for an ethnicity that was ruling over the Chinese and that kept strict endogamic policies -Han Chinese, for example, were legally barred from marrying bannermen up until 1902⁹⁴⁶-, Liang suggested that the assimilative power of the Chinese could only be expected to be more effective if the Han were to rule the future nation-state.

⁹⁴³ Liang, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo", quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 83.

⁹⁴⁴ Liang, "Lishi shang Zhongguo minzu zhi guan cha", 124.

⁹⁴⁵ There existed a Manchu script which had been developed prior to the establishment of the dynasty in 1644 and which was recognised as an official language for imperial documents. Liang depicted it as an artificial creation and presented the linguistic assimilation of the Manchus as an almost complete development. Although the court had intended to push its use, it is true that most bannermen (who were often equalled to the Manchu) were incapable of speaking or writing in Manchu by the Liang's own time. However, it is still a curious omission that seems to obey to Liang's goal of presenting the assimilation of the Manchus as an indisputable fact. See Pamela Kyle Crossley, "Thinking about Ethnicity in Early Modern China", *Late Imperial China* 11, no.1 (1990): 22; Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 59; Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 126.

⁹⁴⁶ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 32.

Liang never answered the question of why, if they were assimilated to such an extent, the Manchus and other non-Chinese dynasties could still be differentiated from their Chinese subjects, or how their descendants could even now exist.⁹⁴⁷ In fact, he had a tendency of presenting his theories regarding assimilative power as common knowledge that required no further explanation or historical evidence; an ambivalent approach that allowed him to conceal the plentiful problems and inaccuracies on which they relied to function.

However, the concept proved to be a lasting success among Chinese politicians and historians, probably due to two main reasons. First, because it fed upon a series of established assumptions regarding identity that were widely shared by Chinese intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike. Effective Chinese centrality, as we have mentioned, was a core component of *tianxia*, *wen/wu*, and *xia/yi* frameworks, even if these had also allowed, to an extent, the legitimate accommodation of non-Chinese groups. Instead of breaking with these previous ideas, Liang simply re-located the power to assimilate and civilise the barbarians, which previously had been a prerogative of the Son of Heaven or of Confucian culture, as an active power of the Chinese *minzu*. The second reason was that it offered a way of recognising Chinese superiority and status as the leading ethnicity of the empire without having to surrender the nation's claim to the territories and populations of the Qing borderlands. By imagining these peoples in the midst of an ongoing process of acculturation and assimilation to the Chinese, as well as by including them -and their lands- as part of the national history of the Chinese, the concept served to legitimise a future nation-state that would encompass the present borders of the Qing, an objective not only shared by other reformers such as Liang, but also by many in the anti-Qing revolutionary camp.

⁹⁴⁷ Despite Liang's claim of the assimilation of the Manchus, Mark C. Elliot has evidenced the fact that, in 1911, Manchus and Han were still easily differentiable from each other, even by foreigners. Mark C. Elliot, "Reinventing the Manchus: An Imperial People in Post-Imperial China", Lecture in The Australian National University, June 20, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38ArKRnEwLQ&t=2719s> [accessed 08/09/2020].

One of such revolutionary intellectuals was Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936).⁹⁴⁸ The heir of a well-known family of scholars and a foremost leader of the anti-Manchu movement, Zhang was also the most remarkable authority on classical texts of the moment. His ambiguous position between extreme anti-Manchism, especially after 1900, and traditional scholarly has made it a somewhat difficult personality to interpret in the eyes of modern historians.⁹⁴⁹ This was to no minor extent caused by the internal contradictions he faced when he wrote about the non-Chinese populations within the borders of the Qing, where he often switched between a 'lesser' Han and a 'greater' nationalism.

For the purposes of this chapter, we will analyse Zhang's 'Zhonghua minguo jie' ('Explaining the *Republic of China*' 中華民國解), an article first published in 1907 in the revolutionary journal *Minbao*, founded in Japan by Sun Yat-sen and of which Zhang was the chief editor until 1908.

In 'Zhonghua minguo jie' Zhang analysed the question of the future name of the Chinese nation-state. This was no minor issue, given that, as other authors such as Liang Qichao had already pointed out, the names given to the country either corresponded to historical dynasties -such as *Hanren* ('people of the Han') or *Tangren* ('people of the Tang')- or to names given to China by foreigners -like *Zhendān* (an ancient Indian term for China) or *Zhina* (the name given to it by Westerners)-.⁹⁵⁰ Therefore, they were not suitable options to describe a national community that had evolved over time and which comprised a large population as required by the main principles of the national framework. Liang had finally reached the conclusion that only *Zhongguo* ('Middle Kingdom' 中國) was a viable name for the nation-state, even

⁹⁴⁸ Also known as Zhang Binglin, he took the pseudonym Taiyan to honour two seventeenth-century intellectuals famous for their anti-Manchu position and their loyalty to the deposed Ming dynasty, Huang Zongxi (known as *Taichong*) and Gu Yanwu (*Yanwu*). Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 145.

⁹⁴⁹ For a deeper analysis of the problems to evaluate Zhang's figure in modern historiography, see Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), 1-49.

⁹⁵⁰ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 108-109.

though the territorial and conceptual borders of the term were not yet clearly defined, simply because that was what the Chinese were used to saying.⁹⁵¹

Zhang advocated instead the term *Zhonghua minguo* (lit. Zhonghua nation-state 中華民國) in his article of 1907.⁹⁵² He began by exploring the etymology of each of the suggested alternatives. Regarding the term *Hua*, he argued that,

The name 'Hua States' (*zhuhua* 諸華) comes from the place which the nation (*minzu* 民族) first occupied. (...) Thus, we see that, the places where the emperors were born, and the hinterlands where they ruled over the people, constitute the extents [of the country]. (...) The Hua mountain forms the boundary, giving the country its name of Hua 華. Such is the origin of that name. Later, people started to migrate and spread to all the Nine Regions [an imperial administrative division allegedly dating back to the Xia Dynasty (ca.2070-1600 BC)]. At the time of the Qin and Han dynasties, Korea and Vietnam had become places where the Hua people tilled the soil, and thus the connotation of the name Hua had become wider. Hua was originally the name of a country and not the name of a race (*zhongzu* 種族), but today it has become a general term for both.⁹⁵³

Therefore, *Hua* entailed a flexible understanding of the community, which not only comprised its territorial extension (which Zhang describes in detail in his article)

⁹⁵¹ Liang, "Zhongguo shi xulun", 109.

⁹⁵² Julia Schneider has translated the term *Zhonghua* as 'Central florescence', whereas Elliot proposes to think of *Zhonghua minzu* as 'Greater Chinese nation'. Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 154; Elliot, *The Manchu Way*, 360.

⁹⁵³ Zhang Taiyan, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", trans. Pär Cassel, *The Stockholm Journal of East Asian Studies*, 8 (1997): 16-17.

but also its dual connection to a particular race and a state.⁹⁵⁴ The two other terms that he analysed -Xia and Han- were, in his view, more limited in their scope and less fit as names to describe the nation-state.⁹⁵⁵ He therefore concluded that

By establishing Han as the name of the race, the meaning of a 'state' is included, and the use of Hua as the name of the state also incorporates the racial sense of the word. These are the reasons for using the name *Zhonghua Minguo* 中華民國- The Republic of China.⁹⁵⁶

Although Zhang had briefly alluded to Korea and Vietnam as territories inhabited by the nation in his analysis of the term Hua, almost the rest of the 'Zhonghua minguo jie' contained a justification for the inclusion into the nation-state of the 'Three Peripheral Divisions' (*san huangfu* 三荒服), a concept by which he referred to Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang.⁹⁵⁷

Despite this fact, rule over Korea and Vietnam, as Hua territories, was to Zhang a priority for any Chinese nation-state project:

Thus, from the standpoint of regulating the borders of the Republic of China, the two prefectures, Vietnam and Korea, must be recovered, with the district of Burma following

⁹⁵⁴ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 155.

⁹⁵⁵ In the eyes of David Yen-ho Wu, 'Zhang Taiyan's vague and inclusive definition [of Zhonghua] marks the beginning of a modern concept of Chinese national identity'. See David Yen-ho Wu, "The Construction of Chinese and Non-Chinese Identities", *Daedalus* 120, no.2 (Special Issue, "The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today", 1991): 161.

⁹⁵⁶ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 18.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

slightly behind in priority. As for Tibet, the Moslem areas [Xinjiang] and Mongolia, these could either be incorporated or rejected.⁹⁵⁸

Zhang's conclusion suggested that his project of a Chinese nation-state was deeply shaped by a racial understanding of the national community, of which non-Chinese subjects of the Qing were not a fundamental part. The incorporation of Korea, Vietnam, and Burma was thus justified by their status as territories inhabited by the Hua, although some recent scholars have argued that this was a somewhat rhetorical concession rather than a true political project.⁹⁵⁹ In contrast, Zhang recognised that, given the present circumstances and in the face of foreign imperial threats, the priorities for the Republic of China would have to change:

Today I am afraid that the Republic of China is not able to restore the borders of pre-Han [206 BC-220 AD] times, and that it is necessary to take the provincial divisions of the Ming, except Burma, as the basis. The restoration of Vietnam and Korea is not an easy task. Not even the restoration of Burma can be accomplished at once. Even though the Three Peripheral divisions are not ancient territory, neither are they dependencies of any other country. So if you proceed by degree of difficulty, then it would be easier to restore these than the two commanderies [Korea and Vietnam] and the aboriginal district [Burma].⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁵⁹ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 162.

⁹⁶⁰ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 28.

Zhang thought, like Liang had done, that the best way to incorporate the Qing borderlands into the state was by assimilating their populations to the Chinese. Unlike Liang, however, he explored in far more detail the problems that such a process would entail and recognised a distinct main obstacle for each of the 'Three Peripheral Divisions': Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia.

