
The Evolution of “Sinicisation”



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Abstract

This paper traces the history and usage of the theory of Sinicisation in western and Chinese scholarship, and discusses the intellectual trends underlying the different discourses in which the theory has been adopted. Since early 20th Century, the theory of “Sinicisation” has evolved and was adopted into three distinct historiographical discourses to construct different arguments. The first discourse is about the historical acculturation of border peoples and assimilation of domestic peoples to Chinese language, culture and economic life; the second one argues an inherent superiority in Chinese culture specifically produced cultural change across eastern Eurasia to promote nationalism; the third discourse emphasizes the diversity and mixture of the people living inside historical and contemporary China to construct and stabilise the polity. Every discourse rooted in its own intellectual trend, and also faces different criticism. Followed with examining criticisms of Sinicisation since the 1950s, this paper concludes by discussing the relationships of the three discourses of Sinicisation.

Keywords: Sinicization; Nationalism; Culturalism; Chinese Nationality

Sinicization (alternatively known as Sinicisation, Sinofication, or Sinification) is usually interpreted as the process by which all non-Han or non-Sinitic people who entered the Chinese realm, no matter whether as conquerors or conquered, eventually were inevitably assimilated as Chinese.¹ The corresponding Chinese word for Sinicization is usually *hanhua* 漢化, but this translation is not optimal due to the mismatch between the “Han” of the Chinese word, which can refer also to Han Chinese or the Han ethnicity, and the “sino-/sini-” of “Sinicization” which refers more broadly to China. The alternative *huahua* 華化, which matches the English word more closely, is preferred by such scholars as Ping-ti Ho and Chen Yuan, the latter of whom uses *huahua* in the title of his book discussing the Sinicization of foreigners from the western regions (*Xiyu* 西域) during the Yuan Dynasty.² Although the character

¹Here the definition of Sinicization is paraphrased from Evelyn Rawski’s article. In her article, she says “Sinicization—the thesis that all of the non-Han peoples who have entered the Chinese realm have eventually been assimilated into Chinese culture”. Evelyn S. Rawski, “Presidential Address: Re-envisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no.4 (Nov. 1996), p. 842.

²Ping-ti Ho, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s ‘Reenvisioning the Qing,’” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no.1 (Feb. 1998), p. 152; Chen Yuan, *Yuan Xiyu ren huahua kao* 元西域人華化考 (Shanghai, 2000).

“hua 化” in the two terms has had the meaning of “civilizing non-Sinitic people” since very early in a Chinese context, neither term carried the meaning of Sinicization before the beginning of the Republic of China in 1912. As an important concept used in East Asian studies, Sinicization theory is discussed not only in almost all topics related to the non-Sinitic groups in Chinese territory, but also is the core of some essential academic topics, such as the New Qing History and “Conquest Dynasties”. In these studies, the theory of Sinicization is always questioned, or even radically rejected, by many western scholars and is treated as a “Han nationalist interpretation of China’s past”.³ In contrast, the theory of Sinicization is embraced by a large number of scholars from Mainland China and Taiwan.⁴ Behind these arguments and studies, however, perhaps because of its seemingly “obvious” character, scholars usually didn’t notice different definitions have been given to Sinicization. With different definitions, Sinicization has been adopted in different historiographical discourses to construct different arguments and fulfill different purposes.

This article argues there are three different discourses in which the theory of Sinicization has been adopted. The first discourse is the description of historical acculturation of border peoples and assimilation of domestic peoples to Chinese language, culture and economic life, resulting in relative stability and continuity within China itself; the second one argues an inherent superiority in Chinese culture specifically produced cultural change across eastern Eurasia to interpret the continuity and expansion of historical China; the third discourse emphasizes the diversity and mixture of the people living inside historical and contemporary China mainly to stabilize the modern Chinese polity. With the discussion of the three discourses, the intellectual trends behind them will also be analyzed in this article. Before heading to the different discourses, the etymology and early usages of Sinicization will be discussed first to determine when the term started to obtain its common implication.

1. “Sinicization” before Sinicization

As a frequently used concept, the morphology of the word “Sinicization” is quite simple; the word is comprised of the root “Sinicize” and suffix “-ization.” The root “Sinicize” means somebody or something modified under Chinese influence; the suffix “-ization” denotes the process, act or result of something, in this case Sinicizing. Words with a similar combination are abundant in English, such as Romanization and westernization. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both Sinicize and Sinicization first appeared in *The Athenaeum*, a British literary magazine at the end of 19th century, and both words are often used to describe the Chinese influence on Japanese language and religion.⁵

³Rawski, “Presidential Address”, p. 842. Some Chinese scholars refer Rawski’s address and Ping-ti Ho’s defense article as a debate. Pamela Crossley recently pointed out on her personal website that there actually is no debate between Rawski and Ho. Rawski only reported the English-language historiography of Qing Studies, and Ho stated an unrelated “objective” Qing history but received no reply. Crossley argues manufacturing such a debate is “an essential element of the mythology of ‘New Qing History.’” Pamela Crossley, “War of Worlds!: The Myth of Rawski and Ho,” accessed Mar 6, 2019, <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~crossley/comment.shtml>.

⁴The two contradictory views even lead to severe political criticism of the New Qing history by attacking it as the “New Imperialist” history. See Li Zhiting, “New Qing History: An Example of ‘New Imperialist’ History,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 47, no. 1(2016), pp. 5–12.

⁵In *OED*, 2nd edition (1989) *OED Online* version March 2016. Examples such as “1889 *Athenaeum* 28 Sept. 414/2, While the civilization of Japan becomes every year more and more westernized, her language becomes more

In the early 20th century, “Sinicization” was used first in academic articles to describe the Chinese impact on the languages and customs of cultures surrounding China.⁶ When W. Perceval Yetts discussed the communication between China and the west in 1926, he even used “Sinicization” to describe the intellectual history of Europe in the 17th and 18th century, writing: “Indiscriminate admiration for Chinese notions and things, or those supposedly Chinese, became the vogue. This Sinicization of intellectual Europe reached its acme during the eighteenth century, and it has influenced our arts to an extent hard to estimate”.⁷ Therefore, it is almost certain that in the beginning, the words “Sinicization” or “Sinicize” served as descriptive terms for Chinese influence, including Chinese notions, language, and material culture, on cultures outside of China. An example of this influence would be the language and religion in Japan, and art in Europe. In other words, when first used, Sinicization had no direct connection with ethnic identity, nor did it carry the connotations of universality (“all”) and meritability (“must”).

As an alternative form of Sinicization, Sinification did not bear the same meaning. According to the *OED*, the word “Sinification” first appeared in 1900 with the same definition as Sinicization. In actuality, it had been in use already in 1899 with the meaning of “managed/administered by the Chinese instead of foreigners.” This was in reference to the process of the Chinese government and people gradually taking over the control of foreign settlements, railways and other organisations inside China.⁸ Further, when Noël Williamson talked about the gradual control of Tibet by the Chinese, he said “Events have been taking place of late which are likely to increase interest in this section of the Lohit valley. I refer to the Sinification of Tibet, and if reports in the public press be true, it is only a matter of months, not years, before the Rong, instead of forming a part of Tibet, will become a Chinese province”.⁹ From these early usages of Sinification, it is clear that Sinification referred to the political control or governance by the Chinese government or people.

It is clear that in the earliest usages of Sinicization, the term was usually used to describe the Chinese influence in external China, such as Japan and Europe, instead of internal China. In the 1920s, a new variant of the “Sinicization” paradigm appeared to describe the acculturation of border populations and the assimilation of domestic cultural groups to Chinese language, culture and economic life, which soon became the dominant connotation of this term.

and more Sinicized.” 1898 *Athenæum* 26 Nov. 747/3, Shinto might have become a religious and ethical system, but its development was arrested by Sinicization and Buddhism.”

⁶William Elliot Griffis, Don C. Seitz and Homer Lea, “Japan and the United States,” *The North American Review* 197, no. 691 (June 1913), p. 729.

⁷W. Perceval Yetts, “Contact between China and the West,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 48, no. 276 (Mar, 1926), p. 122. The term “Chinoiserie” was also probably first used in the 16th and 17th Century.

⁸See “The Proposed Sinification of the Settlements,” *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870–1941)* [Shanghai] no. 20 (Mar 1899), p. 474; Gilbert McIntosh, “The Christian Literature Society Moves Forward,” *The Chinese Recorder (1912–1938)* [Shanghai] no. 01 (Dec, 1923), p. 746.

⁹Noël Williamson, “The Lohit-Brahmaputra between Assam and South-Eastern Tibet, November, 1907, to January, 1908,” *The Geographical Journal* 34, no. 4 (Oct. 1909), p. 383. The Rong here could refer to the Rong-chu Valley.

