**Introduction**

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Recent scholarship on nationalism has shifted focus from the traditional state-centered perspective to a more cultural understanding of the nation and national identity. This tendency is especially helpful for work on nationalism in East Asia, where the emphasis on the state and state building has tended to dominate the literature on nationalism in the past, especially since the rise of modernization theory during the 1950s and 1960s. Moving away from this concern with state building should allow scholars of East Asia to liberate themselves from the Japan paradigm, which has focused on the establishment of a modern state in Japan only to conclude with the lack or relative weakness of the state in the rest of East Asia. While the issue of state building in East Asia is perhaps an overworked topic, the similarities and differences among cultural constructions of national identities and nationalisms in modern East Asia remain underdeveloped topics. It is well established that the state mobilizes culture to shore up its own legitimacy. Yet less attention has been given to attempts by domestic social groups to establish cultural and national identities that may remain in opposition, or at least in an ambiguous relationship, to the state. To understand the politics in the cultural production of a nation, we need to understand the values and ideals that various groups hold up as representing what is most important to them. While states may be analyzed in terms of the economic structures, institutions, and governing apparatuses that inform them, nations are far more chimeric and rest more on those ideas and values that convince many people that they are one. A shift from the state-building perspective to a more sustained reflection on the multiple dimensions of cultural identity in the region will uncover the complexity and heterogeneity of nationalism and nationhood in East Asia.

The appeal to cultural ties in inventing national identity often involves privileging the culture of a specific ethnic group either as the
dominant group of the political arena or the oppressed subgroup of the nation. While power can enhance the appeal of ethnicity among dominant groups, conversely, the shared experience of being oppressed or subsumed under the dominant culture can also lend luster to claims of ethnicity among members of subgroups. The contesting voices of domestic ethnic groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently were overwhelmed by powerful waves of state-engineered nationalisms that often sought to assimilate, integrate, or outright oppress domestic contesting identities. The presence and the role of these divergent cultural forces in the nationalist movements in East Asia during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries need to be reconsidered if we are to understand the complexity of modern East Asian nationalisms.

Notoriously elastic, the concept of nationalism has generated more definitions than consensus. But many analyses point to the importance of sustained communication and the means of communication in shaping a sense of common identity and in the dissemination of that identity. Printed materials, radio, films, literary and historical narratives, ritual, and the performing arts—through which national identities are imagined, contested, and publicized—significantly determined how effective nationalist movements would be in mobilizing popular support. As public means of communication, media easily shape the manners in which national identities are presented, transmitted, and contested. The battle among domestic social groups over how national identities should be imagined and constructed inevitably involves the control and use of media. In part, it is this particular attention given to the role of media and the suppressed voices of sub- and counternationalisms that distinguish this volume from other attempts to come to terms with nationalism in East Asia.

In recent years, we have all come to appreciate how every form of identity presupposes Other(s). Constructing and imagining an identity involves the projection of a sense of Other or Otherness, whether implicit or explicit, domestic or foreign. What constitutes identity and alterity is imagined in terms of differences, traits, and bonds presumed to be “natural” or cultural. It is important not to forget that differences and identities are established conceptually through processes of metonymic reduction and reconfiguration, which “cut up” and reassemble traits to be appropriated as one’s own while jettisoning undesirable ones onto the Other. Of course, as desires, fears, and the nature of conflict change in a given society the significance of the Other(s) changes as well.
With the arrival of the state and state-building projects in modern East Asia, the state was often seen as an emblem of the Otherness of the West and an intrusion on local and native cultural forms. Consequently, in this volume we have found it necessary to reconsider cultural nationalism not only as the ways in which the state mobilized culture but also as how cultural identities could be mobilized independent of and against the modern state. Paradoxically, this cultural or ethnic sense of national identity was deployed widely in China, Korea, and Japan (as minzu, minjok, and minzoku, respectively) and worked at times to support modern states and at other times to undermine them. Surely, the cultural production of national identity in modern East Asia cannot be understood without some consideration of the complicated dynamics of this cultural, ethnic sense of national identity.