First, Zhang thought that Tibet would require the most effort to assimilate linguistically. After all, because a lot of Han Chinese lived in Xinjiang and given that 'the Moslem peoples are more intelligent than the Mongols' this group would be easily assimilated linguistically; similarly, he also portrayed the Mongols as having been gradually capable of imitating 'the sounds of our language'. Consequently, Zhang concluded that only the Tibetans were still 'estranged' from the Chinese and that this was because they had their own 'civilised studies' which had not been influenced by others and which 'may conflict with the Chinese language'.⁹⁶¹

The Mongols, on their part, were difficult to assimilate because they lived in tents and were nomads, and therefore were unlike the Chinese in terms of 'living, eating and crafts'.⁹⁶² The Moslems and the Tibetans, on the contrary, were both agrarian populations and thus could be easily assimilated to the rural ways of the Chinese.

In the case of Xinjiang, legal and political obedience was to pose the most remarkable impediment for assimilation to the Chinese. This was because its Muslim inhabitants had 'not been treated as allies [by the Qing] like the Mongols, nor with religious reverence like the Tibetans', and had been, instead, 'truly conquered and bullied by the Manchus'.⁹⁶³ For this reason, he considered that special attention ought to be paid to the governance of this territory if rebellion against the Republic of China was to be avoided.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Zhang's reached the conclusion that, if the nation-state had to include these territories, all that was necessary was 'to establish offices, encourage learning, and devote special attention to agriculture'.⁹⁶⁴ Complete political equality between these peoples and the Chinese was to be delayed, however, for twenty years, after which Zhang believed that they would be totally assimilated and the Chinese would not incur the risk of letting 'people who do not know anything of the affairs of the State (...) recklessly take seats in parliament'.⁹⁶⁵ This claim, when combined with Zhang's portrayal of the complexities for assimilation in each case, seems to evidence the fact that he did not endorse Liang's optimistic view of these populations as already being almost assimilated to the Chinese. From his perspective, assimilation was not something that had taken place in the past, and instead remained a project for the future.⁹⁶⁶

Considering Zhang's ideological background, one important non-Han group had been omitted up until that moment in the 'Zhonghua minguo jie': the Manchus. He now went on to portray them as 'lazy parasites who do not understand the industries of the people' and that were, therefore, very different from the inhabitants of the 'Three Peripheral Divisions'.⁹⁶⁷ To the argument that some observers made about Manchus being more cultivated than other non-Chinese groups, Zhang responded by saying that although they possessed 'skills in exercise of command', they were in fact deeply ignorant in managing civil affairs. Here he seems to have been inspired by the division between barbarian *wu* military virtues and Chinese *wen*

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁶⁶ However, the attention that Zhang paid to the project seems to point to the fact that he considered that these territories were worth incorporating. Probably this belief was the product of its preoccupation if they were lost to imperialist powers. Analysed under this light, Zhang's (and other intellectuals') position would fall in line with what Gu Jiegang, one of the most important Chinese historians in the decades of 1920 and 1930, wrote: in an age of peace scholars might 'learn for learning's sake'; but when 'the land is in peril' one must 'strive for pragmatism in one's studies'. See Gu Jiegang, "Yugong xuehui yanjiu bianjiang jihua shu" (Plans of the *Tribute of Yu* Society for research on the borderlands 禹貢學會研究邊疆計劃書, 1936), quoted in Ge, "Absorbing the Four "Borderlands" into "China"", 341-342.

⁹⁶⁷ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 31.

civil virtues that we have exposed at the beginning of this section. Nevertheless, the fundamental question still remained: could the Manchus be assimilated to the Chinese and join them as members of a single a nation-state? Zhang assumed so, but he also noted that such a thing would only happen once a revolution had toppled the Qing, the stipends that were paid to the bannermen had been abolished, and the Manchus had been 'forced to labour in the fields'. Only then, having been thoroughly stripped of their preeminent position, would they be assimilable into the *Zhonghua* ethnicity.

But what would happen if these Mongols, Moslems, Tibetans, or Manchus tried to resist their assimilation to the Chinese and declared themselves independent? In this regard, although he did not diametrically deny the right of these populations to found their own states, Zhang, as did many other Greater Nationalists, offered a rather negative perspective on such an idea.⁹⁶⁸ For instance, he considered that due to their own internal divisions, 'the Tibetans [were] not an obstacle and the Mongolians [were] easy to tame'.⁹⁶⁹ Even considering that the 'two evil states', Russia and Britain, were conspiring to gain influence in these regions, they had been incapable of separating them from the Qing dynasty, and Zhang saw little reason to believe that only the fall of the Manchu would lead to an occupation of these territories. In this succinct way, he took for granted the connection between these populations and the Han and refused to pay any serious consideration to any political project developed by the Mongols or the Tibetans outside a future *Zhonghua Minguo*.⁹⁷⁰

Only the Moslems of Xinjiang did, in the eyes of Zhang, 'have an agile and brave popular morale, and so they can unite easily' and were therefore capable of opposing the assimilative process.⁹⁷¹ But even in this case he considered that this would not happen, for although they were currently fighting for independence out of 'hatred' to the Manchu Qing, they would not have any good reason to challenge their

⁹⁶⁸ Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin*, 331.

⁹⁶⁹ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 37.

⁹⁷⁰ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 165.

⁹⁷¹ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 38.

integration in a Republic of China. A new Han-led political entity would make room for these peoples and would encourage them to abandon resistance and assimilate, thus utilising their own anti-Manchuism as a conscious strategy for granting stability to Zhang's project.⁹⁷² Moreover, in the existing international situation of China and faced by threat of Western imperialism, it would be unwise to let the Moslems separate, given their 'few qualified personnel', their deficient political system, and their need 'to ask the Han for help in solving all important questions'.⁹⁷³ An independent Xinjiang would be 'remote', it would have a very difficult time in devising a working defence system, and would not, as a consequence, be able to compare itself with and to oppose other 'civilised countries'. As a buffer zone for the Chinese, such an unstable situation in its western fringes would also endanger the security of the territories of China proper. Zhang was prone to conclude, then, that 'if they [would] understand all this, they [would] not waste any time demanding separation, but strive to assimilate with the Han'.⁹⁷⁴

The closing lines of the 'Zhonghua minguo jie' summarised Zhang's own project for the territory of the new Republic of China. In them, he stated that

To sum it all up, the task has general and specific features, the way has easy and dangerous parts, and, because of this, we will unavoidably worry. If one of the Three Peripheral Divisions separate, the remaining two may not necessarily follow suit, and if all three assimilate with us, then this will be a beneficial application of nationalism. After this, the two prefectures [Korea and Vietnam] and the aboriginal district [Burma] can

⁹⁷² Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 166.

⁹⁷³ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 40.

⁹⁷⁴ It is interesting to observe the remarkable similarities between Zhang's depiction of an independent Xinjiang and Greater British portrayal of sovereign colonies such as Australia or Canada. See, for instance, Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, 242 and Froude, *Oceana*, 389.

be recovered, leading to the restoration of the pre-Han borders and the Republic of China being established in earnest.⁹⁷⁵

After the revolution of 1911, anti-Manchu stances and 'Little nationalist' conceptions of the national community, such as those defended by racial revolutionaries like Liu Shipei (1884-1919), lost a lot of their appeal in favour of Greater Nationalism and the assimilation theory developed by Liang Qichao.⁹⁷⁶ The reason for this were, mainly, the altered circumstances faced by the early Republic (which had taken the name *Zhonghua Minguo* advocated by Zhang Taiyan) and its declared aim of regaining control of the borderlands that had proclaimed their independence during the first stages of the conflict. Even revolutionary representatives, who up until the eruption of revolution had criticised the artificiality of the Qing multi-ethnic empire, came to 'echo those reformers within the Manchu court who had called for the creation of a republic of five races, and they proposed to symbolise this union with a new five-color flag that included red, yellow, blue, white, and black stripes to represent the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan peoples respectively'.⁹⁷⁷

Forefront politicians of the new state, such as Sun Yat-sen remained unconvinced, however, of the strength and stability that such a Republic of the Five Races would provide.⁹⁷⁸ They were deeply influenced in this suspicion by the ideal of a racially homogeneous nation-state that was predominant at the moment and which

⁹⁷⁵ Zhang, "Explaining the "Republic of China"", 40.

⁹⁷⁶ For a deeper analysis on Liu Shipei's position regarding non-Chinese peoples and the borders of a future Chinese nation-state prior to the 1911 revolution, see Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 211-269.

⁹⁷⁷ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 38.

⁹⁷⁸ Elliot has noted that phrases such as "the single family of the five races" present striking similarities with previous Qing imperial formulations such as the 'five languages of the pentaglot *Wuti Qingwenjian*' and has emphasised the continuity between Qing and early Republican frameworks in regard to borderland populations. See Elliot, *The Manchu Way*, 359.

they saw embodied in the ever-present example of the Japanese unitary state.⁹⁷⁹ Therefore, when Sun founded the *Guomindang* ('National People's Party' 國民黨, also GMD) in 1912, one of its main goals became the assimilation of the non-Chinese populations with the Han 'in a single furnace to create the new order of the *Zhonghua minzu*, in an evident reiteration of Liang Qichao's metaphor of the melting of coins.⁹⁸⁰ However, this was not a strategy limited to the GMD, as Li Dazhao (1889-1927), one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, also stated in 1917 that 'the various *minzus* of Asia smelted together in forming a single *Zhonghua minzu* that eliminated all previous boundaries and blood lineages and forged our *minzu*'s lofty and effervescent spirit'.⁹⁸¹ These examples suggest, thus, that many relevant early Republican politicians and intellectuals were prone to combine a territorial image of the new state, which included the Qing borderlands and their populations, with an ethnic understanding of communal identity mediated by Liang Qichao's concept of 'Chinese assimilative power'.⁹⁸²

Yet it would be incorrect to think that the influence of the assimilation theory was limited to politicians. As we have explained elsewhere, the years that led to the establishment of the Republic and the first decade after it witnessed the parallel extension of the assimilative approach as well as of an academic professional historiography that followed Western models. The notion impregnated many historiographical currents in the early Republican years, and thus it remains fundamental to note the significant role that professional history played in the development of Greater Nationalism. For this reason, we must explore the impact that

⁹⁷⁹ Magnus Fiskesjö, "Rescuing the Empire: Chinese Nation-building in the Twentieth Century", *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no.1 (2006): 21.

