Nationalities Papers (2024), 1–18
doi:10.1017/nps.2024.86

ARTICLE

Han-Centrism and Multiethnic Nation-Building in China and Taiwan: A Comparative Study since 1911*

James Leibold[1] and Julie Yu-Wen Chen[2,3]

[1]Department of Politics, Media and Philosophy, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia; [2]Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, Finland and [3]Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand
Corresponding author: James Leibold; Email: j.leibold@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract
Although the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC, also known as Taiwan) and their ruling parties have altered over time, there are quite a few similarities between their models of nation-building, more than is commonly acknowledged. The *guofu* (father) of the modern Chinese state, Sun Yat-sen, one of the few political leaders who is still honored on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, claimed all the peoples and territories of the former Qing empire comprised a single national community, the so-called *Zhonghua minzu*. Yet a Han super-majority has long sat at the center of this national imaginary. In this article, we ask what has happened to Sun's imagined community across the last century, and how it has evolved in the two competing Chinese states the PRC and the ROC. We seek to demonstrate the enduring challenge of Han-centrism for multiethnic nation-building in both countries, while illustrating how shifts in domestic and international politics are altering this national imaginary and the place of ethnocultural diversity within it.

Keywords: Taiwan (ROC); China (PRC); Han-centrism; multiculturalism; nationalism; nation-building; colonialism

The treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been closely scrutinized by scholars, governments, and non-governmental actors in recent years, with claims of widespread human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Inner Mongolia, among other places. At first glance, there seems to be little value in comparing the nation-building policies of the PRC with those at play in Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China (ROC), as these "two Chinas" have increasingly diverged, at least politically, in recent years. In the quest for international solidarity and support for Taiwan's ambitious yet controversial statehood, Taiwanese politicians often contrast the human rights situation on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, praising what they claim is the ROC's robust multiculturalism and superior treatment of minority communities. There is widespread public support for Taiwan's current path towards a more open, democratic, and pluralistic society. Yet is it living up to these ambitions? And is the situation in Taiwan all that different from the Chinese mainland? The aims of this article are twofold.

First, in line with the recent call by David Stroup (2023) in *Nationalities Papers* to include "China" as a comparative case in the study of nationalism, we aim to compare what seems incomparable. By bringing the nation-building policies, practices and ideologies of China and Taiwan into closer relief, we seek to demonstrate how history, politics and demography shape the way these two Chinese states govern their ethnocultural diversity and imagine their national

*This article was originally published with incomplete funding details. These have been updated and a corrigendum published at https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2025.10074.

community. The fact Mainland China lists Taiwan's Indigenous population as one of its fifty-five officially recognized "minority nationalities" or "ethnic minorities" (少数民族), and Taiwan had until 2017 a ministry-level commission overseeing its fictive governance of Mongolia and Tibet, illustrates both the intertwined nation-building models of the two countries, as well as their points of divergence. We believe a systematic overview and comparison of nation-building in the ROC and PRC will further our understanding of both societies and their relationship to other nation-states.

Second, we argue Han-centrism, a belief in the inherent superiority of the Han majority and its right to rule over and ultimately assimilate non-Han peoples, is a common challenge facing both China and Taiwan, and has deep roots in Chinese civilization and its modern political history. Politics and diversity are closely enmeshed and constantly altering. Shifts in domestic and international politics – from hardening and conflict during the Cold War to softening and cooperation in the post-Cold War period – have influenced the position of diversity in both the PRC and ROC; yet their nation-building projects remain Han-centric to varying degrees. As the PRC becomes more authoritarian under Xi Jinping and embarks on a new Cold War with the West, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is violently cracking down on perceived secessionist activities, tightening its controls over minority cultural, religious and linguistic expression, and actively seeking to assimilate non-Han minorities through its education, security and propaganda apparatuses. In contrast, the flourishing of democracy in Taiwan, with a series of competitive and open elections since 1996, is fostering greater individual rights and freedoms, and state policies to promote cultural pluralism and protect the island's diversity. Yet, as we will demonstrate, Han-centrism remains the dominant national orientation in both societies and continues to shape how ethnocultural diversity is viewed.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The first section examines the origin of the Han-centric multiculturalism in early twentieth-centuryChina and compares how it took root in the political systems of both the PRC and the ROC. The second section examines how Xi Jinping is turbocharging Han-centrism while systematically eroding minority rights, cultures, and identities. The third section explores the processes of democratization and nativization in Taiwan during the 1990s and 2000s, and interrogates how it shaped nation-building. The next section illustrates how Han-centrism and the continued domination of Taiwan's Mandarin- and Hokkien-speaking elite plagues Taiwan's burgeoning multiculturalism by sustaining unequal hierarchies among the island's different cultural communities. The final section discusses the place of immigrants within the competing national imaginaries of Taiwan and China. We conclude the article with a summary of our findings and the implications for this comparative exercise.

Nation-Building and Han-Centrism in Modern China

All countries and political parties engage in nation-building. Political elites seek to create a sense of social cohesion and common purpose among their populace. As Eric Hobsbawm (1990) reminds us, states make nations, not the other way around. According to Ernest Gellner (1997), nation-building is essentially about the fusion of culture and polity, that is, the top-down forging of a shared culture and sense of belonging within a single state. This process is far more complicated in countries with diverse ethnocultural communities, especially those that were built on the ruins of large, multiethnic empires.

On the face of it, the PRC and the ROC don't seem to fit that pattern. More than a billion of their people are said to be "Han" (汉人 or 汉族), a super-majority, which comprises ninety plus percent of China's population (Mullaney et al. 2012; Hayton 2020). Yet, this belies the rich cultural and linguistic diversity among those classified as Han by the state, people like the Cantonese, Hakka, Hoklo and others who speak a range of mutually unintelligible languages and hold diverse cultural and historical traditions. Then, we must also consider people classified as "minority nationalities" – Indigenous groups like the Uyghurs, Mongols, Malayo-Polynesians, and others – who have long lived on the vast majority of the territory that is today considered part of "China" before modern

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Han settler colonialism (Bulag 2021) and finally, new migrants from Africa, Southeast Asian and other parts of the world who now reside in the PRC and ROC, as well as Han migrants between China and Taiwan (Brown 2004). National and ethnic identities are never fixed, but rather in constant flux as state elites construct narratives of national unfolding and belonging, and hard and soft boundaries delineating who is part of the nation.

We can trace much of China's diversity back to the Qing empire that preceded the ROC and the PRC, where roughly two million conquest elite from Manchuria came to rule over a vast multiethnic confederation of Han, Mongol, Tibetan, Turkic, and other peoples, and molded both the spatial borders and cultural diversity inherited by the modern Chinese state. The 1911 nationalist revolution led by Sun Yat-sen was initially framed as a "racial revolution," spearheaded by the beleaguered Han majority to get rid of the "alien" and "barbaric" Manchu rulers and other non-Han peoples (Rhoads 2000).

Yet, upon the collapse of the Qing, the biggest challenge facing Han revolutionary leaders like Sun was how to exercise sovereignty and control over this massive empire and its resources and peoples. In sparsely populated western and northern regions where the Han were the minority, the Republican regime faced an immediate threat of foreign encroachment: British troops in Tibet; the Russian soldiers in Mongolia; the "great game" of competition in Central Asia; and finally, Japan's seizure of Taiwan and then Manchuria. Surrounded by hostile imperial powers intent on carving out spheres of influence on the decaying "Chinese" geo-body, nationalist leaders of nearly all political persuasions concluded China's very survival depended on unifying the territorial boundaries of the Qing empire. As a result, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as the Kuomintang or KMT) adopted a pragmatic set of policies aimed at saving the nation while reconstituting Han power (Liu 2003).

Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the KMT, and Li Dazhao, one of the co-founders of the CCP, played a foundational role in popularizing a new national imaginary, one that would fold all the peoples and territories of the former Qing empire into a single national/racial category: the *Zhonghua minzu*(中华民族), or what we will call the Zhonghua race-nation.[1] In their solutions to what came to be known as both the "national" and "frontier" questions (民族问题 and 边疆问题), the two political parties strategically recognized aspects of ethnocultural diversity and provided non-Han communities with a degree of cultural, and even political, autonomy while insisting on their inclusion, and eventual assimilation, into this new singular and homogenous "race-state" (国族) (Leibold 2007; Liu 2003; Hayton 2020).