2. Discourse One: Historical acculturation and assimilation

(1). Impact from Western explorers

This new connotation of Sinicization should be generated from the impact of the western explorers who did fieldwork in southwest China. One of the earliest cases of the usages of Sinicization can be found in the anthropologist Berthold Laufer's research. In the early 20th century, anthropology already had a role in China studies; this was led by Berthold Laufer, an anthropologist, who was educated in Germany and migrated to the US in 1898. During 1901–1904, he led the Jacob H. Schiff expedition to China and acquired a comprehensive ethnographic collection for the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH).¹⁰ In a letter to his mentor Franz Boas at AMNH written in 1903 during the expedition, Laufer says, "I shall conquer China... [for] the anthropologist. China, no longer the exclusive domain of travelers and sinologues, both narrow-minded and one-sided in their standpoints and researches, China to all who have anthropological interests".¹¹

Among the large number of publications by Laufer, one article published in 1917 mentions the Lolo people of southwestern China who did not have family names before contact with the Chinese. He calls a group of Lolo "Sinicized Lolo" because they adopted Chinese surnames.¹² This is one of the earliest examples in which "Sinicize" is used directly to describe the ethnic groups living inside Chinese territory. By adopting Chinese surnames, the group of Lolo had been acculturated into Chinese. Laufer describes them as "Sinicized Lolo". As an anthropologist, Laufer's use of "Sinicized" starts to connect to the concept of ethnicity in anthropology and ethnology, and it clearly diverts the use of "Sinicize" and "Sinicization" into another context and field.

This different usages of Sinicization have been projected into the contemporary Chinese intellectual world, when the term Hanhua 汉化 was first adopted.¹³ The two possible earliest cases of using Hanhua appeared in *Shun Pao* 申报, an influential newspaper founded in 1872, were related directly to the western explorers' fieldwork in Southwest China. The term was used to describe the western explorers' fieldwork in southwest China. In an article titled "Hanzu yu feihanzu (汉族与非汉族, Han Ethnic group and Non-Han Ethnic groups)" published in 1923, it reads,

¹⁰Wang Jiqing 王冀清, "Berthold Laufer", in *Zhongwai Dunhuang xuejia pingzhuan* 中外敦煌学家评传, edited by Lu Qingfu 陆庆夫 and Wang Jiqing 王冀青 (Lanzhou, 2003), pp. 368–387.

¹¹American Museum of Natural History: Laufer to Boas, 12 August, 1903.

¹²Berthold Laufer, "Totemic Traces among the Indo-Chinese", *The Journal of American Folklore* 30, no. 118 (Oct.–Dec., 1917), p. 417.

¹³It is necessary to point out that although the term Han refers to the largest nationality known as Han Chinese in modern China, Han had different implications in diverse periods in Chinese history. For example, in the Jin Dynasty, the Jurchen rulers called the former Liao people who were under their rule as Hanren 汉人 or Yanren 燕人 (People of the Yan [region]), but called the former Northern Song people inside Jin territory as Nanren 南人. Therefore caution should be used when applying the term Hanhua in different dynasties. See Shao-yun Yang, "Fan and Han: The Origins and Uses of a Conceptual Dichotomy in Mid-Imperial China, ca. 500–1200", in *Political Strategies of Identity Building in Non-Han Empires in China*, (ed.) by Francesca Fiaschetti and Julia Schneider (Wiesbaden, 2014), pp. 9–36; Mark Elliot, "Hushuo: The Northern Other and the Naming of the Han Chinese, in *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*, (ed.) by Thomas S. Mullaney, James Leibold, Stéphane Gros and Eric Vanden Bussche (Berkeley, 2012), pp. 173–190.

Westerners who travelled to the borderland of Dian (Yunnan) and Shu (Sichuan) returned and wrote books. In their books, they talked about the diversity of the ethnicity of these areas. While most ethnic groups were assimilated by Chinese, Tibetans were the hardest to assimilate. Not only were they exceptional in not changing with Han influence, but moreover, Chinese who entered Tibet had to follow their customs; only then could they remain peacefully. On one hand, it is because Tibetans have a tough personality; on the other hand, it is because of the power of religion. Because Tibetans commonly believed in Buddhism, it was easier for them to be Sinicized than for them to be Europeanized. If the Republic of China could finally be revitalized, there was no reason to worry about them turning to “others”.

西人游滇蜀邊地者，歸而著書，言其地人種紛歧，而皆受漢族之同化力，其最難同化者，則為藏人，不特不從漢人之化，且漢人入藏地者必從其地之俗，乃可相安。此雖由吐蕃之族較強悍而亦由宗教之力，但西藏同為佛教，使之漢化尚易，而使之歐化則更難，民國果能振作，亦不患其他向也。¹⁴

Both “Hanhua” and “*tonghua*” (assimilation) appear in this article, and it is clear that Hanhua here meant assimilation by the Han people of others through those other peoples following Han customs. The author also stated that these points about Hanhua came from “Xiren” (西人), or westerners.

In addition, there are other cases with similar contexts. One is from the contemporary United States ambassador’s speech after he travelled in southwestern China.¹⁵ The similarity between these cases is that they are about the relationship between Han and other ethnic groups in Southwestern China, namely the Chinese borderland, and those customs are considered as the most important ethnic characteristic. Here, in the case of the Miao ethnic group, customs included styles of clothing, diet, housing and family structure.¹⁶ This context of Hanhua was close to Berthold Laufer’s usage of “Sinicized” in his article about the Lolo people, also in southwestern China.¹⁷ Based on the connection with the western explorers in the earliest cases, one may conclude that the concept of Chinese term “Hanhua” in its early context was borrowed directly from the west; particularly from the western explorers who did fieldwork in southwest China, such as Laufer. Here both Laufer’s use of “Sinicized” and the Chinese term “Hanhua” started to be used to build the discourse of acculturation or assimilation of the border and domestic people by different aspects of Chinese culture.

(2). *Adoption by later scholars*

This discourse, with the adoption of Sinicization as a concept, started to appear in both Chinese-language and English-language historiographies from the 1920s onwards. One famous case is Chen Yuan’s 1923 book, *Yuan Xiyuren Huahua kao* (元西域人华化考 *Research on the Sinicization of the People from Western Regions of Yuan Dynasty*), which was also possibly the first appearance of the term Huahua.¹⁸ In his book, Chen Yuan states that “as for the

¹⁴Laopu 老圃, “Hanzu yu feihanu (part third),” in *Shun Pao*, no.17988 (March 27th, 1923), p. 20.

¹⁵“Mei gongshi youli xinan zhi ganxiang 美公使游历西南之感想,” in *Shun Pao*, no.18286 (Jan. 21st, 1924), p. 7; Liu Xiang 刘骧, “Miaozu zhuangkuang de gailue 苗族状况的概略,” in *Jingbao fukan* 京报副刊, no.17 (1924), pp. 3–4; Cheng Zhi 成志, *Minsu* 民俗, no.67, p. 1.

¹⁶Liu, “Miaozu,” pp. 3–4.

¹⁷Laufer, “Totemic Traces,” p. 417.

¹⁸Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 3.

meaning of Huahua, its acquisition is judged by whether it may eventually be acquired, and if only Chinese have it. (至于华化之意义，则以后天所获，华人所独为断)¹⁹ Here, Chen discusses the content of Huahua; in other words, what people should learn from Chinese to be able to be considered as being Sinicized (Huahua). For Chen Yuan, the answer was Confucianism, Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, Chinese literature, art, rituals, customs, and female education.²⁰ Then, what was the ultimate goal of Huahua? Chen did not present a clear answer, but he revealed some ideas about it in his writing. In his discussion about why he chose to study the people of the western regions instead of the Khitan, Jurchen or others, he says,

Since the issue discussed in this volume is limited to the western region of the Yuan dynasty, therefore, Mongolians, Khitans and Jurchens are not included here. It is also because the Mongolians and so on were culturally naïve, and therefore their assimilation by Chinese was by no means surprising. As for countries like Japan, Korea, the Ryukyus, and Annam, they long ago adopted Sinitic written language and institutions, and therefore, their “Huahua” was also not surprising at all.

本編所论，既限于元西域，故蒙古、契丹、女直诸族不与，亦以蒙古等文化幼稚，其同化华族不奇，若日本、高丽、琉球、安南诸邦，则又袭用华人文字制度已久，其华化亦不奇。²¹

Based on this statement, it is clear that Chen’s “Huahua” means “assimilated by Chinese (*tonghua* 同化华族)”. In other words, by learning any one or any combination of those unique Chinese cultural practices listed above, any people can be, and will be, “assimilated” by Chinese. As for the reason why Huahua was true for the people from the western regions, Chen Yuan states,

The peoples of the western regions were, on the one hand, extensively influenced by Indian, Jewish, Greek and Arabic civilisations; on the other hand, they watched one slice of Chinese civilisation (this refers to the Qara Khitan/Western Liao), no wonder they strongly desired to be personally on the scene. The Yuan army first unified the western regions, then conquered the Central Plain. Among the people of the western region, soldiers, captured personnel, and traders all flooded into the Central Plain. The constitution and civilisation that they always wished to experience suddenly were unfolded before their eyes. Besides, in the Yuan dynasty, the Semu people were allowed to live freely among other people. Therefore, the constitution and civilisation were spread through generations. As a result, many of the people from the western regions liked and believed ancient Chinese classics, *the Book of Odes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites* and *the Book of Music*. The purpose of this volume is precisely to commemorate such a flourishing golden age.

