

From Xia People to Han People and to Chinese Nation

— A Study of the Trajectory of the Cohesion and Integration of Chinese Ethnic Groups

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Abstract: Building multiethnic China was primarily driven by the cohesion and integration of main ethnic groups within Chinese territory, but the process was recorded according to traditional ethnic group discourse system of ancient China, so there is some doubt whether “nation state” theory can interpret it precisely. This paper manages to figure out the trajectory of cohesion and integration of main ethnic groups propelled by ancient Chinese people from the Xia Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty by focusing on traditional views on ethnic groups of ancient China. This paper contend that although there were the phenomena of naming the products of the integrations after the regimes they belonged to, “Han people,” “Hua people” and even “Zhonghua (Chinese) people,” became the designations of main cohesive ethnic groups in China over time, and the concept of “Chen Min (subjects)” and the appearance of “nationals” that developed during the Qing Dynasty successfully transformed their identity, which Liang Qichao referred to as “Chinese nation”. Efforts by the rulers of the Qing Dynasty to bridge the gaps between different ethnic groups by developing a community of “subjects” (Chenmin), produced the concept of “Chinese nation” which included the various ethnic groups with the “Han people” as the main group. This new community merely represents the present-day cohesion of the Chinese Nation and the internal integration continues.

Keywords: Xia people; Han people; Zhonghua people; Chinese nation

Although the term “Minzu” (nation or ethnic) appeared in historical literature in Han language quite early,^① it is generally accepted that “nation” with a modern sense was spread to China from Japan in the modern times. Then Liang Qichao linked it with China’s nation-state-building realities and coined the concept

① *Volume 54: Biography of Gu Huan in Book of Southern Qi* writes, “Today young Zhongyuan people haven’t completely changed their ethnic identity, but they often shave their heads, dress like barbarians, go out bareheaded or loll sideways with their legs wide open. All are attributed to their indiscriminate copying foreign manners, and that will do harm to our ethnic traditions. Therefore, it is inadvisable to carry out a political reform.” Collation notes below the text write, “ ‘Min (people)’ in the version of Book of Southern Qi edited by Nanjing Guozijian (Imperial College), the History of the Southern Dynasties and the Prime Tortoise of the Book Department was written as ‘Shi (clan).’ It can be concluded from these records that “Minzu (nation)” may be a miswriting of “Shizu (clan)” during transcription. (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1972, p.934 and p.950)

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of “Chinese Nation (中华民族, Zhong Hua Min Zu)”, and years later, revolutionists spearheaded by Sun Yat-sen introduced this concept into their revolution against autocracy of the Qing Dynasty. Sun’s introducing it into political area coupled with global nationalism movements of overthrowing the rule of colonialism makes scholars and even Chinese people tend to have a mindset of interpreting and thinking the integration history of Chinese ethnic groups under the framework of “nation state” theory, completely departing from the traditional discourse system that has dominated East Asia’s historical discourse for several thousand years. Consequently, a train of problems arise — how to define “Chinese nation”, how to discourse on relationships between “Chinese nation” and 56 Chinese ethnic groups, and more importantly, whether the “nation state theory” can exactly explain the cohesion and integration history of Chinese ethnic groups that was recorded according to traditional Chinese discourse system. However, such an important problem has long been neglected by the academic circles. Against the backdrop, the paper tries to figure out a basic trajectory of the cohesion and integration history of Chinese main ethnic groups based on previous researches, and welcomes peer review.^①

1. Traditional views on ethnic groups of ancient China

There is a noticeable difference between how ancient Chinese people divided ethnic groups and how Joseph Stalin defined “nation” and how “nation state” theory defined “nation”. Stalin concluded that, “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” and a nation “is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations.”^② Stalin’s view has caused much trouble for both our work and study on nation and our discourses on ethnic relationships in Chinese history, most primarily because Stalin held that nation was formed during the development of capitalism, but China didn’t go through such a stage before the founding of the People’s Republic of China. So if Stalin’s definition is adopted, nation never exists in Chinese history. Albeit his view wasn’t adopted in the process of ethnic identification during the 1950s, four fundamental elements of “nation” put forward by him are widely recognized among China’s academic circles.

In fact, East Asia, especially ancient China, had developed theories about how to identify and divide ethnic groups early before “nation state” theory was introduced. “All under the heaven are a family” reflects the basic understanding of ancient Chinese people towards the order of “under the heaven” (*tian xia*), and dividing the ethnic groups “under the heaven” has been theorized as early as the Pre-Qin period — explicit records can be found in the *Royal Regulations, the Book of Rites (Li Ji Wang Zhi)*. According to it, “There are five ethnic groups including Zhongguo people and four barbarian peoples”:

For settling people, their lifestyles and local climate and geography must be considered. People living in valleys and by rivers are different even in looks, let alone their lifestyles: individual temper, culinary taste, production instrument and ethnic dress all vary. Therefore, the government should emphasize education on

① There are more publications about ethnic relationships and integration in Chinese history, but limited by space, the paper will not make comments on previous researches, and for more information about related research publications, please refer to: Dali Zhabu (ed.), (2010). *Sixty Years of Researches on the History of China*. Beijing: Minzu University of China Publication House.