Han racism (what CCP officials begrudgingly call "Han chauvinism" 大汉族主义) and colonial attitudes (what we might call the "Han man's burden" of civilizing the unruly frontier barbarians) have always undergirded the modern Chinese state's worldview. Diversity was something that had to be temporarily tolerated but ultimately overcome through colonial occupation, securitization, and cultural transformation. The pace of *Hanhua*(汉化), literally "becoming Han," or what is commonly called assimilation or sinicization, varied across the last century. At times, the state pursued it explicitly, and even violently, while at other times, it sought to use economic development, urbanization and state education to gradually erase differences. The Han dominated not only numerically but also materially, with early party officials asserting their dvanced culture, economic might and political status. The "ruling race" (统治民族), as CCP policymakers declared the Han, or more politely put, the Han "elder brother" of the Zhonghua family, was expected to guide and ultimately transform the "younger brothers" or minorities in their own image (Leibold 2007). The benchmark for conformity was northern Han norms – its Mandarin language, bureaucratic rules, culture, etiquette and customs – which became the political culture of both the CCP and the KMT over time.

Following the civil war between the two political parties and the KMT's subsequent retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the two parties' policies temporarily diverged, only to reconverge under the dictatorships of Mao Zedong in China and Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan. On the mainland, the CCP spent much of the 1950s building a multi-nationalities polity – formally classifying fifty-five minority groups, creating territorial autonomy, codifying new minority languages, and providing

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

them with extensive preferential policies to aid with their independent development (Mullaney 2010). The Soviet model of nation-building, what Terry Martin (2011) labeled the "affirmative action empire," was initially adopted by the CCP as a strategic path for securing sovereignty and control over the vast Qing borderlands. However, the Party's impatience and desire to pursue revolutionary transformation kept pushing it in the direction of colonial assimilation. Chairman Mao came to embrace the concept of a Zhonghua race-nation first championed by Sun Yat-sen and Li Dazhao, and ultimately declared class rather than ethnic, religious or other collective identities mattered most in achieving revolution, unity, and modernity (Hayton 2020).

Fei Xiaotong was one of modern China's most celebrated scholars of nation-building. His 1988 theory about the *duoyuan yiti*(多元一体) structure of the Zhonghua race-nation, often glossed as "plurality and unity" or "pluralistic unity," provides the modern ideological framework for Han-centrism. Across the great sweep of Chinese history and territory, the Han functioned as the "coagulative core" (凝聚核心) of China's multiethnic mosaic: a sticky and superior racial nucleus that literally fuses (融合) disparate historical and contemporary peoples as it rolls like a "snowball" (雪球) across "this piece of land," which is and remains "China" (Fei Xiaotong 1989). There is a distinct directionality and teleology in Fei's concept of nation-building, which can be more accurately labeled "from diversity" (多元) towards a "single body" (一体), with this "single body" functioning as "the main thread and direction" (主线和方向) of the nation, according to a recent editorial in the *People's Daily*(Wang 2022). Fei also had no doubt about Taiwan's place in this single body. In the late 1990s as Deputy Director of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, he questioned the viability of Deng Xiaoping's "one country, two systems" formula for reunification in the face of the inclusiveness of the Zhonghua race-nation and its advanced culture (Zuo 2023: 137). The superior Han core and its culture would eventually overcome the two systems, and bring the ROC and the PRC back together into a single polity.

This Han-centric concept of racial evolution not only accords with the Marxist theory of historical materialism – where hapless and backward "ahistorical races" were deemed "ethnic trash" (*völkerabfall*) destined for the dustbin of history – but is also deeply rooted in Confucian thought. Classic works of Confucianism assert the superiority of the Sinic culture of the Central Plains, and argue it will absorb the "barbarians of the four directions" (四夷) through a process of "come and be transformed" (来华) and "becoming Han" (汉化). In Confucian thought, the sedentary Sinic culture of northern and central China is the orthodoxy and "backward" non-Sinic peoples must ultimately be transformed by its influence over time (Leibold 2007; Leibold 2012).

Despite the often-radical shifts in PRC and ROC politics, Han-centrism remains the lodestar and throughline. The terminus is the fusion (融合) of all minority groups into the Han in forming the Confucian utopia of "Grand Union" (大同), or the homogenous *Zhonghua minzu* first envisioned by Sun Yat-sen and Li Dazhao; then operationalized by Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek, and finally theorized by Fei Xiaotong. The intensity of this assimilative teleology varied during different phases of PRC and ROC history. When the PRC was established in 1949 and the Party-state was weak, there was a brief period when the regime was more tolerant, strategically upholding respect for diversity and autonomy as it sought to consolidate its power over the mainland. The ensuing Anti-Rightist Movement (1957–1959) and then the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) dashed hopes for self-rule, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism, prompting widespread cultural destruction in borderland areas like Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang.

After the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese society was reconstructed, and ethnic diversity and tolerance reemerged under Deng Xiaoping, temporarily. Yet the logic of Han-centrism continued to shape nation-building work, albeit with a new belief that state-led developmentalism would fuel the flames of ethnic assimilation in the long term. In the third section of this article, we demonstrate how the PRC's current leader Xi Jinping has become impatient with the pace of racial fusion in China. By stoking the flames of spiritual, ideological, and cultural

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nationalism, Xi is doubling-down on Han-centrism. But for now, let us turn to the island nation of Taiwan to see how Han-centrism came to function there.

Nation-Building in Taiwan Under the Chiang Dictatorship

The islands of Taiwan possess a long history of colonialism, with its administration shifting from the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century, to the Qing empire and then finally the Japanese empire from 1895. The islands and their inhabitants, which include a small non-Han Indigenous community (Malayo-Polynesian) and earlier Han Chinese immigrants from the mainland, were always on the periphery of Chinese civilization. It was considered a backward and untamed frontier, similar to Tibet or Xinjiang, rather than an integral Chinese province (Teng 2004). The island and its elite consistently sought to protect its own autonomy from outside influence (Shepherd 1993). As Steven Phillips (2003) convincingly argues, the island elite had their own nascent national imaginary when the ROC government of Chiang Kai-shek gained control over Taiwan after World War II and the Japanese surrender. Chiang's vision of this "accidental state" (Lin 2016), as a temporary base and economic hub for reclaiming the mainland, clashed with the self-rule ambitions of the native Taiwanese elite, resulting in the violent February 28 Uprising and subsequent White Terror that marked Chiang's rule over Taiwan until his death in 1975.

Despite losing political control of the Chinese mainland, Chiang's vision of Greater China remained Han-centric throughout his lifetime, negating the existence of minority communities on Taiwan and the Chinese mainland alike (Farrer 2014). In his 1943 political tract *China's Destiny*, Chiang (1947) asserted all "Chinese" citizens, including the Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, Hui, and other frontier minorities, were interrelated "lineage branches" (宗支) of a single, consanguineous *Zhonghua minzu.* "Throughout its lengthy historical development," Chiang wrote, "[*the Zhonghua minzu*'s] lineages, on the occasion of the contact and blending of their culture, often discovered their common origin…In short, our various lineages belong to not only the same nation (民族) but also to the same race (种族)."

On Taiwan, over which his exile government had actual control, Chiang dismissed the Indigenous peoples as "mountain compatriots" (山地同胞) and viewed them as "feeble citizens" (弱势国民) who were no different from the Han but simply culturally backward. The Chinese characters for "compatriot" (同胞, *tongbao*) means "from the same uterus," highlighting the purported racial unity of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples with the Han and the Zhonghua race-nation(Van Bekhoven 2019, 260). Starting in the 1950s, the KMT government launched a series of assimilation campaigns, aimed at transforming Indigenous society through the imposition of Chinese language, clothing, food, housing and lifestyles (Harrison 2006). The Chiang regime did grant recognized tribes reserved representation on local government bodies and the ROC legislative assembly from 1972 onward, but exploited their land with little regard for the self-rule implied in the 1947 ROC Constitution (Templeman 2018).

Toward the island's majority Hokkien-speaking population, Chiang's KMT ruled as yet another colonial government, replacing the Japanese with their own set of assimilationist policies under martial law. Through strict control over the education system, media representations, and civil society, the KMT sought to create a single truth, language and identity to paste over the differences between the "mainlanders" (外省人) and the island's "native" (本省人 or 本地人) inhabitants. Regardless of whether one was Hoklo, Hakka or a so-called mountain compatriot, all residents of the islands were expected to be loyal subjects of Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship, and help transform Taiwan into a "unique treasure house" of traditional Han Chinese culture (Harrison 2006). The state's attitude towards ethnocultural diversity was not much different under the strong man rule of Chiang on Taiwan and Mao on the Chinese mainland.

