Geography and Culture: The Middle-Period Discourse on the *Zhong guo* — the Central Country**

Peter K. Bol*

Abstract

During the middle period (8th -15th century) literati began to discuss *Zhong guo* as both historical place and as culture. Although such writing made a clear distinction between *Zhong guo* as the central and superior spatiocultural entity and the surrounding peoples and states (the *Yi di*), these writers were also opposed to an expansionist foreign policy that tried to incorporate outsiders into the empire. In contrast foreign conquerors typically avoided the discourse of *Zhong guo* and instead used ethnicity as basis for defining membership in their empires. Although this was a means of legislating privileges for the conquering minority it also removed the limits on imperial expansion that were inherent in the discourse of the *Zhong guo*.

Keywords: Song dynasty, *Zhong guo*, foreign relations, intellectual history

---

* Peter K. Bol is a professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University.

** I thank the participants at the International Conference on Cultural Interpretations of Mobility, particularly Profs. Wang Deyi and Deng Xiaonan, for their comments. Another version of this essay was presented at the International Conference on Translocal and Transregional Dynamics in Chinese History, 960-1911, at the National University of Singapore, May 2008; I thank Profs. Ong Chang Woei and Koh Khee Heong.

Preface

This paper takes up the cultural interpretation of mobility from a spatial perspective. Just as we can view social mobility as crossing limits that otherwise constrain the scope of a person's or a class's work and aspirations, we can view spatial mobility as crossing boundaries in space that are constructed to define where a person, or even a country, belongs. A foreign conquest is an example of spatial mobility.

Mobility, whether social or spatial, requires the existence of boundaries and limits, for without them mobility would be a meaningless term. The most concrete manifestation of the idea of boundaries are spatial borders, whether between prefectures or countries. In contrast to social boundaries, which we easily see as being culturally constructed, political borders appear to be closer to physical objects in that they can be described and delineated and easily accepted as real. Yet in practice spatial borders, whether they are human constructs or physical objects, are not constant over space and time. And because they are not constant they must be justified, maintained, and interpreted.

This paper looks at the cultural interpretation of the spatial boundaries of that entity which is essential to any discussion of Chinese history: China itself. It does so from two perspectives: those who defined and defended the borders of that place and those who crossed those borders and redrew them. It asks how this was done, what meaning was attached to being inside them or outside them, and what different approaches were meant to accomplish. This inquiry is focused on the middle period—from the start of Tang's decline in the mid-eighth century to the consolidation of Ming rule in the early fifteenth—a period of unprecedented border crossing and boundary redefinition, and it considers the views of both Chinese literati and foreign conquerors.

I pursue this in the first instance through an examination of literati definitions of a transdynastic spatiocultural entity during the middle period, and their use of the term *Zhong guo* 中國 for that entity. The ideological use of the

term seems to have been most frequent in thinking about relations with the states and peoples beyond the borders, an issue of particular concern during this period. The term *Zhong guo* was a vehicle for both a spatial claim—that there was spatial area that had a continuous history going back to the "central states" (the *zhong guo*) of the central plain during the Eastern Zhou—and a cultural claim—that there was a continuous culture that had emerged in that place which its inhabitant ought to, but might not, continue. I translate *Zhong guo* as "the Central Country."

In brief I argue that spatially and culturally literati always deployed the term *Zhong guo* in relationship to a wider world to establish an opposition between the *Zhong guo* and those outside of it, who were typically referred as the *Yi di* 夷狄. This pairing was asymmetrical. The *Zhong guo* referred to a state formation and *Yi di* named the entities outside of it as tribes, thus making a cultural distinction between those who had a state and those who lived in a lesser order of sociopolitical organization. This was purposeful, for all speakers were fully aware that many of those they grouped as *Yi di* had states of their own, that in fact the known world had a great number of states, and the language of diplomacy recognized this with its reference to "ambassadors of external states" (外國使).[1] The use of the *Zhong guo* was also a spatial definition. It asserted that this *guo* was central relative to all others (a quality that requires assuming that there were many *guo* under heaven), thus defining all others as peripheral. This asymmetry helps explain why outsiders were at best ambivalent about adopting the term *Zhong guo* in a cultural sense, for by doing so they were locating themselves as *Yi di*. The issue came to a head when outsiders became insiders, when those who had been called *Yi di* gained sway over part or all of the territory associated with the *Zhong guo*. One strategy that they adopted—such as the Mongols' use of tribal terms to distinguish between all the peoples under their sway and to legislate differentiated privileges for these population groups—was

1 Tuotuo 脫脫, ed., *Song shi* 宋史, Scripta Sinica ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 5.96, 50.996, 50.1006, 114.2719, etc.

perhaps conducive to a certain kind of ethnic nationalism.[2]

In translating the *Zhong guo* as "the Central Country" I have rejected its common translation as "the Middle Kingdom." It seems to me that those who used "the Central Country" were not focusing on political authority but on the cultural qualities of the one country that was at the center. I use the term "country," reserving "state," the common translation of the term *guo*, for dynastic states and government activities. Middle-period writers were interested in the possibility of a transdynastic spatiocultural entity, a country rather than a dynastic empire or a modern nation-state.

The Zhong guo and Zhongguo/China

Before proceeding we need to make a distinction. A reader of middle-period texts who encounters the two characters *zhong guo* is likely to translate the term as "China" because today the internal name of the country that is known in English as China is *Zhongguo*. Today China is a nation-state that claims a history that includes many different dynastic states, population groups (or ethnic groups 民族), and cultural traditions. A leading contemporary historian of China points out that "The concept of 'national history' in its current Western usage was wholly unfamiliar to Chinese historians before the 20th century."[3] The spatiotemporal term we use, "China," originates in the Sanskrit *cīna* but enters into Latinate languages rather late, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

2 For reasons that will be made clear, this does not lead me to support the view of China as a multi-ethnic state such as argued in Wang Ke 王柯, *Min zu yu guo jia—Zhongguo duo min zu tong yi guo jia si xiang de xi pu* 民族與國家：中國多民族统一國家思想的系譜 (Beijing: Zhongguo she ke, 2001).

3 Yu Yingshi 余英時, "Changing Conceptions of National History in Twentieth Century China," in *Conceptions of National History. Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78*, ed. Erik Lönrith, Karl Molin, and Ragnar Björk (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994). Cited in Achim Mittag, "The Early Modern Formation of a National Identity in Chinese Historical Thought — Random Notes on Ming and Early-Qing Historiography" (paper presented at the Chinese and Comparative Historical Thinking in the 21st Century, Fudan University, Shanghai, 2004).

from the Persian toponym Chīnī. Europe of the middle ages used the term Cathay, which came through Inner Asia and stems from "Khitan," the name of the people who created the Great Liao State (907-1125).[4] Whatever the name, outsiders referring to a place that they believed had an existence over time.

When we ask what the inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth century called that place, however, the term that came to mind was the dynastic entity, the Great Qing State 大清國, which was not equivalent to "China" as Westerners at the time used that term, yet in the twentieth century "China/*Zhongguo*" had become an officially mandated term for this country as a continuous historical entity from antiquity to the present. The argument, which I take from Lydia Liu, goes roughly like this: at the end of the nineteenth century some leading intellectuals, having seen that modern Western nation-states referred to their country by names such as France and England, despite changes in political power, argued that their own country needed a name as well, something that recognized its historical continuity without privileging one dynasty. Ultimately, over the objections of some, the ancient term *zhong guo* was adopted and entered into the new nationalist education program (over alternatives such as *zhong hua* 中華 and *hua xia* 華夏). But this modern term, which I shall transcribe as *Zhongguo*, was deployed in new ways, as the equivalent of the Western term "China." In other words the use of "China" and "Chinese" began as a Western usage; they were then adopted by the government of the people the West called "the Chinese" to identify their own country, its culture, language, and population. This took place in the context of establishing the equality of this country in international relations and creating a Western-style nation-state, a "China" to which the "Chinese" could be loyal.[5] In using *Zhongguo*/China to

4 On various external names for "China" see Endymion Porter Wilkinson, *Chinese history: a manual*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), p. 132, pp. 750-753. For a detailed review of external naming see Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, *Wei zai si ming: "Zhongguo" gujin chengwei yanjiu* 偉哉斯名：「中國」古今稱謂研究 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), pp. 329-379.

5 Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 75-81, pp. 264-265. Liu notes that at least one official from

refer to its history, the People's Republic of China in fact recognizes that its population is composed of different peoples. They are all officially "Chinese" but it still distinguishes among peoples with different heritages and languages. Thus the majority population is said to be people of the "Han ethnicity" who speak the "Han language." At least officially there is no such thing as the "Chinese" language, although in informal practice the term "Chinese" pertains to the "Han ethnicity."

China today uses a term that in the ancient Eastern Zhou period referred to the central (*zhong*) states (*guo*) of the central plain (*zhong yuan* 中原) to name a country that asserts its inclusion of the pastoral and aboriginal peoples, lands, and histories that were outside of the "central states" in Eastern Zhou. I can see nothing to object to in this. The referents of the name changed over time; no one period has ultimate authority over its meaning.[6] However, when we read this modern *Zhongguo*/China back onto past texts and past minds, so that every occurrence of the term *zhong guo* appears to us to be the same as "China," we may be wrongly imputing a particular national historical consciousness to the past. For reasons that will be discussed below, the use of terms such as "*Hua*," *Hua-xia*" and "*Zhong guo*" to refer to a transdynastic entity was not the same

---

the "Great State of Qing" (the official name for the polity from 1644 to 1911) found the Western use of "China" and "Chinese" insulting for its refusal to acknowledge in words the political status of his country.

6 This point is made with great clarity by Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, "Lishi shang de Zhongguo he Zhongguo lidai jiangyu 歷史上的中國和中國歷代疆域," *Zhongguo bianjiang shi yanjiu* 中國邊疆史地研究 8.1 (1991). For Tan the adoption of Zhongguo as an inclusive term fit the general trend of history in which once excluded peoples came to be part of China. In contrast, Fei Xiaotong and Chen Liankai took the view that this conception Zhongguo/China was taking form over history; see Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, ed., *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yi ti geju* 中華民族多元一體格局, revised by Chen Liankai 陳連開 ed. (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 169-189, pp. 211-244. Tsutsumi argues that the idea of combining the foreign and native into one state only emerges in Yuan and is adopted in early Ming; Tsustumi Kazuaki 堤一昭, "Chūgoku no jigazō — sono jikan to kūkan o kitei suru mono 中國の自畫像—その時間と空間を規定するもの," in *Gendai Chūgoku chiiki kenkyū no aratana shiken* 現代中國地域研究の新たな視圏, ed. Nishimura Shigeo 西村成雄 (Kyōto 京都: Sekai Shisōsha 世界思想社, 2007), pp. 39-49.

thing as the modern use of China/*Zhongguo* as a counterpart to "England" or "France." Like Ge Zhaoguang, I think the use of the term *Zhong guo* during the middle period came to encapsulate a particular kind of national historical consciousness, one that was not the same as the modern term "China" yet was different from what had gone before.[7]

Comprehending Historical Space and Time

A striking feature of middle-period intellectual culture was its interest in envisioning continuity through space and time, even if it lacked the equivalent of a transdynastic country name such as "China." We find this in well-known historical works. The best example is the series of works that had "continuity/comprehensiveness" (通) in their title: Du You's 杜佑 *Comprehensive Canons* 通典 from the late eighth century; Sima Guang's 司馬光(1019-1086) *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* 資治通鑑, which created a single 1400 year chronology that included all dynastic states without defining any one as more legitimate than others; Zheng Qiao's 鄭樵 *Comprehensive Treatises* 通志 from the mid-twelfth century; and Ma Duanlin's 馬端臨 *Comprehensive Examination of the Written Record* 文獻通考 from the early fourteenth century.[8] These attempts to create single frameworks for the understanding of the past were, I think, one possible response to the fundamental reordering of the connections between wealth, power, status, and culture that was taking place.