② Stalin, 1953

their manners but should not change their customs; implement unified policies but not change their habits. There are five ethnic groups including Zhongguo people and four barbarian peoples, and every ethnic group has its own lifestyle and custom that cannot be exchanged. Those inhabiting in the east are called Yi people who follow the custom of having their hair hanging loose, tattooing their bodies, and some of whom do not eat cooked food; those inhabiting in the south are called Man people who follow the custom of tattooing their foreheads and walking with their toes opposite, and some of whom also do not eat cooked food; those inhabiting in the west are called Rong people who follow the custom of having their hair hanging loose and wearing hide-made clothes, and some of whom do not eat grain food; those inhabiting in the north are called Di people who follow the custom of wearing feather-made clothes and living in caves, and some of whom also do not eat grain food. Although these five ethnic groups have different lifestyles, each has its own suitable dwellings, tastes, clothes, instruments and utensils; although these five ethnic groups have different languages and likes, go-betweeners who are adept at both languages are at hand to help them express what they think. These people are called Ji by Yi people, Xiang by Man people, Didi by Rong people and Yi by Di people.^①

Judging from these records, “Zhongguo” mentioned here refers to Huaxia ethnic group living in the Central Plain, while “Yi”, “Man”, “Rong”, and “Di” refer to ethnic groups living around Huaxia, according to division standards of ethnic differences in “dwelling, taste, clothes, instrument and utensil” among ethnic groups. Obviously, these division standards are not race or blood as showed in the nation state theory, but material culture embodied by distinctive ways of production and life, and other aspects. Therefore, “five ethnic groups” divided by ancient Chinese people are more a division of different regional cultures than a division of ethnic groups.

Exactly because the people of the Pre-Qin period used cultural differences to divide ethnic groups, Yi-Xia view therefrom has showed distinct cultural feature. Meanwhile, dividing ethnic groups according to their cultures and distribution regions has given rise to culturally distinctive ethnic group names such as “Xia (Zhongyuan people)”, “Yi”, “Rong”, “Di”, “Man” and “Hu”, and then helped shape the discourse system for the cohesion and integration history of Chinese ethnic groups written according to this traditional discourse system observed by the majority of historical literature. And it has also provided later generations with a theoretical basis for how to deal with ethnic relationships and for the cohesion and integration of Chinese ethnic groups, and many ancient policies like “Hua-Yi distinction”, “using the Xia to change the Yi”, “ruling according to minority customs”, were formed and developed on this ideological basis.

2. From “Xia people” to “Han people”: basic cohesion of farming ethnic groups

An Outline of the History of the Relationship among the Various Chinese Groups (Zhong Guo Min Zu Guan Xi Shi Gang Yao) gives a detailed account of the development process from “Xia people” to “Han people”, maintaining that “The emergence of the name of Han or the transition process from Xia to Huaxia and to Han is not the change in the nature of the community of people, also not the formation of a new nation, but merely the change of name.”^② More precisely, this book’s accounts of “Han people” or the formation process of “Han ethnicity” are historically well-founded, however its discourses of having no change in the nature but merely the

① Wang, 1978

② Weng, 1990

change of name lack accuracy, for regimes of Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han were founded by different peoples that were descended from different ethnic groups under the classification system of “five ethnic groups”, and “Xia ethnicity” and “Han ethnicity” were different in “nature” and referred to two different main ethnic groups that founded two different regimes. As the name suggests, the appellation of “Han people” obviously is a result of the dynastic name of Han and its long reign, and more examples of how regime change exerted a direct impact on name change of ethnic groups can be found in historical literature. For Xia people, *Treatise on Geography of Book of Han (Han Shu Di Li Zhi)* writes, “Yingchuan and Nanyang were originally states under the rule of Yu the Great of the Xia Dynasty. Xia people were very loyal to their superiors, but also very uncouth at the same time.” For Shang people, *Basic Annals of Zhou in Records of the Grand Historian (Shi Ji Zhou Ben Ji)* writes, “Then King Wu of Zhou sent courtiers to convey his words to Shang people that ‘Heaven bless you all!’. Hearing that, all Shang people bowed down to him with their hands folded in front and the emperor returned a salute.” For Zhou people, *Ranked Biography of Su Qin in Records of the Grand Historian (Shi Ji Su Qin Lie Zhuan)* writes, “Zhou people liked running businesses, hankering after the profitability of twenty percent.” For Qin people, *Geography 1 in Old Book of Tang (Jiu Tang Shu Di Li Yi)* writes, “The Qin Dynasty introduced the administration system of prefectures and counties all over its territory. No wonder Qin people were defeated.” Similarly, the long-lived Han Dynasty integrated people living around “Zhongguo” (prefectures in the Central Plain) within its territory into the community of “Han people” based on the efforts of the Qin Dynasty. Since then, “Han people” has been used as first and third person appellations. It’s noteworthy that these people didn’t all come from “Zhongguo people” of “five ethnic groups”, and some of them came from “Yi inhabiting in the east”, “Rong inhabiting in the west” and “Man inhabiting in the south” (rulers of the State of Chu thought that they were not Zhongguo people, but “Man people”). That is, the emergence of “Han people” is the product of efforts of many regimes including Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han to advance the ethnic integration within “China” (the Central Plain), and of course, the natural integration of different ethnic groups also played a part in the process. Before the Han Dynasty, there was no ethnic group called “Han people”, but ethnic groups named after regimes like Xia people, Shang people, Zhou people and Qin people.

