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From Migration Legends to Regional Identity: the Formation of the Ming-Qing State

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Abstract

Recent years have seen extensive discussions on identity issues across various disciplines. Within the field of history, particularly significant are the debates concerning the "New Qing History" in American Sinology and the special issue on James Watson in the American journal *Modern China*. These discussions are closely tied to the emphasis on diversity and the exploration of the grand unification mechanism in Chinese studies, both domestically and internationally. Migration legends offer a critical lens for examining regional identity, encapsulating the dynamic shifts in regional identities and the historical processes of state formation during the Ming and Qing dynasties, from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Such discussions of identity and state formation should be contextualized within specific historical and spatio-temporal frameworks.

Keywords

migration legends – regional identity – formation of the Ming-Qing state – New Qing History – James Watson special issue

The analysis of identity issues using political or spatial entities such as the state, locality, ethnicity, and community has become a significant focus across various Chinese studies in recent years. In terms of identity issues in Chinese history, two noteworthy topics have emerged alongside familiar discussions.

One pertains to the "New Qing History" in American Sinology, which emphasizes the Manchu or Inner Asian factors in Qing (1616–1911) history, drawing both attention and criticism from Chinese academics. The other topic is related to American anthropologist James Watson's article on the worship of T'ien Hou 天后 (Empress of Heaven). This article sparked debates in *Modern China* and *Journal of History and Anthropology* 歷史人類學學刊, revisiting the concepts of unification and diversity in Chinese culture, though it received less attention from the academic community. These two topics are not only related to identity issues but also directly address the underlying issues of identity.

This article aims to address the identity issues involved in these two discussions by examining historical scholarship and using ancestral migration legends as a point of entry.[1]

1 From Two Debates on "Identity" Issues

In 2010, *Qingchao de guojia rentong* 清朝的國家認同, a volume of essays focusing on the "New Qing History" research and its associated debates, was published. Surprisingly, neither the book's preface nor its epilogue explained why it regarded discussions of the "New Qing History" as discussions about "national identity." That same year, the "Qingdai zhengzhi yu guojia rentong" 清代政治與國家認同 conference in Beijing echoed this thematic ambiguity: discussions of the "New Qing History" were categorized under "The National and Ethnic Identity of the Qing Dynasty," without further elaboration in introductory or concluding remarks, suggesting an assumed understanding by the editors.[2]

1 This article is part of the phased achievements of the project "Anthropological History of Chinese Society" 中國社會的歷史人類學研究 led by Professor David Faure at The Chinese University of Hong Kong under the Areas of Excellence (AoE) Scheme. Initially presented at the "Conference on Local Consciousness and National Identity since the Ming and Qing Dynasties" held at East China Normal University upon the invitation of Professor Xu Jilin 許紀霖, this paper benefited from the guidance of Professor Feng Xianliang 馮賢亮, to whom I express my gratitude. Additionally, the revisions to this paper were inspired by the comments of Professors Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉 and Shi Jingang 石井岡 during the conference, for which I am also grateful.

2 Liu Fengyun 劉鳳雲 and Liu Wenpeng 劉文鵬, ed., *Qingchao de guojia rentong: "Xin Qing shi" yanjiu yu zhengming* 清朝的國家認同—"新清史" 研究與爭鳴 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010); Liu Fengyun 劉鳳雲, Dong Jianzhong 董建中, and Liu Wenpeng 劉文鵬, ed., *Qingdai zhengzhi yu guojia rentong* 清代政治與國家認同 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012).

Considering the widely accepted view that the debate between Evelyn S. Rawski and Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣 (1917–2012) in the 1990s heralded the emergence of the "New Qing History," the key issue at stake was "Sinicization" (*hanhua* 漢化). Sinicization is indeed pertinent to identity, as a group's identification with Han culture implies its Sinicization, though this does not necessarily align with "national identity." Rawski's writings underscored the Qing dynasty's successful integration of Manchu elements but stopped short of suggesting that the Qing was not "China." Even in *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*, she emphasized the distinction between China and the "Manchu" empire, and she did not advocate for a total separation of China from the Qing dynasty.[3] In the volume, J. W. Cohen's critique of the "New Qing History" didn't mention that many seminal works, including Mark C. Elliott's *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China*, predominantly focus on "national identity."[4]

In fact, Elliott challenged the "Chinese identity" issue of the Qing dynasty:

> Perhaps the most significant question raised by the "New Qing History" is whether we can unquestionably equate the Qing dynasty with China. Shouldn't we regard it as a "Manchu" empire, of which China was only a part? Consequently, some historians associated with the "New Qing History" have preferred to delineate a distinction between "the Qing dynasty" and "China," careful not to merely label the Qing as "China" or its emperor as the "Chinese emperor."[5]

This perspective understandably unnerved certain Chinese scholars, such as Huang Xingtao 黃興濤, who addressed how the Manchus during the Qing period viewed "Chinese identity" in response to Elliott's stance.[6] This concern

3 Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

4 Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

5 Ou Lide 歐立德 [Mark C. Elliott], "Manwen dang'an yu 'Xin Qing shi'" 滿文檔案與"新清史", in *Qingchao de guojia rentong: "Xin Qing shi" yanjiu yu zhengming* 清朝的國家認同—"新清史"研究與爭鳴, ed. Liu Fengyun 劉鳳雲 and Liu Wenpeng 劉文鵬 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004), 391.