---

7 Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, "Songdai 'Zhongguo' yishi de tuxian — guanyu jinshi minzuzhuyi sixiang de yige yuanyuan 宋代「中國」意識的凸顯—關于近世民族主義思想的一個遠源," *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲(Qinghua University), 1 (2004). Ge argues that the rise of foreign states in the north during the course of the Tang-Song transition led to a new national self-consciousness, in which spatial and cultural boundaries came to be more sharply drawn than before, and a concern over political legitimacy (正統) and moral authority (道統).

8 Du You 杜佑, *Tong dian* 通典, Scripta Sinica (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988); Ma Duanlin 馬端臨, *Wen xian tong kao* 文獻通考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986); Zheng Qiao 鄭樵, *Tong zhi* 通志 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1896). Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956), 69, pp. 2185-2188. Although he reasserted the idea of legitimate dynasties, Zhu Xi's redaction of Sima's history adopted his chronological approach.

Even more striking was the attempt to make geographical visualizations and compilations serve the purpose of transdynastic continuity, for a geographic perspective is by its nature better suited to capturing variation through space at a particular moment than to relating change over time. The "Map of the Traces of Yu" 禹跡圖, engraved in 1136, sought to relate the present to the description of the geographic whole found in the "Tributes of Yu" 禹貢 section of the *Book of Documents* 尚書. In that text the Great Yu moved through the terrain, distinguishing regions, recognizing distinctive qualities, and, above all, rechanneling the water system so as to bring all regions into a single system, without erasing their distinctiveness. The "Map of the Traces of Yu" is grid map scaled at 100 *li* (ca. 30 miles) to the square (about a 1:4.5 million scale). It aims at accuracy in depicting the coastline, rivers, lakes and mountains, with the depicted river system being an attempt to capture the uncertain account of the rivers in the ancient text. At the same time it locates the modern Song capitals and prefectures on the physical landscape. It does not include the Great Wall and although the map covers parts of Liao, Xia, and Dali, it does not mark their administrative units (with the exception of the sixteen prefectures disputed with Liao). It draws no boundaries—but it is unclear whether it is avoiding the subject or reflecting the court's aggressive push at the borders. It is bereft of any text and depends on the viewer's ability to intuitively grasp it as a spatial proposition about and representation of Song relative to the earliest known account of the world. It is far more accurate than other known contemporary maps.[9] It belongs to a tradition of spatially accurate national map-making, dating back to Pei Xiu 裴秀 (224-271), but the point of the map is not spatial accuracy but a historical claim: the present world is continuous with antiquity.

A different approach, but one that supports the continuity of the present with the past, is evident in the commercially printed *Handy Maps of Geography Through the Ages* 歷代地理指掌圖 from the twelfth century. This atlas creates

9 Cao Wanru 曹婉如 and et al., eds., *Zhongguo gudai ditu ji* 中國古代地圖集, 3 vols. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990-1994), vol 2, pp. 54-56.

historical continuity through its depiction of political and administrative features with forty-four maps and accompanying texts, from antiquity through the Northern Song. It begins with a general map of "Territories of the Hua 華 and the Yi 夷 in the Past and Present" that identifies Song administrative units and foreign states and a second general map (now leaving out the Korean peninsula), "Names of Mountains and Rivers of the Hua and Yi Through the Ages," which also names Song administrative units. The maps are based on a common template that includes the Great Wall and Northern Song prefectures; they cover mainly what we would today call "China proper." Because the maps label the Northern Song prefectures the viewer can look at any past period and locate contemporary prefectures within the administrative structure of the past.[10]

A contemporary work does the same thing without recourse to maps. The *Extensive Record of the Realm* 輿地廣記 is a privately compiled historical gazetteer in two parts. The first lists the upper administrative hierarchy in past periods (Tribute of Yu, Shun, seven Warring States, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, Jin, Tang, Tang military governors, and the Five dynasties), but lists within each the Northern Song prefectures. The second part details the Song administrative hierarchy, down to the county 縣 level, and gives the administrative history of each (i.e. its founding and changes over time).[11] The preface suggests that this is not only a reference work, readers should see from it that there is spatial continuity between the present and antiquity, and this conclusion apparently is meant to support the compiler's stated opposition to the court's efforts to expand Song territory, a point to which I shall return later.[12] Both works, one mainly cartographic and the other much like a database, construct for the reader a larger entity that is continuous over time, one by focusing on physical geography and the other on administrative geography.

---

10 Shui Anli 稅安禮, *Lidai dili zhizhang tu* 歷代地理指掌圖 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, rpt. 1989).

11 Ouyang Min 歐陽忞, *Yu di guang ji* 輿地廣記, ed. Li Yongxian 李勇先 and Wang Xiaohong 王小紅 (Chengdu Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2003).

12 Ibid., p. 1247.

Although not one of these three works names the larger entity they are depicting, the *Handy Atlas* makes clear that the subject is the land of the Hua 華 in its first two maps but almost never uses the term *Zhong guo* (in one case it means the north and in another both north and south).[13] However, taken together, these works show how much middle period views had departed from what Mark Lewis sees in early China when, he tells us, "Universality was asserted as a privilege of the ruler and his agents, while ordinary people remained locked in the limited realms defined by their households, their village, or their region. This contrast justified the former's power and the latter's impotence."[14] The *Handy Atlas* was a commercial product and its contents fed other commercial compilations such as the *Extensive Record of the Forest of Affairs* 事林廣記, the most popular household encyclopedia of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century. There was enough historical geographic information available to scholars through the market that in the 1180s Ni Pu 倪樸, a local scholar in Pujiang 浦江, Wuzhou 婺州, had the means to draw an eight-foot square map showing changes in the northern border throughout history.[15]

These historical compendia, maps, and gazetteers relate the historical succession of dynastic states to a larger sense of spatiotemporal continuity. There was a long tradition of treating a succession of dynastic states as the line of continuity connecting the present to antiquity. Each dynastic state had its own name, administrative system, and territorial claims. Thus the Great Song State (980-1279) succeeded the last of the five short-lived dynasties of the north that followed the demise of the Great Tang State (618-907), and legitimated its claim by having the last emperor of its predecessor formally abdicate the throne. Had there been only one dynastic state at any one moment, abdication ceremonies might have been enough, but during some periods multiple dynastic states

13 Shui Anli 稅安禮, *Lidai dili zhizhang tu* 歷代地理指掌圖, 101,8.

14 Mark Edward Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006), 5, p. 195.

15 Wu Shidao 吳師道, *Jing xiang lu* 敬鄉錄, Xu Jin hua cong shu (Yongkang: Yongkang Hu shi Meng xuan lou 永康胡氏夢選樓, 1924), 6.10a-11a

coexisted. Since Ban Gu's 班固 *History of the Han* 漢書, which had argued that the Liu family was biologically connected to the sage kings, and thus represented the "correct continuity" (正統) with antiquity, some had tried to make sense out of political change and fragmentation by supposing a single line of succession of "legitimate" dynasties, through a combination of abdication ceremonies and assertions that natural portents had signaled heaven's reassignment of the mandate to rule. The last great debate over this sort of legitimate succession took place in the Great Jin State (1115-1234) of the Jurchens, who had taken the northern plain from the Great Song State.[16] It has been argued that the decision during the Yuan to compile dynastic histories of Liao, Song, and Jin changed the situation by treating conquest dynasties as equally legitimate.[17]

Dynastic states created a history with a high degree of definition. Dynastic states were finite in time, they had starting points and end points and they were, at any given moment, boundaried space. Dynastic states organized their territory, at first through a feudal system of power sharing or, beginning with the Qin unification of 221 BC, through a centralized, hierarchical administrative system of commanderies (or prefectures) and counties (or subprefectures). The capital(s) where the court and ruler resided defined the center(s) of a dynastic state. Its laws and rituals defined ranks, privileges and duties. And the logic of hereditary succession provided for the perpetuation of authority during the lifetime of the dynastic state. In all these ways dynastic states defined space and time and social position, making it possible to locate any person or locality with reference to the state.

The "comprehensive" works discussed above were transdynastic: they did not deny dynasties as building blocks of historical time and space but they supplied ways of thinking about the larger entity that states, localities, and

16 This is analyzed in Hok Lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions Under The Jurchen Chin Dynasty (1115-1234)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984).

17 Tsutsumi Kazuaki 堤一昭, "Chūgoku no jigazō — sono jikan to kūkan o kitei suru mono 中國の自畫像—その時間と空間を規定するもの."

individuals were part of. They were about something more than the traditional discourse of the dynastic state. But why not make *Zhong guo* the term for this entity? The answer, to adumbrate the discussion that follows, is that *Zhong guo* as "the Central Country" served a different purpose. It posited an entity that existed in a particular kind of relationship to a larger world, one that had indefinite boundaries, that existed over time without having a definite temporal span, and that had no single place as its center. Dynastic states were historical facts, but the Central Country was an ideological construct that claimed history. Belonging to the Central County was a matter of cultural participation rather than administrative subordination. Dynastic states did not define the Central Country, but they could claim to be it.

Central Country Discourse in the Middle Period

In earlier usage *zhong guo* was a spatial term with cultural meaning that referred to the "central states" area of Eastern Zhou, which was constituted by the states that shared the Zhou rituals and surrounded by peoples who did not.[18]

---

18 The best systematic account of the early development of the term zhong guo is Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, *Wei zai si ming : "Zhongguo" gujin chengwei yanjiu* 偉哉斯名：「中國」古今稱謂研究, 243-280. Hu shows that zhong, "central," is the value and that the use of zhong guo to refer to the states of the central plain is relatively late; and it is at that point that it came to be used as a term of cultural belonging (253-264). He notes too that this allowed for greater inclusion so that states on the northeastern, northwestern, and southern periphery of the central plain came be included at certain points (261-264). Hu's conclusions about changes after Qin and Han are generally asserted without textual support. In brief he wants to argue that all the territory of any imperial state was treated as the *Zhong guo*, although he notes that the examples of it meaning the central plain are very numerous, and that this was the case for both the northern conquest dynasties of the period of division and the middle period dynastic states, whom he thinks recognized each other as parts of the *Zhong guo* (267-273). A search of the term in the *Bei shi* and *Nan shi* (Scripta Sinica editions) suggests, however, that when *zhong guo* was used in the north in a cultural sense, it referred to the conquered natives, and that when it was used in the south it was used in the context of making a distinction with various foreign tribal peoples. The middle period case will be examined below. Hu's arguments for the imperial period would appear to be constrained by official policy on a sensitive subject.