Han Dynasty’s long reign has doubtlessly generated the formation of the community of Han people, but the cohesion basis should be Qin Dynasty’s success in unifying the Central Plain and putting into effect ethnic integration measures like the administration system of prefectures and counties. After unifying China, Qin Shi Huang (Ying Zheng) “divided his empire into thirty-six commanderies governed by Commandery Governor, Commandery Defender and Commandery-inspecting Censor, and standardized the unit of measurement, the script of writing and the width of carriages in the far-flung area from Korea in the east to Lintao (present-day Lintao county, Gansu Province) and Qiangzhong (around Lintan and Zhuoni Counties, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture) and from the southernmost tip to the Yellow River along Yin Mountains to Liaodong Commandery (mainly in present-day Liaoning Province) in the north”^①. His efforts had not only helped end the age of feudal states in the Central Plain and ensured that government orders could be uniformly obeyed, but also facilitated the process of merging the Central Plain into an economic and cultural community that he called “Zhongguo”, and the emergency of this community has provided an internal driving force for the further cohesion of Zhongguo region and also advanced the cohesion and integration of ethnic groups within

① Qian, 1959

the region. “Qin people” was just a product of ethnic integration, which has underpinned the formation of the ethnic group of “Han people” later.

As early as during the Chu–Han Contention period, “Han people” has emerged, referring to the troops spearheaded by King of Han Liu Bang, as evidenced in *Volume 92: Ranked Biography of the Marquis of Huaiyin (Huai Yin Hou Lie Zhuan)* in *Records of the Grand Historian (Shi Ji)*. Kuai Sheng lobbied Han Xin, “Now, you have carved out such a formidable reputation that would put the emperor on his guard and have achieved such incomparable exploits that cannot be reciprocated with any rewards. No matter which state you swear allegiance to, Chu or Han, you would be watched by both their emperors and people. Then, what course should you follow? You’re an official yet have the exploits that even the emperor cannot catch up; you’re a commoner yet have the reputation that other commoners cannot match, so you are in danger on my part.” But in *Volume 110: Treatise on the Xiongnu (Xiong Nu Lie Zhuan)*, “Han people” was referred to as “Zhongguo”: “Xiongnu people eat animals, drink their blood and wear their skin; Xiongnu animals eat plants and drink water, and can move to another place at any time. At the time of war, they learn horsemanship and archery, while at the time of peace, they live a carefree nomadic life. Subject to few limits and a simple bureaucratic system, they can easily and long follow such a lifestyle. Governing a state is like taking care of an organic whole. After their father and brothers died, they would marry their wives, fearing the extinction of their bloodline. So despite the disordered kinship, Xiongnu people are certain to establish legal descendants. Though Zhongyuan people are now decent ostensibly and don’t marry wives of their father or brothers, the kinship between each other is increasingly distant, going to the length of killing each other or even changing the name of their relatives’ dynasties. All are caused by distant kinship. Moreover, the demerits of rites may generate resentment between the emperor and officials, and building sumptuous palaces is bound to sap its people’s strength. Commoners have to toil long hours at fields to feed and dress themselves and build firm city walls to defend themselves, hence they are reluctant to learn horsemanship and archery at the time of war and they get very tired due to heavy farm work at the time of peace. Alas! Han people living in stone houses! No more words! How important you think you are!” *Volume 86: Treatise on the Nanman, Southwestern Yi people (Nan Man Xi Nan Yi Lie Zhuan)* in *Book of the Later Han (Hou Han Shu)* writes, “In the first year of Yonghe reign of Emperor Shun of Han, Governor of Wuling Commandery submitted a memorial to the court, advising that the government should impose more taxes on barbarians for they have been completely sinicized”. As showed above, the social culture featured by farming and the institutional culture characterized by commanderies seem to be used as important marks to divide ethnic groups during the Han Dynasty, while this dynasty’s long reign provided an enabling internal environment for the formation of the ethnic group of “Han people”. Also in the volume, records write, “Thanks to Emperor Wu of Han, barbarians living in Zuodu (in the southeast of present-day Hanyuan County, Sichuan Province) became civilized, and the emperor established Zuodu Commandery here. Local people like having their hair hanging loose, wearing clothes overlaid to the left, speaking metaphors, and living in dwellings like those of barbarians of Wenshan Commandery. Remarkably, there grows a kind of magic elixir herb at the mansion of Immortal Shan Tu. In the sixth year of Yuanding reign, Emperor Wu established Shenli Commandery here. Till the fourth year of Tianhan reign, it was incorporated into Shu Commandery as West Sub-commandery and two commanders-in-chief were installed. One was stationed in Maoniui governing

① Jiang, 2002, p.435

barbarians, and the other was stationed in Qingyi governing Han people". These records show that even in areas inhabited by several ethnic groups, a remarkable distinction between "Yi" and "Han" was made, featured by differences in tax payment and governance method.