6 Huang Xingtao 黃興濤, "Qingchao Manren de 'Zhongguo rentong': dui Meiguo 'Xin Qing shi' de yizhong huiying" 清朝滿人的"中國認同"—對美國"新清史"的一種回應, in *Qingdai zhengzhi yu guojia rentong* 清代政治與國家認同, ed. Liu Fengyun 劉鳳雲, Dong Jianzhong 董建中, and Liu Wenpeng 劉文鵬 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 16–34.

likely influenced the thematic focus on "national identity" in the aforementioned essay collections.

The second topic originates from James Watson's seminal 1985 article, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou (Empress of Heaven) Along the South China Coast, 960–1960."[7] In this work, Watson employed the pivotal concepts of "standardization" and "orthopraxy" to probe the mechanisms behind China's "cultural unification." More than two decades later, in a special issue the journal *Modern China* revisited this thematic inquiry through a collection of articles penned by scholars such as D. Sutton, K. Pomeranz, M. Szonyi, P. Katz, and M. Brown. These articles critically assessed the efficacy of standardization and orthodox practices by uncovering instances of "heteropraxy" within local rituals and the "pseudo-orthopraxy" strategies of local elites, arguing that the so-called "cultural unification" of China had not fully materialized by the late Qing dynasty.[8]

However, scholars David Faure and Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉 expressed skepticism towards this James Watson special issue, which highlighted the diversity of local cultural practices. They contended that acknowledging the diversity of local practices should serve only as an initial step in ongoing research, rather than a definitive conclusion.[9] They argued that the portrayal of cultural diversity as a settled issue overlooks significant scholarly contributions to the study of Chinese social history over the past twenty years. They advocated for a deeper investigation into the underlying mechanisms of "cultural unification," exploring whether such unification exists amidst the diversity of local traditions and how it is manifested. Interestingly, the authors of the James Watson special issue did not significantly contest these viewpoints. Subsequently, D. Sutton's critique of Faure and Liu's perspectives spurred further debate over the interpretation of Watson's concepts, with Faure and Liu's concise responses providing clearer articulations of the underlying disagreements.[10]

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7 James Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') Along the South China Coast, 960–1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 292–324.

8 *Modern China* 33, no. 1 (2007): 3–153.

9 See Ke Dawei 科大衛 [David Faure] and Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉, "'Biaozhun hua' haishi 'zhengtong hua': cong minjianxinyang yu liyi kan Zhongguo wenhua de dayitong" "標準化" 還是 "正統化"：從民間信仰與禮儀看中國文化的大一統, *Lishi renleixue xuekan* 歷史人類學學刊 6, no. 1/2 (2008): 1–21.

10 Su Tangdong 蘇堂棟 [Donald Sutton], "Ming Qing shiqi de wenhua yiti xing, chayi xing yu guojia: dui biaozhun hua yu zhengtong shijian de taolun zhi yanshen" 明清時期的文化一體性、差異性與國家一對標準化與正統實踐的討論之延伸; Ke Dawei 科大衛 [David Faure] and Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉, "Jianduan de huiying" 簡短的回應, *Lishi renleixue xuekan* 歷史人類學學刊 7, no. 2 (2009): 139–66.

While these discussions did not directly tackle the concept of "identity," by recognizing China's cultural unification, they implicitly affirmed an enduring "identity" within Chinese culture.

Initially, the two scholarly debates were distinct and unconnected. Discussions of the "New Qing History" typically focused on the cultural differences in regions like Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang rather than cultural variations within "China Proper." These discussions often concentrated on the cultural strategies employed by the highest rulers, rather than the cultural practices and strategies of the populace. Conversely, discussions on "standardization" and "orthopraxy" were firmly anchored in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties, with a persistent emphasis on the interaction between the state and its citizens. Nevertheless, these discussions largely overlooked any potential changes in the dynamics between local traditional diversity and cultural unification that may have emerged following the establishment of the Qing dynasty. A potential convergence of these discussions is evident in the book *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, edited by Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, and featuring contributions from Mark C. Elliott, David Faure, and Liu Zhiwei.[11] It is commonplace for scholars to share some views while differing on others.

The central theme of this book is "ethnicity," a concept that Crossley and Elliott particularly focused on. In discussing the formation of "ethnicity" or "ethnic identity," the authors emphasize the importance of subjectivity and maintain a nuanced stance toward the "center" and "margins," attributing a dynamic and diverse nature to ethnic identity. A consensus between them is that the definitive shaping or emergence of ethnic identities for northern groups like the Manchus and Mongolians, as well as southern groups such as the Miao 苗, Yao 瑤, and Tanka (*dan* 蜑), occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries. This timeframe coincides with the "Late Imperial" and "Early Modern" periods. However, while Elliott, Crossley, and Sutton sought to demonstrate a direct connection between their case studies and the Manchu characteristics of the Qing dynasty, aligning with the "New Qing History" perspective, Faure, Siu, and Liu inclined more towards analyzing the institutional elements from the Ming dynasty, noting significant roles played by regional development and national registration systems. Reflecting on the debates surrounding the James Watson special issue, it becomes clear that while some scholars emphasized the diversity of ethnic identity formation, others explored potential unifying mechanisms behind this diversity.