Narrative Schemes, Language, and Printed Texts

This volume approaches national identity as something that must be understood beyond the machinations of political institutions; we explore and interpret various narrated sites of identity and Otherness in East Asia as forms of struggle over cultural identity. We are particularly concerned with how Others in East Asia were represented in new narrative schemes: how constructing essential differences involves imagining new boundaries to be deployed in a new configuration of space and time in all sorts of texts, both literary and iconic. One of the new ways in which identities were constructed is the conflict of metanarrative schemes that provided the fundamental frame of reference in time and space. Traditional identities were rendered unintelligible when aporia occurred as a result of redeployment in radically disparate narrative schemes. An important change in the production, dissemination, and consumption of narratives of collective identities (whether ethnic, national, cultural, religious, class, or gendered) in the modern period is the speed with which texts could be duplicated, distributed, and appropriated within the same scriptural society and, especially in modern East Asia, across different national societies using similar writing systems. Narratives and iconographies of both the self and the Other were disseminated and translated into different languages. A translingual discursive space was opened up in print wherein disparate conceptualizations of group identity articulated through different languages competed for “universal validity” in the expanding horizon of what was understood of the world. Producers of
literary culture were forced to deal with discourses originating in other
languages made available through translated texts. This translingual
dimension of the modern discourse on identities in East Asia is an espe-
cially compelling issue since for most of the premodern era people
throughout East Asia (who today are considered to belong to indepen-
dent nations or cultural groups) shared a common literary and intellec-
tual structure.

One finds several key moments beginning with the sixteenth century
when territorial and cultural markers were reimagined to rechart the
spatial boundaries of East Asia, especially between Japan and China.
The chapters by Ronald P. Toby, Kai-wing Chow, and Kevin M. Doak
address the question of the construction of identities in new and conflict-
ing narrative schemata of time and space. Each focuses on some of these
eyearly moments when the boundaries of China, Japan, and Asia were
being reimagined in narrative and iconic representations.

Toby’s chapter marks the origins of a break from the premodern,
transnational, epistemological order in East Asia. As he shows, Japan’s
encounter with Europeans in the mid-sixteenth century contributed to a
change in imagining and representing Japan’s Other(s) in a new spatial
and ethnic relationship with China. The shift Toby outlines, from a
“Three Realms” spatial structure to a “Myriad Countries” framework,
can be seen in the new ways Japanese and their Other(s) were portrayed
in both literary texts and in iconography. In this new spatiality, the rela-
tionship between China and Japan was changed, but it was not yet con-
structed within the framework of modern states. In his universal encyclo-
pedia, the *Kinmo zu* (1666), Nakamura Tekisai recognized that China’s
self-appellation was “Central country,” even though China was called in
Japanese texts by its dynastic titles, Han and Tang. Nakamura was aware
of the Europeans’ choice of “China” (i.e., *shina* in *kanji*), but this term
would not become the label preferred by Japanese intellectuals until the
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *wankoku* framework
in which the boundaries of Japan and China were imagined in the mid-
sixteenth century was prenational, in the sense that it preceded the
construction of a modern state in Japan, but also protonational, in
the sense that it laid the epistemological foundations for a ready accep-
tance of the ethnic definitions of peoples that would proliferate in the
modern period. This representation of ethnic others also demonstrates
how publishing served as an important conduit for the reproduction of
images of Europe’s Other(s).
Toby’s interrogation of the “anthropological” lens converges with Kai-wing Chow’s analysis of the anti-Manchu rhetoric of Zhang Binglin and the revolutionaries in China. As Chow shows, an earlier discourse on race was appropriated and refigured beyond biology into a political ideology directed against the Manchu regime. To exclude the Manchus from the Chinese nation, the vast ethnic, linguistic, and local cultural differences were subsumed under and erased by a Han identity. In sharp contrast to the ways in which modern Japanese mobilized narratives of Chinese ethnicity, Zhang used historical narrative to endow the Han lineage with a subjectivity that homogenized the various dynasties into one Chinese Han lineage (Hanzu) that fought constantly and courageously against barbarians, the equally homogeneous Other(s). As Chow argues, this imagination of the Chinese nation as a mammoth Han lineage descended from Huangdi drew upon the symbolic sources of social Darwinism, Enlightenment discourse on the nation, and indigenous lineage discourse. The extensive deployment of lineage terminology in the writings of the revolutionaries clearly shows the “domesticating” or “distorting” effect of translating foreign discourse into the native language. Like Japanese sinologists, Zhang drew from Western sources on Chinese history and national identity. But, whereas Japanese sinologists frequently argued that China was merely a territory that encompassed five distinct ethnic nations, Zhang Binglin and the revolutionaries sought to efface ethnic minority identities by arguing that a single Chinese nation based on the Hanzu should overthrow the Manchus in order to establish a single Chinese Han nation-state. Here we find a striking example of how ethnic national identity in China was deployed for dramatically different purposes by Chinese and Japanese.