Therefore, this paper concludes that "Xia people", "Shang people", "Zhou people", "Qin people", "Han people" and other appellations are both different and interrelated. These appellations were different products of efforts of different regimes to drive the ethnic integration within their respective territories. The interrelation is the process that "Xia people" kept merging with other ethnic groups and finally developed into "Han people" appeared one by one, so "Xia people" was their common basis.

3. From "Han people" to "Tang people": further cohesion of farming ethnic groups

With the collapse of the Han Dynasty, "Han people" was no longer a generic appellation for farming ethnic groups, and instead, ethnic groups were named after regimes to which they belonged during the period from the Three Kingdoms period to the Tang Dynasty. And the appellation "Hua people" also emerged at the same period.

According to *Records of the Three Kingdoms (San Guo Zhi)*, "Wei people", "Wu people" and "Shu people" were respectively referred to as people within territories of three regimes of Cao Wei, Sun Wu and Shu Han. Similarly, "Jin people" appeared in *Book of Jin (Jin Shu)* after the Western Jin Dynasty unified the Central Plain. *Volume 97: Biographies of Four Barbarian Tribes (Bei Di Zhuan)* in *Book of Jin* writes, "After Emperor Wu ascended the throne, Xiongnu people living in the regions beyond the Great Wall suffered from floods, and over twenty thousand refugees of Saini and Heinan switched allegiance to Han, and the emperor ordered to accept them and helped them resettle in Yiyang of Hexi (located to the west of the Yellow River). Thereafter, they lived together with Jin people, and later they were widely distributed in Pingyang, Xihe, Taiyuan, Xinxing, Shangdang and Leping. During the Tang Dynasty, "Tang people" appeared to refer to the then main ethnic group. *Volume 221: Western Territories (Second)* in *New Book of Tang (Xin Tang Shu Xi Yu Xia)* writes, "In the first year of Tianbao reign of Emperor Xuanzong, King of Cao Kingdom Geluopuluo sent an envoy to offer local specialties, and Emperor Xuanzong conferred him the title of Huaide Marquis. He told the emperor, 'since our ancestors, we have been under the rule of Turks, but from now we will swift allegiance to the court of Tang Dynasty and will be at your service.'"

Appellations of Wei people, Shu people and Wu People were naturally products of disintegration of ethnic groups resulting from the antagonistic relationships between Cao Wei, Shu Han and Sun Wu, but this disintegration was temporary, for that founding of the Jin Dynasty has brought about another cohesion of main ethnic groups within its territory. Although the main ethnic group called "Jin people" "lived together" with ethnic groups that migrated from the frontier, it was easy to differentiate one from another surely based on their different cultural features and governance methods. Interestingly, as more and more ethnic groups lived together, "Zhonghua" appeared in the then historical literature as an important division standard of ethnic groups. Among academic circles, it has been generally accepted that "Zhonghua" first appeared in Pei Songzhi's annotation to *Volume 35: Biography of Zhuge Liang* in *Records of the Three Kingdoms (San Guo Zhi Zhu Ge Liang Zhuan)*. In the book, he wrote, "If Zhuge Liang could have been brought in by regimes of Zhonghua

to give full play to his political genius...”, and made it clear that “Zhonghua” meant the Central Plain.^① However, *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance (Zi Zhi Tong Jian)* recorded Duke Ai of Yangping Fu Rong advising Fu Jian in the tenth month of the seventh year of Taiyuan reign of Emperor Xiaowu in Volume 104, “‘Wisdom of being content protects you from being humiliated; wisdom of not overdoing keeps dangers away from you.’ Since ancient times to the present, the bellicose types all died at last. And legitimate rulership would never fall into the hands of Rong and Di, because although the regimes of Jiangdong (east area of the Yangtze River) are feeble, it is in the will of the Heaven that the regimes of Zhonghua hold the legitimate rulership, so the Heaven will never let their boom run their course.” “Zhonghua” here seems to carry more cultural implications. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the idea of “Hua–Yi distinction” was very prominent, and using “Zhonghua” that represented the legitimate culture to divide ethnic groups also tallied with the traditional division standard of ethnic groups. “He who does not belong to our ethnic group, his heart is different from ours”. Many modern scholars identify this discourse that repeatedly appeared in historical books as “ethnic discrimination”, but actually “ethnic group” didn’t mean “ethnic attribution” at first, for there wasn’t the concept of “ethnicity” in the ideologies of ancient Chinese people, this term was more related with the differences in cultural attribution. For example, *Volume 48: Biography of Duan Zhuo in Book of Jin (Jin Shu Duan Zhuo Zhuan)* writes, “Back in the Han Dynasty, people of Lv clan were suspicious of each other. Internally, there were Marquess of Zhuxu and Marquess of Dongmou, and externally, there were nine vassal states governed by marquesses of Liu clan. So, the rulers were afraid of reform. While today, vassal states have been developing from strength to strength, and become as firm as Tai Mount. He who does not belong to our ethnic group, his heart is different from ours. While the Wei Dynasty enacted laws to control vassal states and separate royal relatives, which would lead to a great disaster. Moreover, recently, it also divided the territory and introduced the five-class marquess system. Yet, this system can neither emulate previous sages nor pardon criminals, but right and wrong were interwoven and Maoshan School was established. Hence, it was more like a makeshift, and if the government didn’t change it later, it would throw the people into trouble and the bureaucratic system into disorder.” As showed above, these discussions have nothing to do with “ethnicity”, but all kinds of powers inside the rule system, so it sounds far-fetched and seems also inaccurate that modern scholars identify them as “ethnic discrimination”.