11 Pamela Crossley, Helen Siu, and Donald Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Therefore, discussions about identity should not only consider how specific historical processes in certain periods frame our understanding but also contemplate whether a particular form of identity might constitute a mechanism indicative of historical shifts – such as the trend toward unity amidst diversity.

2 Ancestral Migration Legends and Guard-and-Battalion System of the Ming Dynasty

The discourse on "national identity" encompasses the evolution of state concepts through various historical epochs, particularly highlighting discussions after the emergence of nation-states. These concepts are often entangled with dynasties, governance, and broad cultural ideologies, including the traditional notion of "all under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下) which symbolizes the universal domain under imperial rule, frequently encounter predicaments where established ideological frameworks obscure the alignment of historical facts with theoretical concepts. The term "local identity" (*difang rentong* 地方認同) extends to the realm of locality, questioning whether identities associated with communities or ethnic groups fall within the scope of local identity and how these relate to national constructs, thereby frequently igniting debates. In this context, I advocate for the adoption of "regional identity" – a concept denoting an identification with a geographical space, whether extensive or confined, where individuals reside.

Beyond this foundational idea, the emergence of regional identity might surpass the restrictive and static understanding typically associated with local identity. It represents a dynamic, continually evolving process, generally emerging from the further development of local identity. Furthermore, regional identity often underpins the formation of ethnic and subsequently national identities, marking an initial phase in their evolution. Thus, in discussions surrounding national and local identities, regional identity should be considered a pivotal historical process that acts as a bridge between these concepts.

Numerous approaches exist for exploring regional identity, such as through administrative divisions, dialects, and ethnic groups. This paper seeks to examine it through the lens of migration legends from the Ming and Qing periods. These legends, which narrate the origins of migrants – specifically tales about ancestral homelands – are posited as markers of regional identity formation and serve as a grassroots foundation for the construction of national identity.

Extensive research on migration legends, such as Cao Shuji's 曹树基 *Zhongguo yiminshi* 中國移民史 (volume 5), An Jiesheng's 安介生 *Shanxi*

yiminshi 山西移民史, Segawa Masahisa's 瀨川昌久 *Kanan kanzoku no sōzoku · fūsui · ijū* 華南漢族の宗族·風水·移住, and Makino Tatsumi's 牧野巽 *Chūgoku no ijū densetsu* 中國の移住伝說, has delved deeply into various tales.[12] Among these, the Zhujixiang 珠璣巷 (Pearl Alley) legend of Nanxiong 南雄 in the Pearl River Delta, the Dahuaishu 大槐樹 (big pagoda tree) legend of Hongtong 洪洞, Shanxi 山西 in northern China, the Getengkeng 葛藤坑 (vine pit) legend of Shibicun 石壁村, Ninghua 寧化 among southern China's Hakka community, the Xiaoganxiang 孝感鄉 (Filial Village) legend of Macheng 麻城 among Hunan 湖南 and Hubei 湖北 migrants in Sichuan 四川, and the Waxieba 瓦屑壩 (Tile Dam) legend among migrants in Jiangxi 江西 have all received substantial scholarly attention.

The Zhujixiang legend of Nanxiong, prevalent in the Pearl River Delta region, recounts the tale of a concubine who fell from favor with the emperor during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) and escaped from the palace to the Zhujixiang people of Nanxiong. When the imperial court discovered her hideout and sent troops to eliminate her lineage, the local populace, fearing retribution, fled southward to the Pearl River Delta overnight, leading many in this area to trace their ancestry to the Zhujixiang of Nanxiong.[13] Liu Zhiwei regards this narrative as an important historical memory and agrees with David Faure that this story is connected to registration issues faced by the residents of Guangdong at the onset of the Ming dynasty. To obtain legal status, the indigenous people and the marginalized sought inclusion in the official registries by claiming origins from the Zhujixiang of Nanxiong, thereby aligning themselves with those already registered and asserting their legitimacy and orthodox roots from the Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原). The widespread adoption of this legend was a strategic response to the registration challenges within the unique social milieu of early Ming Guangdong. Thus, Liu Zhiwei interprets this legend not only as a manifestation of the emphasis on orthodox identity from

12 Cao Shuji 曹樹基, *Zhongguo yimin shi* 中國移民史 (Fujian: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1997); An Jiesheng 安介生, *Shanxi yimin shi* 山西移民史 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1999); Laichuan Changjiu 瀨川昌久 [Segawa Masahisa], *Huanan hanzu de zongzu, fengshui, yiju* 華南漢族的宗族、風水、移居, trans. Qianhang 錢杭 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1999); Makino Tatsumi 牧野巽, *Chūgoku no ijū densetsu* 中國の移住伝說, vol. 5 of *Makino Tatsumi Chosakushū* 牧野巽著作集 (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobō, 1985).