Kevin M. Doak’s chapter looks at how Japanese sinologists mobilized the rhetoric of ethnic nationality to deny that China was a single nation. Even as Japanese historians employed the language of ethnic nationalism favored by anti-imperialists, their representations of Chinese ethnic identities often reflected Japanese imperial interests. As Doak reveals, this was true not only of elite historians in the academy but of popular historians as well. In particular, a 1916 text aimed at the masses, *The Nations of the Far East*, took advantage of a large reading public and a modern efficient publishing industry in the Japanese empire to propagate a common conceit among Japanese that China was not a state. China was seen as neither a modern state nor the Central Country, but as a transitional “multinational region” in which various ethnic peoples had
contested for centuries over political dominance and autonomy. Like British missionaries, this text found the Chinese self-identity as zhongguo (Central Country) unacceptable for its anachronistic, premodern sense of hegemonic identity and its implied arrogance toward other nations. Instead, it employed the transliteration of the English term China, rendering it in Japanese Kanji as shina. But the point was not that China was now a modern national state. Rather, *The Nations of the Far East* shifted its narrative of Chinese history from a narrative of a single national state to independent narratives of the five major ethnic groups (*minzoku*) of China, emphasizing the ethnic oppression of the minority Manchu during the Qing dynasty as well as the shortcomings of contemporary Chinese attempts to construct a unified, stable, political state around a single Han ethnicity. In short, Doak raises troubling questions not only about the ambiguities of ethnic identity in national formation but about the transference of imperial desire in early-twentieth-century Japanese narratives of East Asian identities.

Read together, the chapters by Kai-wing Chow and Kevin M. Doak reinforce how the sharing of the same linguistic symbols (Chinese characters or Japanese Kanji) made it extremely important to gain control over linguistic representation. The choice of the characters for tōyō by Japanese scholars and yazhou by Chinese intellectuals is by no means merely a trivial quarrel over accuracy in rendering the English word Asia. At issue was a translingual contest over the imagining of a new geopolitical space in which both China and Japan sought to position themselves at the center. In fact, as Toby’s chapter shows, a geopolitical space of bankoku had been introduced in Japan in sixteenth-century maps and portraits of non-Japanese. Even though China retained its central position on the world map, it had been decentered in discourse by virtue of the shift from the sankoku spatial structure to the “ten thousand countries,” of which China was only one. After the Meiji Restoration, Japanese scholars increasingly refused to use zhongguo as the name for China, arguing that such usage was not only anachronistic but an affront to the equality of nations.

Nostalgia and Loss in the Formation of Modern National Identity

One issue central to the cultural production of national identities is how modernity engenders a sense of loss and nostalgia for a more certain past
and how this longing can lead to cultural expressions of national identities. Nostalgia as a form of historical consciousness is common in the construction of national and nationalist cultures across modern East Asia. While nostalgic resistance to the defamiliarizing and alienating aspects of modernity is hardly unique to East Asia, within and across East Asian cultural and nationalist discourse a shared concern over the hegemony of Western culture was often an underlying element in the construction of this cultural nationalism. The particularities of East Asian cultural nationalism, if any, can be found in the interstices between this broadly shared nostalgia for a moment prior to the invasion of Western history and the different forms this nostalgic impulse took in responding to and shaping social and political movements in the very different national contexts of China, Japan, and Korea.

Stefan Tanaka’s chapter explores how the Meiji Restoration, like other modern disruptions, simultaneously constructed a new sense of historical time and with it other strategies for contesting tradition in multiple ways and for multiple purposes. Tanaka focuses on a single Buddhist temple, the Hōryūji, which in the early Meiji period was rediscovered and reconceptualized as central to modern Japanese understandings of themselves and their nation. The struggles over the meaning of what had been a rather obscure temple reveal the profound depths of the aesthetic and emotional responses to this modern disruption. At issue was the perception that the past was receding but not entirely inaccessible to modern Japanese. This sense of loss and longing was exacerbated by a specific, modern, temporal consciousness that required past traditions in order to project a particular national identity into the future. What is striking about this debate over a Buddhist temple as an icon of modern Japanese identity is that it was taking place against the backdrop of a modern state that had decisively shifted away from Buddhism toward its own version of nationalistic Shintoism. Clearly, national identity in modern Japan was a field much larger than the state could imagine. Through the debates over Hōryūji, Tanaka skillfully uncovers the multiple uses of and contestations over the national aesthetic past, reminding us of the varieties of ways in which modernity engenders its own peculiar forms of nostalgia and loss and of the varied possibilities in reimagining the past.