西域人既杂受印度、犹太、波斯、希腊、亚刺伯诸国之文明，复曾睹中国文明之一线（此处此黑石契丹/西辽），其渴望身亲见之情可想也。元军先定西域，后下中原，西域人之从军者、被虏者、贸易者，接踵而至，平昔所想望之声明文物，尽触于目前，

¹⁹Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 3.

²⁰Besides practical knowledge, here female-education also includes the wifely submissions and virtues.

²¹Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 2.

元制色目人又自由杂居，故一传再传，遂多敦诗书而说礼乐。兹编之作，正所以著其盛也。²²

According to Chen, the people of the western regions came to China, learned Chinese culture and participated in Chinese cultural performances mainly because they admired Chinese civilisation, and the Mongol conquest created the possibility of travel for them. Therefore, Huahua in the context of Chen Yuan’s book is the assimilation of the people from the western regions by Chinese culture through learning the language, performing some type of Chinese cultural practices, and even making some contributions to Chinese culture. They then can be considered as “Hua (华 Chinese).” Because of these circumstances, most of the people discussed in Chen’s book were Yuan officials and well educated. After excluding the six females in the book who could not be officials in the Yuan government, of the other 127 people described by Chen Yuan,²³ 78 (61.4%) were Yuan officials, and 55 (43.3%) belonged to families having held high official positions for generations. In other words, the lofty requirement of Chen’s Huahua set limitations on the people who could be considered as being assimilated (Huahua) by the Chinese. The limitations not only were on the number of people but also on their social status and family background.

After the early appearance of Huahua and Hanhua, other scholars repeatedly used both terms. Huahua still was employed mainly for research on the people from the western regions in different dynasties. Such publications included: *Tangdai Huahua Fanhu kao* 唐代华化蕃胡考 by Feng Chengjun 冯承钧 first published in 1929; *Tangdai Chang’an yu Xiyu wenming* 唐代长安与西域文明 by Xiang Da 向达 first published in 1933; and *Suitang Xiyuren Huahua kao* 隋唐西域人华化考 edited by He Jianmin 何健民 and including Kuwabara Jitsuzou’s 桑原隲藏 and Feng Chengjun’s articles published in 1936.²⁴ Meanwhile, Hanhua mainly was used for the Inner Asian groups who built regimes in northern China, such as those described in *Nüzhen Hanhua kaolue* 女真汉化考略 by Song Wenbing 宋文炳 first published in 1934 and *Liaoren Hanhua kao* 辽人汉化考 by Mao Wen 毛汶 in 1935.²⁵ It is also necessary to point out that in these works, both Hanhua and Huahua were used frequently and were interchangeable.²⁶

Some of them strictly restrained their discussion with the adoption of Sinicization inside the discourse examined in this section. For instance, when Chen Yuan wrote his book about the Huahua of the people from western regions during the Yuan Dynasty, he also stated that

²²Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 3.

²³There are 168 cases discussed in *Yuan Xiyuren Huahua kao* under 6 different topics. 30 in the Confucianism Chapter, 8 in the Buddhism and Daoism Chapter, 51 in literature Chapter, 32 in art Chapter, 41 in ritual and customs chapter, and female education in Chapter 6. After taking away the people discussed in other chapters, there are 138 people in total. There are 5 people included by mistake, so Chen Yuan actually has discussed 133 people in his book. In the conclusion, Chen Yuan has given the numbers, but there is a minor mistake. See Chen Yuan, 2000, p. 132. About the 5 people mistakenly included, see Hsiao Ch’i-Ch’ing, *Nei beiguo er wai Zhongguo* 内北国而外中国 (Beijing, 2007), p. 579.

²⁴Feng Chengjun 冯承钧, “Tangdai Huahua Fanhu kao 唐代华化蕃胡考,” in *Suitang shidai Xiyuren Huahua kao* 隋唐时代西域人华化考, edited by He Jianmin 何健民 (Beijing, 1939), pp. 127–171; Xiang Da 向达, *Tangdai Chang’an yu Xiyu wenming* 唐代长安与西域文明 (Shijiazhuang, 2001); *Suitang shidai Xiyuren Huahua kao* 隋唐时代西域人华化考, edited by He Jianmin 何健民 (Beijing, 1939).

²⁵Song Wenbing 宋文炳, “Nüzhen Hanhua kaolue 女真汉化考略,” in *Suitang shidai Xiyuren Huahua kao* 隋唐时代西域人华化考, edited by He Jianmin 何健民 (Beijing, 1939), pp. 172–194; Mao Wen 毛汶, “Liaoren Hanhua kao 辽人汉化考,” in *Guoxue lunheng* 国学论衡, vol.6 (1935): pp. 23–43.

²⁶The term Hanhua also has been used a few times in Chen Yuan’s book.

“this book was written during the time when the Chinese were despised the most, and when people advocated complete westernisation, I, therefore wrote a book like this”.²⁷ So by arguing for the assimilation of the people from the west by the superior and admirable Chinese culture, Chen tried to make the readers proud of being Chinese and of their own culture. This is precisely the reason he used Huahua instead of Hanhua in his book and chose people from the Western Regions instead of northern zone for his subject matter. His usage of Huahua/Sinicization in his book, however, didn’t cross the border of this discourse of assimilation or acculturation of the border and domestic people by different aspects of Chinese culture. Some other usages by other scholars did adopted Hanhua/Huahua/Sinicization to construct different discourses, which will be discussed in the next two sections.

Meanwhile, in English-language historiographical works, this discourse also remains. In 1973, John W. Dardess wrote that Sinicization “involved not only the loss of national or linguistic identity but also a most un-Confucian denial of the facts of ancestry. In the Yuan period, it carried an additional burden of the loss of caste as well”.²⁸ Later, Peter Bol adopted Sinicization to refer to the adoption of Han customs (Hanren fengsu 汉人风俗) by non-Han peoples only.²⁹ He used “civilization (*wen* 文, *shangwen* 尚文, *wenzhi* 文治)” to indicate the shift in cultural practices of the Jurchen people.³⁰ Both Dardess and Bol noticed the broad and vague content covered by Sinicization, and therefore try to split it and give Sinicization a specific content.

In his book *The Jurchen in Twelfth-century China: A Study of Sinicization* published in 1976, Jing-shen Tao considered Sinicization equal to assimilation. About assimilation, he states,

The term assimilation is used in this study in the sense of F. C. Anthony Wallace’s statement that “in assimilation, the subordinate group attempts to abandon its existing inadequate culture by entering into the society of the dominant group and accepting its culture, almost *in toto* (retaining only token vestiges of their distinctive culture traits)”. The term so defined includes both acculturation and integration. The concept of Sinicization is employed in this study in the same sense as assimilation.³¹

According to Tao, Sinicization means assimilation, which implies that the dominant group in a society assimilates the subordinate group. In his work, Tao included political centralization, political institution, intermarriage and changing of surname, literature and art, and religion as the content of “Sinicization”.

One of the latest cases of using Sinicization in the discourse of acculturation or assimilation of the border and domestic people by Chinese culture appeared in a work published by John R. Shepherd in 2003.³² Based on his fieldwork in Taiwan, Shepherd wanted to “use Sinicization as a descriptive term to refer to the ‘process of acculturation in which a non-Chinese

²⁷Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 5.

²⁸John W. Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians: Aspects of Political Change in Late Yuan China* (New York, 1973), p. 3.

²⁹Bol, “Common Ground,” pp. 485–486.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Jing-shen Tao, *The Jurchen in Twelfth-century China: A Study of Sinicization* (Seattle, 1976), p. xiii.

³²John R. Shepherd, “Rethinking Sinicization: Processes of Acculturation and Assimilation,” in *State, Market and Ethnic Groups Contextualized*, edited by Bien Chiang and Ho Ts’ui-p’ing, pp. 205–250. Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei.

group adopts elements of the Chinese culture with which it is in contact”. For him, “... why the group adopts Chinese cultural elements, which elements it adopts and which it rejects, and whether the adoption has any effect on ethnic identity and consciousness are topics best left to separate analyses”.³³

With the impact from the western explorers, scholars in both Chinese-language and English-language scholarship choose to use Sinicization to describe the acculturation or assimilation of the border and domestic people by different aspects of Chinese culture, and this discourse of Sinicization continues today. While Sinicization is mainly served as descriptive term in this discourse, some scholars tried to interpret Sinicization to explain the continuity and expansion of historical China, and some used Sinicization to emphasize the diversity and mixture of the people living inside historical and contemporary China to maintain and stabilize the modern Chinese polity. They then have constructed two other different discourses, which will be discussed in the next two sections.