The middle period literati who drew on this tradition were living at a time when the use of the "central states" to refer exclusively to the central plain region was being challenged on two fronts: by the growing economic, cultural, and political importance of the south and the state building of the northern peoples—the Khitans, Jurchens, and Mongols—who occupied first part and then all of the central plain of the north and finally took the south as well.

The term *Zhong guo* appears in discussions of relations with the larger world. Usually the writer speaks from a position "inside" (內) the Central Country about its relations with what is "outside" (外), where the outside is constituted by the other countries and different peoples. Those outside, both pastoral tribal formations and sedentary bureaucratic states, were typically referred to collectively as *Yi* or *Yi di* 夷狄. Although middle period writers understood *Yi di* in different ways, ranging from primitives, to barbarians, to foreigners, this was generally a pejorative term—thus the common translation of "barbarians"—and not accepted by the peoples against whom it was used.[19] We shall see that the term *Zhong guo* figures in debates that involve views of foreigners, foreign relations, and frontiers.

As middle period writers deployed it, the term *Zhong guo* was both an historically defined place—the "central states" of the feudal lords loyal to the Easter Zhou in the central plain—and a cultural space, where a body of practices had accumulated that constituted a certain civilization. To avoid confusion this essay treats these two aspects of the *Zhong guo* as "space" and as "culture." Space and culture were analytically separate but mutually dependent. The danger was that one could be taken without the other. If the Central Country was only defined by culture then wherever the culture existed defined the space where it belonged—in other words, it was not necessary to hold the central plain to claim to be the Central Country; if it was only defined by an historically given

19 This is evident not only in official Liao, Jin, and Yuan usage but also in the later altering of many of the passages quoted in this essay by the *Qing Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 editors, who replaced the term *Yi di* with *wai yi* 外裔 and made other changes. The extent of this kind of editorial work is fully visible in the Scripta Sinica edition of the *San chao bei meng hui bian* 三朝北盟會編.

space such as the central plain of the north, then the occupiers of that space defined the culture of the Central Country. We shall see that writers wanted keep a linkage between the culture of the Central Country and its historical space, even when in Southern Song the central plain, the historical center of Eastern Zhou, was lost. The southern statecraft writer Chen Liang 陳亮 used both spatial and cultural perspectives in making arguments for the recovery of the northern central plain. In letters to the Song emperor in 1178 and 1188 he treats the spatial *Zhong guo* as the "central states" area of Eastern Zhou: "How could heaven make the south limit itself to being beyond this one river [the Yangzi] and not have it be one with the *Zhong guo* 天豈使南方自限於一江之表，而不使與中國通而爲一哉."[20] Chen grants that the historical culture of the *Zhong guo* could continue outside its original historical space, but he contends that without recovering that space Song would ultimately lose authority. Chen has two arguments for why the north must be recovered. First, to the emperor:

> Your subject holds that the *Zhong guo* is the correct *qi* of heaven-and-earth. It is where heaven's mandate is planted. It is where the mind of humanity converges. It is where [official] robes and caps, rites and music collect. It is that by which a hundred generations of emperors and kings have continued in succession. How could this be violated by the perverse *qi* of the *Yi di* from outside of heaven-and-earth. Unfortunately they were able to violate it, with the result that the robes and caps, rites and music of the *zhong guo* have been taken and lodged on the periphery. Heaven's mandate and the mind of humanity still have something they are tied to. But how can on this account we be secure over the long term and free of trouble? [21]
>
> 臣竊惟，中國天地之正氣也，天命之所鍾也，人心之所會也，衣冠禮樂之所萃也，百代帝王之所以相承也。豈天地之外夷狄邪氣之所可奸哉。不幸而能奸之。至于挈中國衣冠禮樂而寓之偏方，天命人心猶有所繫，然豈以

20 Chen Liang 陳亮, *Chen Liang ji* 陳亮集, ed. Deng Guangming, supplemented edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 1.17, letter to Emperor Xiaozong of 1188.

21 Ibid., 1.1, first letter to Emperor Xiaozong. Discussed in Hoyt C. Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch'en Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1982), pp. 102-103.

是為可久安而無事也。

Chen continues that for the south to seek peace and no longer aspire to recovering the *Zhong guo* is analogous to putting all one's energy into one of the four limbs and letting the others atrophy; just as such a body cannot be sustained, neither can Song. He then turns back to the history of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The southeast may have had a cultural claim but once the foreign Tabgatch occupied in the north and, under Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (r. 471-99) of the Northern Wei,

> fixed Luoyang at the capital and cultivated the robes and caps, rites and music of the *Zhong guo* then the old robes and caps, rites and music to the east of the Yangzi were no longer that to which heaven's mandate and the mind of humanity was tied. Thus those who unify all under heaven in the end are in the northwest, they are not in the southeast.[22]
>
> 元魏起而承之，孝文遂定都洛陽，以修中國之衣冠禮樂，而江左衣冠禮樂之舊，非復天命人心之所繫矣。是以一天下者。卒在西北而不在東南。

In short, the Song dynasty in the south has the culture but not the space. If those who occupy the central plain adopt the culture of the *Zhong guo* as well, then they will be legitimate and Song will lose its claim to be the rightful ruler of all under heaven. This argument depends upon the assumption that there is a culture there and that it can be acquired; Chen is not claiming that foreign peoples can replace what is there with their own culture and still be legitimate.

This leads to Chen's second argument, aimed at his literati audience. If those foreigners who hold the historical place *Zhong guo* impose their own culture on it then the inhabitants of the place will lose all that the historical culture of the *Zhong guo* was created to do for them—something that Southern Song literati traveling to the north reported was happening.[23] In this case he opposes cultural assimilation and calls for recovering the north in order to save the culture:

---

22 Chen Liang 陳亮, *Chen Liang ji* 陳亮集, 1.2.

23 Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, "Songdai 'Zhongguo' yishi de tuxian — guanyu jinshi minsuzhuyi sixiang de yige yuanyuan 宋代「中國」意識的凸顯——關于近世民族主義思想的一個遠源," p. 11.

> The sages defended the *Zhong guo* with canons and limited the *Yi di* with borders, thus to make clear that they were not to mix. However, the mandate resides with the populace, and [in that regard] it was not appropriate to make a distinction between *Yi di* and *Zhong guo*. Thus the idea of caring for both arose and the principle of peace on both sides gained currency. It got to the point that [our past dynasties] wanted to marry daughters to them, counting on the goodwill of kinship to secure a day of peace. It is because they are not practiced in ritual and righteousness that they are called *Yi di*. Can we then use the norms of human relations to rein them in? [24]
>
> 聖人以常典衛中國，以封疆限夷狄，明其不可參也，然民命之所在。不當以夷狄中國為別，故兼愛之說興，而通和之義行。甚者至欲以女妻之，冀以舅甥之恩而獲一日之安。彼惟不習於禮義也，故謂之夷狄，而可以人倫而縻之乎？

Chen then provides an answer to his question:

> If there is the *Zhong guo* there must be the *Yi di*. The constant way of handling the *Yi di* was most developed in Zhou and its transformation [i.e. its corruption] is recorded in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋.
>
> 有中國必有夷狄。待夷狄之常道莫詳於周。而其變則備於春秋矣。

The Zhou solution was separation, but as Zhou declined:

> The *Zhong guo* and *Yi di* were mixed together and became one. After that [the southern state of] Chu first usurped [the title of] king and, using the ways of the *Yi di*, acted up in *Zhong guo*. Wu and Yue rose from the south and competed with Jin and Chu for hegemony.....
>
> Today the central plain has already changed into *Yi di*. If we understand the ways of the *Zhong guo* then it is fine if [domestically we first] clean house in order to carry out reforms [preparatory to a military campaign, but] if we should let the populace [of the *Zhong guo*] be transformed by the way of the *Di* without there being a point when it will come to an end, then what is it that is to be valued about humankind? Thus Yang Xiong's words: "That to which the five policies are applied, what the seven taxes nurture, and is at the center of heaven-and-earth is the

24 Chen Liang 陳亮, *Chen Liang ji* 陳亮集, 4.48.

> *Zhong guo*." In Wang Tong's words: " The center of heaven-and-earth is nothing other than humankind." For it is humankind that enlarges the Way, not the Way that enlarges humankind.[25]
>
> 而中國夷狄混而為一矣，其後楚始僭王，以夷狄之道橫行於中國，吳越奮自南方，以與晉楚爭伯。
>
> 今中原既變於夷狄矣，明中國之道，掃地以求更新可也。使民生宛轉於狄道而無有已時。則何所貴於人乎。故揚雄之言曰：五政之所加，七賦之所養，中於天地者為中國。王通之言曰：天地之中，非他也，人也，蓋人能洪道非道洪人。[26]

Chen's full answer makes clear that being "human" is to be defined in cultural rather than natural terms. Humankind is central to heaven-and-earth because the extension of all that is good depends on there being properly cultivated humans to effect it. To keep the separation between the *Zhong guo* and the *Yi di* is to defend the culture and thus the possibility of human improvement.

In asserting that the possession of the central plain was of the essence, thus leaving the south spatially marginal, Chen Liang was taking a narrower spatial view than necessary. In Northern Song some had included the south: Peng Ruli 彭汝礪 (1042-1093) wrote that during the Five dynasties period "the *Zhong guo* was divided into six or seven 中國裂爲六七" thus including the southern states,[27] and Wang Anshi 王安石 spoke of "The *Zhong guo* having the mandate for over 100 years 中國受命至今百餘年 " apparently meaning the Song dynasty rather than the central plain per se.[28] In Southern Song Hong Mai 洪邁 noted that in Zhou times, in contrast to his own, "The territory of the *Zhong guo* was

---

25 Ibid., 4.48-49.

26 洪 is used to avoid the character 弘 in the name of Emperor Taizu's father.

27 Peng Ruli 彭汝礪, "Shang zhe zong lun tai ping bai nian suo dong jie ju 上哲宗論太平百年所當戒懼" in Zhao Ruyu 趙汝愚, *Song chao zhu chen zou yi* 宋朝諸臣奏議 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), p. 43. I thank Jaeyoon Song for this reference.