⁹⁸⁰ Sun Yat-sen, "Sanminzhuyi" (The Three Principles of the People 三民主義, 1919), quoted in Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 43. Mark C. Elliot has argued that 'to say that *zhonghua minzu* is synonymous with "the former peoples of the Qing dominions," is not far from the mark', yet this understanding should always entail the notion of Han [Chinese] superiority. See Elliot, *The Manchu Way*, 361.

⁹⁸¹ Li Dazhao, "Xin zhonghua minzuzhuyi" (New *Zhonghua* nationalism 新中華民族主義, 1917), quoted in Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 42.

⁹⁸² Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 280.

Liang Qichao's concept of assimilative power had in historical practice from the late 1910s onward, especially in the depiction of imperial dynasties of non-Chinese origin, as well as the stimulus it provided to efforts to incorporate non-Han ethnicities into Chinese national history.

As Julia Schneider has pointed out, the challenge posited by the non-Chinese populations of the former Qing to Chinese nationalist historians was 'how to integrate them, how to show that they were a part of China's history and thus also of the Chinese nation-state, and at the same time to not give them a too active and independent role in this history in order to maintain the superior position of the Chinese people'.⁹⁸³ This issue was most clearly brought to the front when these scholars tried to develop an evolutionary scheme for China's history as shown in chapter IV and had to interpret the role played by non-Chinese dynasties ruling the Chinese within this progressive pattern.⁹⁸⁴

As we have seen when studying the evolution of such periodisation schemes, Fu Sinian (1896-1950), one of the first representatives of Chinese academic historiography, developed in 1918 an outline for analysing China's history according to 'the rise and fall of the Han [Chinese] ethnicity'.⁹⁸⁵ In it, he described China's history as a succession of stages of mixture and re-purification of the Chinese ethnicity. He believed that, up until the year AD 581, complete assimilation of various ethnicities to the Chinese had been the main feature of Chinese national history:

[...] Assimilation to the Han [Chinese] ethnicity happened during all dynasties. However, there was only one-directional transformation, and there was no fusion, there was only the

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁹⁸⁴ As mentioned in previous chapters, the conception of national history as an evolutionary endeavour was one of the main principles of the nationalist outlook towards the past.

⁹⁸⁵ Fu Sinian, "Zhongguo lishi fenqi zhi yanjiu" (Analysis of the periodisation of China's history' 中國歷史分期之研究, 1918), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 290.

Yi's change, and there was no Xia change.⁹⁸⁶ Those who were perceived as being [part] of the Han [Chinese] ethnicity by the Han [Chinese] ethnicity at that time, did not cause increase or decrease [of the Chinese ethnicity].⁹⁸⁷

After this period, however, there came an age that Fu termed 'Middle Ages' (*zhongshi* 中世) and which he defined as one of intense intermingling between Han and Hu [barbarian] customs. This situation would last until the Later Zhou Dynasty (951-960), after which

The Hu [barbarian] energy gradually disappeared, until it reached its non-existence. In the three hundred years [until the end of the Song dynasty [960-1279] there was only the Han [Chinese] tradition.⁹⁸⁸

Fu saw the seven hundred years from 1279 up until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 as a new age of mixture of the Chinese ethnicity. Invariably, his portrayal of periods of contact between Han and non-Han cultural influences such as this one was always negative, which suggests that, to him, China's national history had to reserve the central stage for the Han [Chinese] ethnicity. In contrast, periods of re-purification of this group (such as the one that had recently started with the foundation of the Republic of China) were, in his eyes, positive.

Having dedicated most of the 1910s to his political career, Liang Qichao finally retired after an unsuccessful experience as an advisor for Chinese diplomats in the

⁹⁸⁶ The use of Yi ('barbarian') and 'Xia' (civilised/Chinese) in this text refers to the Mencian division exposed at the beginning of this section.

⁹⁸⁷ Fu, "Zhongguo lishi fenqi zhi yanjiu", 292.

⁹⁸⁸ Fu, "Zhongguo lishi fenqi zhi yanjiu", 293.

Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Nonetheless, this did not mean that he gave up on his intellectual activities, and between 1920 and 1922 wrote a series of articles in which he exposed some of his reflections regarding the assimilation and incorporation of non-Chinese during the first decade of the Republic.

The first of those was 'Lishi shang Zhonghua guomin shiye zhi chengbai ji jinghou gejin zhi jiyun' ('Success and failure of the aim of the Chinese nation in history and its future change' 歷史上中華國民事業之成敗及今後革進之機運, 1920), in which he portrayed various non-Han groups -including the Miao (an ethnicity of southwest China), the Tibetans, the Mongols, and the Manchus- as being totally (or almost totally assimilated) to the Chinese. He emphatically concluded that,

About those, who are called extinct, it cannot be claimed that they opposed their extinction, and thus they were absorbed and united with all [the other] ethnicities. They melted and changed their original character and became one integral part of our ethnicity. They broadened its contents. Today, in every province in the interior, there is not one bit of a trace of all these ethnicities in existence anymore. Indeed, no matter which province one recommends to people, there are no blood traces of the Qiang [Tibetans], Miao, Xiongnu [Mongols], Eastern Hu [Manchus], or of any other [non-Chinese] ethnicity. Today there is only the one name of the "Zhonghua [Chinese] nation", which can be seen worldwide.⁹⁸⁹

Liang's claim echoed his previous remarks about the complete assimilation of the Manchus, and offered a diametrical contrast to the political challenge that the

⁹⁸⁹ Liang Qichao, "Lishi shang Zhonghua guomin shiye zhi chengbai ji jinghou gejin zhi jiyun" (Success and failure of the aim of the Chinese nation in history and its future change' 歷史上中華國民事業之成敗及今後革進之機運, 1920), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 302-303.

Republic confronted at the time in territories such as Tibet and Mongolia. This extremely optimistic outlook differed with another essay he would write two years later and which was based on some of his university lectures on history. Published under the title 'Zhongguo lishi yanjiufa' ('Research method for Chinese history' 中國歷史研究法, 1922), here Liang tried to offer a more detailed guide to national history writing in China.⁹⁹⁰ Instead of simply considering political and governmental affairs, Liang exposed in this work, as Fu Sinian had done, that an ideal national history for China should also address prominently the question of the formation and development of the Chinese ethnicity and its contacts with other ethnic groups:⁹⁹¹

First, explain the traces of the foundation and development of China's ethnicity in order to analyse the reasons for its continuity and magnificence, and moreover to examine if there is or is not evidence for its decline.

Second, explain which ethnicities were most historically active on China's borders. What are the traces of our ethnicity's mixings and conflicts with other ethnicities? And what are the results?

Third, explain the basis on which China's ethnicity developed culture. What are the mutual influences of it and the cultures of other global areas?

Fourth, explain the position of China's ethnicity among the whole human race, its special characteristics, and its future responsibility for all humankind.⁹⁹²

⁹⁹⁰ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 304-305.

⁹⁹¹ Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 207.

⁹⁹² Liang, 'Zhongguo lishi yanjiufa', 307. An alternative translation is provided in Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 207.

Even if all these points dealt with the historical development of the Chinese ethnicity in relation to other groups (especially the third and fourth points, which suggest that Liang had totally embraced by then the nationalist assumption of global international spatiality), the first and second points were the most significant ones for Liang's project of incorporating of the non-Chinese peoples and their territories to the imagined national history. Yet, in spite of this, we must be careful not to conclude that he had embrace, by any means, a multi-ethnic perspective about China's history. On the contrary, it may as well suggests the opposite: that even if he regarded encounters between Chinese and non-Chinese as representing a core part of this narration, the minor non-Han ethnicities 'were only included in it as long as they interacted with the Chinese and influenced the Chinese people's fate'.⁹⁹³

Coming back to the subject of assimilation processes taking place in the present, Liang's 1922 articles drew a very different picture from the one he had exposed only two years earlier. If previously he had claimed that there was 'not one bit of a trace of all these [non-Chinese] ethnicities in existence anymore' and that these groups had been almost or totally assimilated to the Zhonghua nation, in 'Zhongguo lishi shang minzu zhi yanjiu' ('Survey of ethnicities in Chinese history' 中國歷史上民族之研究, 1922) he considered that only the Manchus were now to be seen as completely assimilated to the Chinese.⁹⁹⁴ Thus, it seems that by 1922 Liang had become forced to reluctantly acknowledge the difficult situation faced by the Republic of China and its claims of sovereignty over the territories and inhabitants of Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang.⁹⁹⁵

⁹⁹³ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 310.

⁹⁹⁴ Liang, "Zhongguo lishi shang minzu zhi yanjiu", 316.

⁹⁹⁵ The situation of the Manchus after the fall of the Qing differed much from those of other non-Chinese groups. They possessed no native territory to fall back to (given that Manchuria had been widely populated by Han migrants) and the political and social climate made their identity as Manchu a dangerous one. For a brief introduction to the topic, see Elliot, "Reinventing the Manchus: An Imperial People in Post-Imperial China".

In addition to this, Liang also further expanded in these articles his explanations about what two decades earlier he had termed 'China's assimilative power'.⁹⁹⁶ Abandoning his previous reference to a common blood shared by every member of the *Zhonghua minzu*, Liang declared instead that the Chinese ethnicity had remained unpolluted in the past even if those non-Han who assimilated to it had completely adapted to Chinese language, culture, and tradition. In this sense, although not pure from a blood standpoint, the Chinese had been capable of integrating their foreign conquerors by making them lose their language, adopt China's culture, marry to the Han, take Chinese names, and make them adopt Chinese ways of rulership.⁹⁹⁷

Liang also offered a list of eight distinct circumstances in which the assimilative power of the *Zhonghua* nation could be deployed, and based this categorisation on his study of the historical development of the Chinese ethnicity over time. Thus, he tried to convey the sense that, if circumstances were adequate, assimilation to the Chinese was an unavoidable process:

1. The Chinese ethnicity comes into contact with other ethnicities on an equal basis.
2. The Chinese ethnicity conquers other ethnicities and e.g. makes them practice agriculture.
3. The Chinese ethnicity is resettled in areas controlled by other ethnicities.
4. The Chinese ethnicity defeats other ethnicities and resettles them in China proper.