3. Discourse Two: interpreting the historical China

(1). *Social evolutionism and cultural change*

Why has the acculturation and assimilation of border and domestic peoples to Chinese culture happened repeatedly in historical China? Scholars used different theories to interpret Sinicization to answer this question. One of them is social evolutionism. According to them, when two societies or groups encounter, the one with less sophisticated culture or in the lower stage should evolve under the influence of the other one. But some scholars did not give a clear explanation of this theory. For instance, when Chen Yuan discussed the reason he chose not to study the Mongols, Khitan and Jurchen in his book, saying that their assimilation (Huahua) by the Chinese was because their civilizations were primitive (*youzhi* 幼稚), which is different from why Western Region people were assimilated.³⁴ Both reasons, however, imply the sophistication of “Hua” culture, which eventually lead to Sinicization. Even earlier than Chen Yuan, a similar point of interpreting Sinicization as a civilizing process (i.e. a more sophisticated culture or people) assimilating uncivilised (a less sophisticated culture or people) can actually be found in early Sinologists’ work albeit without using the specific term “Sinicization”. For instance, in *Haute Asie* published in 1931 when Pelliot mentioned the change of the Khitan people after they conquered China, he said

Mais il en advint des Khitan comme de tous les nomads qui se fixaient en vainqueurs sur le sol de la Chine et que, par un choc en retour, la civilisation chinoise conquérait bientôt. Au bout de quelques generations, les Khitan s’étaient policés, chinoisés.³⁵

The last sentence is translated as “After a number of generations the Khitan were civilized, Sinicized” by Witfogel and Feng. Here, Pelliot calls the acceptance of Chinese culture as “civilized and Sinicized”, which implies that he considered Inner Asian peoples like the

³³Shepherd, “Rethinking Sinicization”, p. 133.

³⁴Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 3.

³⁵Paul Pelliot, *Haute Asie* (Paris, 1931), pp. 21–22.

Khitan and Jurchen to have been “uncivilized” before “la civilization chinoise conquérait bientôt”. After that, they became Chinese since they were absorbed into Chinese civilisation. This statement was later called “absorption theory,” and served as the major target that Karl Witfogel and Feng Chia-Sheng argued against in their monumental 1949 work about the Liao Dynasty.³⁶

The first work giving explicit explanation for the social evolutionism interpretation of Sinicization is Song Wenbing’s article dealing with the “Hanhua” of the Jurchens published in 1934. In that article, he first stated the reason for Sinicization,

From ancient times to the present, there has been a natural law for two or more than two nations to assimilate each other. The minority were assimilated by the majority. The ones with relatively low culture were assimilated by the ones with relatively high culture. Such has become the general rule of social evolution. The population of Jurchen was much less than that of the Song people, and they were more uncivilised than the Song people. Therefore, the former was assimilated by the latter with a higher culture. Such has become a convention in social evolution and seldom are there exceptions.

自来两民族或两民族以上诸民族，於互相同化之进程中均有自然之规律，少数民族被化於多数，较低文化见化於较高者，已为社会演进之公例。女真人口，远逊於宋，而野蛮之程度则反较宋为优；故其见化於较高者，已为社会演进中之一剧，自难例外。³⁷

According to Song, it was natural law in the social evolution/development that a minority will be assimilated by a majority, and people with low culture will be assimilated by those with high culture. Therefore, it was unavoidable that the Jurchen were assimilated by the people of Song because of their smaller population and lower, uncivilized culture. The Sinicization discussed by Song Wenbing includes the institutions, customs, literature and other aspects of civilisation.

A similar expression about Sinicization can also be found in Tao Jing-shen’ Chinese-language work. Because his English-language book about the Sinicization of Jurchen was criticised by some scholars,³⁸ later in the Chinese edition of his book and in his response to a book review by John Dardess published in 1978 and 1979, Tao translated and interpreted the “dominant group” as the culturally dominant group,³⁹ which was not the same as in the original context of referring to Anthony Wallace. Then Sinicization in his Chinese work became similar as Song Wenbing’s interpretation of Sinicization.

Besides social evolution caused by “cultural dominance”, another theory of social evolutionism is also applied to the interpretation of Sinicization. After 1949, some scholars from Mainland China tried to put Sinicization in the context of Marxism. They interpreted

³⁶Karl A. Witfogel and Feng Chia-Sheng, *History of Chinese Society. Liao (907–1125)* (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 4.

³⁷Song, “Nüzhen Hanhua,” p. 173.

³⁸John Dardess, review of *The Jurchen in Twelfth-century China: A Study of Sinicization*, by Jing-shen Tao, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, Feb. 1978, no.2, pp. 329–330; also reviewed by Ruth Dunnell in *Sung Studies Newsletter*, 1977, no.13, pp. 77–81. The main reason for the criticism is in the Jin Dynasty, the Jurchen was the politically and militarily dominant group.

³⁹Jing-Shen Tao, *Nüzhen shilun 女真史論* (Taipei, Shihuo chubanshe, 1978), 4; Jing-shen Tao, “A Reply to Professor John Dardess,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (Feb. 1979), no.2, pp. 441–442.

Sinicization with the Marxist theory about the stages of history. Concerning about barbarian invasion and conquest in history, Frederick Engels stated that,

Every conquest by a more barbarian people disturbs of course the economic development and destroys numerous productive forces. But in the immense majority of cases where the conquest is permanent, the more barbarian conqueror has to adapt himself to the higher “economic situation” as it emerges from the conquest; he is assimilated by the vanquished, and, in most cases, he even has to adopt their language.⁴⁰

In standard Chinese Marxist historiography, China had entered into the stage of feudalism from the Western Zhou period (ca. 1046–771 BCE) and stayed in that stage until the First Opium War (1840).⁴¹ The population of the Central Plain is usually in a “higher economic situation” than the people from the borderland, who usually are considered as fixed in the stage of slave society or even “primitive communism.” In this context, some scholars from Mainland China interpret Sinicization as “Feudalization” of the people from the borderland who either had gone to the Central Plain or interacted with people from the Central Plain.⁴²

(2). *Culturalism as another way of interpretation*

Between the two interpretations of Sinicization, the former one, social evolutionism caused by cultural dominance, is more commonly seen, and the culture is constantly highlighted by the scholars adopting Sinicization. In the earliest case, Chen Yuan emphasized the significance of culture in the process of Sinicization. Then when Mao Wen and Song Wenbing argued about the Sinicization of the Khitan and Jurchen, Sinicization included respecting Confucianism, hiring Han officials/literati, studying Confucian classics, learning and speaking Chinese, creating language, building cities, marrying Han people, using the Han political system, wearing Han-style clothes, applying Han law, practicing ritual according to the Classics, learning Chinese literature and art, and so forth. In Jing-shen Tao’s argument, he also included political centralization, political institutions, intermarriage and changing of surname, literature and art, and religion as the substance of “Sinicization.” All the different aspects of Sinicization generally can be summarized as learning and adopting so-called “Chinese culture.” Here the concept of “Chinese culture” also was vague and had different characteristics depending on the period.⁴³ Why was Chinese culture, nevertheless, so significant in the process of Sinicization? It was because some of these scholars held the notion that culture as the main standard to differentiate Chinese from non-Chinese always existed in pre-modern China. For instance, in his 1939 article, Feng Chengjun states that “when the

⁴⁰Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*, trans. by Emile Burns (New York, 1894), pp. 208–209.

⁴¹There are different opinions on this topic. The point here is cited from *Zhongguo tongshi jianbian* 中國通史簡編 by Fan Wenlan 范文瀾, which is one of the representative works of Chinese Marxism historiography. See Fan Wenlan, *Zhongguo tongshi jianbian* (revised version) (Beijing, 1964), vol.1, pp. 13–14.

⁴²Tang Zhangru 唐长孺, “Tuobazu de Hanhua guocheng 拓跋族的汉化过程,” in *Lishi jiaoxue* 历史教学 (1956), no.1: 21–29; Zhang Jingsong 张劲松, “Ping Wanyan Liang de Hanhua gaige 评完颜亮的汉化改革,” in *Neimenggu minzu shiyuan xuebao* 内蒙古民族师院学报 (1996), no.4, pp. 1–6.