Ironically, after the death of these two dictators, the PRC became a far more tolerant and multicultural society than the ROC. During the 1980s, the CCP restored, codified, and institutionalized its system of minority autonomy and set about reviving and restoring minority languages,

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cultures, and religions. The 1984 Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy set out a range of special legal protections and preferential policies for minority groups. With the devolution of political power and the reform and opening up of Chinese society under Deng Xiaoping, frontier regions like Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia experienced a degree of genuine autonomy over their own affairs for a brief time (Mackerras 2003). The Chiang dictatorship continued on Taiwan under his eldest son Chiang Ching-kuo. While the younger Chiang did initiate the process of political liberalization by lifting martial law in 1987, it wasn't until his death in 1988 that Taiwan began the gradual process of "nativization" (本土化), or what Bruce Jacobs (2013) called the "Taiwanization" of society, which would gradually lead to the recognition, and even celebration, of the island's ethnocultural diversity.

The parallel processes of Taiwanization, democratization, and liberalization did not immediately make Taiwan a more supportive society for diversity. As noted earlier, Confucianism, as the dominant culture on Taiwan, played a strong role in sustaining a hierarchical, Han-centric norm. After martial law ended, the KMT remained in power until the end of the twentieth century, with more radical reforms only occurring under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) since 2000. The ROC bureaucracy and its Constitution retained a colonial, assimilative orientation, and Han-centrism continued to pervade the entire political system. As Ferrer (2022) has demonstrated, the vestigial Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) in Taipei continued to view Tibet and Mongolia as backward peripheries subordinated to the civilized Han core despite the fact the ROC exercised no control over these frontier regions. Under the KMT regime, the MTAC repeatedly intervened in the affairs of the Tibetan government-in-exile and, like the PRC's own National Ethnic Affairs Commission, sought to undermine the Dalai Lama's authority and influence (Chen and Wallenböck 2023).

To sum up, both the CCP and the KMT adopted a Han-centric model of nation-building. They shared a similar faith in an inexorable teleology from a state of plurality (多元) towards a future state of perfect unity (一体). With reform and opening up during the 1980s, the CCP permitted a limited form of multiculturalism while democratization in Taiwan encouraged a similar acceptance of cultural pluralism. In 1992, the then-opposition DPP adopted a new "ethnic and cultural policy," which asserted that Taiwan comprised a diverse range of ethnic groups and committed itself to pursuing a policy of multicultural citizenship. In the fourth section of this article, we will return to Taiwan's situation in order to demonstrate how Han identity – or more specifically, Han settlers' identity – is still prevalent within Taiwanese society, despite efforts by the DPP government and civil society groups to promote multiculturalism. The direction in which Taiwan is moving, however, is certainly different from Xi Jinping's vision of a new Han empire. In the following section, we turn to recent changes in Xi's self-declared "New Era" (新时代).

Forging Racial Consciousness in Xi's New Era

The 1988 Lhasa protest movement in Tibet, 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, and 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc sparked a major rethink of nation-building work (民族工作) in more conservative segments of PRC society. Influential Peking University scholar-official Ma Rong (2012), for example, argues the PRC has placed too much emphasis on cultural diversity and not enough on national unity. Its policies have created two Chinas on the mainland: the China of the Han majority and the China inhabited by the fifty-five ethnic minorities. This "dual structure" reifies ethnocultural differences and contributes to social conflict and a general lack of mutual interactions and understanding. "At present," Ma Rong wrote in 2012 on the eve of Xi Jinping's ascension to power, "the biggest danger China faces in the twenty-first century is the breakup of the country." The violence and unrest that broke out in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009 confirmed the urgent need for a "second generation of nation-building policies" in the minds of many top CCP leaders, including Xi Jinping (Leibold 2013).

Recently, Federico Brusadelli (2023), a conceptual historian, published an article demonstrating how serious PRC intellectuals took the breakup of Yugoslavia and the ensuing crisis of Kosovo in

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the early 1990s. Echoing what we noted earlier, Brusadelli argues that Mao never fully accepted the Soviet model, but rather the CCP has always been trying to assimilate its minorities and exercise complete control over its ethnic peripheries. What happened to the USSR and Yugoslavia during the 1990s presented PRC intellectuals and political leaders with a poignant lesson about the dangers of not only federalism but also how sovereignty could never be shared. In response, as the PRC entered a new era of open competition with the West and its efforts to "blackmail, contain, blockade, and exert maximum pressure on China," the CCP re-centralized power under Xi Jinping and returned to the openly assimilationist policies of the Cultural Revolution, albeit with a new focus on techno-authoritarianism and rule by the Party's law (Byler 2021).

Beginning in 2014, Xi Jinping spoke about the urgent need to "forge the communal consciousness of the Zhonghua race-nation" (铸牢中华民族共同体意识), with the phrase emerging as the central ideological formulation of nation-building work under Xi. A shared Zhonghua culture and identity is once again emphasized over minority identities and cultures. Under Xi, CCP officials are encouraged to actively intervene in minority communities, aggressively fight against foreign interfence and separatist activities in frontier regions, and push forward new policies aimed at remolding non-Han minorities in the culture, behavior and linguistic norms of the Han majority. The crackdown on "extremism," reeducation camps and tech-enhanced surveillance systems in Xinjiang are the most dramatic example of this new approach (Byler 2021).

Despite de jure legal protections for minority cultures and languages, Mandarin (普通话) is now the only medium of instruction in all schools and even kindergartens. Patriotic Han-centric education begins at the age of three in state preschools, and the CCP is actively erasing ethnic cultures and traditions and replacing them with those of the Han majority (Lavička 2021; Friend and Thayer 2017). Recent work by Lavička and Chen (2023) demonstrates how religious policies in China are becoming more draconian under Xi Jinping as he insists on the "sincization" (中国化) of "foreign" religious traditions in China, removing domes and minarets from mosques, for example, and replacing them with Han-style pagoda rooftops and towers. The CCP continues to work toward the final eradication of religion as Marx advocated, which would, at the same time, undermine minority cultures and traditions.

Scholars have noted the close relationship between multiculturalism and regime type, with cultural pluralism more difficult to sustain in autocratic regimes (e.g., Kim 2014; Van Assche et al. 2019; Velez and Lavine 2017). China's current leader Xi Jinping has a good deal in common with Mao and Chiang, and this sort of strongman rule is not conducive to diversity and tolerance. In Xi Jinping's eyes, the Zhonghua race-nation is a "large family" with fused bloodlines and a common origin, and any diversity is performative and temporary in nature. The Han majority are the racial and cultural core of the Zhonghua family, and thus destined to domesticate and ultimately fuse any ethnic Other as the superior "coagulative core" (凝聚核心) of the great Han "snowball."

Xi Jinping does not speak in explicit terms about the Han being the core of the Zhonghua race-nation, but rather uses metaphors like the "descendants of Yan and Huang" (炎黄子孙), "sons and daughters of Huaxia" (华夏女儿), and the "Yellow River Valley culture" (黄河文化) as the "maternal trunk" (母体和主干) of the nation (Tian 2021). Zhonghua culture is the "backbone" (主干) and ethnic cultures are the "branches and leaves" (枝叶), Xi declared (Xinhua 2021): "Only when the roots are deep and the trunk is thick, can the branches and leaves flourish." As Chinese politics has turned distinctly authoritarian under Xi Jinping, so has its cultural politics.