13 According to my understanding, among the Han and Tibetan populations in Qinghai, there exists a legend of migration from Nanjing's Zhuxi Alley. This narrative appears to conflate the migration induced by the early Ming dynasty's establishment of the Guard-and-Battalion system with local developments, presenting an issue that merits further research. However, this also highlights the significant influence of such legends.

the Central Plains but also as a reflection of the pursuit of registration, serving as both a means and an outcome in the formation of national identity in the Pearl River Delta during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[14]

Luo Xianglin's 羅香林 seminal works, *Kejia yanjiu daolun* 客家研究導論 and *Kejia yuanliu kao* 客家源流考,[15] laid the foundation for Hakka migration research. Utilizing extensive genealogical data, Luo concluded that the Hakka originated from the Central Plains, having undergone five major migrations from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589) through to the late Qing dynasty. This view long dominated the studies on the Hakka. Contrarily, Chen Zhiping 陳支平 argued that the Hakka ethnic lineage emerged from the amalgamation of various southern groups, maintaining that there is no genetic distinction between the Hakka and other Han Chinese populations in provinces such as Fujian 福建, Guangdong 廣東, and Jiangxi.[16] According to his findings, the Hakka and non-Hakka showed little difference in terms of their original settlements and southern migration processes. Chen noted that while the Hakka initially migrated to southern Jiangxi, western Fujian, and north-eastern Guangdong facing little resistance, their expansion south-westward led to severe conflicts with local residents. By the 16th and 17th centuries, these newcomers were derogatorily referred to as "sojourn people" (*kemin* 客民) by the local inhabitants of southern Guangdong.

Chen Chunsheng's 陳春聲 research, which also builds on Luo Xianglin's studies, found evidence in the Han River 韓江 basin that the term *ke* 客 (Hakka, meaning "sojourner") was used as a linguistic classification marker by the early Qing period, as documented in the *Jieyang xianzhi* 揭陽縣誌 from the reign of the Emperor Yongzhong 雍正 (r. 1722–1735), which described a local uprising. By the 1640s, "Hakka" had become an accepted classification for a dialect group. During the migration and resettlement periods under the Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1661–1722), coastal groups speaking Hokkien initially moved into the Hakka mountain regions, followed by diverse dialect-speaking groups settling in the plains and coastal areas, which subsequently saw significant clan establishment activities. Many genealogies from this period recount

14 Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉, "Fuhui, chuanshuo yu lishi zhenshi: Zhujiang sanjiaozhou zupuzhong zongzu lishi de xushi jiegou jiqi yiyi" 附會、傳説與歷史真實—珠江三角洲族譜中宗族歷史的敘事結構及其意義, in *Zhongguo pudie yanjiu* 中國譜牒研究, ed. Shanghai tushuguan 上海圖書館 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999).

15 Luo Xianglin 羅香林, *Kejia yanjiu daolun* 客家研究導論 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1992); Luo Xianglin 羅香林, *Kejia yuanliu kao* 客家源流考 (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao chubanshe, 1989).

16 Chen Zhiping 陳支平, *Kejia yuanliu xinlun* 客家源流新論 (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 3.

stories of ancestors migrating from the Central Plains to Ninghua Shibi and thereafter to their present locations.

The conceptualization of the Hakka as a "modern racial group" (*jindai zhongzu* 近代種族) emerged distinctly following the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars (*tuke daxiedou* 土客大械鬥) during the Xianfeng 咸豐 (1850–1861) and Tongzhi 同治 reigns (1862–1875), characterized by severe conflicts over land and economic rights between the indigenous Punti (local Cantonese communities) and migrant Hakka populations. These intense disputes, occurring alongside the rise of urban centers and the spread of evolutionary theories during the late Qing era, played a pivotal role in solidifying the Hakka identity within broader regional and national narratives.[17] Chen suggests that prior to the late Ming, distinct ethnic classifications such as "Hakka" were absent. Comparable to the Yao and She 畲, groups later identified as "Hakka" were originally indigenous to the Nanling 南嶺 mountain area. The formal acknowledgment of the Hakka identity was profoundly influenced by these historical conflicts and was further shaped by the contemporary dissemination of evolutionary theories, which framed them as a distinct group within the diverse ethnic landscape of China.

Recent research suggests that while the Zhujixiang legend of Nanxiong can be seen as a narrative created by local indigenous or marginalized groups, the Getengkeng legend of Shibicun among the Hakka community follows a similar pattern. However, the Dahuaishu legend of Hongtong displays unique features. This legend is primarily prevalent in northern regions such as Beijing 北京, Henan 河南, Hebei 河北, and Shandong 山東. Although it extends to other provinces, its frequency diminishes with increasing distance from the Central Plains, suggesting a lesser emphasis on asserting a Central Plains orthodox identity.