⁴³The word “Chinese” in “Chinese culture” is vague. Such questions as when the word “Chinese” can be adopted into the culture in the Chinese territory, and what culture particularly can be considered as “Chinese” culture, all need to be discussed. Different scholars may give different answers for these questions. For instance, Qian Mu and Ge Zhaoguang give a different description of Chinese culture in both of their works. Qian Mu, *Zhongguo wenhua shi daolun* 中国文化史导论 (Beijing, 1994); Ge Zhaoguang, “Hewei Zhongguo”, pp. 112–115.

ancient people in our country judged if a person was Hua or Yi, it was decided basing on if this person practiced the ritual and moral code";⁴⁴ in other words, anybody can become Chinese by learning and practicing the Chinese "ritual and ethical code". In 1940, when Chen Yinke discussed the Barbarization and Sinicization (Hanhua) in the Northern Dynasties, he said,

In sum, in the history of Northern Dynasties questions between Hu and Han without exception are in fact questions between barbarization and Sinicization, rather than the division between races of Hu (胡) and Han (漢). In other words, it is more related to culture than to race. Such is what was called "provide education for all people without discrimination (*youjiao wulei* 有教无类)".

總而言之，全部北朝史中凡關於胡漢之問題，實胡化漢化之問題，而非胡漢種問題。當時之所謂胡人漢人，大抵以胡化漢化，而不以胡種漢種為分別，即文化之關係較重，而種族之關係較輕，所謂有教無類者是也。⁴⁵

In this statement, Chen Yinke more specifically points out that in the Northern Dynasties, culture was more important than race, and the Hu-Han dichotomy was based on culture. Qian Mu and other scholars applied this point to all the dynasties in pre-modern China,⁴⁶ and Joseph R. Levenson⁴⁷ later called this way of interpreting Chineseness as culturalism. Therefore, through contact with and learning Chinese culture, which was the main subject matter of Sinicization, non-Chinese people could become Chinese.

(3). *Interpreting historical China*

The interpretations of Sinicization with social evolutionism and culturalism all emphasized the superiority of Han culture or civilization over the others in during the process of Sinicization in historical China. In Song Wenbing's article about the Hanhua of the Jurchen

⁴⁴Feng, "Tangdai huahua", p. 135.

⁴⁵Chen Yinke, *Suitang zhidu yuanyuan lue lungao* 隋唐制度渊源略论稿 (Taiwan, 1966), pp. 16–20. This book was first published in 1940.

⁴⁶Qian, "Zhongguo wenhua", pp. 41–42. This book, *Zhongguo wenhua shi daolun*, was first published in 1948. Ping-ti Ho also made similar a point in his rebuttal by stating, "This saying of Mencius (about Shun and King Wen of Zhou) suggests that long before the rise of the Zhou the fundamental criterion for defining membership in the Sinitic world was the awareness of a common cultural heritage rather than rigid racial or ethnic identity." Ho, "defense", p. 129.

⁴⁷Levenson, "Confucian China", pp. 98–102. To the interpretation of culturalism, Hoyt Tillman and Ge Zhaoguang responded by tracing Chinese ethnic nationalism to the Song Dynasty, and Yuri Pines and Paul Goldin by pointing out the existence of Han discourse about the "un-civilizable" side of foreigners such as Xiongnu because of military conflicts. Shao-yun Yang, however, argues that the term culturalism should not be adopted to describe the "relativistic and moralistic discourse on Chineseness and barbarism", which was a product of the Tang-Song transition instead of Eastern Zhou origin or earlier. Nevertheless, the truth or falsity and the origin of culturalism interpretation is not the concern of this paper, what is more important for the argument in this paper is that this interpretation is held by many researcher till today. See Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "Proto-Nationalism in Twelfth-century China? The Case of Ch'en Liang", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39 (1979), no.2, pp. 403–428; Ge, "Hewei Zhongguo", pp. 126–133; Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans: Pre-imperial Origins of the 'Sino-Barbarian' Dichotomy," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (ed.) Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden, 2004), pp. 59–102; Paul R. Goldin, "Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Classical China" in *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present*, (ed) Paula L.W. Sabloff, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2011), pp. 228–234; Shao-yun Yang, *Reinventing the Barbarian: Rhetorical and Philosophical Uses of the Yi-Di in Mid-Imperial China, 600–1300*, Ph.D. dissertation from University of California, Berkeley, Spring, 2014.

people, he specifically points out that Han culture was relatively high culture, and the Jurchen culture was relatively low culture, which was the main reason that they were “Sinicized (Hanhua)”.⁴⁸ There were other examples mentioned above implying Han cultural superiority. Han cultural superiority was also an important part of the cultural interpretation of Chineseness, such as the existence of “bestiality” in *Chunqiu* discourse argued by Yuri Pines.⁴⁹ One more important aspect of Sinicization discourse is that in most cases, it was not important to the researchers if those “Sinicized” people considered themselves as “Chinese”. What was more important to them was that the people had contact with and learned those aspects of Chinese culture, which already fulfilled the requirement of Sinicization. In this sense, the non-Sinitic peoples according to Yuri Pines were Sinicized because Chinese culture was better than their own. They inevitably were attracted to or involved in the process of Sinicization, even when the non-Sinitic peoples were the ruling class.

With Han cultural superiority emphasized in these interpretation, Sinicization was used by these scholars to construct another discourse to interpret the historical China as a “great and continuous civilisation” or a “success state power”. When Chen Yuan wrote his book about the Huahua of the people from the western regions during the Yuan Dynasty, he emphasized the superiority of Chinese culture by admiring which Chinese cultural practices those people chose to learn. He stated that “this book was written during the time when the Chinese were despised the most, and when people advocated complete westernization, I, therefore wrote a book like this”.⁵⁰ So by demonstrating the assimilation of the people from the west by the superior and admirable Chinese culture, Chen argued the “great and continuous civilization” under the Mongol rule to make the readers proud of being Chinese and of their own culture. This is precisely the reason he used Huahua instead of Hanhua in his book and chose people from the western regions instead of northern zone for his subject matter. The arguments in works by Mao Wen and Jinshen Tao dealing with the Liao and Jin dynasties also illustrated the continuity of Chinese civilisation, like Pelliot and other early Sinologists did.

Meanwhile, when some scholars, like Xiao Yishan, Ho Ping-ti and Mary Wright, argued about the success of some dynasties built by non-Han people, especially the Qing. They explained the success of sinicization in terms of its the social evolutionism or culturalism interpretation, especially the later one.⁵¹ In Ho Ping-Ti’s 1967 article, “The Significance of the Ch’ing Period in Chinese History”, he lists several reasons to demonstrate the significance of the Qing Dynasty, for instance, geographic expansion, the maturity of its political, economic, and social institutions, and so forth. And he attributes this success and significance of the Qing to Sinicization.⁵² With the attraction and superiority of Chinese culture, including almost every aspect related to Chinese culture, the “historical myth” of the continuity of

⁴⁸Song, “Nüzhen Hanhua”, p. 173.

⁴⁹Pines, “Beasts or Humans”, pp. 63–69.

⁵⁰Chen, *Huahua kao*, p. 5.

⁵¹Ho Ping-ti. “The significance of the Ch’ing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1967), pp.189–195; Mary C Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T’ung-Chih Restoration, 1862–1874*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1957; Xiao Yishan, *Qingdai tongshi* (General History of Qing Dynasty), (Beijing, 1986).

⁵²Ho, “Significance of the Ch’ing”, p. 191.

Chinese history in terms of culture regardless of dynastic change, and the “success” of those dynasties built by non-Han people can be well explained by these scholars.

This discourse of Sinicization for interpreting historical China served as the main target of criticism from the west. Evelyn Rawski considers Sinicization “a twentieth-century Han nationalist interpretation of China’s past”.⁵³ Compared to Rawski, Crossley’s analysis specifically points out the bare implication of Sinicization. She states:

The barest implications of “sinicization” were that Chinese culture was somehow autochthonous, rigid and exclusive, and in contact with other worlds either obliterated or was obliterated. Secondly, it was implied that through nothing much more subtle than the sheer charisma of Chinese culture, peoples were attracted to China and its society from elsewhere and, no great obstacle withstanding, were consumed in the flames of Hanhua.⁵⁴

Rawski’s criticism puts Sinicization into the background of nation-state building in 20th Century China, and interpreting historical China is an essential part for the process. With more detailed analysis, Crossley’s discussion of Sinicization reads Sinicization as cultural superiority, which implies “the sheer charisma of Chinese culture”. In that article, Crossley further suggests that some Chinese scholars, who use the terms like *tonghua* 同化 (assimilation), *xianghua* 向化 (submission and civilisation) and *ronghe* 融合 (fusion), should not be considered Sinicizationists since they give more definitive expression to cultural exchange in Chinese history.⁵⁵ Chen Yinke and Xiang Da are listed as the examples because of their discussion about “alien exploitation of Chinese political instruments and Central and Inner Asian impact upon the cultural traditions of the Northern Qi, Sui and Tang regimes”.⁵⁶

As a matter of fact, in many works related to Sinicization by Chinese scholars discussed above, such as Chen Yinke and Xiang Da, terms like *tonghua* and *xianghua* are interchangeable with Hanhua; *ronghe*, however, is a strikingly different term to express the process of Sinicization. Crossley overlooked this usage of Sinicization, but recognised it as a different and unrelated discussion. This usage is however, from another discourse of Sinicization, which is mainly used to support and stabilize the modern Chinese polity, although interpreting historical China and stabilizing modern China are always entangled with each other. In this discourse, different races and cultures are all included inside the category “the Chinese race” and “Chinese culture,” and the whole “Chinese race” and “Chinese culture” is a mixture and fusion of all of them. Therefore, according to these scholars, their adoption of Sinicization theory would not necessarily lead to an “autochthonous, rigid and exclusive” use of Chinese culture, as Crossley criticized. Instead, they emphasize the inclusivity and flexibility of Sinicization in the third discourse of Sinicization, which will be discussed in the next section.