As Farrer (2014) argues, Xi's vision of a "Grand Union" goes well beyond the peoples of mainland China. The collective consciousness of Zhonghua includes the residents of Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and even overseas Chinese (华侨), whose unity is exalted as a part of Xi's so-called "China dream." Hence, Xi's nation-building agenda is transnational in coverage. And China's foreign policy is now part of its "grand national rejuvenation" (民族大复兴), with the aim of bolstering claims over Taiwan, the South China Sea and other so-called "lost territories." On 2 January 2019, for example, Xi gave a speech at the meeting marking the fortieth anniversary of Mao's "message to compatriots in Taiwan," in which he stated: "The compatriots on both sides of

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Strait share the same roots and origin, same culture and race, and Zhonghua culture is the spiritual root vein and abode of the compatriots on both sides of the strait" (Xi 2019).[2] This same narrative of shared blood has been adopted by other public figures in the PRC when talking about Taiwan. Here, Xi sounds a lot like Chiang Kai-shek in *China's Destiny*, with the various "lineages" (宗支) of the Zhonghua race-nation possessing the same origin, blood, history, and destiny. In sum, nation-building has become more intense, urgent, and expansionist under Xi Jinping, with the CCP adopting interventionalist policies aimed at manufacturing a shared racial consciousness, leaving fewer spaces for the articulation of non-Han cultures and identities.

Taiwan's Divergent yet Incomplete Decolonial Project

As mentioned, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, both the CCP and the KMT begrudgingly tolerated diversity while upholding a Han-centric hierarchy and the ultimate goal of fused homogeneity. However, in 1992, when the DPP was still an opposition political party, it adopted a new policy, which recognized Taiwan's ethnocultural diversity and committed itself to the pursuit of multicultural citizenship (Wang 2004). Notably, it stressed Taiwanese identity was based on civic participation rather than some shared cultural or blood relationship, as the CCP and its current leader Xi Jinping hold, and denounced the "oppressive policy of assimilation or one-sided integration" while advocating "a multicultural policy of respect for differences and coexistence and co-prosperity" (DPP 2004).

Two years later, the KMT government under President Lee Teng-hui, adopted the term "aborigine" (原住民) to refer to Taiwan's Indigenous communities and established the Council of Aboriginal Affairs under the Executive Yuan, where their interests could be represented at the ministerial level of the central government. Nonetheless, the expectation remained one of assimilation, with Lee arguing in 1994 "the Taiwan aborigines cannot exist apart from Taiwanese society…," rather they are part of "our society" and must "melt" (融入) into Taiwanese society by constructing a new "community of destiny" (生命共同体) (Office of the President of the Republic of China 1994). Here, Lee Teng-hui didn't sound that dissimilar to CCP politicians, nor were his actions. He opposed the idea of native land title, the so-called "mountain reserve land" (山地保留地), which was a holdover from Japanese colonial times, and instead illegally whittled away and exploited Indigenous land (Ku 2005). Han immigrants from the mainland remained the core of Lee Teng-hu's "new Taiwanese" identity (Lee 1999, 193-94).

Yet starting with Lee, the KMT and then the DPP embarked on a path towards the articulation of a more inclusive, multicultural Taiwanese identity. In this identity, the Indigenous Other became a key symbol of distinction from mainland Chinese identity but was also subordinate to the Han identity and culture at its core (Chang 2004; Ku 2005; Jacobs & Liu 2007). The belief at the time of Lee Teng-hui was only aboriginal culture could present a national vision of Taiwan that is distinct from Chinese culture on the mainland. This de-sinicization project was about using what was unique about Taiwan to construct a Taiwanese identity and culture distinct from the PRC (Chang 2004; Brown 2004). Under the democratically elected Lee Teng-hui, the KMT and DPP opposition pushed for constitutional reform, including an additional article in 1997 "affirming cultural pluralism" and "actively preserving and fostering of Indigenous languages and cultures."

Under the DPP governments of Chen Shui-bian(2000–2008) and Tsai Ing-wen(2016–2023), the Taiwanization process gained momentum, and gradually evolved in the direction of de-colonization, internationalization, and continued de-sinicization. In 2001, President Chen Shui-bian announced that the ROC was a multiethnic and multicultural country. In 2005, the Legislative Yuan passed the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law, which not only adopted the UN definition of "Indigenous peoples" (原住民族) but also promised extensive self-rule and protection of Indigenous cultures. In 2016, Tsai Ing-wen offered a national apology in Parliament for past injustices and established a Transitional Justice Committee within the President's Office. In short,

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

multiculturalism emerged as a new framework for understanding Taiwanese society and the civic values that uphold it (Wang 2004).

More and more citizens came to embrace the concept of indigeneity, and the need to decolonize knowledge and power across Taiwanese society. This process of decolonization is perhaps most evident (and arguably most successful) in the field of Taiwanese Studies. Take, for example, the important work of Professor Shu-mei Shih, a Korean-born Taiwanese-American scholar, who has led a group of academics in building an inclusive, just, and tolerant body of knowledge about Taiwan and its peoples (e.g., Shih and Tsai 2021). Yet, tensions remain between an indigenous decolonization project and the DPP's de-sinicization agenda, with restorative justice for Taiwan's majority Hoklo population – who still view themselves as victims of Mainlander violence perpetuated under the Chiang Kai-shek dictatorship – often taking precedence over Indigenous rights and language revitalization. Furthermore, the decolonization process is hamstrung by the ROC Constitution, which "preserves a relationship of dominance between the government and the Indigenous peoples," and is unlikely to be revised to recognize Indigenous peoples' sovereignty due to fear the PRC would see this as Taiwan's move for de jure independence and attack the island nation (Van Bekhoven 2019, 278). As Indigenous scholar Awi Mona (2019) argues, "neither the unified nor the multicultural national model [of the KMT and DPP respectively] has a place for Indigenous *sui generis*status," meaning the Taiwanese public "is indifferent to Indigenous rights," and the sovereign claims of Indigenous people remain unrecognized.

In the eyes of the officials in Beijing, 98.6 percent (2020) of Taiwan's population is Han, while only 350,000 (1.4 percent) are members of the so-called*Gaoshanzu*(高山族, "high mountain clan") minority. Identity politics in Taiwan, however, is far more complicated due to the interplay of state recognition and self-ascription. The Taiwanese government officially recognizes sixteen Indigenous tribes with a population of over half a million people (2.5 percent of the island's population). It does not lump all Indigenous groups into a single Gaoshan category, as the PRC has done. Furthermore, some communities in Taiwan, such as the Siraya, self-identify as Indigenous and have successfully sought legal recognition despite opposition from other groups, which reflects deep-seated tensions between the more sinicized "plains Indigenous peoples" and the already state recognized "mountain Indigenous peoples" (Hioe 2022).

Identity is increasingly self-constructed and hyphenated in Taiwan with the term *zuquan*(族群, ethnicity) used instead of the inherently contradictory *minzu* idiom on the Chinese mainland. In contrast to the PRC, where the Han *minzu* officially comprise 91 percent of the population, Han identity is far more unstable and fluid in Taiwan's multicultural politics. The ROC continues to use the term Han race/clan/people (汉族 or 汉人), claiming that besides the 2.5 percent of the population which is Indigenous, the "majority of the rest are Han," with the Executive Yuan (2022) putting the figure of Han people in Taiwan at 96.4 percent. Yet Han identity is bifurcated by a range of sub-identities, such as Mainlander (12%), Hakka (13%) and Hoklo (also called Fulao 福佬) (73%),[3] which possess far more grassroots saliency in public life. In sharp contrast, *minzu* identity in the PRC is state-ascribed; in other words, it is assigned by the state and stamped across one's identification documents. Everyone is assigned a single category or must pick one in the case of the offspring of inter-*minzu* marriages, with Chinese president Xi Jinping declaring in 2014: "Fifty-six*minzu* is fifty-six*minzu*; we don't want to divide any further. If we divide further, we could have several hundred *minzu*. Opening this box will lead to chaos" (National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China 2014). In contrast, state-issued identification documents in Taiwan do not list the ethnicity of its holder, and individual citizens have more freedom to define their own identities free from state oversight.

An overarching "Taiwanese identity" (台湾人认同) also sits awkwardly alongside various ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities in the ROC. Taiwan was declared the "dominant theme" of the school curriculum in the 2001 educational reforms. A subject called "native languages" is now compulsory in elementary schools from the third grade. Some schools now offer Indigenous languages; but most teach either Hokkien or Hakka alongside the national language of Mandarin.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The new history curriculum places less emphasis on Han culture and history on the mainland and more on the history of Taiwan and its global connections. There are ongoing state and civil society efforts to construct Taiwanese identity, history, culture, and even a "national brand" that is distinct from the PRC and the CCP's version of both Zhonghua-ness and Han identity. As a result, the number of people self-identifying as Chinese is now at an all-time low, a mere 2.5 percent in 2023, with 63 percent identifying themselves as "Taiwanese" and a further 32 percent as both Taiwanese and Chinese.[4] Yet, these surveys only contrast Taiwanese and Chinese identity, and tell us little about the quotidian politics of self-recognition in Taiwan. That said, one could argue, because of the divergent political path of China and Taiwan, Fei Xiaotong's Han-centric*duoyuan yiti* is the orthodoxy enforced by the CCP on the mainland, while Fei's formula is losing saliency in Taiwan, or rather being slowly complicated, if not undermined, by the civic participation and bottom-up identity politics associated with a democratic society.