⁹⁹⁶ Although two decades earlier he had termed it *Zhongguo tonghuali* (China's assimilative power), in 1922 he named this concept *Zhonghua minzu tonghuali* (Assimilative power of the Chinese ethnicity).

⁹⁹⁷ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 320.

5. The Chinese ethnicity freely spreads and settles in the *Lebensraum* of other ethnicities because of economic interests.
6. Other ethnicities conquer the Chinese and consequently assimilate.
7. Single persons or tribes of other ethnicities come to surrender or because of other reasons, get to know China's civilisation and consequently become people of China.
8. [Those who] settle down for reasons of trade, assimilate into China after some time.⁹⁹⁸

All these situations led, according to Liang, to a one-directional transformation of the non-Chinese into the Chinese ethnicity. With the support of this new categorisation and by pointing to the sixth entry of this list, Liang was now able to claim, as he had done almost twenty years earlier, that non-Chinese conquest dynasties (such as the Manchu Qing) had been assimilated to the Han simply as a direct consequence of their control over the Chinese ethnicity.

Fu Sinian's and Liang Qichao's works during the late 1910s and early 1920s differed from each other in certain key periodisation aspects, as did many other historical approaches of the period. However, they offered a significative similarity if we consider how they handled and portrayed the inclusion of non-Chinese peoples in the history of China. Although Fu's account did not made it clear if he regarded China's ethnicity in terms of racial or cultural distinctiveness, he certainly positioned this group at the centre of his project of a Chinese national history, with the non-Han peoples simply taking part as hinderances or pollutions to this ethnicity's natural development.⁹⁹⁹ Liang's analysis was akin to Fu's in that he presented the non-Chinese peoples and the dynasties they founded as mere vessels ready to receive the assimilative influence of the Zhonghua nation. By emphasising the passive character

⁹⁹⁸ Liang, "Zhongguo lishi shang minzu zhi yanjiu", 322.

⁹⁹⁹ Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 294.

of these populations, both authors managed to develop a template to narrate China's national history that, even though it included non-Chinese peoples as part of the nation, did not challenge the historical centrality of the Han in the whole process.

School history textbooks were not immune to this tendency away from Han 'Little nationalism' in the first years of the Republic and most of them accepted the concept of assimilative power while they criticised, at the same time, previous works for having paid insufficient attention to non-Chinese ethnicities. Zhong Yulong (1880-1970), one of the authors of such educative materials, claimed in 1914 that 'most of our national history works were focused on the Han, with obvious prejudices towards other nations' and made it his declared objective to 'view *wuzu gonghe* ['Republic of Five Races' 五族共和] as the principle, with equal attention [paid] to the development and integration of the Manchu, the Hui, the Mongol and the Tibet'. He promised that he would not 'judge by preference' to the Han, and that he would do so in order to strengthen the sympathies between the five races and 'promote national integration'.¹⁰⁰⁰ However, as in Liang's and Fu's cases, works such as these did not imply, in practice, multi-ethnic approaches to national history, and tended to embrace, instead, the picture of these populations and their territories as passive recipients for the assimilative power of the Chinese ethnicity.

The 1920s witnessed the success of Liang's concept of assimilative power and its crystallisation in a wide variety of historical works.¹⁰⁰¹ Although their authors were mainly professional historians trained in Western methods, which as we have seen in chapter VI led many of them to challenge traditionally accepted ideas about the distant past, they usually uncritically 'accepted that, in the context of China's history, there always was a (culturally/racially) dominant ethnicity (...) opposed to

¹⁰⁰⁰ Zhong Yulong, *Xin zhi benguoshi jiaoben* (The Newly Edited History Textbook' 新知本國史教本, 1914) quoted in Renee Yuwei Wang, "Who are the Han? Representations of the Han in Chinese school textbooks in late Qing and early Republican China", AACCS Conference (2011): 40.

¹⁰⁰¹ For a brief analysis of the influence of the concept of 'China's assimilative power' in some authors during the 1920 decade, see Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 330-380.

many other (culturally/racially) dominated or even uncultivated ethnicities'.¹⁰⁰² Even if they did not agree in how the process of assimilation had worked in historical terms, they did not deny the assumption that non-Han peoples were a fundamental part of national history only at the moments when they were in contact with the Chinese ethnicity. In some cases, the acknowledgment of this notion represented a conscious intent of backing Chinese claims over the increasingly contested borderlands.¹⁰⁰³

Thus, we can conclude that, similarly to how the new Republic claimed to be the heir to the territorial geo-body of the Qing empire, the framework under which Republican historians produced their histories was a re-elaborated version of previous notions of Chinese centrality.¹⁰⁰⁴ Increasingly during the 1920s -and for sure by the 1930s- alternative territorial conceptions of the nation (such as 'Little nationalism' or Pan-Asianism) were mostly abandoned, and a majority of intellectuals 'accepted that the boundaries of the new *Zhonghua minzu* should ultimately assume the same geographical space as the Manchu empire'.¹⁰⁰⁵ Even if, as has been shown, some of the historiographical debates of the 1920s -especially the Doubting Antiquity Movement and the theory of Sino-Babylonianism- challenged certain aspects of the legitimation of Han superiority and rule over non-Chinese peoples, this assumption was able to retain its significance in Chinese political and historical debates.

d. Comparison and balance

After having presented an examination of both projects -Greater Britain and Greater Nationalism-, we are now in a better position to address two questions. First, we can now compare them as projects of imperial reconfiguration in order to evidence what they shared and in what aspects they differed from each other. Second, and most

¹⁰⁰² Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 376.

¹⁰⁰³ Ge, "Absorbing the Four "Borderlands" into "China"", 339, 357.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Rhoads, *Manchus & Han*, 294.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 45-46.

importantly, we can try to answer the fundamental issue raised by the historical evolution of both schemes: why did Greater Nationalism succeed whereas the idea of Greater Britain did not?

We have already presented some of the similarities between these projects in the introduction to this chapter. To the extent that they were responses to the threat of international competition and to the perception of internal weakness, both had many assumptions in common. These fears manifested, for instance, in a negative outlook towards small independent states and in a sense of urgency about the measures that had to be taken in order to strengthen their respective states.¹⁰⁰⁶

However, concrete projects of reconfiguration such as the ones we have described also offered striking parallels in their practical approaches. First, given that these were deeply influenced by nationalist principles and concepts, they tended to offer an image of these great nation-states as homogeneous entities. In an international environment which upheld racial theories and Social Darwinism as valid conceptual frameworks, this ultimately entailed that Greater Britain and Greater China were pictured more as 'race-states' than as nation-states. Whereas British imperialists resorted to an alleged Anglo-Saxon community that bound together the white settler colonies of the empire to Britain, Chinese reformists and revolutionaries followed the double strategy of stressing the common origin of Han and non-Chinese populations of the empire and of depicting the non-Han as already assimilated and indistinguishable from the Chinese.¹⁰⁰⁷ Of course, this also involved an exclusivist and essentialist approach to national belonging that in extreme cases left large groups

¹⁰⁰⁶ The use of 'small independent states' to refer to such vast areas as Canada, Australia, or Mongolia seems out of place. However, it must always be taken into account that, from the perspective of these intellectuals, who considered the enormous imperial geo-bodies as a unique entity, they would only constitute severed fragments of a bigger (and more complete) whole.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Symbols such as the Yellow Emperor (a mythical common ancestor of all the inhabitants of China) or the Yellow race were instrumentalised by Chinese revolutionaries and political parties in order to produce a sense of common belonging and racial descent out of the geo-body of the Qing. See Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 122; also Frank Dikötter, "Culture, "Race" and Nation: The Formation of National Identity in Twentieth Century China", *Journal of International Affairs* 49, no.2 (1996): 590-605.

of population out of the imagined national community (as in the case of the Indians in the British case).

Projects of imperial reconfiguration also required, in both cases, processes of historical reconceptualisation. The main principles of the national framework exposed in chapter III made it necessary for nations to be imagined as evolving historical subjects. Consequently, all the territories and populations that the authors of these projects wanted to integrate in their enormous states had to be re-imagined as constituent parts of this account. This was manifest, in practice, on an ideological and intellectual effort to construct these lands and peoples as stages and actors, respectively, of fundamental and unquestionable significance for national history. By the same token, it also entailed a process of de-centralisation from the metropolitan history towards the peripheries: Seeley's claim that in the eighteenth century 'the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia' can be better understood under this light.¹⁰⁰⁸ The approach of Chinese intellectuals and historians such as Liang Qichao or Fu Sinian, on the contrary, was to utilise the 'assimilative power' of the Chinese as the conceptual foundation to interpret the contacts between Chinese and non-Chinese throughout national history. Despite their evident differences in this regard, the end goal of both strategies was the same: to re-organise a metropolis-centred perception of the past into an adequate national history that could legitimise an empire-wide nation-state.

Another aspect of these processes of historical reconfiguration was the emphasis that these authors put on depicting their plans as continuations of past developments. Almost all Greater Britons, for instance, imagined their national community -Greater Britain- as one that *already* existed in a more or less established manner; what remained to be done, in their eyes, was just to advance further in this ongoing process. In the case of China, the historicisation of 'China's assimilative power' allowed to evidence the degree to which the inclusion of the Qing peripheries into the future Chinese nation-state was in fact a natural and desirable prospect. Palpably motivated by the national principle of continuity, these approaches aimed at

¹⁰⁰⁸ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 9.

dodging the criticism of utopianism and inventiveness that was often wielded against these thinkers, while at the same time providing an argument by which to criticise the growth of regional and colonial 'artificial' identities.