⁵³Rawski, “Presidential Address”, p. 842.

⁵⁴Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity”, p. 2.

⁵⁵Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity”, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

4. Discourse Three: Racial and cultural diversity and contemporary polity

In the third discourse of Sinicization, the racial or cultural diversity inside the category of Chinese and its culture is emphasized to make either the historical or modern China, more specifically modern Chinese polity, to be more inclusive and flexible. This discourse is closely associated with the process of stabilising the modern Chinese polity during republican era and after. But to explain the significance of Sinicization in stabilizing the polity, different plans of rebuilding China in the end of Qing Dynasty will be discussed first.

(1). *Ways of rebuilding China*

With the weakening of the Qing regime in its final years, there were two different ideas about how to rebuild the Chinese state. One of them was espoused by the revolutionaries, such as Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, Zou Rong 邹容 and Liu Shiwei 刘师培. They wanted to construct Han nationalism in China. These revolutionaries considered the Manchu rulers to be barbaric invaders riding roughshod over the Han Chinese, so their regime needed to be overthrown.⁵⁷ They still believed, however, that the Manchu had already been assimilated already by the Chinese. For instance, Zhang Taiyan said:

Some may say if so then the Manchus are also minorities, and have already been slightly assimilated to us; why cannot they be considered the same as the Chinese. I answer: the reason that the assimilation of different nations is acceptable is because sovereignty is on our side and enables us to absorb them. The assimilation of the Manchu is not achieved by our pacifying and ruling, but because of their humiliating and overthrowing us. These two ways cannot be compared. It is like the example of marriage and plunder. If a woman is sent to us through marriage, then she will be assimilated by us; if they occupy our palace and beds through plundering, they also could be assimilated by us. It is absolutely clear, however, who is the enemy and who is a relative. I used to say the reason that we should drive the Manchus out is also because they overthrew our country and took away our sovereignty. If we defeated the enemy, and the Manchu Khan left Wanping and went to Huanglong Prefecture, then we can accept their submission and assimilation, and consider them the same as the Japanese and Thai people. Before our sovereignty was recovered, however, it could not be used as an example.

或曰若如是則滿洲人亦居少數，而已稍稍同化於我矣，奚不可與同中國，為答曰，所以容異族之同化者，以其主權在我，而足以翕受彼也，滿洲之同化，非以受我撫治而得之，乃以陵轢顛覆我而得之，二者之不可相比。猶婚媾與寇之例，以婚媾之道而歸女於吾族，彼女則固與吾族同化矣，以寇之道而據我寢宮入我牀第，亦未嘗不可與我同化，然其為怨為親，斷可識也，吾向者固云所為排滿洲者，亦曰覆我國家，攘我主權之故，若其克敵致果，而滿洲之汗大去宛平以適黃龍之府，則固當與日本暹羅同視種人順化歸斯受之而已矣，然主權未復即不得舉是為例。⁵⁸

What Zhang emphasized was that the initiative of assimilation was more important than cultural assimilation itself. The sovereignty of the Han nation should have the power to control the process of assimilation. Even if the Manchu people had been assimilated culturally by the

⁵⁷Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *He wei Zhongguo: jiangyu minzu wenhua yu lishi* 何为中国: 疆域民族文化与历史 (Hong Kong, 2014), pp. 78–79.

⁵⁸Zhang Taiyan, *Taiyanwenji* 太炎文錄, vol. 1, in *bielu* section, Minguo Zhangshi congshu edition 民國章氏叢書本.

Chinese, they still should not have been treated as Chinese (Zhongguo 中国). Therefore, the Han Chinese could not accept them as rulers. This point of view was against the concept of culturalism in classic Chinese thought. Joseph R. Levenson pointed out that “the civilization, not the nation, has a moral claim on man’s allegiance” in classic Chinese doctrine.⁵⁹ In other words, as Hao Jing 郝经 (1223–1275) from the Yuan Dynasty had said, “Those who can carry out the *dao* of China (Zhongguo 中国), are the rulers of China” (能行中国之道，则中国主也).⁶⁰ From the revolutionaries’ perspective, however, this was even worse than those “barbaric” rulers who carried out the Chinese way, as Liu Shipai said,

Alas, when barbarians entered our China, they occupied our earth, mountains and rivers, stole our young men, women and property. They borrowed for a long time and never returned, without realising that these were not their belongings. How pathetic. The most pathetic of all was that they stole the wisest doctrine of our deceased emperors. Alas, the ethics and rites of barbarians were different from that of the central mainland. Their construction of ritual codes and production of music were, in fact the source of their weakness. Their abandonment of the barbarian customs and adherence to Chinese culture did not prove that they truly respected the doctrine of the sages. It was only a way of using Chinese law to deal with the Chinese land. They did this under the name of defending the doctrine (*dao*) ---- who on earth were they deceiving?

嗟乎，夷狄之入我中國也，據其土地山河，竊其子女玉帛，久假不歸，烏知非有，已可悲矣，其尤甚者，至並竊先王之至道。嗚呼，夷裔禮教與中土殊，制禮作樂實為衰弱之源，其舍夷從夏者，豈真知聖道之尊哉，不過以漢土之法還治漢土耳。於此而託名衛道則吾誰欺。⁶¹

Because those foreign rulers really did not understand the Chinese way, they just used Chinese methods to manipulate the Han Chinese people. The revolutionaries’ viewpoints vividly illustrates Levenson’s paradigm of *tianxia* (all-under-heaven) giving away to nation-state during the process of constructing modern China.

Towards the end of the Qing dynasty, the more urgent task became how to reunite all the people who formerly had been under the rule of the Qing government. Besides the political thought of the Chinese republic of five races (*wuzu gonghe* 五族共和, the five races include Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan), historical research also reflects this political necessity.⁶² In 1910, Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) published an article “Zhongguoshi xulun (中国史叙论 [Discussion of Chinese History])” about how researchers should deal with Chinese history. In the fifth section, on “race” (*renzhong* 人种),⁶³ he states that there are more than ten races in Chinese history. Six races are the most obvious and relevant

⁵⁹Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965), p. 102.

⁶⁰Hao Jing 郝经, “Yu Songguo chengxiang lun benchao bingluan shu 与宋国丞相论本朝兵乱书,” in *Lingchuan wenji* 陵川文集 (Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan edition 北京图书馆古籍珍本丛刊), vol. 38, 6 (upper section) -11 (lower section).

⁶¹Liu Shipai, “Yudao pian 鬻道篇,” in *Rangshu* 攘书 (Minguo Liushenchu xiansheng yishu edition 民國《劉申叔先生遺書》本).

⁶²Ge, “*Hewe Zhongguo*,” p. 78; Wang, “*Zhongguo*,” pp. 215–222.

⁶³Here, based on the context, *renzhong* 人种 should be translated as to race. In the beginning of the *renzhong* section, Liang Qichao says that western scholars divided the world population into five, three or seven kinds, which is not the ethnicity but race. Liang Qichao 梁启超, “Zhongguoshi xulun 中国史叙论,” in *Yinbingshi heji* 饮冰室合集 vol.6 (Beijing, 1988), pp. 5–7.

ones; the Miao 苗, Han 汉, Tibetan 图伯特, Mongolian 蒙古, Xiongnu 匈奴 and Tungus 通古斯 peoples.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Liang emphasizes that even though he has listed six races, it still was very hard to distinguish one from the other. He says,

Different races and nations, however, were generated separately. Their population was amazingly great. Moreover, their mixed inhabitation has a long history. They intermarried with each other. Their ancestry also mingled together. Nowadays, if we intend to divide the boundary between some races or nations, it is not easy. Not to mention, the nomadic people whose constant migration followed no customary pattern. If we, as people who live thousands of years after, try to identify the nomadic nations recorded in history with today’s nations one by one, it is either a silly deed or an absurd fallacy. Therefore, nowadays people use six nations to describe all the peoples who appeared in Chinese history, which cannot avoid the criticism for being arbitrary and carelessly omissive.