The process of democratization has produced regime changes in Taiwan, which in turn has fostered internal division among political parties regarding the identity issues. The chief political cleavage in Taiwan has been over a party's identification with the Chinese motherland and its culture. The KMT embraces a stronger Chinese identity and advocates national and foreign policies that support this orientation, ranging from a more Chinese-focused curriculum to more robust economic cooperation with the PRC. The DPP, in contrast, champions Taiwanese identity and favors domestic and foreign policies that de-sinicize Taiwan. Politicians frequently leverage identity politics to advance their agendas. With regime transition amidst election cycles, government policies' tilt, which inevitably influences identity politics. Thus the influence and nature of "Han-centrism" has varied under different governments, and is likely to remain fluid under current president Lai Ching-te with the KMT gaining more power in the legislature at the 2024 election.

In sum, tensions remain between competing nation-building projects and their national imaginaries both within Taiwan and China, as well as on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. Take, for example, clothing, one highly visual representation of the "national brand." The traditional costume of a nation or ethnic group can operate at both the level of official state nationalism as well as the daily practices of identity articulation (Finnane 2007). At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, fifty-six children dressed in traditional "ethnic costumes" (民族服饰) paraded the PRC flag across the Bird's Nest Stadium, only for it to be revealed that they were all Han actors. When questioned about this sleight-of-hand, a CCP official stated: "It is typical for Chinese performers to wear different apparel from different ethnic groups. There is nothing special about it" (Leibold 2010). As part of Xi Jinping's new Han-centric cultural nationalism, ethnic costumes are becoming less visible in PRC society. They are still worn during the obligatory minority song and dance routine at the New Year Eve TV gala and by Han tourists visiting famous sites in Tibet or Yunnan but are less visible in Party-orchestrated performances of the nation. At the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, for example, the PRC flag was passed across the Bird's Nest Stadium by a more diverse group of citizens – soldiers, workers and the odd minority – dressed in various state uniforms. In the PRC, the nation is ultimately united under the red flag of the CCP, and the increasingly dour attire of its (Han, male) apparatchiks (Buckley 2016).

There has been a long-running and controversial discussion about the need for a single "national costume" (国服) in the PRC, with repeated proposals (some by Chinese politicians) for the adoption of Han clothing (*Hanfu*, 汉服) as the national costume. In the words of one official, "the Han are the main racial group (主体民族) of the Zhonghua race-nation in contemporary China, and the Han language (汉语) is the common language of China as well as the national language, so the establishment of *Hanfu* as the 'national costume' will be of great help in enhancing the sense of national pride and cohesion of the country. It not only represents the image of the Zhonghua race-nation, but also strengthens the love for the motherland of the whole country, including compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan" (Weixin 2023; Carrico 2017; Law and Qin 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

There has been a similar debate regarding Taiwan's national costume, with clothing becoming part of the decolonization and de-sinicization projects. In 2004, Chen Shui-bian repealed the "Dress Regulation," which dated back to the 1930s and mandated uniforms for students and civil servants, arguing it was out-of-date. The Regulation required men to wear a blue robe with a black jacket, leather shoes, and a Western-style hat. As for women, there were two options: a blue cheongsam with leather shoes or a jacket skirt with leather shoes (Huang 2017). The repeal of the Regulation set off a heated discussion about what national dress Taiwan should have, if any, and how to distinguish it from that of the PRC. Cultural creators turned to Indigenous motifs when seeking to design a new national costume, but this was not without controversy. For instance, when Li Meihua designed a costume with Indigenous totem motifs for the 11th Miss Taiwan Beauty Contest, some Indigenous leaders claimed cultural misappropriation.[5] Whose nation; whose costume, they asked. These controversies and disagreements over the appropriate national costume demonstrate the fluid and contested nature of nation-building in both the PRC and ROC. In the next two sections, we explore two other issues that are also contested in order to illustrate the complex nature of identity politics and nation-building in Taiwan: first, we examine the emergence of a Hoklo-dominated Taiwanese identity and how it complicates the emerging multicultural Taiwan framework; second, we explore how immigration and transnational flows raise new questions about the nation-building processes in both Taiwan and the PRC.

The Hoklo Elite at the Centre of Taiwanese Identity

The idea of a multicultural Taiwan – centered around the "four ethnic groups" (四个族群) of Mainlander, Hoklo, Hakka, and Indigenous peoples – has been proposed for constructing a new Taiwanese identity that is distinct from the Han-centrism of Xi Jinping's PRC. However, as Taiwan's large Hoklo elite have been at the forefront of democratization, di-sinicization and Indigenous rights, this new Taiwanese identity is ultimately hierarchal with obvious inequalities among the four groups (Wu 2017; Wang 2007). In short, the cultural and identity politics associated with this nascent Taiwanese identity revolves around a (largely unspoken) "nativist Hokkien localism" (Wilson 2009). As such, Hoklo identity is privileged in most of the literature, cinema, art, and music associated with Taiwaneseness (Chen 2023), not to mention politics and the economy, while Hakka, Indigenous and migrant peoples remain a marginalized part of multicultural Taiwan.

Take the Hakka (客家人, "guest people"), for example. There are more than four million Hakka on Taiwan (roughly 15 percent of the total population), who trace their origin back to the Chinese mainland. Their history of forced migration and racial discrimination form an important part of Hakka identity. With the construction of a new Taiwanese identity, the Hakka – in particular their youth – face increasing pressure to abandon their nostalgia for their ancestral homeland in China, and native language. Just as Indigenous groups and the Hoklo elite mobilize locally to demand their cultural rights, various Hakka groups advocate for their rights in Taiwan dating back to the 1980s. Yet some Hakka leaders now believe they must engage with the processes of democratization and localization in Taiwan so that their group can find a place in Taiwan's nation-building process rather than being isolated and excluded. Some promote the concept of "Taiwanese Hakka," rather than "Chinese Hakka" or "Hakka in Taiwan," to situate themselves within multicultural Taiwan while also promoting their own cultural and linguistic rights (Wang 2004 and 2007).

While Hakka activists have secured their collective rights and distinct cultural identity within Taiwan's evolving national imaginary, not all Hakka leaders are satisfied, and some believe it has come at a cost. The Hakka, as a group, have historically migrated both within and beyond the Sinosphere, not just to Taiwan but also to other parts of the world like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States. Hakka identity, at its core, is a fluid set of hybrid, transnational connections (Leo 2015). The Hakka, generally speaking, are well integrated into Taiwanese society, and being recognized as a protected minority group can be a positive, affirming experience;

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

however, the rigid boundaries of the multicultural Taiwan framework, with its four neat yet unequal categories, can also negate the fluid and composite nature of the Hakka diaspora. There is a subtle tension between the development of a new inclusive Taiwanese identity and the transnationalism of the Hakka diaspora and its identity. Wang (2007) demonstrates how some Hakka activists are pushing for the infusion of greater hybridity, heterogeneity, and diversity into multicultural Taiwan.

Indigenous groups face similar challenges within a Hoklo-dominated multiculturalism. The ROC state seeks to recognize past injustices and remedy the mistakes of the past; yet a lingering assimilatory logic still expects Indigenous peoples to conform to majority norms. The legal system and courts, like society as a whole, have turned a blind eye to the failure to uphold the autonomous rights contained within the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law. Indigenous peoples and their cultures are merely deployed for their strategic value in distinguishing Taiwan from the PRC and its Han-centric identity. Nesterova (2019) argues not only does mainstream society need to move beyond their racist and stereotypical views, Indigenous peoples also need to shed the colonial mindset that has internalized views that the status quo is simply better than the past. In other words, Indigenous people in Taiwan must adopt a proactive stance in demanding restorative justice, equity, and sovereignty within a fully decolonized Taiwan.