If advocates for Greater Britain and Greater Nationalism were preoccupied by the threat of foreign competition, they were not less worried about the impact that contemporary conditions had on the national population. This focus on the 'character of the people' found expression in their analogous attacks to regional self-understandings, materialist thought and lack of national self-awareness.¹⁰⁰⁹ Whereas James Froude painted a gloomy picture of Britain and fantasised with the idea of massive emigration to the colonies, scholars such as Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan lamented that the Chinese did not even have a name for their nation and were devoid of national solidarity. As early as 1903, Liang had already claimed that few Chinese 'have had the spirit to assert themselves and they have been bowed down into systems of caste until they [were] like sheep driven by their rulers. We want self-edification enough to say, "I am myself". (...) We cannot gain liberty by acting alone. We must act together with the strength of us all. In union there is strength.'¹⁰¹⁰ The latter was an statement which both groups would undeniably have endorsed.

If Greater Britain and Greater Nationalism offered, in the eyes of these intellectuals, solutions for metropolitan problems, they were not less conceived as beneficial proposals for the peripheral populations. The advocates of these projects highlighted the advantages of these huge nation-states in terms of progress and extension of civilisation. Mongols, Moslem, Manchus, or Tibetans would gain much from integration into the Chinese ethnicity: among others, membership into one of the 'historical nations' that was destined to endure in the world, defence from foreigners, and access to a culture superior to the ones they already possessed. Canadians, Australians, South Africans, and New Zealanders, on their part, would

¹⁰⁰⁹ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 52.

¹⁰¹⁰ Liang Qichao (1903), quoted in Joseph Richmond Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the mind of modern China* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 71-72.

join alongside Britain in the civilising mission of the Anglo-Saxon race in Asia and Africa and would leave their stamp on the face of the earth.

When we pass over these elements we also grasp another one of the similarities that existed between these imperial reconfiguration intents; that is, that although they envisioned a horizontally equal nation-state that accorded to the nationalist framework, they still reproduced a centre-periphery conceptualisation of the future nation-state. Both Britain (more specifically England) and China proper provided the cultural, ethical, aesthetical, political, and symbolical foundations of the projects for creating Greater Britain and Greater China. In this sense, these schemes did not offer a multi-polar approach to nation-building but represented, instead, centralising intents of expanding the metropolitan identities over the vast expanses of the peripheral territories. The pervading idea behind this was that these centres remained superior from a cultural standpoint: they were more advanced, politically mature, and civilised than the borderlands and the former colonies. Nothing of value was to come from these outer territories, except their landmasses, their resources, and the securities they provided for the core region; in every other respect, the new nation aspired only to be an enlarged version of the imperial metropolis. Chinese assimilative projects, in this sense, seem to us more forthright and straightforward: as the Qing borderlands and their inhabitants possessed nothing that the Chinese lacked and wanted, Chinese Greater Nationalists agreed in that it was simply better to transform them thoroughly into Chinese.

However, these two projects also diverged in important aspects. First, they offered different approaches to how the new nation-state should be politically structured. As we have seen, federalism was a strong position with many adherents in the case of Greater Britain; in China, on the contrary, very few advocated for it and most preferred a centralised political order. The most likely answer to explain this divergence lay in the different political traditions that existed in the British Empire and in China. Whereas the concept of political representation had been intensely debated in Britain since at least the sixteenth century, the Ming and Qing political systems had emphasised mutually beneficial relationships between ruler and subject. As a result, British and colonial intellectuals were more accustomed to a language of

parliamentary politics that was summarised in the American Revolutionary slogan of 'No taxation without representation'. In fact, it seems that one of the main goals of the imperialists was to avoid the accusation of trying to construct a new system for the sole benefit of Britain. Chinese intellectuals, on the other hand, were less worried by this issue, and were ready to justify inclusion of non-Chinese populations in the nation-state in the name of the common good.

This divergent political tradition also had an enormous impact on the political representation of peripheral populations in the future nation-states. In this regard, British positions tended to grant the inhabitants of the colonies a much more active role than the Chinese did with respect to those of the Qing borderlands. The Imperial Federation League had a strong presence in colonies such as Canada and Australia, and authors such as Dilke, Froude, and Labilliere, not to say Jebb and Curtis, were always attendant to what any change of opinion in the colonies could mean for the prospect of creating a united Greater Britain. If they criticised colonial identities as provincialism and dedicated hundreds of pages to describing the gloomy future that would await them as sovereign states, it was because imperialists implicitly acknowledged that they were in fact able to secede from Britain. Since the colonists had to be convinced, rather than forced, into the future nation-state, imperialist schemes could not merely ignore their views and needs to pander to metropolitan audiences. Only the colonies of Asia and Africa, being inhabited by races perceived as inferior in Social Darwinist terms, were almost completely disregarded by these intellectuals.

In China, however, the situation was altogether different. Greater Nationalism was a discourse directed mainly to the Han from China proper, and little attention was paid to acknowledging the opinions of the inhabitants of Mongolia, Tibet, or Xinjiang. This was because Chinese political tradition, as interpreted by most advocates of Greater Nationalism, could not imagine that these populations were capable of rejecting inclusion into the Chinese nation-state if offered to do so. The long-standing assumption of Chinese superiority, embodied in concepts such as *tianxia*, *wu-wen*, or *xia-yi*, was re-adapted to the new approaches to integrate these populations to the national community. In this sense, the notion of assimilative power

naturalised this hierarchical position as an essential feature of the Chinese ethnicity and allowed the imagination of non-Han peoples as ultimately helpless objects which sooner or later would be absorbed by the Chinese.

The relative extension of these projects marks another difference between Greater Britain and Greater China. Whereas the former was always a political notion defended by a particular group, which can be broadly identified with the Imperial Federation League, first, and with the Round Table Movement, later, the idea of Greater Nationalism extended and permeated many different positions of the political debate in China, especially after 1911. In this we may read the persistence of previous models of Chinese superiority over the non-Chinese as well as the influence these had on the self-understanding of most reformists and revolutionaries during the years prior and after the fall of the Qing. Simply put, such a well-established identification and inherent support was not available to Greater Britons.¹⁰¹¹

The last difference was related to the historical reconfiguration projects endeavoured by both groups. We have already referred to how a main characteristic of these intents was to portray the imperial peripheries as meaningful spaces for national history. In this respect, however, Greater Britain posited a much more difficult challenge than China. Although the geographical extension of successive 'Chinese dynasties' had been as varied as could be possibly imagined, the concept of the assimilative power of the Chinese allowed to imagine a unique evolving national community underneath these often-fragmented political entities. Chinese nationalists could, under this light, present the *Zhonghua minzu* as a nation that

¹⁰¹¹ Even though Richard Jebb criticised the existence of an ideology of British Ascendancy, that upheld the interests and agenda of the metropolis, there existed no equivalent in Britain to ideas such as those echoed by Zhang Taiyan in 1900 when he stated that 'Regarding character, there are differences between civilisation and savagery, between Rong [barbarians] and Xia [Chinese]. In older times, those kinds of living creatures, which [only just] did not have claws and teeth [anymore] and were able to speak, were called Rong and Dí [barbarians]. They were not equalled with humans, and I regret that today this is not the case'. See Zhang Taiyan, *Qishu chukeben* (Book of Urgency 檄書初刻本, 1900), quoted in Schneider, *Nation and Ethnicity*, 168-169.

boasted thousands of years of continuous and progressive history and which had nothing to envy to Western civilisation.¹⁰¹²

Greater Britain was, in comparison, the result of almost contemporary developments. Considering that, at most, the history of the colonies of Britain (excluding Ireland) dated back to the sixteenth century, it was almost impossible to include the empire as a relevant arena for national history prior to that moment. Even Seeley's *The Expansion of England*, by far the most successful of all the historical works connected with the Greater British project, had only focused in providing a national history for the empire territories from the sixteenth century onwards. Before this moment, national history had had but a single theatre: the British Isles. During those earlier centuries, from the Roman establishment or from the arrival of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (depending on the source) until the voyages of Christopher Columbus, Greater British history was tantamount to English history. This produced an incoherence between the national community and national history that defenders of Greater Britain intended to conceal simply by looking away from it. In short, they tried not to pay much attention to the past and to show, instead, that the national history of Greater Britain rested almost completely in the future.

Now that we have exposed some of the similarities and differences between both schemes of imperial reconfiguration it is time to try to answer our second question: why did the idea of a Greater China succeed whereas that of a Greater Britain did not?

First, there is a demographic explanation. We have pointed out in the introduction to this chapter that although the Qing borderlands (meaning Tibet, Manchuria, Mongolia, and the Moslem territories in northwest China) equated approximately to 60 per cent of the landmass of the empire, in terms of population they were vastly outnumbered by the inhabitants of the densely populated regions of China proper. Some of these borderlands, especially Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet, had experienced a massive flux of immigrants from China proper during the

¹⁰¹² Recent scholarship has suggested that this sense of unity and uninterrupted history was preeminent among the Chinese until the last decades of the twentieth century. See Wu, "The Construction of Chinese and non-Chinese Identities", 160.

second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹³ As a result of this, the demographic balance that existed between a Chinese inhabited core and a periphery of non-Chinese peoples shifted rapidly during the last decades of the Qing and the first years of the Republic and might have made it for an easier acceptance of Chinese discourses of integration and control of these territories. In contrast to this, although large communities of emigrants from Britain lived in the colonies, they do not seem to have had any particular impact in extending a metropolis-centred view of the community and tended instead to integrate into the already existing colonial societies.

A second reason would be the different role that the threat of international competition played in China and Britain. As we have seen, Chinese nationalists, since the translations made by Yan Fu of Social Darwinist texts in the last years of the nineteenth century, emphasised the concept of *qun* ('group' 群) as the basic unit for understanding social and political reality. Different authors developed different approaches to *qun*, that ranged from wide understandings of the Yellow Race (that would include, for instance, Japanese and Korean peoples) to *qun* that would only encompass the Han Chinese, alongside many more options in between. The emphasis on group unity and strength seemed to these intellectuals a natural response to the threat of 'death of the state and extinction of the race' (*wangguo miezhong* 亡國滅種) in the face of Western and Japanese imperialism.¹⁰¹⁴ As a result, they were much more determined to accept the integration of the non-Chinese territories and their populations both as buffer zones against foreign expansive ambitions and as part of a great nation-state that could defend its own sovereignty.