28 Wang Anshi 王安石, *Linchuan xian sheng wen ji* 臨川先生文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p. 62. It is possible, however, that Wang had precisely the northern central plain in mind and that he was saying that heaven's mandate had been lodged with the dynasty that held that space, rather than with the older Liao dynasty.

extremely narrow," that many named places were outside of it and that the territory included only several tens of modern prefectures; "it apparently was barely one fifth of all under heaven,"[29] which suggests that for Hong the Central Country was not fixed in space. When Xu Jing 徐兢, a southerner, describes his account of the embassy to Kŏryŏ (Gaoli) in the early twelfth century as the result of "sifting out those things that were the same as the *Zhong guo* and selecting those that were different, in all over 300 items arranged in forty chapters 謹因耳目所及，博采衆説，簡汰其同於中國者而取其異焉，凡三百餘條，釐爲四十卷，"[30] we assume that he is thinking of Great Song in cultural terms and equating it with the *Zhong guo*. Similarly, documents from Song, Liao and Jin in the *Collection of Documents Relating to Treaties with the North During Three Reigns* 三朝北盟會編 use the term *Zhong guo* in relation to outside states 166 times. In contrast "Great Song (State)" appears half as often and then in formal exchanges between states, as in "The Emperor of Great Song transmits this letter to His Majesty the Emperor of Great Jin 大宋皇帝致書於大金皇帝闕下。"[31] Still the use of *Zhong guo* carries a certain spatial ambiguity. Does the common phrase "The *Yi di* have long been a problem for the *Zhong guo* 夷狄爲中國患久矣"[32] refer to the central plain or to the state that claims to be the Central Country? We might ask the same on reading this call to recover the sixteen lost prefectures: "The Liao state will certainly perish, I hope Your Majesty will consider the suffering of [our] former populace and restore the past borders of the *Zhong guo*.遼國必亡願陛下念舊民遭塗炭之苦復中國往昔之疆。"[33]

---

29 Hong Mai 洪邁, *Rong zhai sui bi* 容齋隨筆, Scripta Sinica ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 5.64. Noted in Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, *Wei zai si ming*: "Zhongguo" gujin chengwei yanjiu 偉哉斯名：「中國」古今稱謂研究, p. 262.

30 Xu Jing 徐兢, *Xuanhe feng shi Gaoli tu jing* 宣和奉使高麗圖經 Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), Preface. I thank Jaeyoon Song for this reference.

31 Usage counts are based on a search of the Scripta Sinica text database. Xu Mengxin 徐夢莘, *San chao bei meng hui bian: fu jiao kan ji* 三朝北盟會編：附校勘記, Scripta Sinica ed. (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), 14.97B.

32 Ibid., preface 3A.

33 Ibid., 1.2B.

More frequent is the use of the *Zhong guo* when Great Song is being seen as a political actor in relation to foreign states. When Song speakers use it the term suggests that the Song state is serving a historical imperative greater than itself.

> The caitiffs [i.e. the Khitans in the 16 Tang prefectures Song claimed but never held] know that their state will perish and that the *Zhong guo* will necessarily want its former territory. Thus they will not fight but will accept our guidance, saying that the *Zhong guo* has gotten what it wanted, and they still can take advantage of the *Zhong guo's* power to preserve their lives. But if the intention of the *Zhong guo* is focused on necessarily destroying them then the caitiffs will later persuade the Jurchens to violate the central plain and threaten our base, all in order to have vengeance. This would be the worst mistake the *Zhong guo* could make.[34]
>
> 虜知其國且亡，而中國必欲故地也，是以不戰而聽順。謂中國既得所欲，而彼尚可假中國之勢存其血食而已。然中國之意期於必滅之而後已，是以虜後復說女真犯中原，傾我根本，皆以復讎也。中國失之甚者，尤在於是。

When foreign speakers (in Chinese texts) use the term it seems to be no more than an acknowledgment that Song is at the center. As when Aguda, the Jin founder, tells a Song emissary, "Of what concern is the *Zhong guo* to me? I myself have moved into Yanshan [prefecture] and it is now mine. How can the *Zhong guo* get it? [Zhao] Liangsi was unable to reply. 中國何足道，我自入燕山，今爲我有，中國安得之，良嗣不能對。"[35] Or when we read "The Jin men also sent a proclamation reading: 'The *Zhong guo* has made a covenant [with us]. We have come to punish rebellious ministers. You should supply us with provisions.' 金人又移檄曰：中國既盟矣，我來討叛臣，當餉我糧。"[36]

---

34 Ibid., 9.60B

35 Ibid., 16.112A.

36 Ibid., 18.131A.

The Centrality of Culture and the Universality of Morality: The *Zhong guo* and the *Yi Di*

It is generally held that Confucius already had the idea that the centrality of the *Zhong guo* was justified by its role as the source of civilizing models. The idea that Confucius used the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋 to make a moral-cultural distinction between the *Zhong guo* and *Yi di* comes from the Gongyang and Guliang commentaries, but the phrase that sums this up in commentaries from the middle-period on comes from Han Yu's 韓愈 influential essay, "On the Origin of the Way" 原道. Han's point was that Confucius put culture ahead of place: although some of the feudal states of Eastern Zhou were regarded as being *Yi di* and outside of the "central states," Confucius, approach was to "treat feudal lords who used *Yi* rituals as *Yi* but if they advanced to [using the rituals of] the *zhong guo* then he regarded them as *zhong guo.* 孔子之作春秋也，諸侯用夷禮則夷之，進於中國則中國之。"[37] For Han the Way of the Sages had universal effectiveness—"Thus no Way is greater than benevolence and righteousness, no teaching more correct then ritual and music, punishment and policy. Practice it under heaven then the myriad things obtain what they ought, apply it to one's person then the body will be secure and the *qi* balanced. 是故道莫大乎仁義，教莫正乎禮樂刑政，施之於天下，萬物得其宜，措之於其躬，體安而氣平。堯以是傳之舜，舜以是傳之禹，禹以是傳之湯，湯以是傳之文武，文武以是傳之周公，孔子書之於册，中國之人世守之。" The sage kings had transmitted it and Confucius had preserved it for posterity in texts. What set the *Zhong guo* apart was that "The men of *Zhong guo* have maintained it through the generations."[38]

---

37 Han Yu 韓愈 and Ma Qichang 馬其昶 (ed.), *Han Changli wen ji jiao zhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), On the Origin of the Way 原道. Han's interpretation owes much to the Gongyang Commentary.

38 Ibid., 20, "Song fu tu wen chang shi xu" 送浮屠文暢師序.

For Han Yu the transmission of this Way had taken place in a certain place, but it had also been lost in that same place; his mission was to persuade literati to rediscover it for themselves. This was a matter of choice; this Culture/Way would only be effective if literati acted self-consciously to choose it.

Han Yu's "Way of the Sages" was derived from an understanding of antiquity. He was, ultimately, a culturalist. In contrast the Neo-Confucian moral philosophers supposed that the fundamental principles on which the cultural forms of a moral world were based were always immanent in all people, wherever they lived. As the great Neo-Confucian leader Zhu Xi 朱熹 explained: "If there is any distance [from the Way in one's personal behavior] then this mind will have died. In the *Zhong guo* it is this principle and in the *Yi di* it is also just this same principle. 曰：「『道不可須臾離，可離非道。』須是無間斷方得，若有間斷，此心便死了。在中國是這箇道理，在夷狄也只是這箇道理。」"[39] It followed that just as the *Yi di* were capable of morality the *Zhong guo* was capable of abandoning it. Zhu tells his students:

> But Aguda was obstinate; he constantly spoke in terms of maintaining trust. Whenever his generals wanted to raise troops and charge the other side with crimes Aguda did not allow it, saying: "The treaty I have made with Great Song is already fixed, how can we break a treaty!" The *Yi di* were able to maintain trust and righteousness but the fact of our breaking the treaty and losing trust thus caused such anger among the *Yi di*. Every time one reads his letter it pains the reader.[40]
>
> 然阿骨打却乖，他常以守信義為說，其諸將欲請起兵問罪，阿骨打每不可，曰：「吾與大宋盟誓已定，豈可敗盟！」夷狄猶能守信義，而吾之所以敗盟失信，取怒於夷狄之類如此！每讀其書，看得人頭痛。

If fundamentally the same moral principles were endowed in all humans (including the *Yi di* of the present and past) what justified a distinction between the *Zhong guo* and the *Yi di*? Theoretically, from a Neo-Confucian philosophical

---

39 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 43. 1106-1107.

40 Ibid., 127.3050.

perspective, there was no justification. In a passage frequently cited today Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 states:

> If a sage should appear across the eastern or the western sea, the northern or the southern, this mind will be the same and this principle will be the same. Hundreds of thousands of generations into the past and into the future this mind will be the same and this principle will be the same.[41] 東海有聖人出焉，此心同也，此理同也；西海有聖人出焉，此心同也，此理同也；南海北海有聖人出焉，此心同也，此理同也；千百世之上有聖人出焉，此心同也，此理同也；千百世之下有聖人出焉，此心同也，此理同也。

Why had not the sages solved this problem once and for all when they ruled the world, when they "made all under heaven one family and the *Zhong guo* one person?" 以天下爲一家，以中國爲一人。[42] Zhu Xi's answer is that the sages had, by transforming the inhabitants of the central state with culture, differentiated them, although some customs from those primitive undifferentiated times had survived. He explains: "In the most ancient times the *Zhong guo* and *Yi di* were about the same. Later when the sages came forth they reformed [us] but there were aspects that they did not finish, such as the impersonator of the dead at a sacrifice. 杜佑說：上古時中國但與夷狄一般，後出聖人改之，有未盡者，尸其一也。"[43] Lu Jiuyuan had a similar explanation:

> The sages' valuing the *Zhong guo* and disparaging the *Yi di* was not a case of selfishly favoring the *Zhong guo*. The *Zhong guo* obtained the *qi* of centrality and harmony and this necessarily was where ritual and righteousness resided. Their valuing of the *Zhong guo* was not valuing the *Zhong guo* it was valuing ritual and righteousness. Even when [the *Zhong guo*] went through decline and chaos, the models of the Former Kings still existed, their remaining customs were not com-

---

41 Yang Jian 楊簡, *Cihu yi shu* 慈湖遺書, Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 5.2b.

42 This phrase, from the Li yun 禮運 chapter (9.20) of the *Book of Rites*, is cited in various Song commentaries on the Classics and, most appropriately in explications of Zhang Zai's "Western Inscription." See also Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhu Xi ji* 朱熹集, ed. Guo Qi 郭齊 and Yin Bo 尹波 (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 65.536, letter to Lu Zimei.

43 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, 90.2310.

> pletely extinguished.[44]
>
> 聖人貴中國，賤夷狄，非私中國也。中國得天地中和之氣，固禮義之所在。貴中國者，非貴中國也，貴禮義也。雖更衰亂，先王之典刑猶存，流風遺俗，未盡泯然也。

In short it was the culture facilitated by superior geography, not inherent human differences, that separated the inhabitants of the two realms. It followed that the Central Country was the only available vehicle for defending that culture against the *Yi di*.

Lu Jiuyuan's claim had a precedent in the *Comprehensive Canons* 通典 of Du You, Han Yu's contemporary, and Zhu Xi in the passage above was citing Du You. The section on foreign states in the *Comprehensive Canons* 通典 begins.

> Within what [heaven] covers and [earth] supports, on which the sun and moon shine, *Hua xia* occupies the center of the land, and living things receive *qi* that is correct. Its humans have a character that is harmonious and a capability that is generous. Its earth is most productive and its products multitudinous. Thus it could give birth to the sagely and worthy, who continued the use of law and instruction, corrected faults when they arose, and exploited the benefits in things. Since the Three Kings and Five Emperors, every generation has had men appropriate to it. Ruler and minister, older and younger were ranked; the teaching of the Five Constants and Ten Norms were complete. Filial piety and parental caring were born here; kindness and love became strong here. The ruler's might was proclaimed and those below were secure. Authority was not divided and the laws were unified. That those who lived there were greatly rewarded was truly due to this. In the past a worthy said, "After the Way is lost they turn to virtue, after virtue is lost they turn to benevolence, after benevolence is lost they turn to righteousness, after righteousness is lost they turn to ritual."[45] Truly he meant paring down what is thick to make it thin, diluting strong wine to make it weak. He also said, "Among the ancients people went to their deaths without ever becoming in-

---

44 Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵, *Xiangshan ji* 象山集, Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 23.3b. "Lecture on the Great Learning." I thank Professor Yu Yunguo 虞雲國 for this reference.