When Tanaka’s chapter is read in conjunction with Peter Zarrow’s chapter analyzing a roughly simultaneous moment in China, one catches both the similarities of this modern nostalgia across East Asia and some
of its differences. Zarrow highlights how the Revolution of 1911 in China led not to a complete discarding of the earlier reliance on ritual as power and tradition but to its redefinition for modern Chinese social needs in the hands of men like Yuan Shikai. Like Tanaka, Zarrow undertakes his analysis with the modern rupture as his point of departure while reminding us that the past is not a complete loss in modern societies but was reconfigured in the invention of new identities. Zarrow locates the power of this nostalgic concern for the past and its rituals not merely at the political level but at deeper cultural levels where individuals find their personal needs met through reconnection with an earlier moment even while those needs are reconfigured within new political and social contexts. Zarrow’s reading of Yuan’s attempt to find answers to modern social and national questions in the Qing emphasis on ritual reminds us again of this particular consciousness of loss and the hope that responses to the disquieting effects of modern social ruptures can be quelled by looking backward into the past.

Another perspective on how modern forms of nostalgia situate the past and the nation is provided by JaHyun Kim Haboush’s chapter on Korean historical fiction. Kim-Haboush shows how the nation can be approached as a text in the same way that literary texts prefigure national obsessions: in her analysis, the Korean nation becomes a “multidimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original.” For Korean intellectuals in the 1980s, modernity was not a hegemonic ideology that called forth suppressed desires but a possibility that could be read into their own tradition by looking into their past and locating an autonomous modernity. Such a retrospective gaze, however, required a concept of “arrested time,” a sense that East Asia had multiple paths toward modernity, multiple ways of filling the gap created by loss and longing, multiple national identities, and multiple narratives of the West. Through her powerful and compelling readings of contemporary Korean historical fiction, Kim Haboush not only reminds us of the continuing importance of historical consciousness in Korea but of the importance of interpreted culture and political fluidity in democratic politics and societies.

Just as Kim Haboush’s analysis of literary texts foregrounds the broad menu of strategies available for coming to terms with loss and longing for the past, Hung-yok Ip shows how a similar spectrum of cosmopolitan concerns informed Chinese Communist intellectuals. Ip explores how Chinese Communism was itself a response to the disorienting array of new ideas and modern political values that flooded into East
Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She provocatively suggests how cosmopolitanism and Marxism were not simply antagonistic systems of belief but often converged around a shared experience of loss of continuity and the radical conditions of modern society. Modern utilitarian values, evident in Communist celebrations of the nation as a legitimate tool in anti-imperialist movements (even as they condemned bourgeois nationalism), were themselves a central part of the modern reflection on the loss of original, pure essences and an awareness of the contextual or contingent nature of modern social life. As Ip demonstrates, this was especially true of Chinese Communists, who had to deal not only with the economic effects of modern capitalism but with the cultural connotations of Western social theories as tools for the liberation of East Asia. This cultural dilemma often led Chinese Communists to what Ip calls cosmopolitanism as a means of reimagining Chinese national identity from a cultural perspective, rather than locating it wholly within the modern state or in some essential category of tradition.

Diaspora, Gender, and Ambiguity of Identity

National and cultural identities need to be historicized and heterogenized. With different geopolitical focuses and analytical strategies, all the chapters in this section underscore the ambiguity and cultural politics of identity formation in modern East Asia. Rather than a homogeneous discourse — whether emanating from the state, the nation, or ethnic groups — identity is actually the site of hegemony, contestation, and various kinds of resistance. Gender, diaspora, and popular culture provide significant ways of understanding the complex politics of identity making.

Poshek Fu focuses on the Hong Kong cinema between 1937 and 1941 to explore the ambiguity of local identity formation. In the 1930s, as colonial subjects of Great Britain, Hong Kong people were doubly marginalized by the British colonizers and the diasporic intellectuals exiled from Japanese-occupied Shanghai. While the British “Otherized” them as apathetic and excluded them from war preparations, the people of Hong Kong were castigated by the mainland Chinese émigrés as “feudal” and unpatriotic. The local cinema became a site in which a China-centered nationalist discourse that privileged modernization and Enlightenment values tried to impose its hegemonic control over local popular culture. Through the lens of what Fu calls “Central China syndrome,”
the émigré filmmakers and critics inscribed a primitive and slavish Other onto the local cinema. The Mandarin films they made in Hong Kong—a city of Cantonese speakers—projected this “centralizing nationalist ideology” by valorizing a national language as the instrument of state building and sacrifice to collective interests. Against this statist intervention, some local filmmakers strove to foreground the cultural difference of Hong Kong from the geopolitical situation on the mainland. This difference, Fu argues, animated the production of an alternative vision of a Hong Kong identity. But under the twin pressures of British colonialism and centralizing nationalism, this incipient sense of local identity was tentative. As is evidenced in one of the popular films discussed in his chapter, this identity was both hybridized and ideologically ambivalent. It was situated uncomfortably between an attachment to the Chinese homeland and an assertion of local difference.