International competition played a much more ambiguous role in the case of Britain. Although there existed, as we have exposed, an increasing perception of the declining position of Britain relative to other powers such as Germany or the United States, there were also ideological currents, such as Teutonism or Anglo-Saxonism, that tended to alleviate these suspicions. Even if Greater British authors warned about the loss of pre-eminence of the empire if political reconfiguration was not achieved,

¹⁰¹³ Esherick, "How the Qing Became China", 240.

¹⁰¹⁴ Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*, 30.

public opinion and intelligentsias never considered the disappearance of Britain as an independent entity a real prospect. Unlike in the Chinese case, there existed no equal to the *wangguo miezhong*, and a geographically diminished Britain could be even imagined, in the eyes of those who advocated Little Englandism, as a purer and more progressive Britain still. In this sense, Greater Britons faced much more difficult circumstances in which to predicate their vision and did not attain the same success in producing and extending a climate of emergency and necessity to support their far-reaching political projects.

Further reason for the ultimate failure of Greater British projects rested on British political traditions and on the role that colonists were able to play within these debates. As we have mentioned, notions of political representation and national freedom were already well-established in Britain and the colonies by the mid-nineteenth century and the concession of Dominion status to the white settler colonies indicated a large step in the de-centralisation process of the empire which would ultimately lead to its dissolution and to the creation of the British Commonwealth. Since they had to take into account the opinions not just of metropolitan audiences, but the desires of politically organised colonial crowds and elites, Greater British authors had to negotiate a much wider -and often mutually exclusive- set of positions than their Chinese counterparts. This attempt at consensus, merged with not a small measure of idealist thinking, was the cause of their almost schizophrenic efforts to combine free trade with protectionist measures, institutional, military, and political centralisation with the granting of further competences to the colonies, and the participation of these peripheries in the civilising mission of the empire with the effective equation of this civilisation with English values, practices, and culture. No surprise, then, that opposition to these plans from metropolitan Little Englanders and nationalists in the Dominion colonies, who did not have to deal with these contradictory notions, was able to undermine the likeliness of Greater British authors achieving success in their projects.

The last reason we would like to point out has to do with the schemes of historical reconfiguration that both endeavours entailed. In this regard, once again, Chinese Greater Nationalists found themselves in a better position to achieve their

goal than Greater Britons. This was because they could offer an account of the national history of Greater China focused on the continuous expansion and development of the Chinese ethnicity in relation with non-Han peoples. Deeply influenced by previous strategies for dealing with the inhabitants of these imperial peripheries, Chinese intellectuals did not feel the urge that Greater Britons did for making their message more acceptable in these territories. Instead, they equated the history of China with the history of the Chinese ethnicity, which in practice meant the Han. The result was a national history that, although had to be imposed over the non-Chinese territories and their populations, was much more coherent from the perspective of the main principles of the nationalist historical outlook.

In comparison, Greater British intellectuals were only able to develop a much weaker and less cohesive approach to the narration of their past. Because the empire appeared so late in British history, they had no chance but to apply previous models of narrating English history to ancient and medieval times or to renounce to take them into account altogether. Although Seeley chose the second approach, it was not a sustainable one if Greater Britain had to produce national history textbooks and general materials. However, those previous patterns, as we have seen in chapter IV, generally presented English history as a progressive evolution towards parliamentary representative government and were mostly uninterested with imperial expansion. By taking one half of these accounts and combining it with Seeley's description of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Greater British records ultimately resulted in an incoherent mixture of parliamentary and imperial histories that was problematic in manifesting national continuity and evolutionary progress.

We can conclude, then, that the success of Greater China and the failure of Greater Britain obeyed to a varied set of differentiating factors, which ranged from their particular political traditions to demographic changes, historical reconfiguration intents, and the response to international competition and peril. These combined with the actual possibility of control of the peripheries, which the Chinese maintained nominally up until the People's Republic of China attained effective power over the former Qing borderlands. However, it must be emphasised that Chinese legitimacy over these territories had been developed continuously since at least the 1890s. In

contrast, Britain, with its colonies scattered all over the world, had a much more difficult time in enforcing its direct control, even if it had wanted to. However, the significant fact was that it had not wanted to. It is this reflection which remains the most important one when we consider Greater British projects: they were not schemes condemned from the start because, as their opponents often argued, the territories of the empire were vastly separated from each other; instead, they were challenged -and ultimately defeated- by other imagined national communities which competed with them (the former Dominion colonies and Britain itself) and which had been increasingly accepted because they were much more coherent and less problematic from the standpoint of the established nationalist framework.

VIII

Conclusions

At the outset of this research we made clear our intention of exploring how the world of nations had come into being in China and Britain. Given that this transformation had provoked momentous alterations in terms of ontology, morality, as well as politics, we were curious about how such a change in mentality and identity could have occurred in the first place. Notions about the sovereignty of the people, the historical continuity of the nation, or the natural existence of a community united by ties so strong as to constitute the basis for many individuals' self-understandings seemed to us too easily accepted, too widely expected. As a consequence of this realisation, our interest turned to understand why these ideas had come to be seen as undisputable; in other words, we started to pursue a slightly different question: how was this world of nations constructed and constantly reproduced in our two cases?

After reviewing some of the main works dealing with the formation of national identities, we proposed a theoretical approach to answer this question. According to it, the imagination of national communities -and people's belonging to them- would only be possible within a framework in which these notions would acquire legitimacy and meaning. In this regard, we also showed the extent to which modern research endorsed the idea that historical thought was capable of providing such a structure, as well as the degree to which the development of a national outlook towards the past was a decisive aspect for it to arise.

Therefore, we set ourselves to the task of identifying what distinguished national historical narratives from previous accounts, and how these changes affected the production of national communities and the construction of identities. Through a careful study of source materials from our two analysed cases, we have been capable of singling out eight core principles that vertebrate such a pattern: unity, community, continuity, sovereignty, purity, historical subjecthood, representation, and international global spatiality. Although each one of these, by itself, is not enough to produce the historical imagination necessary for a national identity to arise, it is the combination of these assumptions which results in the definite framework in which national communities can be first imagined, acquire meaning and legitimacy, and be later discussed and reproduced.

However, even if our theoretical approach seemed to explain how national identities could arise in general, these claims still had to be tested against the reality of China and Britain between 1880 and 1930. To this end, we have analysed the historical journeys behind the introduction of these principles into the historical consciousness in both cases and have tried to single out similarities and differences between them.

We have started with the principle of the nation's historical subjecthood. In this regard, we have evidenced how this notion, which required to present history as an uninterrupted journey towards national self-completion, was at odds with previous patterns of historical consciousness such as the Whig interpretation of history or the classical and dynastic histories produced in China. The introduction of this principle into historical narratives led to the transformation of the past into a progressive account via the promotion or devaluation of highly -or lowly- considered episodes, as well as the particularisation and nationalisation of universalist ideas like British constitutionalism and Confucian classicism in the face of a now normative Western civilisation. However, the Chinese found more difficulties in presenting their own past as a tale of progress than did the British, especially due to the relative positions that both countries occupied in the international system of the age. Whereas this kind of re-telling of British history found few obstacles in the still hopeful climate of the period, Chinese intellectuals, when faced with the same task, could not but feel unsure

of the legacy which previous times had endowed upon them. In this context, the necessity of rewriting the past as a national history opened the door to strong criticisms against long-held perspectives about the flow of time and the increasing acceptance of Western periodisation models which were problematic when applied to China.

These decades also witnessed a strong advocacy of the principle of community in both our studied cases, particularly manifest in the works of historians and intellectuals such as John Richard Green or Liang Qichao, as well as in the extension of Social Darwinist notions which portrayed societies as natural organisms. Nonetheless, this preoccupation with the nation at large brought with it the requirement of defining what distinguished these unities from one another. The pursuit of homogeneity, in the face of previously endorsed accounts of communal uniqueness, such as those differentiating Han from Manchus, or Anglo-Saxons from Celts, pushed historians and intellectuals to search for new ways of imagining their own communities. Concepts such as the Yellow or the British race, which at origin may have been based on strong racial components, were increasingly adapted from the 1910s onwards to encompass the large populations which inhabited the imperial geo-bodies by stressing common descent or shared cultural frameworks. These transformations were meant to lead, in turn, to the production of culturally defined ethnic identities in both societies, as well as to the integration, albeit with a limited agency, of peoples previously regarded as 'backward' into the national imagined community.

The new nations -identified first in terms of clear-cut racial characteristics, and later increasingly defined in more cultural terms- could not, however, celebrate their own novelty. Given that national continuity was one of the main principles of the nationalist worldview, it was mandatory that these contemporary groups looked like the obvious result of the historical journey of the nation. This was more easily said than done. In Britain, the preponderant, albeit not wholly secure, position of the empire in world affairs meant that no major revision of the connection between past and present was necessary. The British could remain self-content of their own history, even when certain aspects of it were found to be half-truths or outright anachronisms.

However, that was not the case at all in China, where the threat of disintegration and foreign occupation cast a shadow of doubt over the achievements of classical tradition. In this context, literati, officials, intellectuals, and historians became embedded in the task of defining which parts of China's own past were useful for the current situation, and which ones had to be discarded as hinderances or useless relics for the strengthening of the nation.

Aside from having dealt with these broad topics regarding the introduction of particular elements of the national outlook in historical discourses, we have also evidenced how these were combined in two projects aimed at the transformation of two empires -the British and the Qing- into nation-states. In this case, we have pointed out that both projects, Greater Britain and Greater Nationalism, obeyed not simply to similar circumstances regarding international competition or internal instability, but were also in tune with the nationalist principle that emphasised that only those who claimed to represent a unified nation could be legitimate states. Consequently, these projects tried to construct historical accounts that demonstrated the existence of common, natural bonds which connected each constituent of these imperial entities, even if this rarely meant giving up previously existent schemes of metropolitan superiority over the peripheral regions. Despite these apparent similarities, the practical difficulties to introduce the empire into British history -due to its late apparition-, the long tradition of representative ideals within the empire, and the more active agency allocated by these discourses to peripheral regions seem to have contributed to the failure of Greater British projects. All in all, in terms of its adaptation to the national narrative pattern, Greater Nationalism in China was capable of constructing a more coherent and less problematic historical account than that of Greater Britain, and this certainly boosted its chances of beating other imagined communities such as a Han nation.