Modern scholars have neglected the fact that the appellation of “Zhonghua people” came into being after the emergence of the concept of “Zhonghua”. *Volume 637: A Poem about Building Town (Zhu Cheng Pian)* by Gu Yun in *Complete Tang Poems (Quan Tang Shi)* and *Volume 185: Frontier 1 of Comprehensive Institutions (Tong Dian Bian Fang Yi)* by Du You both mentioned “Zhonghua people”. It also appeared in the *Volume 4 of Zhangsun Wuji’s Commentaries on the Tang Code (Tang Lv Shu Yi)*. These records show that the appellation of “Zhonghua people” has appeared during the Tang Dynasty at latest, and judging from its use in Tang poems, it had become a universal usage to some extent then. Meanwhile, the fact that “Zhonghua people” shared the same nature with “Tang people” and “Zhongguo people” demonstrates to some extent that they were all appellations for Tang Dynasty’s main ethnic group.

① Please refer to: Chen, 2008; Fei, 1989; Tian, 2002.

4. Reappearance of “Han people”: another expansion of farming ethnic group

After the Tang Dynasty, the integrated farming ethnic group was disintegrated again, and was divided into different groups and incorporated into different rule systems along with the establishment of regimes of Five Dynasties, Song, Liao and Jin dynasties. Albeit there were ethnic groups named after the regimes they belonged to in historical books, some rulers and authors of historical books also made a clear distinction between different ethnic groups, especially in the case of Liao and Jin dynasties headquartered in the northern region.

During the reign of Emperor Taizong whose sinicized name was Yelv Deguang (927-947), Khitan people had a hand in the melee of the Central Plain in favor of the Later Jin Dynasty. To return the favor, the ruler of Later Jin submitted his empire to the rule of Khitan regime, promising to cede the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun to Khitan and offer Khitan 300,000 bolts of cloth as tribute every year^①. Therefore, the Liao Dynasty founded by Khitan people consisted of both farming and nomadic ethnic groups. *Treatises on State Offices of History of Liao (Liao Shi Bai Guan Zhi)* writes, “According to Khitan traditions, bureaucratic system should be plain with streamlined procedures and specialized officials. Without confusing official position titles, officials can have more interest in governance. During the sixth year of Shence reign, Emperor Taizu convened all officials and issued the decree of regulating the bureaucratic system. As Zhongguo (namely the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun) was ceded to Liao, Emperor Taizong established two different bureaucratic systems for southern and northern regions during his reign — Khitan bureaucratic system for Khitan people and sinicized bureaucratic system for Han people. Khitan bureaucratic system followed the tradition of simplicity, while sinicized bureaucratic system the complicated position titles. The Liao Dynasty established two sets of bureaucratic systems, namely northern division (*Bei Yuan*) taking charge of the affairs related to the court, the ethnic group and vassal states and southern division (*Nan Yuan*) taking charge of the affairs related to the governance, taxes and war-horses of prefectures inhabited by Han people. Such a custom-friendly governance method was very suitable.” Although adopting different governance methods for different ethnic groups wasn’t pioneered by Khitan people, and actually the “sinicized bureaucratic system” stemmed from the previous dynasties, modern scholars have still thought highly of the governance method of “adopting the Khitan bureaucratic system for Khitan people and the sinicized bureaucratic system for Han people”.^② But the coexistence of two different governance methods goes against the cohesion of ethnic groups within the territory, especially the cohesion of farming and nomadic ethnic groups. Specially, the existence of two different governance methods for “Han people” and “Khitan people” indicates that there was still a clear distinction between farming and nomadic ethnic groups within Liao’s territory; two different governance methods were in practice good for Liao’s rule and the internal integration of the two ethnic groups, but they also formed a man-made barrier for the integration of the two ethnic groups that would go against the formation and expansion of the main ethnic group of the Liao Dynasty.