45 Dao de jing 道德經.

volved with one another; they did not exchange, they did not fight; they sought only to be self-sufficient." This is a technique for dealing with the sick—praise the purity of the past in order to encourage them to admire it. It is common for humans to feel that the antiquity was better than the present; they were simpler then and there were few problems. Indeed it was admirable. But it was perhaps not free of degenerate customs and corrupt habits. Think back to the *Zhong hua* of antiquity, they were in may ways like the *Yi di* of today. Among them there is residing in nests and caves, burials without a planting of trees [i.e. no graveyards], eating with the hands, impersonators of the corpse at sacrifices; I mention but a few examples for I cannot cite them all. Their territories are of the extremes and their *qi* is obstructed. They do not bring into being sages and worthies; no one reforms their old customs, or instructs them as to what is not permitted; ritual and righteousness does not reach them. They are outside and not inside; they are distant and not close. If they come then control them; if they depart then defend against them. Perspicacious literati of earlier ages have already spoken of this in detail.[46]
覆載之內，日月所臨，華夏居土中，生物受氣正。其人性和而才惠，其地產厚而類繁，所以誕生聖賢，繼施法教，隨時拯弊。因物利用，三五以降，代有其人。君臣長幼之序立，五常十倫之教備。孝慈生焉，恩愛篤焉，主威張而下安，權不分而法一。生人大貴。實在於斯。昔賢有言曰：失道而後德。失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮，誠謂削厚為薄，散醇為醨，又曰：古者人至老死不相往來。不交不爭。自求自足。蓋疾時澆巧，美往昔敦淳，務以激勵勉其慕向也。然人之常情，非今是古。其朴質少事，信固可美；而鄙風弊俗，或亦有之。緬惟古之中華，多類今之夷狄，有居處巢穴焉。有葬無封樹焉，有手團食焉，有祭立尸焉，聊陳一二，不能徧遍舉。其地偏，其氣梗，不生聖哲，莫革舊風，誥訓之所不可，禮義之所不及。外而不內，疏而不戚，來則禦之，去則備之，前代達識之士亦已言之詳矣。

Du then proceeds to summarize the history of foreign relations to show that cultural superiority does not equate to military superiority. Attempts to conquer the

46 Du You 杜佑, *Tong dian* 通典, 185.4978-4980. The idea that the *Zhong guo* was in the midst of geographical extremes and a place where things were perfected is already found in the *Xun Zi* 荀子; see Lewis, *The construction of space in early China*, p. 210.

Yi di have failed repeatedly, at tremendous human cost. "To hold what is full is difficult; to know what is enough is not easy 夫持盈固難，知足非易." But the lesson is clear, as his own times have shown, foreign adventures lead to loss, not to gain.

Du's geographic-naturalistic explanation for cultural progress was based on the central plain; he roots cultural superiority in geographic space. But I think, at least in Southern Song, some were more willing than Chen Liang to imagine that in cultural terms the Central Country could exist independently of its spatial origins. The statecraft thinker Ye Shi 葉適 quoted approvingly from the *Strategies of the Warring States* 戰國策:

> The *Zhong guo* is the place where perspicacity and intelligence abide; where wealth gathers; where the sages teach; where benevolence and righteousness are practiced; where the *Odes* and the *Documents*, ritual and music are employed; where genius and technique are tested; where distant places go to observe; where the *Man* and the *Yi* take their models.[47]
>
> 中國者聰明睿智之所居也，財用之所聚也，聖人之所教也，仁義之所施也，詩書禮樂之所用也，異敏技藝之所試也，遠方之所觀赴也，蠻夷之所儀行也。

From this perspective the survival of the Central Country (wherever it might be) in world historical terms required understanding that it held its position in the world because it maintained the highest standards and achievements of humanity.

Central Country Rhetoric and Imperialism

In almost all the cases discussed above the speakers use the term *Zhong guo* when they want to make a distinction between their country and the *Yi di* other. This is not simply to reinforce a sense of superiority; they are making a point about the nature of the difference. The Central Country has its position by virtue

47 Ye Shi 葉適, *Xi xue ji yan* 習學記言 Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 18.9a. Citing *Zhan guo ce* 戰國策(Scripta Sinica ed.) 19.656.

of its culture, and it is the preservation of that culture that justifies maintaining the difference. But why make this argument? We can easily suppose that in Southern Song it was self-serving—a way of saying that we may have lost the north but at least we are culturally superior—and that in Northern and Southern Song it was a way of saying that the state-building of the northern peoples did not in fact make them equal to Song. But in fact in some cases the issue was not national self-justification but an internal debate in which a commitment to morality and culture was pitted against an imperialist foreign policy. This was already evident in the passage from Du You quoted above, and it reemerges in Northern and Southern Song. Ye Shi explains this in a series of essays on foreign relations.

> One maintains a country with principles, with normative names, and with the ability to change according to the circumstances. For the *Zhong guo* not to govern the *Yi di* is principle. For the *Zhong guo* to be the *Zhong guo* and for the *Yi di* to be *Yi di* is the normative name. We are in control of both. Therefore if they come to pillage then in this case we go to war with them; if they come to submit then in this case we receive them; to order them according to their reasons for coming is the ability to change according to the circumstances..... The reason the *Zhong guo* is the *Zhong guo* is simply because it has these three things. If we cast aside the tools by which we will necessarily be victorious and merely rely on deceit and force than we will have transformed ourselves into *Yi di*..... However, although the *Yi di* are unprincipled, they always expect good faith and principle from the *Zhong guo*. The *Zhong guo* regards the *Yi di* as unprincipled and thus responds to them without employing good faith and principle. It does not understand that this is the reason it is the *Zhong guo*. Basically it cannot abandon something because the *Yi di* lack it.[48]
>
> 為國以義，以名，以權。中國不治夷狄，義也。中國為中國，夷狄為夷狄，名也。二者為我用，故其來寇也。斯與之戰。其來服也。斯與之接，視其所以來而治之者。權也……中國之所以為中國，以其有是三者而已，苟捨其所以必勝之具，而獨以詐力為用，是既已化為夷狄矣。……然則夷

48 Ye Shi 葉適, *Ye Shi ji* 葉適集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), Bieji 4.684-686.

> 狄雖不義，常以信義望中國，中國以夷狄為不義，是以不用信義答之，不知此其所以為中國者，本不以夷狄之無而廢也。

To argue for living up to one's own values and against imperial expansion had particular salience because the New Policies emperors from the 1070s into the 1120s had fought to expand the frontiers, resulting in the loss of the north.

In this context to speak in terms of the Central Country as a larger national entity could be an alternative to "all under heaven" with its implicit claim to universal kingship. Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙, contemporary and friend of Ye Shi and Chen Liang, taught one of the important texts from the New Policies era, Fan Zuyu's 范祖禹 *Mirror of the Tang* 唐鑑. I have only translated those comments where Lü adds emphasis to Fan's text.

> The Central Country's having *Yi di* is like day having night, yang having yin, and the noble man having the small man. When the Central Country fails in governance then the four *Yi* attack. We can know in general how the former kings controlled them. Shun said, "Reject schemers and the *Man* and *Yi* will lead each other in submitting."[49] He also said, "Be without disrespect, be without negligence; the four *Yi* will come and recognize your kingship."[50] In which case if you want them to submit nothing is better than rejecting schemers. If you wish them to come and recognize your kingship nothing is better than being free of disrespect and negligence." "Be kind to the distant, and cultivate the ability of the near."[51] They ordered the inside and gave security to the outside and peoples of different customs accepted their influence and admired their principles. They did not seduce them with profit, they did not coerce them with might, and they came of themselves. They aided those who wished to adhere. They did not force those

---

49 James Legge, tran., "Shun dian 舜典," in *Shu King* 書經 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. 42, http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/sbe03/shu00.htm(2009.9.21) "Be kind to the distant, and cultivate the ability of the near. Give honour to the virtuous, and your confidence to the good, while you discountenance the artful－so shall the barbarous tribes lead on one another to make their submission." 遠柔能邇,惇德允元,而難任人,蠻夷率服.

50 "Da yu mo 大禹謨," Lü Zuqian notes that this was an admonition to Shun, not his own words. In fact it was Shun to Yu. James Legge (*Shu King*, p. 47) "Be without idleness or omission, and the barbarous tribes all around will come and acknowledge your sovereignty." 無怠無荒,四夷來王.

51 "Shun dian." James Legge (*Shu King*, p. 42)

who did not wish to. Therefore they did not exhaust the people or waste resources.

As for rulers in later ages: some hated them and wanted to extinguish them, some took delight in them and wanted to get them to come. These two are both wrong. Why is that? Although they are *Yi di* they are also like the people of the Central Country. They pursue the beneficial and avoid the harmful; they desire life and dislike death. How are they different from people? [Lü Zuqian: That is to say, although the *Yi di* are not the same sort as the Central Country their desire for life and dislike of death are also the same as the people of the Central Country.] A king nurtures everything within heaven-and-earth. He ought even to care about the birds and beasts, the shrubs and trees; how much more so humans. Would he want to destroy them? Destroying them is certainly not allowable, how much more so when it is impossible to vanquish them and he ends up destroying his own people. This is something a humane person will not do. The one who did it was the First Emperor of Qin.

Given the constraints of the landscape and the influence of the environment, their languages are different and their material desires are not the same. When [one of our rulers] takes their territory he cannot occupy it; when he gets their people he cannot command them. In organizing them into prefectures and countries he values appearances above reality. In addition, since he sees getting them as a meritorious achievement he will have to see losing them as shameful. If the loss does not happen under him then it will happen under his descendants. Thus there are the exhaustion of campaigns and the burdens of provisioning. The people do not survive it and he accordingly perishes. Yangdi of Sui is an example.

Moreover, the territory of the Central Country is extensive, its people are many. Better not to take them and not to lose. Improve our ritual and music and administration. Nurture our people with beneficence, so that "farmers have surplus grain and women have surplus cloth."[52] "Peace is brought about without warfare."[53] Is this not greatly to the credit of an emperor or king?