The results we have obtained from this research seem to align well with the arguments we aimed to test. First, that there exists a particular narrative framework at work in national histories, which arises out of the combination and interaction of a series of principles about reality and time. Although a relationship between nation

and history has been often brought to the front,¹⁰¹⁵ we have provided evidence that points towards the fact that the way a story is told might be as important to produce a national community as its content, or perhaps even more. In this regard, we side with those who, like Margaret Somers, maintain that narrativity and emplotment are fundamental -and often overlooked- aspects in the construction of identity.¹⁰¹⁶

Second, that as a result of the introduction of this framework in the historical consciousness of individuals, the latter may develop new identities, motivations, objectives, and strategies, and that the principles of the national outlook might be so powerful so as to constrain or limit some of these stated goals. In this area, our research has evidenced the extent to which the search for coherence with the main principles of the national historical framework constitutes a central element to the construction of these imagined communities; by the same token, it has also shown, as in the case of Greater Britain, how failure in meeting these expectations may condemn the chances of some of these purported nations. This seems to refute the portrayal of nationalism as simply a tool wielded by political elites in order to attain particular objectives, given that '[a]ctors do not have a "portfolio" of interests that they carry around independent of social context" and rather "define their interests in the process of defining situations".¹⁰¹⁷ Nationalist objectives -such as the sovereignty of the people or the conception of a homogeneous and pure community- did not arise earlier than the introduction of the nationalist worldview; similarly, problematic situations like the 'foreign' reign of the Manchu Qing or the accommodation of the imperial peripheries within a single political entity were only discovered, so as to

¹⁰¹⁵ For some major examples, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 69; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London-New York: Verso, 2006), 26; Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), 30; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning narratives of modern China* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

¹⁰¹⁶ Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach", *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 617-618.

¹⁰¹⁷ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization* 46, no.2 (1992): 398.

speak, as the world of nations, with all its principles and assumptions, entered the minds of those dealing with these topics.

Third, we have found that the ease or difficulty to adapt the historical consciousness in both societies to the new framework obeyed, to a large degree, to the extent to which this did not oppose or contradict previously accepted assumptions about the world. Here as well, our research has shown how, while ideas of equality and community were somewhat easily brought over into both discourses, the demotion of Golden Ages -such as the Three Dynasties or the Anglo-Saxon period- to fit the evolutionary historical journey of the nation was, in general, a more contested process. Unsurprisingly, the enormous transformation from models of dynastical cycles or degenerative transmissions of moral examples to one based on the nation's progressive journey towards self-completion meant that these changes were much more radical in China than they were in Britain, where fundamental aspects of the latter had already been largely accepted. After all, positive comparisons between the present and the ancient past had existed in Western Europe since at least the seventeenth century, when English and, fundamentally, French authors had questioned the preponderance of Greek and Roman examples. As a result, these debates contributed to the demystification of the authoritative status of the past and to the increasing introduction of the progressive framework that later national histories would require.

Lastly, we argued that differences between national accounts within a single country, as well as between those produced in both, rested in direct connection to the particular circumstances -historical, political, social, and so on- within which these were fabricated. Authors who tried to foster a British, or a Teutonic, or a Greater British identity did not differ much from each other, as all of them tried to do so by presenting the agreement between their communities and the main principles of the national discourse. Of course, they may have unique reasons to push them, such as a preoccupation with international power or communal purity, as well as distinct objectives, like a world-spanning superpower or a more contained, virtuous community. In any case, their divergences can be explained as variations within the possibilities opened by the national worldview, rather than as wholly opposite

projects. The same can be said for the case of Han and Greater Nationalism, but China's example also evidences a further point: the extent to which the relative position of a country within the new nationalist framework can shape its response to it. After all, if we do not consider the climate of danger and vulnerability within which these were deployed, it is difficult to explain why Chinese intellectuals would have abandoned their own historical self-understandings to accept new ones that painted them as inferior and weak in relation to the Westerners.

The results of this research also allow us to provide grounds for a more general conclusion regarding nationalism studies at large: that nationalism is neither a political ideology, nor an instrument in the hands of the powerful, nor the mere recognition of the natural communities of mankind. Of course, it is all of these things, with fundamental implications for the development of political agendas, but a conception centred only in these elements cannot exhaust every aspect of its influence. This is because nationalism is, first and foremost, a way of making sense of the world, an ontological framework shaped by a limited series of principles and assumptions about reality, and that it is only in the conditions enabled by this worldview that nations can be imagined, political projects be devised, or identities appear.¹⁰¹⁸

Not that this suggestion is wholly new. It has already been addressed in nationalism studies that 'the idea of the nation, though a potent one, belongs to the realm of the imaginary rather than the real'.¹⁰¹⁹ More so, a towering figure of the field such as Michael Billig espoused the notion that nationalism was the ideology 'by

¹⁰¹⁸ In this sense, nationalism would constitute something similar to a Foucauldian 'discourse' which rather than being 'simply the means by which a human subject -existing prior to the discourse- expresses itself or accomplishes something', would entail 'the discursive conditions (rules and criteria) [which] set up specific places or positions in which subjects can form'. In the case of nationalism, these would include the set of exposed requirements and restrictions which allow and constrain the possibilities of what can be written, said, or thought about nations, as well as the new social roles, such as those of nationalist activist or intellectual, which are made available within this space. See Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (London – New York: Routledge, 1993), 48.

¹⁰¹⁹ Raphael Samuel, "Continuous National History", in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Vol 1: History and Politics*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London-New York: Routledge, 1989), 16-17.

which the world of nations has come to seem the natural world¹⁰²⁰, and others have also supported his idea by stating that we, inhabiting our contemporary societies, 'are equipped [...] with a "nationalising eye"'.¹⁰²¹ Even the question of 'how this imaginary community reaches the minds of those who are convinced of it' -that is, how the national worldview is perpetuated- has been tackled in a similar vein to some of our conclusions, by claiming that 'it is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture' and that '[n]ational identity is thus the product of discourse'.¹⁰²²

What is novel, however, is the notion that this mental framework, even if it is the product of discourse and narrative, does not arise by chance out of the multiplicity of accounts and possible stories. Rather, it is the result of a very particular type of narrative, one shaped by the interconnection of eight elements - unity, community, continuity, sovereignty, purity, historical subjecthood, representation, and international global spatiality- and which makes it possible to imagine the world as naturally divided in clearly-cut, well-delineated entities called nations.

The incidence of these elements, as has been shown in this research, can be traced especially through the study of historical consciousness, given that discourses about the past provide not merely knowledge about previous times, but also legitimise and naturalise our very notions about the present and the future.¹⁰²³ The modes in which episodes are narrated, characters introduced, ages categorised, or communities portrayed are not casual nor irrelevant, for they convey the image of a world which can only be understood by accepting the main foundations of national discourse. In this sense, we agree with Prasenjit Duara in that the fact that 'we have tended to regard history more as a transparent medium than as a discourse' has, until very

¹⁰²⁰ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE, 1995), 37.

¹⁰²¹ Geoffrey Cubitt, ed., *Imagining Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 1.

¹⁰²² Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 22.

¹⁰²³ Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 80.

recently, blinded ourselves to the processes and strategies by which multiple stories are transformed into history.¹⁰²⁴

This approach can have, we think, fundamental implications for the study of nationalism at large. It was Benedict Anderson who once described three apparent 'paradoxes' that haunted those who tried to theorise about nationalism: 'the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists [...], the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept [...], and] the "political" power of nationalism vs their philosophical poverty and even incoherence'.¹⁰²⁵ These questions, as we have exposed in our Introduction, lay at the root of the debates between modernists and ethno-symbolists, and even today they have not been satisfactorily addressed. In this regard, we consider that our theoretical approach and the results of this research offer valid answers to all three items mentioned by Anderson.

First, regarding the question of the modernity or antiquity of nations, conceiving nationalism as a worldview allows us to avoid some of the pitfalls of previous historiography. This national framework is the result, as we have shown, of a particular interaction of principles and assumptions about the world, and its extension is in fact a very modern development, which we have traced in our two societies to around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As neither national identities nor national claims could arise prior to the introduction of this discourse, we can thus assume that nationalism is, in fact, a fairly modern phenomenon. Yet, as we have also observed in our examples, adaptation to these principles and assumptions did not necessarily mean the rejection of previous markers of identity. Quite the contrary, as these notions were often brought back as fundamental contents of the new national identity, such as in the case of Anglo-Saxonism or the assimilative theory of Chinese Greater Nationalists. Even when this was the case, however, continuities with the previous meanings of these markers were

¹⁰²⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning narratives of modern China* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁰²⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

not direct, as their authors sustained, but rather incidental and, in some cases, almost non-existent. The multiple transformations and alterations suffered by Confucian tradition and the sage's own figure to fit in the new national histories are paradigmatic in this regard. In short, although 'they reflect social processes that are both ancient and universal', we cannot obviate the extent to which 'these idioms [such as nation and nationalism] are deeply embedded within the epistemology of modernity'.¹⁰²⁶

Secondly, our approach has no difficulty in offering an answer for the apparent formal similarity of nations around the globe. As has been shown in our study, Britain and China presented very different and particular circumstances for those who constructed their national identities within them, both in terms of international power, as in political, social, cultural, or ethnic terms. Despite this fact, the worries and preoccupations that their national narratives reflected were strikingly similar. Rather than the consequence of chance, this was an expected result of our theoretical approach, as nationalism as a worldview implies that events, characters, periods, and imagined communities must be adapted to the main principles and assumptions of the national discourse. This in turn meant that the search for coherence with this framework pushed national histories to similar perspectives in both contexts, even when they dealt with wildly dissimilar issues.