In short, Taiwan's ongoing experiment with multiculturalism and a more inclusive Taiwanese identity is a work in progress. The process is far messier and bottom-up than the state-led nation-building agenda in the PRC. And as such, tensions and hierarchies continue to exist between the four main ethnic groups, and others who call Taiwan home. In the next section, we interrogate the equally thorny issue of whether a "foreign Other," such as mainland Chinese spouses or Southeast Asian immigrant workers, can be included within this new Taiwanese identity.

Are Immigrants Part of the Nation?

In the PRC, although the number of foreign residents has grown and the government is starting to develop a legal and institutional framework for managing them, non-Chinese immigrants are, generally speaking, not considered part of the country's nation-building project. There is some discussion about the need to attract global talent and migrant workers as China's population both ages and declines (Haugen and Speelman 2022), but the nation in the PRC is rigidly Han-centric with only limited foreign, non-Chinese migration, interracial marriage, and even less naturalization. Take, for example, the once large group of African migrants residing in the southern city of Guangzhou, who have long been subjected to daily forms of discrimination and overt racism in what the locals have nicknamed "Chocolate City." The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these tensions, and saw their numbers dwindle due to the intense surveillance they were placed under (Castillo and Amoah 2020). Despite some intermarriage between Chinese citizens and other Asian peoples, mixed-race marriages continue to be highly stigmatized and minority nationalities who cannot pass as "Chinese," such as Uyghurs and some Tibetans, are viewed as both "dangerous" and "backward" (Leung 2015). The idea that Anglo foreigners could somehow become the PRC's "57 ethnic group," as a Turkish professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University once suggested (Zhu 2013), is nonsensical to most Han Chinese.

Similarly, until the early 2000s, immigrants were not part of Taiwan's conception of the nation despite their growing presence on the island. There are now nearly a million foreign residents living in Taiwan (over 4 percent of the total population) and they chiefly come from two sources: mainland China and Southeast Asia (Lin 2023). Like foreigners in the PRC, these two groups are discursively constructed as an ethnic Other in Taiwanese conceptions of their national self. Furthermore, they are also viewed as innately inferior with social and cultural stigmas attached to them (Zemanek and Momesso 2023). As a threat to the purity, quality and now security of the island's population, foreign brides and their children are expected to assimilate into Taiwanese

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

society if they wish to be accepted, and incidents of discrimination and abuse are commonplace (Kasai 2022).

From the mid-to-late 2010s, civil society actors became more vocal about the rights of new immigrants in Taiwan and started advocating for more open, inclusive, and tolerant attitudes toward them. In 2016, Tsai Ing-Wen's DPP administration adopted its New Southbound Policy (NSP), which aims to boost trade, investment, and security links between Taiwan and the countries of South and Southeast Asia while reducing the island's economic dependency and its previous cultural orientation towards China. Unlike previous policies, the NSP seeks to encourage two-way flows rather than one-way Taiwanese overseas trade and investment. Here exchanges between peoples and cultures are emphasized, with Southeast Asian migrants living in Taiwan now viewed as valuable bridge for achieving the government's NSP objectives (Kasai 2022).

As a result, once overlooked and stigmatized Southeast Asian migrants and their offspring were praised in Tsai's policy speeches and referred to as valuable cultural assets for strengthening Taiwanese multiculturalism and global soft power. Lan (2019) argues that this state-led "neoliberal multiculturalism" appropriates and instrumentalizes foreign residents for the state's economic, political and security interests. It is common to hear complaints that the Taiwanese government is simply paying lip service to multiculturalism without any meaningful effort to improve the rights, status and wellbeing of its migrant and Indigenous communities. Yet there have been some concrete policy shifts. Take, for example, the addition of "new immigrant languages" to the education curriculum in 2019, where primary school students can take one 50-minute class per week in one of seven Southeast Asian languages. While chiefly symbolic, this more inclusive curriculum and wider public discussion about the role of Southeast Asian migrants within Taiwanese society does strengthen civic-forms of belonging while undermining narrow, blood-based forms of racial and cultural nationalism.

In sharp contrast, "foreign brides" (外籍新娘) from the Chinese mainland, whose numbers are smaller than those of Southeast Asian migrant workers, are increasingly excluded from Taiwan's multicultural project. Pejoratively labelled "mainland sisters" (*dalu mei*, 大陆美), women born in the PRC are believed to be not only untrustworthy but also backward. In fact, as relations with the PRC sour and become more acrimonious, the mistrust of mainland Chinese migrants in Taiwan has intensified (Zheng 2023). Yet, unlike Southeast Asian migrants, the racial and linguistic similarities between mainland wives and their Taiwanese husbands allows for what Sara Friedman (2015) calls an "exceptional" or "partial" citizenship. Chinese spouses can naturalize by shifting their household registration to Taiwan but face a probationary form of citizenship with intensive regulatory surveillance, restrictions on certain types of employment, and a ban on sponsoring dependents from mainland China. Scholars such as Allen Chun (2002) have noted the inward-looking nature of Taiwan's multiculturalism, which aims only to enhance the cohesion between the ethnic groups already on the island while largely overlooking the continuous inflow of immigrants to the island through work or marriage.

In sum, while non-Chinese immigrants are excluded from the CCP's conception of the Zhonghua race-nation, they are selectively deployed in the ROC as the Taiwanese government seeks allies in its political and cultural rivalry with the mainland. Under the DPP government's rhetoric about multicultural and global Taiwan, hierarchical forms of inclusion and exclusion coexist, awkwardly, at times. The result is continued Han-settler-centrism, Hokkien-localism, tokenistic Indigenous representation, and the selective appropriation of certain immigrant groups for soft power diplomacy. Despite recent efforts to view migrants as Taiwan's "fifth ethnic group," these migrants are hardly a homogenous group, and thus further complicate state-led efforts to construct an inclusive, multicultural Taiwanese identity distinct from the Han-centrism on display in the PRC (Zemanek and Momesso 2023). Like the PRC, nation-building in Taiwan retains certain assimilative assumptions with the norms of its Mandarin and Hokkien speaking elite as the standard on which minority groups are ultimately judged and expected to conform to.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Concluding Remarks: Same, Same but Increasingly Different

Although both the PRC and the ROC and their ruling parties have altered over time, overall, there are numerous similarities between both sides' nation-building ideologies and practices, more than is commonly acknowledged. Today's divergent paths of CCP neo-authoritarianism under Xi Jinping and the DPP's continued liberalization create the impression that the "two Chinas" have little in common when it comes to nationalism and the governance of ethnocultural diversity. In this article, we have examined both sides' policies since 1911 to demonstrate how they are surprisingly similar. The CCP and the KMT adopted a parallel set of pragmatic policies for building a unified Zhonghua nation during the first half of the twentieth century, a vision of Han-centrism that hardened during the dictatorships of Mao Zedong in mainland China and Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan. Until recently, both states tolerated a degree of ethnocultural diversity; yet this multiculturalism was viewed as both regrettable and temporary, with different groups and identities expected to fuse together in a single national melting pot as the countries developed. This was what Fei Xiaotong called China's unique national form, which was evolving "from multiple origins towards a single body" (多元一体), with the Han super-majority functioning as its "coagulative core" or giant "snowball" for absorbing and fusing other cultures and peoples together in the formation of a homogenous race-state.

Both parties have pursued a top-down agenda of cultural nationalism across the last century. These party-state-directed projects actively construct a set of cultural traditions, symbols, and ideological formulations for thinking, feeling, and acting out the unity of the nation. This model of nation-building, with its core logic of hierarchical inclusion, remains a barrier to genuine multiculturalism and decolonization. There has long been tension within both the PRC and ROC between assimilationist and accommodationist measures. For example, under Deng Xiaoping and Lee Teng-hui, the two countries adopted a more tolerant attitude towards cultural pluralism while also insisting on the inevitability of assimilation for non-Han communities.

Life on both sides of the Taiwan Straits is doggedly Han-centric, with minority cultures, identities, and lifestyles expected to ultimately conform – if not, bend in the case of Xi's China – to Han norms in the name of progress. These Han norms have been repeatedly imposed (sometimes by force) on local, migrant, and Indigenous communities through waves of colonial domination and dispossession. Finally, neoliberalism underpins these colonial state structures in the PRC and Taiwan and continues to hinder efforts for justice, equality, and fairness. The bottom line is that if you are born into a Tibetan or Paiwan family, your life chances are far more constrained than those of the Han elite.

