

# Commentary and Discussion on Zhou Ping's *Chinese Nation: Integration or Pluralism?*

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*The Chinese Nation: Integration or Pluralism* by Zhou Ping is an important paper in the field of political science. The connotation of “the Chinese nation” and “the nation” has aroused heated debates among the scholars of politics and ethnology. In line with the policy of “a hundred schools of thought contend”, this paper makes targeted comments on the specific points of Zhou Ping’s paper, in particular, the connotation of “the Chinese nation”, “the integration of the Chinese nation”, “the nation” and these major issues will be discussed one by one. Finally, the author puts forward some important insights of his own.

**Keywords:** the Chinese nation (*zhong hua min zu*), the nation (*min zu*), state-nation (*guo zu*), nation-state (*min zu guo jia*)

## The Important Issues to Be Discussed

Through such ethnic identification, the ethnic groups formed in Chinese history have been identified as 56 ethnic groups. Such a political division of ethnic groups not only politicizes and fixes various ethnic groups, moreover, the ethnic groups existing as historical and cultural groups have been recognized as ethnic groups with specific political status and collective political rights, thus bringing about significant changes in the structure of inter-ethnic relations. (Zhou, 2016, p. 20)

Whether the division of 56 ethnic groups is “politicized and fixed”, whether it is “recognized as having a particular political status and collective political rights” and whether it “has brought about significant changes in the structure of inter-ethnic relations”. These arguments also need solid evidence to back them up. National differentiation and national fusion are two inevitable ends of history, which need to respect national self-determination and national autonomy, respect individual’s national identity and national self-determination.

There is no discussion of the Chinese nation in the national theory of the People’s Republic of China, there is no discussion of the Chinese nation in the constitution of the nation-state, there is no discussion of the Chinese nation in the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, which has become the vanguard of the Chinese nation. (Zhou, 2016, p. 21)

These phenomena illustrate the necessity and urgency of comprehensively discussing the connotation of “the Chinese nation”. There are at least a few important milestones that need to be clarified in the discourse of the Chinese nation:

First, the Chinese nation originated from the civilization of the Yellow River valley, with a history of 5,000 years, and we are all part of the descendants of Yan and Huang, that is, the multiethnic amalgamation of the Yan and Huang tribes.

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Second, the Chinese nation created the civilization of the Yellow River valley and the Yangtze Valley before the Qin dynasty was unified, and after the Qin dynasty was unified, the Chinese nation became a unified kingdom.

Third, the modern Chinese nation-state Republic of China was founded by Sun Yat-sen in the Revolution of 1911. After decades of struggle, he devoted himself to “expelling the Manchus and restoring China”.

Fourth, the modern Chinese nation-state is the People's Republic of China, in which “people” is an ethnic whole/group, or “people”, and “republic” is democracy.

Fifth, the Chinese Communist Party is the vanguard of the Chinese nation, leading the Chinese nation to realize its great rejuvenation and the Chinese dream.

The concepts of “the Chinese nation” and “Chinese Volksgemeinschaft” put forward the task of “actively cultivating Chinese Volksgemeinschaft consciousness” (Zhou, 2016, p. 23).

There are three tasks that can be divided into two levels of interpretation: The first connotation is “the Chinese nation (state)”, “the Chinese nation (state) community”, and “actively cultivate the Chinese nation (state) community consciousness”. The second connotation is “the Chinese (great) nation”, “the Chinese (great) Volksgemeinschaft”, and “actively foster the Chinese (great) Volksgemeinschaft consciousness”.

### **The Discussion on the Connotation of “the Chinese Nation”**

“The Community of people referred to by the concept of ‘nation’, has an inherent and essential connection with the nation-state (CCCPC & SC, 2016)” (Zhou, 2016, p. 16).

According to the “people” of Benedict Anderson, its characteristics are: First, political community; second, common sovereignty; third, limited, imagined community. It can be seen here that “nation” can refer to ethnic groups, but also can refer to the nation.

“Nations are imagined communities”, says Benedict Anderson (2003) (Zhou, 2016, p. 24).

For nation states, the national meaning of a nation state is defined by its identity as an imagined community. Although the “imaginary community” includes the superficial phenomenon of “emptiness” and “Emptiness”, nationality is a part of national political identity and political community entity. In short, from an ethnic perspective, in a nation state, the nation is the imagined community; from a political perspective, in a nation state, the nation state is not the imagined community. For example, the People's Republic of China is a powerful political entity.