According to *Annals of Emperor Taizu of History of Jin (Jin Shi Tai Zu Ji)*, in the second year (1116) of Shouguo reign, Emperor Taizu issued a decree, “Since we defeated the Liao troops, countless people from all

① Sima, Guang. (1956). *Comprehensive Mirror in aid of governance*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

② Please refer to: Ma, 2000; Tian et al., 1990; Zhao, Yuntian. (1993). *A history of China’s administration of its borderland*. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Publishing.

four sides paid allegiance to us, and we should offer good treatment to them. As from today, commoners and officials from Khitan, Xi, Han, Bohai, Jurchen of the Liao Dynasty, Shiwei, Dalugu, Wure and Tieli peoples, having surrendered or been captured, or returned after escape, shall be exempted from punishment, and their chieftains can resume their former positions as before, and they also can choose where to live on their own.” These records show that there was still a clear distinction between ethnic groups in the northern region during the early Jin Dynasty, but as the Liao and Northern Song dynasties were wiped out successively, the rulers of the Jin Dynasty adopted a governance method different from that of the Liao Dynasty, which some scholars refer to as “experiencing a process of constant improvement and sinicization”^①. Obviously, “sinicization” is a conclusion from the perspective of modern Han ethnicity, and also represents the general perception in the context of “nation state” of contemporary academic circles, but the following dialogues between Emperor Shizong and Right Aide to Imperial Secretariat Tangkuo Anli in *Biography of Tangkuo Anli of History of Jin (Jin Shi Tang Kuo An Li Zhuan)* show the achievements of the Jin Dynasty in the ethnic cohesion within its territory, “In the seventh year (1167) of Dading reign, Emperor Shizong issued a decree, ‘At Hedong Nanlu Commandery, many Jurchen households are stricken by poverty. So are Han households here. By renting plots of land, they just cannot make ends meet, let alone spend money learning horsemanship and archery. Naturally, they would not join the army. To help them out, all male adults shall join the army and be stationed across Shandong Donglu Commandery, and they can get some money and rice every month. If you have other suggestions, please let me know.’ Ten days later, the emperor asked, ‘Have any ministers gotten some ideas about how to deal with poverty-stricken Minggan households of Shandong Donglu Commandery after discussions?’ Tangkuo Anli answered, ‘Not yet.’ Then the emperor asked him, ‘How do you think of this problem?’ He answered, ‘Minggan people and Han people have merged into a community. Now, they are all Jin people living on farming. If all of them were ordered to join the army, I’m afraid of affecting the agricultural production.’ Hearing this, the emperor reproached, ‘I thought you were far-sighted, while you just copy Han people for all things you’re faced with. If it’s at a time of peace, we can focus on farming, but the situation is that Song people may be planning a war. If an empire is at war, how come its people can have leisure to engage themselves in farming? I know you are good at Han language and ever read the *Classic of Poetry (Shi Jing)* and the *Book of Documents (Shang Shu)*. Putting aside these Han things, now I want to discuss with you our Jin’s bureaucratic system. Looking back, your predecessors were all Jurchens, and you’re the only Han minister-level official. You just mentioned a community, and the supposed community should be of the same ethnic group, but Jurchen people and Han people are two different ethnic groups as they get. When I ascended the throne in Dongjing (East Capital, present-day Liaoyang City, Liaoning Province), only Jurchen people sent envoys to congratulate me, without seeing any Khitan and Han envoys. Why didn’t Han people send an envoy, if they and Jurchen people belonged to the same community?’ The emperor continued, ‘I often think all night how can I make our Jin Dynasty founded by our great Emperor Taizu be handed on from generation to generation for an aeon, and make Jurchen people have an inexhaustible supply of resources and wealth. All of you must know this.’ Therefore, the emperor listed a series of measures to lift Minggan people out of poverty and had Left Office to Director Niangher Woteci written down them for discussions with officials at the office of the Department of State Affairs.” Doubtless such appellations like “Jurchen people”, “Han people” and “Khitan people” in these dialogues can serve as evidence that there was still a clear distinction between ethnic groups then, but the emergence of the

① Please refer to: Chen, 2008; Fei, 1989; Tian, 2002

appellation of “Guo people” also can provide a case in point that there were some insiders in the then rulership in favor of bridging the gap between ethnic groups and forming a community of “Guo people”. Although whether this idea was ever translated into practicable actions and how these actions worked remain to be explored, the emergence of “Han people” in the “four-class system” and the composition of the system during the Mongolian-founded Yuan Dynasty can be regarded as a hint of Yuan’s recognition of the achievements in ethnic cohesion made during the Five Dynasties, Song, Liao and Jin dynasties.

Detailed accounts of Mongolian people, Semu people and Han people of the “four class system” can be found in the *Chapter of Clans in Giving up Farming in Nan Village (Nan Cun Chuo Geng Lu Shi Zu)*. According to it, “Han people” classification included eight ethnic groups, namely “Khitan, Goryeo, Jurchen, Zhuyindai, Shulikuodai, Zhuwen, Zhuchidai and Bohai”, followed by notes that “Jurchen is equivalent to Nvzhi (*Nv Zhi*)”^①. Some scholars defined Yuan’s “four-class system” policy in terms “heavy with ethnic discrimination and oppression”^②. From the perspective of “nation state” theory and modern ethnicity theory, there is nothing wrong with this definition, but it’s highly noteworthy that this system incorporated Khitan, Goryeo, Jurchen, Zhuyindai, Shulikuodai, Zhuwen, Zhuchidai and Bohai into “Han people” classification. Such a classification serves as an indicator that Yuan’s rulers thought that these ethnic groups had something in common with “Han people” in cultural features and governance methods, and can be treated uniformly with Han people, and it also provides an institutional guarantee for the further ethnic integration. Therefore, the paper maintains that the “four-class system” meant that Yuan’s rulers recognized the achievements in ethnic integration made during the Five Dynasties, Song, Liao and Jin dynasties, and created a more enabling environment for the integration of “Han people” and “Southerners” into a community, thereby facilitating the reappearance of “Zhonghua people”.