Furthermore, this legend, transmitted orally or via tomb inscriptions and gravestones, is also extensively recorded in clan genealogies, linking it to the construction of clan identities. Whether the clan construction in these areas is associated with settlement and tax registration practices, similar to those in South China, has yet to be conclusively determined. The widespread

17 Chen Chunsheng 陳春聲, "Diyu rentong yu zuqun fenlei: 1640–1940 nian Hanjiang liuyu minzhong 'kejia guannian' de yanbian" 地域認同與族群分類—1640–1940 年韓江流域民眾 "客家觀念" 的演變, in *Jindai Zhongguo shehui yu minjian wenhua: shoujie Zhongguo jindai shehuishi guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 近代中國社會與民間文化—首屆中國近代社會史國際學術研討會論文集, ed. Li Changli 李長莉 and Zuo Yuhe 左玉河 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2007).

distribution of this legend does not indicate its origination from a specific dialect group within a specific period or under specific conditions, unlike the "Hakka."

Additionally, the Shandong region exhibits varied spatial distributions of ancestral migration legends. In this area, many claim descent from migrants linked to the Dahuaishu legend of Hongtong. In Dengzhou 登州 and Laizhou 萊州 of Jiaodong 膠東 Peninsula, numerous individuals attribute their ancestry to "Little Yunnan" (*xiao Yunnan* 小雲南) and "Tieduijiu" 鐵碓臼 in Sichuan province while others in central northern parts claim origins from Zaoqiang 棗強 in Hebei, and in the south from Changmen 閶門 in Suzhou 蘇州. In the southeast, some trace their lineage to the "Thirteen Families of the Eastern Sea" (*Donghai shisan jia* 東海十三家) among other sources.

This scenario could be seen as a microcosm of the nationwide distribution of the Dahuaishu legend of Hongtong. While China may not entirely fit Chen Chunsheng's earlier depiction as a "virtual immigrant society," it is evident that many familial migration histories have been fabricated. In frontier regions, ancestral migration legends often claim origins from the Central Plains, boasting an extensive historical lineage. In contrast, legends from the Central Plains or core areas of the Ming and Qing dynasties typically describe simpler migrations from one locality to another, often involving places so obscure they are almost impossible to verify.

Moreover, societal classification in the Central Plains or the core areas of the Ming and Qing dynasties historically differed from those in the frontier areas. Even in earlier periods, when these regions were not yet recognized as core areas, distinctions were evident. In the frontier regions, individuals were categorized based on dialect, beliefs, and livelihoods into groups considered "inside the transformation" (*huanei* 化內) and "outside the transformation" (*huawai* 化外), or as *bianhu qimin* 編戶齊民 (common people listed in the household register) and *wuji zhitu* 無籍之徒 (people without registry). This effectively marked the divisions between Han 漢 and Yi 夷 (non-Han). However, in those central regions, such distinctions faded:[18] everyone was considered part of "inside the transformation," all were registered, and even though Mandarin became widespread, replacing local dialects, the ancestral migration legends – including claims of specific ethnic identities like the Mongols, the Hui in the

18 This distinction highlights that scholars of the South China School seek to identify mechanisms of cultural unity across broader geographical expanses, starting from the diversity inherent in regional cultural traditions. Research focusing on the North or the core areas of the dynasties clearly demonstrates how these regions have navigated this process since the Song dynasty, thus offering valuable precedents for the South China School's studies.

Ming dynasty, and Banner people (*qiren* 旗人) in the Qing dynasty – might suggest a different historical narrative.

In my examination of the Dahuaishu legend of Hongtong, as noted in the Republican-era *Huojia xianzhi* 獲嘉縣誌 of Henan province, people currently claim descent from Hongtong rather than identifying as indigenous or as military settlers from the early Ming, indicating that the establishment of the Guard (*wei* 衛) and Battalion (*suo* 所) system (a guard consisted of 5,600 men, each guard was divided into battalions of 1,120 men, and each battalion contained 10 companies of 112 men) during the Ming significantly influenced the creation of these ancestral legends.[19] The most frequently mentioned period in these narratives is the early Ming, specifically the Hongwu 洪武 (1368–1398) and Yongle 永樂 (1403–1424) reigns, coinciding with the peak of military relocations and garrison establishment. Following the Xuande 宣德 (1426–1435) and Zhengtong 正統 (1436–1449) reigns, large-scale military mobilizations ceased, and due to policy adjustments by the imperial court, garrison soldiers were required to serve nearby, reducing the need for extensive migrations. Consequently, the system-induced widespread migratory behavior significantly decreased.

The Ming dynasty's Guard-and-Battalion household system not only segregated original military households from those stationed at the garrisons, causing numerous people from the same household to reside in different locations, but also facilitated ongoing interactions between diverse populations through requirements for supplementary military service, inheritance of positions, and the farming duties of military households in various locales. Scholarly research suggests that from the mid-Ming period onward, many local military households compiled family genealogies and constructed clan identities as strategic responses to military service obligations. It appears that a significant relationship exists between ancestral migration legends predominantly documented in these genealogies and the extensive recording of early Ming military households within the same texts.