Like Fu, Jiu-jung Lo looks at diasporic Chinese identity. Her subject is Taiwanese identity and its ambiguous position in the shifting contexts of Chinese politics. Beginning in 1931, under the colonial policy of assimilation, the majority of Taiwanese became Japanese nationals. But many intellectuals chose to remain loyal to China because it provided them with a psychological escape from colonial oppression. After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937, some Taiwanese went to join the resistance on the mainland only to meet with the suspicion of the Chinese government, while the colonial authority enlisted those who remained in Taiwan to serve in the imperial Japanese Army. The end of the war thus brought the question of Taiwanese nationality to the forefront: were Taiwanese Chinese nationals or Japanese nationals? It was a question with serious implications. A heated debate broke out within the Chinese government regarding whether Taiwanese should be brought to trial under the category of traitor or war criminal, a question that hinged on their nationality. In Lo's account, just after the war many Taiwanese readily identified themselves as Chinese while pleading for legal clemency for their wartime behavior. After 1946, however, under the abusive rule of the Chinese, who ignored their complicated situation, Taiwanese began to imagine a separate national identity by fashioning a distinctive ethnic-cultural tradition out of their Japanese colonial past. This ambiguous history marked the beginning of an increasingly fixed but contested boundary between Taiwan and China, providing an excellent example of the invention of national identity in modern East Asia.

While Fu and Lo discuss the Chinese diaspora as an instrument of
homogenizing nationalism, John Lie explores diasporan Koreans in Japan. Through the writings of three Korean writers in Japan, he demonstrates the pluralities of responses to ethnicity and national identity among Korean Japanese. While Kim Sŏk-pom yearned to return to a homeland that existed only in his literary imagination, Yi Yang-ji found herself, like many Korean Japanese, trapped in a predicament between an idealized homeland and its alienating reality. One way to escape this predicament is offered by Yi Hoe-sŏng. Yi avoids the psychological ambivalence by eschewing a return to a national homeland and championing a diasporic and “pan-ethnic vision” of Korean identity. This paradigmatic shift “from exile to diaspora” tries to sever ethnicity from national aspiration and relocate it as merely cultural membership in a deterritorialized group. Lie takes us back to the equation that informed the initial quest for national identity in modern East Asia: the attempt to identify and then match ethnic identities with their own nation-states. But Lie’s is a postnational vision: diasporic identity—accepting the condition of exile rather than seeking to alleviate it by returning to a homeland—as the only realistic solution when the boundaries between homeland, identity, and one’s place of residence are constantly shifting and fraught with ambiguity.

Focusing on popular songs in Republican Shanghai, Andrew F. Jones explores the reconfiguration of nation in the 1930s surrounding the figure of the sing-song girl. The mass appeal of popular songs had been predicated on the fetishization and consumption of their female performers—sing-song girls—whose glamorous but brutal lives were at the same time exploited as sensational themes in these songs. As an all-out Japanese invasion became imminent in the early 1930s, critics of different backgrounds began to attack popular songs as weakening the spirit of national salvation. This did not mean that they gave up the figure of sing-song girls. Instead, they incorporated them, especially the pathos of their oppression, into the nationalist discourse by transforming them into a symbol of national humiliation. Popular music was thus turned into an instrument for mobilizing resistance against the Japanese invasion. But in both the commercial and nationalist discourses the “real persons” of sing-song girls were erased.

Prasenjit Duara seeks to locate the gendered politics of identity formation in modern China in a complex nexus between history and the national state. He locates an enabling contradiction at the foundation of national history in that it is at once linear and timeless. In his words,
“linear History embeds a notion of time in which all is in flux, but it also locates an unchanging core at the heart of change.” It is this unchanging core that animated the production of national identity. In Republican China, as in other (post)colonial nation-states, as Duara argues, this identity was thoroughly gendered. Political elites represented women as that unchanging core, that realm of authenticity that defined the nation. This subsumption of women into the national discourse was in effect a strategy of containment, subjecting women to patriarchal control. But Duara does not see this as a totalized regime of control. Rather, some women, like the Hong Kong filmmakers and Taiwanese, were able to appropriate the nationalist idiom to enunciate their resistance. Herein lies the ambiguity of identity politics. Gender, articulated by male elites to define the core of national tradition, ironically may simply make national identity more accessible to women within the terms of this repressive schema. For all their discursive homogenizing power, discourses on nationalism and national identity throughout modern East Asia have not been able to displace social resistance, whether on the basis of gender or other sources.