Thus to make foreign demands is as difficult as those cases and not to have foreign demands is as easy as this. But why then do rulers of men always reject

52 Lü Zuqian: citing the *Mencius* 孟子.

53 Lü Zuqian: citing the *Yue ji* 樂記.

what is easy and practice what is difficult? If they ignore what is near and prefer what is far, if they are fed up with the old and scheme for the new, then if they do not end up as Qin they will end up as Sui. Even if they do not end up perishing they will usually end up with the same problems. Taizong [of Tang] boasted of his achievement and ability, his ambitions were infinite. He wanted to make *Hua* and *Yi*, central and foreign, one. This was not the way to create a legacy and bring security to the central country. This ought to be a warning and is not to be admired. [Lü Zuqian: That is to say, we ought to take Taizong as a warning; we should not admire what he did.][54]

昔之有天下者，莫不以冠帶四夷為盛德大業。何哉？（易繫盛德大業至矣哉）故嘗試論之曰：中國之有夷狄，如晝之有夜，陽之有陰，君子之有小人也。中國失政，則四夷交侵，先王所以御之者，亦可得而畧聞矣。舜曰而難任人，蠻夷率服。（書舜典柔遠能邇而難任人蠻夷率服）又曰無怠無荒，四夷來王。（書大禹謨益曰吁戒哉云云無怠無荒四夷來王按此即益戒舜之辭非舜自言）然則欲其率服，莫若難任人，欲其來王，莫若無怠荒。柔遠能邇，治內安外。而殊俗之民，嚮風慕義。（前宣帝紀百蠻嚮風單于慕義，不以利誘不以威脅而自至矣欲附者則撫之不欲者不強致也）故不勞民不費財。至于後世之君，或以讐疾而欲殄滅之，或愛悅而欲招來之，是二者皆非也。何則？彼雖夷狄，亦猶中國之民也。趨利避害，欲生惡死，豈有異于人乎？（言夷狄雖非中國比類其貪生惡死亦與中國之人同）王者於天地之間無不養也，鳥獸草木，猶當愛之。況人類而欲殘之乎，殘之固不可，況不能勝而自殘其民乎，仁人之所不為也，為之者秦始皇是也。山川之所限，風氣之所移，言語不通，嗜欲不同。（記王制五方之民 言語不通嗜欲不同）得其地不可居，得其民不可使也，列為州縣，是崇虛名而受實弊也。且得之既以為功，則失之必以為耻，其失不在于己，則在于子孫。故有征討之勞，餽餉之煩，民不堪命而繼之以亡，隋煬是也。且中國地非不廣也，民非不衆也，曷若無得無失，修其禮樂政刑，（記樂記禮樂刑政四達而不悖）以惠養吾民，使農有餘粟，女有餘布，（孟滕文公農有餘粟女有餘布）兵革不試以致太平。（記樂記兵革不試諸侯賓服）不亦帝王之盛美乎！故有求于外如彼其難也，無求於外如此其易也。然而人君常捨所易而行所難，何哉？忽近而喜遠，厭故而謀新。不入于秦則入于隋，雖不至于亡，而常與之同事，其累德豈細哉。（書旅獒不矜

54 Fan Zuyu 范祖禹 and Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (annotations), *Tang jian* 唐鑑 Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 6.

細行終累大德）太宗矜其功，能好大無窮。（前本紀贊好大喜功窮兵于遠）華夷中外欲其為一，非所以遺後嗣安中國之道，（遺貽也）此當以為戒而不可慕也（言當以太宗為戒 不可慕其所為）

Fan Zuyu wants to hold two positions at once: the Central Country as culture is superior and ought to be sought out and emulated by outsiders and there ought to be spatial distinction and non-interference between the *Zhong guo* and *Yi di*. In the end Ye, Fan, Lü, Du, and Zhu can only say that the Central Country is responsible for maintaining (its own) standards of morality without pressing them on others and for defending itself. Expansion and conquest are self-destructive.

The Foreign Alternative to Central Country Discourse

State building among the northern peoples, the breakdown of the system of foreign relations, and imperial adventurism led to the loss of the central plain to the Jurchens in 1126, the retreat of the court south of the Yangzi River, and ultimately to the Mongol empire and its conquest of the Song in the 1270s.

The Jurchens, after their conquest of the northern part of Song, were undecided about whether they would be an external state that had taken possession of the central plain or whether they were going to recast themselves as the latest incarnation of the Central Country. After the attempt to conquer the south failed Emperor Shizong 世宗 supported a retrenchment. Yet his administration tried both to maintain its otherness, through a program to maintain the Jurchen customs of the northeast for example, and to claim the same ethical values of the Central Country's antiquity and a commitment to civil culture by reviving the examination system for both literati of the north and for Jurchens (using the new Jurchen script).[55] Texts in Chinese that quote Jurchen leaders occasionally do use the term the *Zhong guo*, but it is not immediately clear when a speaker is making a reference to the space of the ancient central

55 Peter K. Bol, "Seeking Common Ground: Han Literati Under Jurchen Rule," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.2 (1987).

states or has in mind a spatiocultural claim to being the Central Country.[56] Thus the objection that tea was a "weed from Song soil" for which the "valuable silk textiles of the *Zhong guo*" should not be traded could merely refer to the central plain. 八年七月，言事者以茶乃宋土草芽，而易中國絲綿錦絹有益之物，不可也.[57] A similar ambiguity crops up when, reflecting on the rise of the Mongols that placed Jin in the middle between enemies, the Jin emperor tells his generals: "The reason the northern troops are always victorious is because they rely on northern horse power against the technology of the *Zhong guo*. It is indeed difficult for us to match them, but as for the Song people, they are hardly a concern. With three thousand troops I could easily move about between the Yangzi and Huai Rivers; you should try harder. 上諭之曰：「北兵所以常取全勝者，恃北方之馬力，就中國之技巧耳。我實難與之敵，至於宋人，何足道哉。朕得甲士三千，縱橫江、淮間有餘力矣。卿等勉之。」"[58] But at least in one instance a Jurchen leader, in the course of agreeing with a chief councilor's comment that "Song has long been a defeated state, it will certainly not dare move against us," appears to grant the Song view of itself: "Although Song is the *Zhong guo*, its power is inadequate [to threaten us]. 左丞相宗浩曰：「宋久敗之國，必不敢動。」[獨吉]思忠曰：「宋雖中國，但力不足耳。」"[59] Perhaps because they were never as successful in conquest, the Jurchen court's leaders differ from the Manchus in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in two respects. First, the Jurchens do not assert, as Qing emperors (but not literati) did, that the *Zhong guo* was coterminous with their territory, thus making the various frontier peoples that earlier times had called *Yi di* now the "the populace of the *Zhong guo*" 中國之民. Second, the Jurchens do not make a point of recognizing the *Zhong guo* as transdynastic cultural entity representing civilized life. The Manchus' acceptance of that proposition

56 In addition to the examples cited below, see Tuotuo 脫脫, ed., *Jin shi* 金史, Scripta Sinica ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 63.1506, 93.2078, 98.167, 98.175, 98.180.

57 Ibid., 49.1109.

58 Ibid., 119.2599.

59 Ibid., 93.2064.

explains their desire to expand the space of the *Zhong guo*, thus allowing them to be integral to it, in a manner that fits the twentieth century better than the middle period.[60]

What the Jurchens did contribute was a rather different and, from the documentary evidence, a far more common approach, one that the Mongols' Great Yuan adopted and extended. This was the legal recognition of ethnopolitical distinctions among the various peoples they had conquered. For the Mongols these were more important than the cultural-political distinctions between officials, literati, and registered population (*min* 民) and obviated the need to take recourse to terms like the *Zhong guo*. An example is a ruling in 1264 that "*Meng-gu-ren* will fill the post of overseer (*darughaci*) of each route, *Han-ren* will fill the post of commander, *Hui-hui* will fill the post of co-administrator. This is to be the system forever 以蒙古人充各路達魯花赤，漢人充總管，回回人充同知，永爲定制."[61] And five years later: "*Nü-zhen, Qi-dan*, and *Han-ren* serving as overseers (*darughaci*) of all routes are to be removed. *Hui-hui*, Wei-wu, Nai-man, and *Tang-wu* are to continue as before 罷諸路女直、契丹、漢人爲達魯花赤者，回回、畏兀、乃蠻、唐兀人仍舊."[62]

The use of *Han-ren* 漢人 to refer to the native inhabitants of the conquered territory began with the medieval northern conquest dynasties and was common currency by Song times. It was an ethnocultural distinction—as in "their clothing and speech is generally like that of *Han-ren*"[63]—but, I see no evidence that it was used in this period as an ideological foundation for state building. In Song the term comes up in the context of frontier populations, when a distinction is made between our kind of people and the distinctive others on the frontier (the

60 This view of the Qing imperial use of the *Zhong guo*, which contrasts with the conclusions drawn in some recent scholarship, is from Gang Zhao, "Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early twentieth Century," *Modern China* 32.1 (2006): 7-14. I thank Mark Elliott, who has reached much the same conclusion, for referring me to this article.

61 Song Lian 宋濂, ed., *Yuan shi* 元史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 6.106.

62 Ibid., 6.118.

63 Tuotuo 脫脫, ed., *Song shi* 宋史, 492.14152.

Fan-ren 蕃人). Thus, for example, in the context of an effort to expand the frontiers, which led to the incorporation of foreign populations, Wang Anshi proposes that "If today the 300,000 *Han-ren* can exchange goods for land and the *Fan-ren* get goods, then both sides will get what they want. The fields will be cultivated and goods will flow. *Fan* and *Han* will be one; the situation will be easy to manage. 安石奏曰：「今以三十萬之衆……漢人得以貨與蕃部易田，蕃人得貨，兩得所欲，而田疇墾，貨殖通，蕃漢爲一，其勢易以調御。」"[64] But an opponent argued against integration, demanding that intermarriage be forbidden.[65]

In Liao, Jin, and Yuan sources there are frequent references to ethnocultural groups, as when a Jin edict orders that "When officials draft announcements, the Jurchens, Khitans, and Han people are each to use their own writing systems 詔百官誥命，女直、契丹、漢人各用本字。"[66] Perhaps because they had many more groups to deal with and maintained their rule by working with the different population groups that had submitted, the Yuan relied heavily on quotas in apportioning office and giving access to resources; quotas subordinated those they had conquered but also guaranteed a degree of participation and representation.[67] Court policy sometimes distinguished between different groups, as we have seen above, but sometimes it lumped groups into larger categories, in which the order of precedence corresponded to the sequence of conquest or submission: the *Meng-gu* (the various tribes of Mongolia), *se-mu* 色目 (literally "the many kinds," referring to the various Central Asian peoples), *Han-ren* (the Khitan, Jurchen, and Han-ren population of Jin), and *Nan-ren* 南人 (the people of Southern Song).[68] In one case we find a larger distinction between the various Central Asian peoples, who are to be given the same

64 Ibid., 144.4759.

65 This was Liu Xiang 劉庠 (1023-1086), see Ibid., 322.10452.

66 *Jin shi* 金史, 4. 73.