The "Little Yunnan" legend in Shandong's Jiaodong Peninsula, primarily sourced from Dengzhou and Laizhou, and specifically from localities such as Lingshanwei 靈山衛, Aoshanwei 鰲山衛, and Haiyang Suo 海陽所, highlights many genealogies tracing ancestors back to Yunnan's Wusawei 烏撒衛. Conversely, the "Shandong Little Yunnan" legend in eastern Liaoning province recounts ancestors originating from Shandong's Dengzhou and Laizhou,

19 Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜, "Zuxian jiyi, jiayuan xiangzheng yu zuqun lishi: Shangxi Hongtong Dahuaishu chuanshuo jiexi" 祖先記憶、家園象徵與族群歷史—山西洪洞大槐樹傳説解析, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 1 (2006): 49–64.

claiming ancestral roots in Yunnan.[20] If these legends hold any historical veracity, they predominantly reflect the continuous relocation of military personnel rather than the specifics of where these ancestors were officially registered.

Similarly, Xu Bin's 徐斌 research illuminates numerous genealogies in Eastern Hubei that trace their ancestry to Waxieba in Jiangxi Province. These genealogies attribute their lineage to the distinguished military contributions of Wu Ru 吳汝 (n.d.) from Raozhou 饒州, Jiangxi, and his commanding officer, Huang Rong 黃榮 (n.d.), during the Battle at Poyang Lake 鄱陽湖, where they achieved significant merit under Emperor Taizu of Ming 明太祖 (r. 1368–1398). Following his appointment as garrison commander in Huangzhou 黃州, Huang Rong's soldiers and their households established themselves as prominent clans within the region. This historical context is crucial during the early Ming dynasty when households were officially registered, making it a common practice to link one's familial origins to these military figures' hometowns.[21] In genealogies from the Xichang 西昌 and Yibin 宜賓 regions in Sichuan that I have reviewed, it is also typical to encounter descriptions of ancestors as military households originating from Xiaoganxiang of Macheng. Notably, in Ming and Qing genealogies professing Hui ancestry with which I have engaged, the majority include records belonging to the Guard-and-Battalion household system.

While ancestral migration legends related to the early Ming Guard-and-Battalion household system are prevalent in frontier regions, this study does not assert that all migrants were part of these military households. Instead, it seeks to demonstrate several key points. First, the peculiar origins noted in these legends, citing obscure and minor locations such as Dahuaishu, Zaolinzhuang 棗林莊 (Date Grove Village), and Waxieba, might be associated with the military deployment and reassignment practices of garrison soldiers. Second, the Guard-and-Battalion household system enabled frequent and extensive population movements, both during wartime and peacetime in early Ming China, establishing these individuals as dominant groups within many locales. Although not always the largest demographic group, their origins became pivotal reference points for surrounding populations. Third, regardless of their association with the Guard-and-Battalion household system, if ancestral migration legends were predominantly related to the registration processes in early Ming, the specific homelands mentioned in these legends

20 Liu Dezeng 劉德增, *Da qianxi: xunzhao "Dahuaishu" yu "xiao Yunnan" yimin* 大遷徙—尋找 "大槐樹" 與"小雲南" 移民 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2009).

21 Xu Bin 徐斌, *Mingqing e'dong zongzu yu difang shehui* 明清鄂東宗族與地方社會 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2010).

likely facilitated their formal registration; otherwise, these choices would be challenging to rationalize.

Cheng Meibao 程美寶 has highlighted that regional cultural labels are often reinforced in diaspora settings,[22] a dynamic also applicable to migration legends. However, these legends initially served as survival strategies for immigrants in unfamiliar territories, and over time, they may have evolved into markers developed by local communities to display their inclusiveness of diverse cultures. Therefore, rather than merely reflecting historical memories and regional identification with a homeland, these legends have transformed into tools facilitating the formation of regional identities in new settlements.

3 Regional Identity and the Formation of the Ming-Qing State

Discussions concerning the formation of the Ming-Qing state have predominantly focused on the founding periods of the Ming and Qing dynasties, highlighting their civil and military accomplishments and the creation, transmission, and transformation of state institutions – elements that are undeniably essential. However, effective governance over vast territories and the integration of diverse demographic groups into the nascent state structure were also critical components of state formation.

At its outset, the Ming dynasty did not endeavor to preserve the expansive territory of its Yuan (1206–1368) predecessors. Lacking the Mongols' capacity for direct control over the northern steppes and the western highlands, the Ming rulers instead consolidated their power within a more confined territorial scope. Through the implementation of various national policies, they strengthened land and population control, achieving a level of internal cohesion surpassing that of the Yuan dynasty. This consolidation set the stage for gradual territorial expansion, spurred by mid-Ming global changes such as increased regional development, enhanced population mobility, and escalated demand for diverse resources. The formation of the Qing state subsequently inherited and built upon these legacies, marking a natural progression in the development from the Yuan through the Ming era. Thus, the transitional phase from the Ming to the Qing became a pivotal period for the crystallization of national identity.