然則各種各族，各自發生，其數之多，殆不可思議。且也錯居既久，婚姻互通，血統相雜。今欲確指某族某種之分界線，其事蓋不易易。況遊牧民族，遷徙無常，立於數千年之後，而指前者發現於歷史上之民族，一一求今之民族以實之，非愚則誣。故今日以六種族包括中國史內之人民，誠不免武斷掛漏之譏。⁶⁵

From this point, if the bloodlines of all these different races already had been mixed during the long history of China, the so-called Han race should not be accentuated since “even our Han race, was actually from the same ancestor? Or just arose separately? This is also an undecidable question. (即吾漢族，果同出於一祖乎，抑各自發生乎，亦一未能斷定之問題也)”.⁶⁶ Therefore, all these different peoples that Liang listed should be treated within Chinese history, as their own history was also a part of Chinese history. For this purpose, since the late 1920s, Sinicization were adopted widely in the field of Chinese history to construct another discourse from the earliest ones discussed above.

(2). Racial and cultural diversity and mixture

In Feng Chengjun’s article about the Sinicization of foreign people during the Tang Dynasty, he begins his argument by stating that all the nationalities with a long history are “*zazhong* 杂种 (mixed/hybrid nation)” and so were the “*Hanzhong* 汉种”.⁶⁷ Apparently his point followed Liang Qichao’s idea about the “*Hanzhong* 汉种”.⁶⁸ Then, Feng gave his description and definition of Huahua. Unlike Chen Yuan, he did not emphasize the superiority of the unique Chinese culture, but the “Han nation (*Hanzhong* 汉种)”, stating that:

Xianbei, which was discussed below [in this article], had already been Sinicized in the Tang dynasty. Except for a small number of people with the surnames from the north of Daizhou (代州), Xianbei people were in fact no different from other Tang people. From this aspect, the extent to which Yuan Zhen 元稹 was Chinese was no less than today’s so-called Han (汉) people. On the other hand, the differentiation between today’s so called Manchu people and Han people could

⁶⁴Liang, “Zhongguoshi Xulun”, pp. 5–7.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Here, although Feng uses the “*zhong* 种” similar to Liang Qichao’s “*renzhong* 人种,” in Feng’s context, the “*zhong*” is closer to nation or ethnicity; the people who share the same “*zhong*” also share history and culture in Feng’s writing. So I use “nation” to translate Feng’s *zhong*.

⁶⁸Feng, “Tangdai Huahua”, p. 134.

in fact be ignored. The Han ethnic group is like a vast ocean, while Xianbei, Turks, Khitan, Jurchen, Mongol, and Manchu are like streams. Since all these rivers run into the sea, how can we distinguish between river water and sea water?

[本文]此后所述之鲜卑，在唐时已早华化，除其少数代北姓氏之外，实与唐人无殊。就此点言，元稹之汉人程度，不能少于今日所谓汉人，而今日所谓满人与汉人，相差之程度，亦无几矣。汉种犹之大海，鲜卑、突厥、契丹、女真、蒙古、满洲皆如川流，诸川入海，尚有何川水海水之可辨耶。⁶⁹

Feng's description of "Huahua" here accentuated the diversity and mixture of the "Han nation", which absorbed all the other small ethnic groups as an ocean absorbs all the small rivers and makes them indistinguishable inside the ocean. This type of description appeared in later Chinese historical writing again and again. In the discussion at the end of Mao Wen's article about the Sinicization of the Khitan people in the Liao Dynasty, he said,

The Chinese nation is, in fact, a flexible colossus. After the Han people and Liao people came into contact with each other, the Liao people were assimilated by the Han like iron being melted by a furnace. This is for certain, but the fact that the fire in the furnace also has changed constantly should be remembered. Moreover, the Liao people rose from the North, and the nations in the northwest and northeast all were dominated by them. Their Sinicization also made Chinese civilisation spread to the nations in the northwest and northeast.

中华民族实一具有弹性之庞大物也。汉辽接触而后，辽化於汉，如铁入炉。斯固然已，特炉中之焰，亦复时生变化为可念耳。⁷⁰矧辽人起自朔方，东北西北诸国族，彼实尽之。彼其汉化，亦所以传播华夏文明於东北西北诸民族也。⁷¹

Mao's metaphor compared the Han to a furnace. To some extent, this is similar to Feng Chengjun's comparison of the Han nation to an ocean and other ethnic groups to the rivers. The concept of Chinese Nationality (Zhonghua minzu 中华民族) in this quotation is also similar as Feng Chengjun's "Hanzhong (Han nation)". They both kept taking in other ethnic groups around China during the course of Chinese history. This made them indistinguishable so they became part of the Chinese Nationality; and the "Chinese Nationality" or "Han nation" itself also had changed from time to time. This change is not only about the racial mixture, but also or even mainly culture mixture. Mao also made a further statement that "Chinese civilization (Huaxia wenming 华夏文明)" had been transmitted to the ethnic groups in northwest and northeast China through the Hanhua of the Khitan people.

(3). *Stabilising China*

As for the early cases of using Sinicization, anxieties over losing the borderlands of the Republic of China can be found in many places. In one of the earliest examples, the Sinicization of Tibet are discussed because the author worried that Tibet might be Europeanised (Ouhua 欧化) and seek support from Europe. So the author wanted the Republic of China

⁶⁹Feng, "Tangdai Huahua", p. 132.

⁷⁰Fire in the furnace refers to Han civilization, and here Mao gives an example that Buddhism was introduced to the Liao from Han territory, which is a kind of transformed "fire".

⁷¹Mao, "Liaoren Hanhua", pp. 23–43.

to become more powerful and have more influence on Tibet by using Sinicization.⁷² This idea was the same as Sun Yat-sen’s interpretation of nationalism in the Three People’s Principles (sanmin zhuyi 三民主义) in early 1920s.⁷³ Meanwhile, in a 1935 article, Mao Wen argued that the Khitan people had become an indistinguishable part of “Chinese Nationality”. He emphasized that Chinese civilization had been transmitted to northwest and northeast China by the Khitan people. Therefore, in the end of the article, he claimed,

Who says that the northeastern people would finally end up as barbarians? Among the descendants of Jishou,⁷⁴ there were those who revitalised in different eras. We need only to rub our eyes and wait for them.

谁谓东北民族，其终沦於夷狄乎。奇首后裔，间有异代而兴者，谨拭目以待之可耳。⁷⁵

From this statement, it is clear that what really concerns Mao Wen is that northeastern China, which was occupied and controlled by the Japanese at that time, might be lost to the barbarians (Yidi 夷狄). By arguing that the ancestor of the northeastern ethnic groups was the Khitan people, who integrated into the Chinese nation, their descendants along with their territory, should also be part of China and no longer controlled by the Japanese.

With the gradual increase of threat from the Japanese against China in the 1930s, and in response to Japanese politicians and scholars theory of “preserving China” or “carving up China”,⁷⁶ the unity of “Chinese nationality (Zhonghua minzu 中华民族)” was more and more accentuated. The construction of a history for Chinese Nationality became significant and urgent.⁷⁷

In 1931, after the Mukden Incident on September 18, the government of the Republic of China made a course in the General History of China mandatory for college students.⁷⁸ With the beginning of the full-scale invasion of China by the Japanese was marked by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July of 1937, Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚 published an article with the title “The Chinese nation is one (Zhonghua minzu shi yige 中华民族是一个)”, which was supported by many Chinese scholars.⁷⁹ In this article, he began with the statement of “All the people of China belong to the Chinese Nation ... within the Chinese Nation we should no longer differentiate any other nationalities ... from now on everybody should exercise caution on using these two characters: *minzu* (民族, nationality)”.⁸⁰ Then he

⁷²Laopu, “Hanzu yu Feihanzu”, p. 20.

⁷³Wang, “Zhongguo”, p. 226.

⁷⁴Jishou is ancestor of the Khitan people according to *Liaoshi. Liaoshi*, juan, pp. 32, 378.

⁷⁵Mao, “Liaoren Hanhua”, p. 43.

⁷⁶The Japanese thinkers claim that as the leader of East Asia, they have the responsibility to protect East Asians from the western states. Either “preserving China” or “carving up China” would need the help of the Japanese, which would involve military occupation and “supporting” the local ethnic groups to build “their own” nation-state, such as the Manchukuo state. Ge, *Hewei Zhongguo*, pp. 82–84.

⁷⁷Before the Japanese threat becoming more serious, there were other ideas of dealing with the different ethnic groups inside China and in Chinese history. Ge, *Hewei Zhongguo*, pp. 91–97.

⁷⁸Li Mumiao 李木妙, *Guoshi dashi Qian Mu jiaoshou zhuanlue* 国史大师钱穆教授传略 (Taipei, 1995), p. 77.

⁷⁹Zhou Wenjiu 周文玖, “Cong yige dao duoyuan yiti: guanyu Zhongguo minzu lilun fazhan de shixueshi kaocha (从一个到多元一体: 关于中国民族理论发展的史学史考察),” in *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Science)* 44, no.4 (2007), pp. 102–110; Ge, *Hewei Zhongguo*, pp. 104–109.