Hegel once said, “Nations do not exist to create states, nations are created by states” (Zhou, 2016, p. 16).

There was a state before there was a nation. The state can be divided into a dynasty state and a modern state. The Chinese nation is the descendants of Yan and Huang, up and down 5,000 years of civilization; dynasty states from the first dynasty Xia dynasty, so the concept of the Chinese nation was earlier than the West.

Eric J. Hobsbawm (2000) stressed, “It is not nations that create nations and nationalism, but nations and nationalism that create nations” (Zhou, 2016, p. 16).

The states and nationalism can create nations, but how to create is a difficult, complicated and long-term process of confrontation. In the West, dynastic sovereignty was established through 30 years of war and a series of peace treaties. Signed in October of 1648, it affirmed the Westphalia system, which determined national sovereignty and the way in which disputes over sovereignty were resolved. Since then, the principle of state

sovereignty has been established, and the supreme sovereignty of a country has been recognized by other countries, which marks the beginning of the independence of modern states.

“When the concept of ‘nation’ was introduced into China, there was no entity corresponding to it” (Zhou, 2016, p. 15).

This judgment needs to be grounded and explained. When and by whom? At that time, the Qing dynasty state was also divided into a number of nationalities. When the concept of nationality is introduced, whether there is a corresponding entity needs further investigation. But Sun Yat-sen's concept of “Republic of China” and its concept of “Three Principles of the People” have highlighted the meaning of the concept of “nation”.

“The definition of the concept of ‘Chinese nation’. The need of reality always impels the history to make the choice, thus manifests one kind of historical inevitability” (Zhou, 2016, p. 16).

The connotation of “realistic needs” is diverse, it can be the needs of the state, it can be the needs of the people, and it can be the needs of all ethnic groups. Who pushed history to make the definition of the concept of “the Chinese nation”? Whose connotation reflects the inevitability of history or conforms to the thrust of historical development? The people, and only the people, are the fundamental driving force for the development of history. The people here can be understood as all ethnic groups, so fundamentally speaking, it is not in line with the actual needs of anyone, but the people or all ethnic groups to promote the composite concept of historical synergy, which is the author's fundamental point of view.

“Dynastic states did not shape the stable social groups referred to by the Western concept of ‘nation’” (Zhou, 2016, p. 16).

China's feudal society for thousands of years, known as the “social super-stable structure” in the world, both the state and “some people”, has a long history. Whether in the Spring and Autumn period or the Warring States period, many small countries have formed stable social groups. Although it did not adopt the name of “nation” at that time, it had the concept of “nation” of “Qin, Qi, Chu, Han, Zhao, Wei, and Yan”. “People”, “people (plural)” and “the nation” are the same words as people. Since the Xia dynasty, many dynastic states have lasted for hundreds of years. How can we say that stable social groups have not been shaped?

After Qin dynasty unified the six states and established the centralization regime, the dynastic state became the dominant form of state in China until the last dynasty was overthrown by the 1911 Revolution. The lack of a unified form of community for effective integration of the residents, the people will be in a state of disarray. (Zhou, 2016, p. 16)

China's dynastic state has a much longer history. The Qin dynasty was the first unified dynastic state in Chinese history, and its national form could be called the Qin people. Both the integration of ethical values and social integration, especially in the Western Zhou dynasty, the political system was monarchy and enfeoffment, the system of succession was primogeniture and hereditary succession, the patriarchal clan system, and the class system was slavery. The state system is the ritual system of the Zhou dynasty, the economic system is the minefield system, the legal system is the nine punishments system, and the military system of the West Six Divisions and the King Cheng's Eight Divisions.

It can be said that since the Western Zhou dynasty, the country has carried on the effective conformity to the resident, the populace has been in the stable or the basic stable condition, “the national”, “the race”, “the people” are the stable social community. In the 5,000-year history of Chinese civilization, the descendants of Yan and Huang of the Chinese nation have formed a dynastic state of “dividing for a long time, uniting for a long time, dividing for a long time”. “Scattered” was the word Sun Yat-sen used, stressing that society was

unorganized and statism, and he did not try to use “unified communities for effective integration”. On the contrary, his “Three Principles of the People” always put the people in the first place, and the “people” here also includes the “nation”, because the “restoration of China” is aimed at national independence, so the *volksgemeinschaft* already exists.