67 E.g. Song Lian 宋濂, ed., *Yuan shi* 元史, 349, 410, 428, 541, 712, 786.

68 The quotas for the civil service examination is a particularly clear case. Ibid., 81.2019-2121. I have found one instance of in which the southerners are referred to as "men of Song," see *Yuan shi* 元史, 16.349.

privileges as *Meng-gu-ren*, and the "*Nü-zhen* 女眞 and *Qi-dan* 契丹, who are [to be treated] the same as *Han-ren*. If the *Nü-zhen* and *Qi-dan* are from the northwest and do not comprehend *Han* language they are [to be treated] the same as *Meng-gu-ren*. *Nü-zhen* who have lived a long time in *Han* areas are [to be treated] the same as *Han-ren*."以河西、回回、畏吾兒等依各官品充萬戶府達魯花赤，同蒙古人；女直、契丹，同漢人。若女直、契丹生西北不通漢語者，同蒙古人；女直生長漢地，同漢人。[69] There seems to have been a general assumption that it was obvious who was who, but some did try to cross boundaries, thus necessitating the ruling that "For overseers of the prefectures and counties apportioned to the princes and consorts of princesses only *Meng-gu-ren* are to be used and by rule shifted every three years. Those *Han-ren*, *Nü-zhen*, and *Qi-dan* whose names are *Meng-gu* are to be removed. 詔：「諸王、駙馬所分郡邑，達魯花赤惟用蒙古人，三年依例遷代，其漢人、女直、契丹名爲蒙古者皆罷之。」[70] At one point, presumably to prevent boundary crossing into higher offices that required literacy it was ordered that "*Han-ren* and *Nan-ren* are forbidden to learn *Meng-gu* and *Se-mu* writing."[71]

From an imperial perspective one advantage of speaking in terms of ethnopolitical groups was that it avoided suggesting that "the Central Country" and certain population groups had a privileged cultural authority. But this was what literati wanted, as when the northern scholar and Neo-Confucian advocate Xu Heng 許衡 spoke of it taking thirty years to "change the customs of the north to using the methods of the Central Country. When the Jin State first perished we should have proposed this and it is a great pity that we did not attend to it." 以北方之俗，改用中國之法也，非三十年不可成功。在昔金國初亡，便當議此，此而不務，誠爲可惜。[72] The same approach is evident when a

69 Song Lian 宋濂, ed., *Yuan shi* 元史, 13.268.

70 Ibid., 21.458.

71 Ibid., 39.839.

72 Chen Dezhi 陳得芝, Qiu Shusen 邱樹森, and He Zhaoji 何兆吉, eds., *Yuan dai zou yi ji lu* 元代奏議集錄, Scripta Sinica ed., Yuan dai shi liao cong kan (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1998), A.90.

memorialist urges the founding of an ancestral temple on the grounds that "Your Majesty is now emperor over the Central Country, you ought to practice the affairs of the Central Country「陛下帝中國，當行中國事。事之大者，首惟祭祀，祭祀必有清廟。」" [73] But another proponent of the reinstatement of sacrifices to the imperial ancestors forsook the appeal to the *Zhong guo* and argued successfully from precedent: this is what those who held all under heaven, who in the past were *Han-ren* (but now were not), did. 於是中書省臣奏曰：「自古漢人有天下，其祖宗皆配天享祭，臣等與平章何榮祖議，宗廟已依時祭享，今郊祀止祭天。」制曰「可」。是歲南郊，配位遂省。[74] Similarly, the heir apparent could be ordered to "learn the writing of Han-ren" without allowing an implication of centrality, it was just a valuable attribute of one more group of subjects.[75]

In the memorials and public essays we have those who did deploy the concept of the *Zhong guo* used it to argue that Great Yuan ought to define the state in terms of the *Zhong guo* as a transdynastic spatiocultural entity and against policies that used its resources to further expand Great Yuan to areas outside of it. The fact that "Imperial Yuan had integrated all under heaven," 皇元混一天下 including both the *Zhong guo* and the foreign was rarely celebrated.[76]

---

73 Su Tianjue 蘇天爵, *Yuan chao ming chen shi lue* 元朝名臣事略 Scripta Sinica ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 12.252.

74 Song Lian 宋濂, ed., *Yuan shi* 元史, 72.1783-1784.

75 Ibid., 886.

76 Liu Yueshen 劉岳申, *Shenzhai ji* 申齋集, Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983). Dong'e Xian Tongcheng zhen fu zi miao bei 東阿縣銅城鎮夫子廟碑 and shu ya shan bei hou 書崖山碑後. Xiao Ju 蕭剞 *Qin zhai ji* 勤齋集 Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983). Introduction to the collection by Zhang Chong 張沖. Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄, *Guizhai wen ji* 圭齋文集 Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983). 元故奎章閣侍書學士翰林侍講學士通奉大夫虞雍公神道碑 (for Yu Ji). I agree with the Tsutsumi that "united north and south" 混一南北 was aimed at the native audience rather than expressing the Mongols' view, however it seems to me that this usage refers not to north and south of the Great Wall but the south and the central plain of the north; see Tsutsumi Kazuaki 堤一昭, "Chūgoku no jigazō — sono jikan to kūkan o kitei suru mono 中國の自畫像—その時間と空間を規定するもの," pp. 43-44.

Instead we find opposition to expeditions against the southwest, Japan, and the Turks, based in each case on the adequacy of the *Zhong guo* for a state and the harm expansion would do to its inhabitants.[77]

Great Ming and the Central Country

We may read the pronouncements of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, the founder of Ming (1368-1644) who rose in the south and drove the Mongols from the central plain, in this context. The Great Ming State went on to fight wars against the Mongols, Vietnamese, and the Japanese in Korea and (after trying to close foreign trade for a century) traded with East and Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, Africa, Europe, and the New World.

The Ming founder attempted to sort out the conundrum created by the fact that despite the ancient distinction between the *Zhong guo* and the *Yi di*, for the past century the *Yi* had also been emperors. After Song, he explained, heaven's mandate to rule had gone to an extraordinary man from the desert, who "entered the Central Country and became master of all under heaven," but now he as a man from the southeast had become "the ruler of the Central Country."[78] But in letters to the rulers of foreign states he challenges the legitimacy of the Yuan on cultural grounds. "In the past our *Zhong guo* 我中國 was unjustly occupied by the nomads for 100 years, and they then had the *Yi di* spread across the four quarters, abolishing our *Zhong guo*'s moral norms...I am now ruler of the *Zhong guo* and all under heaven are at peace. I fear that the Four *Yi* do not yet know of this, therefore I am sending ambassadors to report to all countries." 曩者我中國爲胡人竊據百年，遂使夷狄布滿四方。廢我中國之彝倫……朕主中國。天下方安，恐四夷未知，故遣使以報諸國.[79] I am, he informs the King of Japan,

77 Su Tianjue 蘇天爵, *Yuan chao ming chen shi lue* 元朝名臣事略 4.58, Chen Dezhi 陳得芝, Qiu Shusen 邱樹森, and He Zhaoji 何兆吉, eds., *Yuan dai zou yi ji lu* 元代奏議集錄, A.321, B.262.

78 From his announcement on taking the throne, in Qian Bocheng 錢伯城 and et al., eds., *Quan Ming wen* 全明文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 1992), 1.2.

79 Ibid., 18.339 to the King of Zhan-cheng.

"originally of an old family of the *Zhong guo* 朕本中國之舊家." "Since last year I have cut off the northern *Yi* and ruled the *Zhong guo*, but I have not yet reported to the four *Yi* 自去歲以來，殄絕北夷，以主中國。惟四夷未報。"[80] Earlier, in announcing his intent to the north to take the central plain, he had appealed also to culture and history:

> Since antiquity when emperors and kings directed all under heaven, the *Zhong guo* occupied the inside and regulated the *Yi di*, and the *Yi di* occupied the outside and served the *Zhong guo*. I have never heard of the *Yi* governing all under heaven. Once the Song gift was transferred, the Yuan as northern *Yi* entered and ruled the *Zhong guo*, all inside and outside the four seas submitted as subjects. How could this be due to human strength? In fact it was heaven that gave it. But excellent men and committed literati still were saddened by the overturning of official garb. From that time forth the minister and sons of Yuan did not honor the ancestral instructions, they destroyed the norms.[81] 自古帝王臨御天下，中國居內以制夷狄，夷狄居外以奉中國，未聞以夷狄治天下也。自宋祚傾移，元以北狄入主中國，四海內外，罔不臣服，此豈人力，實乃天授。然達人志士，尚有冠履倒置之嘆，自是以後，元之臣子不遵祖訓，非壞綱常。

From the perspective of place, the legitimacy of a dynasty in the "legitimate succession of the *Zhong guo* 中國正統"[82] was vouchsafed by its possession of the territory. But in speaking the language of the *Zhong guo* the Ming founder does not appeal to place or the right of the *Han-ren* and *Nan-ren* as inhabitants to rule. Rather, he puts culture over place: it is the nomads' disregard for the civilization that had ancient roots in the *Zhong guo* that ultimately made their possession unjust even if Heaven had originally given them the mandate to rule. This civilization—the way people lived, their sense of morality, the cultural forms they employed—ought to dominate the *Zhong guo* and existed distinct from the organization of political power. When he speaks of "my/our *Zhong*

---

80 Ibid., 18.339.

81 論中原檄 in the *Huang Ming wenheng* 皇明文衡 (Sibu congkan); see the discussion in Mittag, "The Early Modern Formation of a National Identity in Chinese Historical Thought—Random Notes on Ming and Early-Qing Historiography."

82 Qian Bocheng 錢伯城 and al., eds., *Quan Ming wen* 全明文, 18.339, to the King of Gua-ai.

guo," Zhu claims to be committed to it, and it is this that justifies driving out the northern Yi and establishing his own political power. In adopting this language and making his connection to the *Zhong guo* the primary issue in writing to foreign rulers (he mentions that his state name is Great Ming in passing) the Ming founder was joining those literati from north and south who had distinguished a culture with a history from political authority and thus made southerners equally claimants to the right to define it.[83] Yet he was not immune to the language of population groups, as when he informs the state of Dali that "Over seven years I have restored our Han people's old country and united the Central Xia. All the states of the four *Yi* have been informed, and they all have announced themselves as subjects and come with tribute.復我漢人故國統一中夏今經七年，四夷諸國已通報，無不稱臣入貢。"[84]

The founder, although not free of imperial designs (the reconquest of Yunnan being an example), defined the limits on Ming expansion, and thus accepted what his use of the *Zhong guo* implied, that the Central Country would be surrounded by foreign states on all sides. His successors were less restrained in their exercise of imperial power abroad, but when in 1449 the emperor was captured on an expedition against the Mongols north of the Great Wall, the issue of the Central Country's relations with the countries of the *Yi di* came once again to the fore. When in 1487 Qiu Jun 丘濬 presented to the throne his monumental study of statecraft, the *Supplement to the Elaboration of Meaning of the Great Learning* 大學衍義補, he drew at length on Song literati writings and the founder's views in arguing for necessity of keeping the *Zhong guo* and foreign states separate rather than trying to include them in an effort to "make all under heaven one family 以天下爲一家."[85] Qiu spoke not of Great Ming but of the

---

83 John W. Dardess, "Did the Mongols Matter? Territory, Power, and the Intelligentsia from the Northern Song to the Early Ming," in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. Paul Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

84 Qian Bocheng 錢伯城 and al., eds., *Quan Ming wen* 全明文, vol. 1, p. 18.

85 Qiu Jun 丘濬, *Da xue yan yi bu* 大學衍義補, ed. Zhou Jifu 周濟夫 (Beijing Shi: Jing hua chubanshe, 1999), Chapters 143-156 "Controlling the Yi di".