22 Cheng Meibao 程美寶, "Jindai difang wenhua de kua diyuxing: ershi shiji ersanshi niandai yueju, yueyue he yuequ zai shanghai" 近代地方文化的跨地域性—20 世紀二三十年代粵劇、粵樂和粵曲在上海, *Jindaishi yanjiu* 近代史研究, no. 2 (2007): 1–17.

The ancestral migration legends referenced in this article originated during this transformative epoch. According to current research, these legends first emerged in the mid-Ming period. For example, the Waxieba legend of Jiangxi's Raozhou area in eastern Hubei province is documented as early as the Zhengde 正德 (1506–1521) period of the Ming dynasty, yet it only became widespread in the locale during the reigns of the Kangxi Emperor and the Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1736–1796) period.[23] Similarly, the Zhujixiang legend of Nanxiong in the Pearl River Delta began appearing in family genealogies after the mid-Ming period and achieved widespread recognition during the Qing dynasty. In North China, traces of the Dahuaishu legend of Hongtong date back to the late Ming, but the story only achieved widespread dissemination by the mid-Qing. The prevalent recording of such legends in genealogies, which became common during the Qing, particularly from the mid-Qing period onwards, suggests that their oral transmission predates these written accounts.

The migration legends of frontier or border regions have been extensively analyzed. These tales often feature an origin in the Central Plains, serving to establish a legitimate identity for their subjects. Beyond the Zhujixiang legend of Nanxiong prevalent in the Pearl River Delta, many legends in the western regions claim ancestors from Zhujixiang of Nanjing 南京. One example involves the Dong 董 family from Tengchong 騰衝, Yunnan, who, according to family lore from the Ming dynasty hereditary military officers, were originally local militia. It was not until the genealogies were compiled and ancestral halls erected during the reign of the Emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶 (r. 1796–1820) that claims of Nanjing ancestry were formalized, specifying descent from Hushuwan 鬍樹灣 in Shangyuan 上元 county, Yingtian 應天 prefecture.[24]

In certain Hui and Tu communities of Qinghai, oral traditions similarly assert Nanjing origins. Cantonese descendants claimed from Nanxiong Zhuji Alley include early registered locals who differentiate themselves from Yao, Tanka, and She people, as well as those among these groups involved in developing new farmlands and adopting Han identities. As a result, diverse groups gradually embraced a shared ancestral migration legend, fostering a regional identity within the Pearl River Delta. Likewise, the Shibicun legend of Ninghua among the Hakka presupposes a Central Plains origin, thus shaping the regional identity of communities around the Nanling Mountains.

23 Xu Bin, *Mingqing e'dong zongzu yu difang shehui*, 21–22.

24 Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜, "Shenfen bianhua, rentong yu diguo bianjiang tuozhan: Yunnan Tengchong Dongshi zupu (chaoben) zhaji" 身份變化、認同與帝國邊疆拓展—雲南騰衝董氏族譜（抄本）札記, *Xibei minzu yanjiu* 西北民族研究, no. 1 (2013): 67–76.

Unlike these, the migration legends from core areas display distinct traits, lacking the motivation to craft an identity linked to the Central Plains. This likely stems from the post-Qing chaos, marked by significant changes in land ownership in the north, the dissolution of the Guard-and-Battalion system, and the convoluted distinctions between military, civilian, and banner lands. These conditions necessitated the creation of identities that reinforced claims to being Ming dynasty military households. The most frequently cited evidence for the Dahuaishu migration of Hongtong comes from various entries in the *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄 such as:

> In September of the twenty-second year of the Hongwu period, on the day of *Renshen* 壬申, Rear Military Governor (*houjun dudu* 後軍都督) Zhu Rong 朱榮 submitted a report stating that impoverished individuals from Shanxi had relocated to the three prefectures of Daming 大名, Guangping 廣平, and Dongchang 東昌, where they were allocated a total of 26,072 hectares of land.
>
> On the day of Jiaxu 甲戌 of the same month, Zhang Congzheng 張從整, along with 116 households from Qinzhou 沁州, Shanxi, petitioned to enlist for the military farming initiative. The Ministry of Households (*hubu* 戶部) relayed this petition to the imperial court. The Hongwu Emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, decreed rewards of money and silver ingots for Zhang Congzheng and his group, assigning them to Deputy Auditor-General for the Rear Military Governor (*houjun dudu qianshi* 後軍都督僉事) Xu Li 徐禮 who distributed land to them. Furthermore, Zhang and his group were ordered to return to Qinzhou to recruit more settlers for military farming. Observing the high population and scarce land in Shanxi, the Emperor authorized the relocation of people to cultivate the underutilized lands of Beiping, Shandong, and Henan, thereby motivating Zhang Congzheng and his peers to volunteer.
>
> In November of the same year, on the day of Bingyin 丙寅, the Emperor observed that regions like Zhangde 彰德, Weihui 衛輝, and Guide 歸德 in Henan, and Linqing 臨清 and Dongchang 東昌 in Shandong were suitable for the cultivation of mulberries and jujubes, due to their sparsely populated but underutilized lands. In contrast, Shanxi faced significant poverty due to its dense population and limited land availability. As a result, the Emperor instructed the Deputy Auditor-General for the Rear Military Governor Li Ke 李恪 and his colleagues to inform and verify the populations willing to relocate, granting them land. Those fraudulently claiming excessive land were to be penalized. Furthermore, the