“There were no diverse ethnic groups in the country” (Zhou, 2016, p. 24).

Ethnic groups are inherently diverse and very similar both at home and abroad.

Liang Qichao (1902) introduced the Western concept of “nation” to China, and then combined the concept of “nation” with the increasingly prominent concept of “China”, he created a concept of “the Chinese nation” to describe and analyze national phenomena (Zhou, 2016, p. 16).

It needs to examine the historical background of Liang Qichao. The real meaning of “the Chinese nation” focuses on “the Chinese nation-state” to replace “Great Qing state”, “Manchukuo”, “Qing Court”; this was decided by the background of the times of “expelling the tartars and restoring China”. Liang Qichao studied in Japan, the rise of the Japanese “Daiwa Nation”, strongly stimulated and awakened his sense of nation-state. However, the Qing dynasty was not a single nation, like Japan, which could cover the territory of the Qing dynasty as “China”, so he chose the concept of “the Chinese nation”, that is, “the nation in the Chinese territory”. This is a plural word, and “Five Ethnic Republics” are based on a plural word, rather than a single nation’s word.

First, “the Chinese nation” refers to “the state of the Chinese nation”, which are synonymous with each other. Second, “the Chinese nation” refers to the collective name of all the ethnic groups in the Chinese territory or “the greater China/the greater nation”. The formulation of “one nation” is the anti-Japanese war period of “the Chinese nation”, in order to arouse the national consciousness, but it is not the strategy of a single nation of realistic operability.

After Liang Qichao created the concept of the “Chinese nation”, it was accepted and used by Yang Du, Zhang Binglin, Sun Yat-sen, Li Dazhao and many revolutionaries, thinkers and scholars of the time. “In theory, Liang Qichao formed the concept of ‘a big nation’ based on the choice of Western ideas about ‘nation state’” (Huang, 2002, p. 14; Zhou, 2016, p. 17).

I strongly agree with Liang Qichao’s idea of forming “a big nation”. This is also with “The Chinese nation is one” the similar point of view.

“Entire country and the various ethnic groups that make up the Chinese nation are facing the danger of national extinction. The Chinese nation has come to the point of life and death” (Zhou, 2016, p. 18).

“The fall of the nation”, the lyrics of the national anthem “the Chinese nation has come to its most dangerous moment”, “the independence and liberation of the Chinese nation”, “the Chinese nation has stood up”, these classic symbols of nation-state have two meanings: One is that “the Chinese nation” really means “independent state” or “a big nation”. The other is “ethnic groups”, which means various ethnic entities, and cannot be considered as a single nation or a nation. Moreover, if minority people were simply referred to as “ethnic groups”, it would greatly simplify the complexity of the national problem. Most modern countries in the world form “nation-states” with “ethnic groups”, which are oriented towards “peoples”. The United States, Britain, France and other countries are such a model of multiple nations-state, rather than a single nation-state.

“It is in this sweeping war against foreign aggression, the Chinese nation to strengthen the internal cohesion, and eventually become a complete whole” (Zhou, 2016, p. 18).

The great second Sino-Japanese War accelerated the integration of the nation, and there is no doubt that the Chinese nation is becoming increasingly cohesive, but not necessarily “a whole nation as a whole” (an entity of a nation), but ultimately an entire nation-state.

### **The Argument of “Integration of the Chinese Nation”**

The relationship between “integration” and “pluralism” in the process of the construction and development of the Chinese nation has emerged, that is to say, strengthening the integration and development of the Chinese nation will inevitably restrict the development of the various ethnic groups that make up the Chinese nation. On the contrary, strengthening the diversity and development of the Chinese nation, the cohesion and integrity of the Chinese nation may be deconstructed (Zhou, 2016).

First of all, the basic characteristics of the nation are pluralistic, the basic characteristics of the state are integrated, the two belong to the nested integration level, the key to the integration mechanism of diversification and integration is the constitutional system and the structural guarantee of the democratic system of the state. This is not only the general model of nation-state in the world today, but also the practice of the relationship between nation and state established after the founding of China.