5. Reappearance of “Zhonghua people”: expansion of “Han people” community and its status transformation

Zhu Yuanzhang, founder of the Ming Dynasty, overthrew the rule of the Yuan Dynasty with the mission to “expel barbarians and restore *Zhonghua (Qu Chu Da Lu, Hui Fu Zhong Hua)*”^③, and although he tried to enhance the cohesion of main ethnic groups within his empire by restoring the *Hua customs (Huafeng)*, there was still a distinction between “Hua” and “Yi”. Therefore, he put forward the political lines of “Hua-Yi unity and equivalent treatment despite different surnames”^④, “making no distinction between Hua and Yi for we are of the same Ming community”^⑤, attempting to bridge the gap between different ethnic groups. Exactly for this reason, such appellations like “Ming people”, “Han people”, and “Hua people” all appeared in *Veritable Records of the Ming (Ming Shi Lu)* to refer to Ming’s main ethnic group. It should be noticed that the appellation

① *A Research Review of Chinese Ethnic Policies of All Dynasties* by Tian Jizhou, et al. maintains that Tibetan people should be also incorporated into Semu people, Han people should mainly consist of Han, Jurchen, Khitan, Bohai and Goryeo inhabiting in the north to Huai River within the original territory of the Jin Dynasty, and Southerners should mainly include those ethnic groups inhabiting within the territory of the previous Southern Song Dynasty. (p. 246)

② Tian, 1993

③ Yao, Guang Xiao & Xia, Yuanji (Eds). (1962). Entry of the tenth Month of the first year of wu reign. In *Veritable records of emperor Taizu of the Ming (Volume 26)* (p. 402). Taipei: Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinca.

④ Yao, Guang Xiao & Xia, Yuanji (Eds). (1962). Entry of the six month of the third year of Hongwu reign. In *Veritable records of emperor Taizu of the Ming (Volume 53)*. (p. 1048). Taipei: Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinca.

⑤ Yao, Guang Xiao & Xia, Yuanji (Eds). (1962). Entry of the fourth month of the second year of Yongle reign. In *Veritable records of emperor Taizong of the Ming (Volume 30)* (pp. 533–534). Taipei: Institute of Hisotry and Philology of Academia Sinica.

of “Zhonghua people” also explicitly appeared in *Volume 322: Biography of Japan in History of Ming (Ming Shi Ri Ben Zhuan)*:

In the fifteenth year of Yongle reign, Japanese pirates (*Wo Kou*) raided Songmen, Jinxiang and Pingyang. Local stationed army captured dozens of them, and escorted these captives to the then capital city, advising Yongle Emperor to behead them. The emperor said, “Punishing them into submission is inferior to taming them with benevolent treatment, so releasing them is best.” Then he ordered Lv Yuan who was then Supernumerary Gentleman Cavalier Attendant of Bureau of Punishments and some other officials to admonish these captives and make them repent of their wrongdoings. At the same time, they also negotiated with them on releasing those Zhonghua people they captured. In the fourth month next year, King of Japan sent an envoy and went to the court of the Ming Dynasty with Lv Yuan and his retinue to offer tributes, bringing the following message, “Pirates are so rampant that those envoys I ever sent to offer tributes cannot succeed in reaching your court. I had not a slightest knowledge of the wrongdoings committed by the scoundrels of our kingdom. I would appreciate it very much if your great emperor can pardon us and accept our tributes.” These words greatly pleased the emperor who consented their request and treated their envoys with respect as before. However, pirates were still very rampant.^①

“Zhonghua people” mentioned here is a relative appellation of Japanese, and should be equivalent to “Ming people”, not Zhongyuan people (people inhabiting in the Central Plain). In a sense, it is another appellation for Ming's main ethnic group.

During the Qing Dynasty, the “fundamental status of Manchu people” was stressed again and again after the regime succeeded in “unifying China”, but its rulers have also been trying to bridge the gap between ethnic groups since the reign of Shunzhi Emperor, hoping that its “legitimacy” can be recognized by other ethnic groups, especially “Han people”.^② Interestingly, albeit naming the people within a territory after the regime was prevalent in history books, and modern people also extensively use “Qing people” to refer to the people living during the Qing Dynasty, the paper finds no usage of “Qing people” in the *Veritable History of the Qing (Qing Shi Lu)* written during the Qing Dynasty and the *Draft History of Qing (Qing Shi Gao)* compiled during the period of the Republic of China, but finds “Chenmin” (subjects) that was used as a unified appellation for different ethnic groups within Qing's territory. And the appellation of “Chenmin” appeared up to 883 times in the above two books and this word was already equivalent to “common people”. Qing's rulers have made continuous efforts to shape the appellation of “Chenmin”, and during the process, another appellation of “nationals” also came into being as it made the transition from a dynastic state to a modern and contemporary sovereign state. Since the Guangxu reign of Emperor Dezong, the appellation of “nationals” has been used to refer to “Chenmin” under the control of the Qing Dynasty, which can be seen as a result of Qing's efforts to shape the appellation of “Chenmin” although Qing's ruler ever launched the Constitutional Monarchy Movement in its late years. According to the Entry of the Seventh Month of the Thirty-second Year of Guangxu Emperor in *Volume 562 of Veritable Records of Emperor Dezong of Qing (Qing De Zong Shi Lu)*, Guangxu Emperor ever issued an imperial edict on the “Constitutional Monarchy Movement”:

Both central and local officials ought to work hard to deliver tangible results in invigorating our regime.