Zhong guo, with origins in antiquity, quoting Zhu Xi: "The *Hua xia* is the land of the Central Country civilization 中國文明之地."[86] The Ming founder stands out for forcing out the only foreigners to occupy all of the *Zhong guo*, and recovering the sixteen prefectures that had been lost for 448 years, and the central plain that had been lost for 241 years. The Mongols were illegitimate rulers because they did not honor the cultural tradition of ancient Zhou, and led "our people of the *Zhong guo*" to forsake it themselves. There is no "great virtue" in trying to attract the *Yi di* to submit, virtue is culturally specific, it applies to "the land of the *Hua xia* civilization."[87] This does not mean that foreign relations should be cut off. Instead they should be intensively managed and supervised. The Ming founder's view of the world extended into the Pacific Ocean and across Eurasia to the Atlantic, as we know from a giant map (386 cm. x 486 cm) from 1389.[88] Throughout Qiu makes the point that domestic well-being is the foundation of national security, the central concern of the Central Country is itself and its civilization.[89]

But consistently Qiu Jun argues in terms of population groups and calls for their separation: heaven-and-earth have created a boundary, inside are the *Hua*, outside are the *Yi*. Those foreigners who have settled within this boundary must be managed, broken into smaller groups and relocated, so that they disappear as distinct peoples.[90] Perhaps for the first time we have the idea that the Central Country belongs to a certain group of people as much as it does to a culture.

Conclusions

The modern use of *Zhongguo*/China is different from the middle period use of the *Zhong guo*/the Central Country. Both are place names (although the place

86 Ibid., 143.1236. I have not located the passage in Zhu Xi's works.

87 Ibid., 144.1246-1249.

88 Cao Wanru 曹婉如 and al., eds., *Zhongguo gudai ditu ji* 中國古代地圖集, II.pls.1-5.

89 Qiu Jun 丘濬, *Da xue yan yi bu* 大學衍義補, 145. 1257-1261.

90 Ibid., 143.1237-1240.

varied over time) but only the second is also an ideological term that defines the cultural position of the country in relation to the outside world. I do not think this is at odds with what we already know.

Worth remarking upon are two other findings. First, those who employed Zhong *guo*/the Central Country discourse were in fact proponents of a permanent distinction between themselves and the foreign others in cultural terms (but not necessarily ethnic terms). This precluded the possibility of equality. They also opposed an expansionist foreign policy because they denied that historically different cultures could be harmoniously absorbed into a single polity. Such a position did lead to an acceptance of foreign states, but not to engaging them as partners in any kind of international mission. Doing good was only possible within a domestic context. In this view the relationship with foreign states was fundamentally defensive, and although it did not preclude foreigners coming to acquire cultural and material goods the relationship was one-sided. Assimilation was permitted in theory, although in Qiu Jun's view true assimilation of a population that was the majority in its own enclave was close to impossible.

Second, another possibility emerged during the middle period. The Jurchens and particularly the Mongols had some success in formally recognizing different population groups as members of a single polity through a quota system. This had the advantage of ensuring a degree of representation to the conquered peoples while writing the privileges of the conquerors into law. This was a system that allowed for the expansion of empire; it was not constrained by culture or place and thus there was no need for cultural assimilation. In fact assimilation was seen as undermining what was in effect a spoils system aimed at privileging the dominant minority population.

It seems to me that these two possibilities do not entirely fit a Chinese/foreign dichotomy. It is true that the proponents of Central Country culture were literati who saw themselves as being the bearers of that culture and who saw cultural learning (and examinations) as a criterion according to which political power should be distributed. But they found allies among highly placed Khitans,

Jurchens, Central Asians, and Mongols. Although proponents of quota systems were foreign conquest groups they found supporters among the inhabitants of northern and southern China who were, after all, guaranteed a share. Yet the introduction of ethnopolitical distinctions as a crucial factor in public life had influence that in Ming could link a people with a polity, the very opposite of what foreign conquerors had tried to achieve.

References

Bol, Peter K. "Seeking Common Ground: Han Literati Under Jurchen Rule." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.2 (1987): 461-538.

Cao Wanru 曹婉如, and et al., eds. *Zhongguo gudai ditu ji* 中國古代地圖集. 3 vols. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990-1994.

Chan, Hok Lam. *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions Under The Jurchen Chin Dynasty (1115-1234)*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984.

Chen Dezhi 陳得芝, Qiu Shusen 邱樹森, and He Zhaoji 何兆吉, eds. *Yuan dai zou yi ji lu* 元代奏議集錄. Scripta Sinica ed., Yuan dai shi liao cong kan. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1998.

Chen Liang 陳亮. *Chen Liang ji* 陳亮集. Edited by Deng Guangming. Supplemented edition. ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987.

Dardess, John W. "Did the Mongols Matter? Territory, Power, and the Intelligentsia from the Northern Song to the Early Ming." In *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, edited by Paul Smith and Richard von Glahn, pp. 111-134. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003.

Du You 杜佑. *Tong dian* 通典, Scripta Sinica. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988.

Fan Zuyu 范祖禹, and Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (annotations). *Tang jian* 唐鑑 Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, ed. *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan y ti geju* 中華民族多元一體格局. Revised by Chen Liankai 陳連開 ed. Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1999.

Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光. "Songdai 'Zhongguo' yishi de tuxian — guanyu jinshi minsuzhuyi sixiang de yige yuanyuan 宋代「中國」意識的凸顯——關于近世民族主義思想的一個遠源." *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲(Qinghua University) 1 (2004): 5-12.

Han Yu 韓愈, and Ma Qichang 馬其昶 (ed.). *Han Changli wen ji jiao zhu* 韓昌黎文集校注.

Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957.

Hong Mai 洪邁. *Rong zhai sui bi* 容齋隨筆. Scripta Sinica ed. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978.

Hu Axiang 胡阿祥. *Wei zai si ming: "Zhongguo" gujin chengwei yanjiu* 偉哉斯名：「中國」古今稱謂研究. Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.

Legge, James. trans., *Shu King* 書經. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879. at http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/sbe03/shu00.htm(2009.9.21)

Lewis, Mark Edward. *The construction of space in early China*, SUNY series in Chinese philosophy and culture. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006.

Liu, Lydia H. *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Liu Yueshen 劉岳申. *Shenzhai ji* 申齋集, Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵. *Xiangshan ji* 象山集, Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Ma Duanlin 馬端臨. *Wen xian tong kao* 文獻通考. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.

Mittag, Achim."The Early Modern Formation of a National Identity in Chinese Historical Thought —Random Notes on Ming and Early-Qing Historiography." Paper presented at the Chinese and Comparative Historical Thinking in the 21st Century, Fudan University, Shanghai 2004.

Ouyang Min 歐陽忞. *Yu di guang ji* 輿地廣記. Edited by Li Yongxian 李勇先 and Wang Xiaohong 王小紅. Chengdu Sichuan daxue chubanshe 2003.

Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄. *Guizhai wen ji* 圭齋文集 Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Qian Bocheng 錢伯城, and et al., eds. *Quan Ming wen* 全明文. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 1992.

Qiu Jun 丘濬. *Da xue yan yi bu* 大學衍義補. Edited by Zhou Jifu 周濟夫. Beijing: Jing hua chubanshe, 1999.

Shui Anli 稅安禮. *Lidai dili zhizhang tu* 歷代地理指掌圖. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, rpt. 1989.

Sima Guang 司馬光. *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑. Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956.

Song Lian 宋濂, ed. *Yuan shi* 元史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976.

Su Tianjue 蘇天爵. *Yuan chao ming chen shi lue* 元朝名臣事略 Scripta Sinica ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.

Tan Qixiang 譚其驤. “Lishi shang de Zhongguo he Zhongguo lidai jiangyu 歷史上的中國和中國歷代疆域.” *Zhongguo bianjiang shi yanjiu* 中國邊疆史地研究 8.1 (1991).

Tillman, Hoyt C. *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch’en Liang’s Challenge to Chu His*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1982.

Tsutsumi Kazuaki 堤一昭.“Chūgoku no jigazō — sono jikan to kūkan o kitei suru mono 中國の自畫像—その時間と空間を規定するもの.” In *Gendai Chūgoku chiiki kenkyū no aratana shiken* 現代中国地域研究の新たな視圏, edited by Nishimura Shigeo 西村成雄, 30-61. Kyōto 京都: Sekai Shisōsha 世界思想社, 2007.

Tuotuo 脫脫, ed. *Jin shi* 金史. Scripta Sinica ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.

Tuotuo 脫脫, ed. *Song shi* 宋史. Scripta Sinica ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977.

Wang Anshi 王安石. *Linchuan xian sheng wen ji* 臨川先生文集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959.

Wang Ke 王柯. *Min zu yu guo jia—Zhongguo duo min zu tong yi guo jia si xiang de xi pu* 民族與國家：中國多民族統一國家思想的系譜. Beijing: Zhongguo she ke, 2001.

Wilkinson, Endymion Porter. *Chinese history : a manual*. Rev. and enl. ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000.

Wu Shidao 吳師道. *Jing xiang lu* 敬鄉錄, Xu Jin hua cong shu. Yongkang: Yongkang Hu shi Meng xuan lou 永康胡氏夢選樓, 1924.

Xiao Ju 蕭𡼏. *Qin zhai ji* 勤齋集 Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Xu Jing 徐兢. *Xuanhe feng shi Gaoli tu jing* 宣和奉使高麗圖經 Wenyuange Siku quanshu Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Xu Mengxin 徐夢莘. *San chao bei meng hui bian: fu jiao kan ji* 三朝北盟會編：附校勘記. Scripta Sinica ed. Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962.

Yang Jian 楊簡. *Cihu yi shu* 慈湖遺書, Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Ye Shi 葉適. *Xi xue ji yan* 習學記言 Yinyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

Ye Shi 葉適. *Ye Shi ji* 葉適集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961.

Yu Yingshi.“Changing Conceptions of National History in Twentieth Century China.” In *Conceptions of National History. Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78*, edited by Erik Lönrith, Karl Molin and Ragnar Björk, pp. 155-174. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994.

Zhao, Gang.“Reinventing *China*: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese

National Identity in the Early twentieth Century." *Modern China* 32.1 (2006): 3-30.

Zhao Ruyu 趙汝愚. *Song chao zhu chen zou yi* 宋朝諸臣奏議. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999.

Zheng Qiao 鄭樵. *Tong zhi* 通志 Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1896.

Zhu Xi 朱熹. *Zhu Xi ji* 朱熹集. Edited by Guo Qi 郭齊 and Yin Bo 尹波. Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996.

Zhu Xi 朱熹. *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類. Edited by Li Jingde 黎靖德. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988 ed.

地理與文化：
近古時期關於「中國」的論述

包　弼　德*

摘　要

在近古時期（八至十五世紀），士人開始將「中國」同時視為「歷史地點」與「文化」而進行討論。雖然這類著作將「中國」視作處於中央並具優越性的空間—文化主體，而將之與其周圍的人民、國家（夷狄）做出清楚的區分，然而這些作者同時也反對試圖將外人納入其帝國的擴張性對外政策。相反的，外國征服者通常避免「中國」論述基礎。雖然這是一種將少數征服者所享有之特權合法化的方法，然而它也移除了內在於「中國」論述中對帝國擴張的限制。

關鍵詞：宋代、中國、外交關係、思想史

* 作者係美國哈佛大學東亞系教授。