Yet, there is also no denying Taiwan and the PRC are moving in opposite directions when it comes to nation-building at present. Xi Jinping is obsessed with forging a single, Han-centric consciousness on the mainland, while a more inclusive, civic nationalism, based on liberal democratic norms, is taking hold in Taiwan. Membership in the nascent Taiwan nation is increasingly defined by community engagement and a shared set of liberal values rather than a single state-defined culture, race, or even ideology. This reflects the wider embrace of pluralism, diversity, and tolerance across Taiwanese society, while tech-enhanced surveillance and party-defined conformity increasingly mark life inside Xi Jinping's China. Ritualized performances of ethnic (and often exotic) Otherness continue to be performed in the PRC for the voyeuristic pleasure of visiting Han and foreign tourists; yet, on the main stage, Uyghurs and other Indigenous and minority communities are being taught to dress, act, and speak as one with their Han minders in state schools and factory assembly lines. By contrast, identity construction is increasingly negotiated through bottom-up processes in Taiwan, where individuals have more agency to narrate and perform themselves in a hybrid and fluid fashion. In sum, while on the surface, Taiwan and the PRC might look rather similar in Beijing and Taipei, with the dominance of what the Chinese call "black hair, black eyes, yellow skin" (黑眼睛黑头发黄皮肤), their national values are diverging:

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The PRC towards Han-centric totalitarianism under Xi Jinping and Taiwan toward a more civic, democratic and diverse form of Taiwanese identity under the DPP.

Financial support. James Leibold's contribution was supported by funding from the Australian Research Council (DP#180101651) and the National Science and Technology Council of Taiwan.
Julie Yu-Wen Chen's work has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe coordination and support action 101079069–EUVIP–HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Disclosure. None.

Notes

1 The Chinese term *minzu*(民族) is deeply polysemic and politically loaded. Depending on the context, it can refer to both the collective singularity of the Zhonghua race-nation(中华民族) as well as the distinct identities of the fifty-five officially recognised minority nationalities (少数民族). In the past minorities like the Tibetans and Mongols were called "nationalities" in English, but in recent years, Party officials (and many Western scholars) began using the English term "ethnic minorities," thus erasing the autonomy, sovereign potential, and self-determination of these groups. Finally, as a part of their nation-building efforts, Chinese political leaders seek to highlight, and even demonstrate scientifically, the consanguinity of the Zhonghua nation, and thus the neologism *Zhonghua minzu* is best rendered as the Zhonghua race-nation in English. See Bulag (2021).

2 See, for example, how the phrase used by Xi Jinping was repeated in a public announcement on the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference website on 20 December 2021, at https://archive.md/FUlTo(accessed December 5, 2023).

3 The national census in Taiwan does not collect data on ethnicity. Rather it only counts the number of Indigenous people, non-resident foreigners (making a distinction between Chinese mainland/Hong Kong/Macau and non-Chinese foreign workers), and language users (Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, Indigenous, and other languages). See National Statistics Republic of Taiwan, found at https://eng.stat.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=2400&s=231359(accessed 12 March, 2023). The statistics listed here come from the semi-official Taiwan Education Centre in Mongolia, and can be found here: https://archive.md/Jzy2h.

4 On the website of the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University, there is comprehensive data on the percentages of people who identify themselves as Taiwanese compared to Chinese since 1992: https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961(accessed December 5, 2023).

5 In the following link, one can find the original news item in Chinese about the debate over Indigenous elements in the Ms Taiwan's national dress. It was aired and published by TITV News on 24 November 21, https://news.ipcf.org.tw/11584(accessed December 5, 2023).

References

Brown, Melissa J. 2004. *Is Taiwan Chinese: The Impact of Culture, Power and Migration on Changing Identities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brusadelli, Federico. 2023. "A Federal Nightmare: The People's Republic of China and the Breakup of Yugoslavia." *Global Perspectives* 4(1). https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2023.75315

Buckley, Chris. 2016. "China's Leader wears many Hats, but only one Jacket," *The New York Times*, 25 May, https://archive.is/Lh3Ep.

Bulag, Uradyn. 2021. "Minority Nationalities as Frankenstein's Monsters? Reshaping 'the Chinese Nation' and China's Quest to become a 'Normal Country'," *The China Journal* 86: 46–67.

Byler, Darren. 2021. *In the Camps: China's High-Tech Penal Colony*. New York: Penguin

Carrico, Kevin. 2017. *The Great Han: Race, Nationalism, and Tradition in China Today*. Oakland California: University of California Press.

Castillo, Roberto and Padmore Adusei Amoah. 2020. "Africans in Post-Covid-19 Pandemic China: Is there a Future for China's New Minority?" *Asian Ethnicity* 21(4):560–565.

Chang, Bi-yu. 2004. "From Taiwanisation to de-sinification," *China Perspectives*, 56: 1–16.

Chen, Julie Yu-Wen. 2023. "A Transnational Approach to Understanding Japanese Colonial Influence on Taiwan: Manifestations in Taiwan's Cinema and Popular Music." In *Transnational East Asian Studies*, eds Kevin Cawley and Julia Schneider, 199–213. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Chen, Julie Yu-Wen and Ute Wallenböck. 2023. "Reincarnation System of Living Buddhas: A Taiwanese Perspective." In *The Dalai Lama's Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question*, edited by Jagannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, 62–67. Stockholm: Institute for Security & Development Policy.

Chiang, Kai-Shek. 1947. *China's Destiny & Chinese economic theory*, with notes and commentary by Philip Jaffe. London: D. Dobson.

Chun, Allen. 2002. "The Coming Crisis of Multiculturalism in 'Transnational' Taiwan." *Social Analysis* 46(2): 102–122.

DPP. 2004. "Minjindang zuquan duoyuan guojia yiti jueyi" (DPP Resolution on ethnic diversity and national unity," *Lianhebao*, 27 September 2004. https://archive.md/C0RWD (accessed May 29, 2023).

Election Study Center of National Chengchi Univrsity. 2023. Taiwanese/Chinese Identity (1992/06-2023/06). https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961 (accessed December 5, 2023).

Executive Yuan. 2022. "Zuqun" (Ethnicity), Brief Introduction of the State of the Country, https://archive.md/JY0ra.

Farrer, James. 2014. "Multicultural Dreaming: Democracy and Multiculturalism in the 'Chinese Dream'." In *Multicultural Challenges and Sustainable Democracy in Europe and East Asia*, edited by Nam-Kook Kim, 15–35. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fei Xiaotong. 1989. *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju*(The Pattern of Plurality and Unity in the Chinese Nation). Beijing: Zhongyang renmin xueyuan chubanshe, 1989.

Ferrer, Alessandra. 2022. "The Republic of China's Fantasy Frontier: Shifting Portrayals of Mongolia in the Mongolian and Tibet Affairs Commssion," *China Perspectives*, 131: 49–58.

Finnane, Antonia. 2007. *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation*. London: Hurst.

Friedman, Sara. 2015. *Exceptional States: Chinese Immigrants and Taiwanese Sovereighty*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

Friend, John. M., and Bradley Thayer. 2017. "The Rise of Han-Centrism and What It Means for International Politics." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 17(1): 91–114.

Gellner, Ernest. 1997. *Nationalism*. New York: New York University Press.

Harrison, Mark. 2006. *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwan Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Haugen, Heidi Østbø and Tabitha Speelman. 2022. "China's Rapid Development has Transformed its Migration Trends." *The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/china-development-transformed-migration

Hayton, Bill. 2020. *The Invention of China*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hioe, Brian. 2022. "Taiwan's Pingpu people one step closer to recognition," *The Diplomat*, 2 November, https://thediplomat.com/2022/11/taiwans-pingpu-peoples-one-step-closer-to-recognition/.

Hobsbawn, Eric. 1990. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1789: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huang Yiyuan. 2017. "Jiandian hai chuan minchu lanpao heigua, Taiwan zhijin mei guanfang renzheng 'guofu'" (Still wearing the blue robe and black jacket of the early Republic for memorial service; Taiwan is doesn't have an officially recognised national costume), *Shangbao*, 9 October, https://archive.md/mBX9s.

Jacobs, Bruce. 2013. "Whither Taiwanization? The Colonization, Democratization and Taiwanization of Taiwan." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 567-586.

Jacobs, Bruce and Ben I-Hao Liu. 2007. "Lee Teng-hui and the Idea of 'Taiwan'," *The China Quarterly*, 190: 375–393.