> Ministry of Works (*gongbu* 工部) was ordered to publicly announce these decrees.[25]

Many scholars have overlooked that the initial proposal for this migration during the Hongwu era originated from officials within the Ministry of Households (*hubu* 户部). Although Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang initially issued the decree to the Ministry of Households, the execution was primarily managed by the Rear Military Governor's Office. This office served as the supervisory body over the Capital Region Metropolitan and Provincial Military Commission (*jingshi neiwai du siwei suo* 京師內外都司衛所), responsible for military officer appointments and troop inspections, and also managed military farming affairs. In addition to overseeing the guard battalions within the capital, the Rear Military Governor's Office also supervised the guard battalions in the North (initially under the Beiping Regional and Branch Regional Military Commissioners), the Shanxi Regional and Branch Regional Military Commissioners, and the Daning and Wanquan Regional Military Commissioners. These regions were pivotal migration sites as depicted in early Ming legends about Shanxi. While there is no direct evidence confirming whether these migrants remained registered as civilian households, operational practices suggest they were integrated into the Guard-and-Battalion system.

Ancestral migration legends are intrinsically linked to the early Ming dynasty's settlement and development history. The process by which various groups moved and established new areas is also indicative of the gradual formation of regional identities.

The historical narratives of different groups settling and developing areas at various times not only reflect the personal histories of individuals during the Ming and Qing dynasties but also contribute to the broader narrative of state formation during these periods. The Ming Empire inherited an extensive and heterogeneous territory from the Mongols, marked by numerous "geographical gaps." These gaps, present both in remote peripheries and within the central mainland, often remained isolated from the central or regional administrative centers. As a result, the empire's governance extended beyond the traditional prefecture and county system, known as *bianhu qimin*, employing a tiered system of Guard-and-Battalion, Subordinated Guard-and-Battalion (*jimi weisuo* 羈縻衛所), and Aboriginal Offices (*tusi* 土司) systems to manage frontier and minority regions. Meanwhile, Guard-and-Battalion units within the core areas

25 *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄 (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1962), vol. 197, 198.

addressed the "geographical gaps," integrating them into the official household registration system.

The Qing dynasty perpetuated these administrative practices. Initially, areas such as the Northeast and Mongolia were designated as "forbidden territories." Like the expansion into the mountainous and southwestern frontier areas of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi in the South, populations in the North began migrating to and developing the Northeast and Inner Mongolia. Initiatives such as *chuang guandong* 闖關東 (venturing into the Northeast) and *zou xikou* 走西口 (moving through the Western Pass) popularized migration legends such as the Hongtong Large Locust Tree in Inner Mongolia and "Little Yunnan" in Shandong. These legends facilitated the expansion of regional identities beyond the Great Wall, thus delineating the territorial boundaries of the Qing state.

Is it appropriate to discuss the formation of the Ming-Qing state together? Despite significant differences between the Ming and Qing regimes – particularly with the Qing's emphasis on Inner Asian influences, as highlighted by the "New Qing History" – it is plausible to consider their formations concurrently. Regarding the territories originally under Ming control, it is reasonable to discuss them collectively. Why is there a focus on changes observed after the 16th century? Employing a framework from modern historical discourse, the Ming era can be characterized as having "two halves": the first half marked by entanglements with the Yuan dynasty's legacy, and the second heralding the transformative changes that led into the Qing era.

These entanglements with the Yuan dynasty involved continuing several of the Yuan's administrative controls, such as the division of households based on service obligations within the mainland and the implementation of a dual management system comprising Aboriginal Offices and Guard-and-Battalion in the frontier regions, thereby linking the state to its people and lands through diverse governance models. However, from the mid-Ming period, roughly starting in the 16th century, these systems began to loosen and eventually disintegrate. In the household registration system, the *lijia* 里甲 (village labor service) system, military households, and artisan households underwent significant transformations; frontier regions started transitioning to direct imperial governance, and the Guard-and-Battalion system became more localized. These changes enhanced population mobility, further facilitating the shift from indirect to direct governance in frontier areas, and the application of inland governance principles and standards began to extend to these borderlands.

The Qing dynasty's approach to grassroots governance was almost entirely inherited from the Ming dynasty, though it was more standardized and

systematized, featuring an intensified control mechanism. Therefore, the development of a "new" state that began in the 16th century was not fully realized until the 18th century under the Qing.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, a period marked by significant increases in population mobility, a variety of ancestral migration legends not only emerged but also gained extensive popularity, transitioning from oral traditions to documented written forms. These narratives were enthusiastically adopted and adapted by the scholar-official class. Far from merely reflecting local or ancestral identities, these legends articulated shared experiences across diverse groups, addressing their distinct needs and cultivating a sense of broader regional identities. Alongside other cultural markers, these legends significantly expanded the understanding of regional identity, ultimately symbolizing the development and refinement of a national identity.

Translated by Jenny Lu

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