Secondly, the function and influence of national integration and pluralism need to be evaluated in terms of historical, unity of opposites and long-term effects, not just on the basis of current value judgment. “To strengthen the plurality and development of the Chinese nation, the cohesiveness and integrity of the Chinese nation may be deconstructed” is questionable, because the plurality and unity of the Chinese nation are not ideal classification categories, just as multicellular and unicellular organisms are easy to lose their vitality. The same is true of the gene for the double helix rather than the single helix. However, ethnic diversity and national integration is an ideal category, and the pluralistic ethnic groups are united in one country. This relationship, which is both opposite and unified, sustains the prosperity of ethnic groups and the stability of national structure. In short, the development, composite, dynamic stability is the real cohesion and stability, mechanical, single, static cohesion is only the surface and form, and will eventually lose cohesion and integrity.

According to historical experience, only put the problem in the realistic need to discuss in order to make a rational choice. In view of the national goal pursued by China in the fierce international competition, the development of the Chinese nation in the direction of integration can provide the necessary support for the rise of China and the realization of the Chinese dream. (Zhou, 2016, p. 15)

First of all, the direction of Chinese national integration or diversification is the result of various forces working together in the course of contemporary history. “The people, and only the people, are the driving force of historical development”. Whether it is the needs of the people, the pursuit of national goals, the great rejuvenation or the Chinese dream, the “needs of reality” is a long-term, natural and organic evolution process, which requires in-depth discussion.

Secondly, is the rational standard of Chinese national integration guided by the needs of the state based on the ultimate value goal or the tool value goal?

Thirdly, how to deal with the relationship between goal-oriented integration and national autonomy and national self-determination?

Fourth, the value of rational choice has diversity, such as constitutional reason, democratic reason, social reason, its national belief, and its characteristic culture. The greatest reason of a nation is its political identity, especially the identity of its core values.

Fifth, the national formation is the result of a long-term historical development. Over the past 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the history of China as a modern country is relatively short, and the national goals of "the rise of the Chinese nation", "the great rejuvenation", and "the Chinese dream" are taken as the basic basis for the integration of the Chinese nation or the nation. Is it a rational choice? The rationality and coupling between them need to be fully demonstrated.

The main content of the idea of the "unity" of the Chinese nation in the direction of integration: First, the Chinese nation fully conforms to the original meaning of the concept of "nation", that is, the nation in the nation-state (Ma, 2014, p. 35; Zhou, 2016, p. 23)

I strongly agree with it. If so, there would be no advocacy of the state-nation.

Third, "positioning the core concept of 'nationality' at the level of 56 'nationalities', the objective result is that 'the Chinese nation' is hollow and fictitious" (Zhou, 2016, p. 23).

It is not to be so sure. "The Chinese nation" refers to the Chinese nation or nation-state, the Chinese nation (state) belongs to the political community or political entity, the state is a strong entity, how to talk about the building on stilts and virtualization. This is a misunderstanding caused by the confusion of the category of national entity and the category of political entity. We can borrow a physical structure to make an analogy, spider web organic elastic compound structure, far more than a single, rigid physical structure. The flexible composite structure of the vest is far superior to a single physical structure. Therefore, the multi-ethnic has woven into a single country, far more than a single nation props up the country, multi-ethnic cross-breeding country far more than a single nation single breeding country. All over the world, the United States, ranked first in overall strengths, is a typical multi-ethnic country. They call themselves multi-ethnic country, and the ethnic/racial diversity is a prominent national characteristic. If China catches up with and surpasses the United States, it is hard to imagine losing its dynamism and vitality to become a single nation. How can it compete with a multi-ethnic, innovation-driven America? Therefore, the concept of a single nation needs comprehensive analysis and comparison from multiple perspectives, especially the structural and functional, innovative power, innovative mechanism, and the basic features of the times, rather than the false judgment of linear thinking and zero-sum thinking.

"The realization of the Chinese dream must depend on the national integration of the Chinese nation" under the historical conditions, it is even more necessary to "build and consolidate the Chinese nation into a unified and cohesive nation" (Ma, 2014, p. 36; Zhou, 2016, p. 23).

"The Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" is absolutely correct. This is the national dream, but not necessarily through the means of unifying the multiple nations. What is the connotation and prerequisite of nationality? What structural contradictions and conflicts will arise? What are the real, potential, huge, profound impacts? How to deal with the relationship between the nationalities? The utopian national dream of unity is not only unique among the world's great powers, but also has an irreversible and negative political and social impact at home and abroad.