Kasai, Haruna. 2022. "Taiwanese Multiculturalism and the Political Appropriation of New Immigrants' Languages." *Comparative Education* 58(4): 509–525.

Kim, Nam-Kook(ed.) 2014. *Multicultural Challenges and Sustainable Democracy in Europe and East Asia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ku, Kun-hui. 2005. "Rights to Recognition: Minority/Indigenous Politics in the Emerging Taiwanese Nationalism," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, 49(3): 99–121.

Lan, Pei-Chia. 2019. "From Reproductive Assimilation to Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Framing and Regulating Immigrant Mothers and Children in Taiwan." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 40(3): 318–333.

Lavička, Martin. 2021. "Changes in Chinese Legal Narratives about Religious Affairs in Xinjiang." *Asian Ethnicity* 22(1): 61–76.

Lavička, Martin and Julie Yu-Wen Chen. 2023. "New Measures for Governing Religions in Xi's China." *China Report* 59(3): 259–274.

Law, Andrew Malcolm and Qin Qianqian. 2022. "Reflexive Han-ness, Narratives of Moral Decline, Manchurian Subjects and "Mass" Societal Others: A Study of the Hanfu Movement in the Cities of Beijing, Chengdu, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Xi'an." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 1-26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lee, Teng-hui. 1999. *The Road to Democracy: Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity*. Tokyo: PHP Institute, Inc.
Leibold, James. 2007. *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigene Became Chinese*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Leibold, James. 2010. "The Beijing Olympics and China's Conflicted National Form." *The China Journal* 63: 1–24.
Leibold, James. 2012. "Searching for Han: Early Twentieth-Century Narratives of Chinese Origins and Development." In *Critical Han studies: The History, Representation and Identity of China's Majority*, eds Thomas S. Mullaney*et al.*, 349–393. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Leibold, James. 2013. "Ethnic Policy in China: Is Reform Inevitable?" *East-West Center Policy Studies* 68:1–65.
Leo, Jessieca. 2015. *Global Hakka: Hakka Identity in the Remaking*. Leiden: Brill.
Leung, Wing-Fai. 2015. "Who Could be an Oriental Angel? Lou Jing, Mixed Heritage and the Discourses of Chinese Ethnicity." *Asian Ethnicity* 16(3): 294–313.
Lin, Yumei. 2023. "Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan: Human rights and soft power," *CSIS*, 28 September, https://archive.md/RCkOu.
Liu, Xiaoyuan. 2003. *Frontier Passage: Ethnopolitics and the Rise of Chinese Communism, 1921-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Lin, Hsiao-ting. 2016. *Accidental State: Chiang Kai-shek, the United States, and the Making of Taiwan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Ma, Rong. 2012. *Zuqun, minzu yu guojia goujian [Ethnicity, Nationality and Nation-Building*].Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe.
Mackerras, Colin. 2003. *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation*. London: Roubledge.
Mona, Awi. 2019. Conceptualising Indigenous Historical Justice Towards a Mutual Recognition with State in Taiwan, *Washington International Law Journal*, 28(3): 653–675.
Mullaney, Thomas. 2010. *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. Berekeley: University of California Press.
Mullaney, Thomas*et al.*, eds. 2012. *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China. 2014. "Moving Forwards Along the Road of Using Chinese Characteristics to Solve Ethnic Problems Learning from the Central Conference on Ethnic Work." https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/xwzx/201411/1007903.shtml
Nesterova, Yulia. 2019. "Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education Approaches to Indigenous People's Education in Taiwan." *Multicultural Education Review* 11(4): 253–270.
Office of the President of the Republic of China. 1994. "The President Participated in Indigenous Culture Conference Organized by the Council for Cultural Affairs." *Press Release* on 10 April. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/3429 (accessed December 4, 2023).
Phillips, Steven E. 2003. *Between Assimilation and Independence: The Taiwanese Encounter Nationalist China, 1945-1950*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.
Rhoads, Edward. 2000. *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
Shepherd, John Robert. 1993. *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800*. Redwood City: Standford University Press.
Shih, Shu-Mei and Lin-chin Tsai(eds.) 2021. *Indigenous knowledge in Taiwan and beyond*. Singapore: Springer.
Stroup, David. 2023. "Chinese Nationalism: Insights and Opportunities for Comparative Studies." *Nationalities Papers* 51(3): 497–511.
Templeman, Kharis. 2018. When Do Electoral Quotas Advance Indigenous Representation?: Evidence from the Taiwanese Legislature, *Ethnopolitic*s 17(5): 461–484.
Teng, Emma Jinhua. 2004. *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center.
Tian, Xuebin. 2021. "Huanghe wenhua: Zhonghua minzu de gen he hun" (Yellow River Culture: The root and soul of the Zhonghua nation), *Xuexi shibao*, 5 Feburary 2021, at https://archive.md/ikKhO.
Van Assche, Jasper, et. al. 2019. "Diverse Reactions to Ethnic Diversity: The Role of Individidual Differences in Authoritarianism." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 28(6): 523–527.
Van Bekhoven, Jeroen. 2019. "Reforming the Constitutin; Reforming the Postcolonial State? Indigenois Peoples and Constitutional Reforms in Taiwan." *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 14: 245–278.
Wang, Lijung. 2004. "Multiculturalism in Taiwan." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 10(3): 301–318.
Wang, Lijung. 2007. "Diaspora, Identity and Cultural Citizenship: The Hakkas in 'Multicultural Taiwan." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(5): 875–895.
Wang, Yaoyu. 2022. "Zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtongti yishi (zhuanti shensi)" [Forging the Zhonghua nation's collective consciousness (deeply considered the topic)], *People's Daily*, 17 March 2022, at https://archive.md/hG9ok.

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.86 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Weixin. 2023. "Zhengxieweiyuan tiji jiang hufu zuo 'guofu', queyin qi 'xingzhi fuzha', 'fazhan duandai' yinfa zhengyi." [CPPCC member proposed Hanfu as the 'nation constume'; yet 'design complexities' and 'development periodization' spark constrovery], *Woniu hanfu*, 16 January, https://archive.md/9l25G.

Wilson, R. Scott. 2009. "Making Hakka Spaces: Resisting Multicultural Nationalism in Taiwan." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16(4):414–437.

Wu, Meiyao. 2017. "Moral Education and the Aboriginal Peoples of Taiwan: From Sino-Centrism to the Ethic of Multiculturalism." *Journal of Moral Education* 46(1): 69–78.

Velez, Yamil. R., and Lavine, Howard. 2017. "Racial Diversity and the Dynamics of Authoritarianism." *The Journal of Politics* 79(2):519–533.

Xi, Jinping. 2019. "Working Together to Realise the Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China's Peaceful Reunification. Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan." January 2 http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412_12155687.htm (accessed December 4, 2023).

Xinhua. 2021. "Xi Jinping chuxi Zhongyang minzu gongzuo huiyi bing fabiao zhongyao jinghua" (Xi Jinping chairs the Central nation-building work conference and delivers an important speech), 28 August 2021, https://archive.md/XQeMW.

Zemanek, Adina and Lara Momesso. 2023. "Multiculturalism Through a Lens: Migrants' Voice in Taiwanese Documentaries." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 24(3): 413–430.

Zheng Xinnan. 2023. "Marriage Migrrants' Human Rights Issues: A Case Study in Mainland Spouses' Human Rights Plights and Rights Claims in Taiwan." MA Thesis, University of Ottawa,

Zhu Xiaolei. 2013. "Tuersi jiaoshou: wang 'laoweizu' chengwei Zhongguo di 57 ge minzu" [Turkish Professor: Hopes the 'foreigner race' will become China's 57th minzu), *Huanqiuwang*, 4 March, https://archive.md/88k2o.

Zuo, Wenmin. 2023. Duoyuan yu yiti: Fei Xiaotong de minzu yanjiu ji zuijin de yanjiu dongtai [Pluralism and Integration: Fei Xiaotong's Ethnic Studies and Recent Research Trends), *21st Century East Asian Sociology*, 12: 131–148.

Cite this article: Leibold, James, and Julie Yu-Wen Chen. 2024. "Han-Centrism and Multiethnic Nation-Building in China and Taiwan: A Comparative Study since 1911". *Nationalities Papers*: 1–18, doi:10.1017/nps.2024.86