⁸⁰Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚, “Zhonghua minzu shi yige 中华民族是一个”, in *Kunming: Shiyi bao* 世益报 (Feb. 13, 1939).

continued to argue that all the different cultures inside China were the culture of “Chinese Nationality”, and so were the people inside China.⁸¹ By means of this theory, Gu wished to unite all the people inside China to fight against the Japanese. During this time, several works regarding general Chinese history and ethnic history were also published; one of the most famous was the *Outline of National History* (*Guoshi dagang*, 国史大纲) finished in 1939 and published in 1940 by Qian Mu 钱穆.

Although Qian’s book was a general history about China, the Inner Asian peoples did not play an important role in his book. For example, he only spent one chapter on the Liao and Jin Dynasties, and their relationship with the Song, but three chapters on the Song Dynasty. For the Inner Asian peoples in the *Outline of National History*, for instance, when he discussed the Northern Dynasties, he said,

At the time, China invited the barbaric groups of five Hu people into the heartland. Since then, these barbarian groups have been influenced by Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, although these people seized the opportunity to revolt, they already had been sharing the same powerful current of culture with the Chinese. Such a powerful current of culture irrigated the vitality of their life, and thus permeated their existence. The division, upsurge, alternation and revitalisation of these barbarians were happenings that only mirrored the fluctuation inside Chinese society itself.

当时五胡诸蛮族,中国延之入内地者,自始即与以中国传统文化之熏陶,故彼辈虽乘机骚动,而彼辈固已同饮此文化之洪流,以浇灌其生机,而浸润其生命。彼辈之分起迭兴,其事乃仅等于中国社会内部自身之一种波动。⁸²

So the argument is that those Inner Asian groups were “nurtured” by Chinese traditional culture and are included into the Chinese Nationality through the process of Sinicization, which Qian mentioned a number of times in his book. According to Qian Mu, the internal transformations brought about by the Inner Asian peoples are all just fluctuations inside Chinese society, which is similar to Gu Jiegang’s argument.

From the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republican Era, the theoretical structure of the history of Chinese Nationality was gradually built to support the contemporary Chinese polity. Later on, a number of scholars made adjustments to the interpretation of Chinese Nationality, but the base of this theoretical framework continues even into the 21st Century.⁸³ One significant characteristic of this theoretical framework is its inclusivity and flexibility, and the third discourse of Sinicization theory has played an important role to make it attain this characteristic. Under this theoretical framework, scholars then can pay more attention to the elements brought into Chinese civilisation by other non-

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Qian Mu 钱穆, *Guoshi dagang* (国史大纲) (Beijing, 1991), p. 19.

⁸³ See Chen Yinke, “Li Tang shizu zhi tuice houji” 李唐氏族之推测後记, in *Jinming guan conggao erbian* 金明館叢稿二編 (Shanghai, 1980), p. 303; Young-tsu Wong 汪荣祖, *Lun duominzu Zhongguo de wenhua jiaorong* 论多民族中国的文化交融, in *Huren Hanhua yu Hanren huhua* 胡人汉化与汉人胡化, edited by Young-tsu Wong and Lin Guanqun 林冠群 (Yijia, 2006), pp. 1–40; Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, “Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of the Chinese People”, The Tanner lectures on human values, delivered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Nov. 15 and 17, 1988. Chinese version of this lecture is in *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* (中华民族多元一體格局), edited by Fei Xiaotong (Beijing, 1999), pp. 3–39; Yao Congwu 姚從吾, “Guoshi kuoda yanmian de yige kanfa (國史擴大綿延的一個看法),” in *Dongbei shi luncong* 東北史論叢 1 (Taipei, 1959), pp. 1–26.

Han people. When Chen Yinke argues about the success of the Tang empire, he states that “With the barbarian blood of valor and vigor was injected into the decadent body of Central Plains culture, moribund conventions were removed and a new vitality was reborn. By developing and carrying forward [the new vitality], then [the Tang] was able to distinctively create an unprecedented prosperity”.⁸⁴ In this statement, the “Barbarian blood of valor and vigor” refers to the Inner Asian people and culture during the Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern Dynasties. In his research on this period, besides Hanhua, he also uses another term “Huhua (胡化 barbarianisation)” to describe how the Han people in northern China were affected by “barbaric” culture. Young-tsu Wong also put the Huhua together with Hanhua and Yanghua (洋化 foreignisation) in his article discussing the multi-ethnic China. Later in Mainland China, the main theory about the Chinese Nationality is the “Plurality and Unity (*duoyuan yiti* 多元一体)” theory by Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, who argues that plural nationalities (*minzu* 民族) and cultures form the unity of Chinese Nationality both in historical and modern China.

That is also why Ho Ping-ti, in the beginning of his rebuttal to Rawski’s speech, stated:

To reduce the potential for misunderstanding, I should state explicitly that Chinese civilisation certainly changes over time, in part because of internal developments and in part because contacts with the very peoples who become sinicized also expand the content of what it can mean to be Chinese. While there are certain elements of Chinese thinking and behavior that have an extremely long historical pedigree, Chinese culture takes on distinctive characteristics in different historical periods as the culture is itself transformed.⁸⁵

In Ho’s explanation, Chinese civilisation and Chinese culture changed over time through internal development and contact with “Sinicized” people. Those people had expanded the content of being Chinese. It is clear that Ho’s argument was the same as the basic theoretical framework about Chinese Nationality. Therefore, in his argument, the Manchu identification should not have excluded other forms of identity and been included in the Chinese Nationality; in other words, one can be Manchu and Chinese at the same time.⁸⁶ Apparently, in Ho’s context, Chinese represented not only Han Chinese but the entirety of Chinese Nationality.

In all these and earlier researches, the stable base of the theoretical framework for Chinese Nationality includes the notion that all the peoples inside China possess Chinese Nationality; hybrid Chinese Nationality is also a changing historical entity defined by different peoples from different dynasties. So the category of “Chinese Nationality” can unite (or eliminate differences between) all the historical and present peoples inside the Republic of China and People’s Republic of China to form an egalitarian identity as a member of “Chinese Nationality”. The third discourse of Sinicization theory, constructed in Feng Chengjun’s, Mao Wen’s, Song Wenbing’s, Qian Mu’s and Ho Ping-ti’s works discussed above, has played a significant role in the formation of Chinese Nationality during the historical development, which is mainly for ideologically constructing and stabilising the contemporary Chinese polity.

⁸⁴Chen, “Li Tang shizhu”, p. 303.

⁸⁵Ho, “defense”, p. 125.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

5. Discussion

This article differentiates three different discourses from the usages of Sinicization by scholars from both Chinese-language and English-language scholars since early 20th Century. Every discourse is rooted in its own intellectual trend, and also faces different criticisms. The first discourse use Sinicization to describe the acculturation or assimilation of the border and domestic people by different aspects of Chinese culture, and this discourse of Sinicization continues today. With Sinicization serving as a descriptive term in the first discourse, some scholars tried to interpret Sinicization to explain the “great and continuous” or “success” of historical China, and some used Sinicization to emphasize the diversity and mixture of the people living inside historical and contemporary China to maintain and stabilise the modern Chinese polity. Then the two other discourses are constructed by these scholars.

Although the three discourses of Sinicization can be separated, they are not completely divided and separate, and scholars often combine two or all of them together in their argument while using the term, which caused confusion in the discussions and debates about Sinicization. The first discourse is a narration of a historical phenomenon, and some scholars like John Dardess and Peter Bol think it is too general and broad and has limited and problematic analytic value. So some scholars want to narrow it down to make it more accurate. The second one is a historical interpretation. Since the second discourse is a historical interpretation and explanation of historical China, it unquestionably can be criticised, challenged, supplemented, or even replaced, and this discourse is indeed often criticised by scholars such as Pamela Crossley. By applying the Sinicization theory to every dynasty, the historical interpretation becomes a deterministic narrative. As a reaction to the flourishing of Sinicization theory in China and its adoption by some western scholars, the ethnicity of the non-Chinese peoples in Chinese history is emphasized more and more in the works of western scholars as represented by the New Qing historians. When they criticise this interpretation, however, they usually only target the second discourse, and overlooked the third one sometimes combined into their argument. Scholars, especially Chinese scholars, however, often use Sinicization or respond to the criticism with the third discourse or combine the second and third together. The third discourse, nevertheless, is a political narrative and construction for the contemporary Chinese polity. Sinicization of the third discourse is argued to be inclusive, and its content then becomes loose, broad and vague. In this sense, it is almost pointless and useless to argue against the whole discourse academically, although some complement to Sinicization, such as “Barbarianization (Huhua),” offered some insight to the history of China.

The analysis of different discourses of Sinicization in this article allow us to put the discussion of the usages of Sinicization into their own discourses, and more caution should be used while adopting or criticising this term in the future.

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