### **Discussion on the Connotation of "State-Nation"**

"So that the concept of 'the Chinese nation' in the 'Five Ethnic Republic' under the idea of a distinct national meaning" (Zhou, 2016, p. 17).

If the concept of “nation” is to be adopted, the meaning of “nation” needs to be clarified. “Nation” refers to “the Chinese nation”, and “the Chinese nation” refers to “the nation above the Chinese territory”, not a single nation. A single “nation” cannot replace all ethnic groups and constitute the basic structure of the “Chinese nation”. Therefore, “the vivid national race implication” has the evidence?

In 1924, Sun Yat-Sen (1986) presided over the formulation of the “1st National Congress of Kuomintang Declaration”, is “the Chinese nation to seek liberation” and “All ethnic groups in China are equal” to explain the Nationalist Party. In the 1922 Declaration of 2nd National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was said that the “alien peoples” of Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang would govern themselves and then “Unite as a Federal Republic of China” (UFWD, 1991; Zhou, 2016, p. 17).

Since the founding of the Republic of China, the concept of “national equality” and “national autonomy” advocated by the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party has been firmly established, but the political concept of transforming all ethnic groups into a “nation” has not been adopted.

“On the one hand, the Chinese nation is defined as a new national entity formed by the integration of various historical and cultural groups, with the connotation and characteristics of the nation” (Zhou, 2016, p. 18).

This argument is debatable and requires factual support. “The Chinese nation” is the pronoun of “the Chinese nation-state”. In the world, “the nation-state” does not necessarily have the form of “a single nation-state”. The composite nation-state merges with their culture, with political community and political identity, China can be called “the Chinese nation (state)”, can be seen as a big nation state/overall nation state/composite nation state. Its nation-state entity has existed for a long time, which can be traced back to the Qin dynasty, which was the first unified dynasty.

“The concept of ‘Chinese nation’ and the definition of its connotation have not only prepared the national name and the symbol of identification for this national entity” (Zhou, 2016, p. 18).

Liang Qichao first put forward the concept of “the Chinese nation”, our nation-state has long existed in the form of dynastic state, especially during the period of national unification, it was not until Liang Qichao came up with the term that it became a symbol of identity for “national entity” or “nation”.

In 1938, Gu Jiegang published an article titled “China south of the Great Wall (*zhong guo ben bu*) should be abandoned” in the *Yishi Daily*, which resumed publication in Kunming. “It is a belief and a fact that the Chinese nation is one”, Fu Sinian wrote in response. Gu Jiegang (1996) published the article the Chinese nation is one, “all Chinese people are the Chinese nation—within the Chinese nation we should never identify any other nation—we should all be careful to use the word ‘nation’ in the future”, he said (Zhou, 2016, p. 19).

In the crisis of the Chinese nation needs to be united, so Fu Sinian and Gu Jiegang proposed “the Chinese nation is one (nation)”, no longer divided into various ethnic groups. The appeal to unite in the face of national peril is understandable. But even the metaphor of a single strand of rope is the tension of many strands, which in a non-crisis situation would be dispersed as multiple strands of rope, which works like a carpenter’s saw principle.

After Gu Jiegang published Fei Xiaotong’s article, a sequel to “The Chinese nation is one” was written in response to Mr. Fei Xiaotong (Zhou, 2007). Chiang Kai-shek’s (1943) speech on March 10, 1943, “The destiny of China”. It said, “because of the interdependence of life, and cultural exchanges, most of the local clan, by this point has long been integrated into a great nation of China” (Zhou, 2016, p. 19).

However, the usage of Chiang Kai-shek term is different. His claim is “the great nation of China”, interdependence, integration into a great nation. He does not say “the great nation of China” to replace the ethnic groups.

The “Chinese nation” that Liang Qichao aspired to, as opposed to the “foreign nations”, was the “nation” of the “nation-state”, which must be combined with the state and have the form of the state (Zhou, 2015; 2016, p. 19).

“The Chinese nation” means “the Chinese nation (-state)” and therefore has the form of a state.

“The founding of the People’s Republic of China realized the combination of ‘the Chinese nation’ and ‘the state’, thus the Chinese nation became the national entity with the form of the state, that is, the real state-nation” (Zhou, 2016, p. 20).