Finally, we think that Anderson was mistaken when he claimed that there existed a stark contrast between the political relevance of nationalism and its philosophical development. It is true that there might be a lack of great ideologues who comprehensively defined all the questions that nationalism can address, and that most of nationalist texts were rather utilitarian and of low profile. It is also correct that no equivalent exists among nationalist activists to towering personalities such as Karl Marx or Adam Smith. But this, rather than an evidence of its weakness, might be the clearest sign of its formidable strength. Whereas political projects which stemmed from the nationalist worldview, such as Greater Britain or Greater Nationalist China -to cite only two of them-, may have required a great degree of planning and organisation to mobilise the support they required to be viable, the same

¹⁰²⁶ James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (New York-Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

does not seem to have applied to the nationalist worldview as a whole. The logic of this discourse, the idea of a world of nations, seems to have entered the historical consciousness of these societies in a seamless, almost unnoticeable manner. Although it is undeniable that there were resistances to some of the changes that this transformation entailed -and we have dealt with some of them in this research- the conversion, when taken as a whole, can hardly be considered a traumatic one. In this context, as it claimed to be but a reflection of the natural state of the world, to try to discover a great intellectual development of nationalist premises would be as unlikely as to expect to find a philosopher of the common sense.

Of course, our investigation has certain limitations which may be addressed by further research on the topic. Some of these shortcomings concern the developed approach to the comparison of our two cases. Here, although we have tried to provide a panoramic perspective on the changes that the introduction of the nationalist worldview provoked in the historical consciousness of these two societies, certain aspects could not receive the attention they merited. Among these, for instance, we find the responses of the Qing court to nationalist and revolutionary rhetoric during the late Qing period, as well as the nationalist narratives produced in the peripheral regions of the British empire. These discourses directly competed with the exposed national narratives of British and Chinese nationalism and therefore were major elements affecting the development of these discourses. Our focus on British and Chinese national narratives, thus, ought not to be taken as a denial of the existence of other parallel discourses and identities being developed within these imperial entities, but rather as a conscious limitation arising from the complexity and extension -both temporal and territorial- of our research topic.

A second limitation, and one to which we can provide no answer at the moment, refers to the fact that we have presented the nationalist framework - resulting from the combination of its eight main assumptions- as an already constituted and developed scheme. The period we covered, although it witnessed its ultimate triumph and extension as a hegemonic perspective in the historical consciousness of our two analysed societies, does not most certainly coincide with its apparition. We do not know, for sure, where this particular combination of

assumptions and ideas about the world coalesced for the first time. Even if we could venture some approximate dates and geographical contexts for these first manifestations, such as Western Europe during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, this would still be too vague to satisfy most readers. In this regard, we can only expect that further research on the topic may be capable of finding the conditions under which this nationalist worldview first arose, and the reasons that pushed historical consciousness to be framed in the terms exposed in this research.

Apart from correcting these limitations, it is our sincere hope that further comparative research between national narratives may be conducted in the future. It was the sociologist Clifford Geertz who claimed, while discussing Islamic practices in Morocco and Indonesia, that '[r]eligious faith, even when it is fed from a common source, is as much a particularising force as a generalising one': we believe that the same is true for nationalism.¹⁰²⁷ The existence of a shared formality, a common logic, while rendering each of its manifestation similar to each other in their preoccupations and responses, has not exhausted the ability of national narratives to be markedly unique in their contents. Given that the starting conditions of the historical consciousness in each society -or even among diverse groups within a single society- were different, the processes of adapting these self-understandings to the new national framework were also bound to be distinct. Rather than spelling the end of particularistic perspectives in the analysis of nationalism and national identity, our approach offers, as has been shown in this work, new comparative grounds from which to study the emergence and extension of the world of nations in widely different contexts.

On a more personal note, we would like to state that, while developing this research, we have been faced with unavoidable reflections which tested our pre-existent knowledge about geographical divisions, communal identities, and the nature of history itself. On multiple occasions, these moments of deep thought have come paired with an striking realisation: that we shared on many -if not most- of the assumptions and principles defended in the nationalist narratives of authors such as

¹⁰²⁷ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 14.

Liang Qichao, John Richard Green, Fu Sinian or George Macaulay Trevelyan. Even when we did not personally agree with their claims, or with the facts they provided to support their arguments, these criticisms never went against the framework within which these proposals were deployed. After all, was it not right that the people were sovereign? Groups united by a common lifestyle and origin ought not to be allowed to form their own representative institutions? Was it not unchallengeable that their cultures should be kept as untainted as possible from foreign contamination and decay? These questions, we realised, were still relevant in the contemporary world. In contrast, it was the historical understandings these intellectuals opposed, such as Confucian classicism, the dynastic cycle, or the Whig interpretation of history, that were difficult to comprehend, so alien in comparison to the seemingly simple logic of these historians. Yet, we concluded, a preference for these nationalist principles over those of their rivals does not arise out of thin air, nor is a consequence of an objective observation of human events; rather, it encapsulates the instinctive response of someone brought up to imagine the world of nations as the natural world. Even if this is just a simple anecdote, we believe that it can serve to illustrate the extent to which, even today, the worldview sketched out by nationalist principles is still largely legitimised and uncritically accepted.

History is not a mirror to the past. The individual, when it engages on the act of remembering, invariably produces a representation which will 'condition [his] sense of what it was, is, can and should be', and the same is true of historians.¹⁰²⁸ We have observed how these accounts were shaped and transformed in China and Britain during the half-century from 1880 to 1930, and the impact they had on the minds and identities of those that accepted them. We have also signalled the presence of incoherencies in their approaches, and we have tried to understand why they chose the strategies they did for accomplishing their goals. But, most essentially, we have tried to unveil a systematic way of conceiving social reality and to trace the rules and principles that explain the extension and persistence of nationalism in our own world.

¹⁰²⁸ Renee Yuwei Wang, "Who are the Han? Representations of the Han in Chinese school textbooks in late Qing and early Republican China", AACS Conference (2011): 4. Also, Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, "Whig History and Present-Centred History", *The Historical Journal* 31, 1 (1988): 14.

The Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and its empire witnessed the increasing intrusion and ultimate triumph of this conception more than a century ago; today, in our contemporary societies, this framework is still as pervasive, but there are not many anymore who question its core assumptions. In this sense, our own identity and our own consciousness about the past cannot but with great effort try to overcome the principles of this nationalist discourse. For better or for worse, we have become inhabitants of the world of nations, and beyond it still lies the unknown.

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**TESI ZUZENDARIAREN BAIMENA TESIA
AURKEZTEKO**

**AUTORIZACIÓN DEL/LA DIRECTORA/A DE
TESIS PARA SU PRESENTACIÓN**

Zuzendariaren izen-abizenak /Nombre y apellidos del/la director/a: Ludger MEES

IFZ /NIF: X 0617905 X

Tesiaren izenburua / Título de la tesis:

NATIONS ON PAPER: NATION BUILDING AND HISTORICAL PRACTICE IN CHINA AND BRITAIN
(1880-1930)

Doktorego programa / Programa de doctorado:
DOCTORADO EN HISTORIA CONTEMPORÁNEA

Doktoregaiaren izen-abizenak / Nombre y apellidos del/la doctorando/a:
ASIER HERNÁNDEZ AGUIRRESAROBÉ

Unibertsitateak horretarako jartzen duen tresnak emandako ANTZEKOTASUN TXOSTENA ikusita, baimena ematen dut goian aipatzen den tesia aurkez dadin, horretarako baldintza guztiak betetzen baititu.

Visto el INFORME DE SIMILITUD obtenido de la herramienta que a tal efecto pone a disposición la universidad, autorizo la presentación de la tesis doctoral arriba indicada, dado que reúne las condiciones necesarias para su defensa.

Tokia eta data / Lugar y fecha: Leioa, el 12 de noviembre de 2020

Sin. / Fdo.: Tesiaren zuzendaria / El/La director/a de la tesis

AUTORIZACIÓN DE LA COMISIÓN ACADÉMICA DEL PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO

La Comisión Académica del Programa de Doctorado en HISTORIA CONTEMPORÁNEA en reunión celebrada el día 22 de diciembre de 2020, ha acordado dar la conformidad a la presentación de la Tesis Doctoral titulada: Nations on Paper. Nation building and historical practice in China and Britain (1880-1930), dirigida por el Dr. Ludger Mees y presentada por Don Asier H. Aguirresarobe, adscrito al Departamento de Historia Contemporánea.

En Vitoria-Gasteiz a 22 de diciembre de 2020

EL RESPONSABLE DEL PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO

AUTORIZACIÓN DEL DEPARTAMENTO

El Consejo del Departamento de Historia contemporánea en reunión celebrada el día 15 de diciembre de 2020 ha acordado dar la conformidad a la admisión a trámite de presentación de la Tesis Doctoral titulada: *Nations on paper. Nation building and historical practice in China and Britain (1880-1930)* dirigida por el Dr. Ludger Mees y presentada por Don Aiser Hernández Aguirresarobe ante este Departamento.

En Leioa a 15 de diciembre de 2020

VºBº DIRECTOR DEL DEPARTAMENTO

SECRETARIA DEL DEPARTAMENTO

Fdo.: Mikel Urquijo Goitia

Fdo.: Susana Serrano Abad

ACTA DE GRADO DE DOCTOR O DOCTORA
ACTA DE DEFENSA DE TESIS DOCTORAL

DOCTORANDO/A DON/DÑA. _____

TITULO DE LA TESIS: _____

El Tribunal designado por la Comisión de Postgrado de la UPV/EHU para calificar la Tesis Doctoral arriba indicada y reunido en el día de la fecha, una vez efectuada la defensa por el/la doctorando/a y contestadas las objeciones y/o sugerencias que se le han formulado, ha otorgado por _____ la calificación de:
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SOBRESALIENTE / NOTABLE / APROBADO / NO APTO

Idioma/s de defensa (en caso de más de un idioma, especificar porcentaje defendido en cada idioma):

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En _____ a _____ de _____ de _____

EL/LA PRESIDENTE/A,

EL/LA SECRETARIO/A,

Fdo.:

Fdo.:

Dr/a: _____

Dr/a: _____

VOCAL 1º,

VOCAL 2º,

VOCAL 3º,

Fdo.:

Fdo.:

Fdo.:

Dr/a: _____ Dr/a: _____ Dr/a: _____

EL/LA DOCTORANDO/A,

Fdo.: _____