① Zhang, Tingyu. (1974). Biography of Japan. In Zhang Tingyu & Wan Sitong (Eds.) *History of Ming (volume 322)* (pp. 8345–8346) Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

② Li, D. L. (2014). Transformation and Shaping of “citizens”: Qing's efforts in nation-building with multiple ethnic groups. *Study and Exploration*(9), 162–170.

Several years down the line when the landscape takes preliminary shape, the government will make a deliberate timetable for the establishment of the constitution after assessing the situations and learning from other countries, and will publish it by then. And this timetable will be formulated based on the progress we make. Generals, governors—general and governors, please inform all people within areas under your respective administration of my edict. Urge them to study hard to know well the essence of being patriotic and loyal to the throne and reinvigorating our state by uniting as one; urge them to bear in mind that do not damage the public interests because of personal bias and do not jeopardize the big picture due to individual grievance; urge them to respect order and uphold peace so as to improve themselves for citizenship of a monarchy state. Sincerely looking forward to seeing that! Please publicize my edict far and wide.

It's noteworthy that the ideal of "Chenmin" shaped by Qing government is to become "nationals" that are "patriotic and loyal to the throne". If the Qing Dynasty referred to itself as "China" according to expressions in international treaties, the appellation of "nationals" can naturally be replaced by "Chinese people". That's where the phrase of "Chinese nation" coined by Liang Qichao primarily derived.

"Chinese nation" is a hybrid of Chinese and Western terms and was first used by Liang Qichao. According to Liang Qichao's *About the Changing Tendency of Chinese Academic Thoughts* published in 1902, "Since the ancient times to present, the State of Qi is the only Chinese nation having the idea of marine right, so the two concepts have been formed during the process, namely national view and world view."^① "Chinese nation" mentioned here refers to Huaxia people and "Han people" that grew out from Huaxia people and kept expanding over time. However, Liang Qichao maintained in his another article titled *A Study of Nationalities in Chinese History* published in 1922 that, "Whoever immediately thinks of 'his/her Chinese nationality' when meeting aliens is surely a member of the community of Chinese nation", and that "Manchu are also a member of the community of Chinese nation now"^②. By analyzing these words, "Chinese nation" here obviously includes both present-day Han ethnicity and ethnic minorities like Manchu, so it is actually equivalent to "Chinese people". Therefore, this paper concludes that Liang Qichao's correct usage of "Chinese nation" has experienced an evolution process. Originally, he intended to use this term to refer to "nationals" under the rule of the Qing Dynasty, namely "Chenmin" mentioned in Guangxu Emperor's edict on the "Constitutional Monarchy Movement", but it is "Han people" who grew out from "Xia people" and have been expanding during their integration with other ethnic groups that have constituted the main of "nationals".^③

In conclusion, ethnic cohesion and integration within Chinese territory is complicated, and this paper attempts to associate ethnic cohesion with change of political regimes so as to analyze the cohesion trajectory of main ethnic groups of ancient China through the evolution of appellations. Ancient Chinese people have long built a unique theoretic system for ethnic group division characterized by cultural features, and the regimes that ever appeared in China had made consistent efforts to advance integration of those ethnic groups

① Liang, 1999.

② Liang, 1999.

③ Perhaps aware of this, Professor Gu Jiegang published the article *There's Only One Chinese Nation in Borderland Weekly* in *Yishi Daily* (Issue 9, *Borderland Weekly*, *Yishi Daily*, February 13, 1939) to articulate again the origins and connotations of "Chinese nation", nevertheless the later generations don't pay attention to it from the academic perspective, but consider it a manifestation of scholars' "patriotism" when Chinese nation was in grave peril. Although Mr. Fei Xiaotong didn't agree with Professor Gu's view, he published a paper titled *Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of the Chinese Nationality* after the founding of the People's Republic of China, which can be seen as an indicator that he has inherited and developed Professor Gu's view from another angle.

within their respective territories under the guidance of this system. Albeit there are phenomena of naming the products of ethnic integration after the regimes they belonged to, “Han people”, “Hua people” and even “Zhonghua people” have become appellations for the main cohesive ethnic groups within Chinese territory. Meanwhile, though efforts by the rulers of the Qing Dynasty to bridge the gap between ethnic groups through building a community of “Chenmin” (nationals) have given rise to the appearance of the concept of “Chinese nation” made up by many ethnic groups with “Han people” as the main, this new community merely represents the completion of the cohesion of different ethnic groups within Chinese territory, and their internal integration still continues.

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