First of all, it is not the founding ceremony of the People’s Republic of China that marks the first beginning of the union of “the Chinese nation” and “the state”, forming a national entity in the form of the state, the state-nation, but the true unity of the Chinese nation-state, that is, “The Chinese nation has stood up”. The various ethnic groups of the Chinese nation constitute a big family, that is, a big nation. It is not necessarily a nation that produces a single state-nation, nor is it necessarily a dual entity state that is both a nation and a state-nation. Secondly, the people-state, which can be called the state directly, has the attribute of political entity or political community; in the unitary nation-state, the national entity is the nation-state, while in the multi-national state, the state is not the national entity, but the national entity with the majority nationality as the backbone, such as the Han nationality.

Such a discussion “In fact is put forward a strict sense of the Chinese nation’s thinking.” The putting forward of such a Chinese national thought is a significant theoretical innovation, embodying the top-level design of the governance of national issues of the central leading collective. (Zhou, 2016, p. 23)

This can be understood as a utopian vision. The central expression did not appear that the Chinese nation is the expression of a single entity nation. How to talk about the “strict sense of the Chinese nation”? What is the connotation of “top-level design for the governance of national problems”? What’s the basis for that?

### **Discussion on the Connotation of Fei Xiaotong’s “Unity of Pluralism”**

In his 1988 speech on “The pattern of pluralistic integration of the Chinese nation” at the invitation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Fei Xiaotong expressed his views on the “pluralistic integration” of the Chinese nation (Zhou, 2016, p. 21).

I strongly agree with Fei Xiaotong on the “unity of diversity” of the Chinese nation. Pluralism refers to various nationalities, and integration refers to “national integration” or “multi-integration process” of “Chinese nation-state”, because “integration” itself has the meaning of dynamic “integration process”. However, “integration” cannot simply be considered as a “nation”.

The significance of the idea of “pluralistic integration” of the Chinese nation lies in its re-emphasis on the Chinese nation under the condition that the Chinese nation has been deconstructed and gradually become an empty noun, and will position it as “a conscious national entity”. (Zhou, 2016, p. 21)

“The deconstruction of the Chinese nation and its gradual transformation into an empty noun” is somewhat exaggerated, and this judgment lacks a basic basis. The root of the misunderstanding is that the



Chinese nation has two meanings. First, it is the entity of each nation. Second, the Chinese nation-state is not a national entity, but a political and cultural entity at the national level. The Chinese nation has a common political identity, civic values and civic behavior of the community, that is, the Chinese nation's political community; these are mandatory provisions of the Constitution. Third, if each nation is a composite national entity, the Chinese nation also becomes an entity of the conscious nation-state, rather than a "dual entity" of the nation and the state-nation.

### **To Discuss the Deviation of Ethnic Minorities Policy**

The regional national autonomy only stresses the right of the autonomous administrative territorial entity of China, but seldom or never stresses the obligation of the autonomous administrative territorial entity of China to the state. Second, a special political culture has been developed, in which words and deeds that safeguard and promote the rights and interests of ethnic minorities are encouraged, and words and deeds that adopt a rational attitude towards the rights and interests of ethnic minorities are suppressed or even attacked. Related policies can only play a role in one direction, forming a "policy kidnapping". Third, "Two Less and One Width". (CCCPC, 1984, pp. 1-2; Zhou, 2016, p. 21)

The relationship between the state and ethnic minorities needs to be adjusted urgently. "Two less, one width" is a criminal policy aimed at ethnic minorities, which insists on "fewer killings and fewer arrests" for criminals from ethnic minorities, and generally give them leniency in their treatment, the details of which are stipulated in document No. 5 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

First, economically, socially, culturally and ecologically, the state should implement preferential and preferential policies towards ethnic minority areas, but all ethnic groups in politics should always adhere to the principle of "all ethnic groups are equal". Short-term political easing, political tilt, appeasement strategy, "Two less, one width" policy, will be buried in the long-term, the potential political hidden danger, there will be a situation that is not worth the loss.

Second, the nation-state is a community of political identity, through a democratic constitutional system, forming civic identity, civic values, civic consciousness, civic culture, civic behavior, and citizenship; this is a political and compulsory state obligation that all ethnic groups must abide by. If these state obligations conflict with national identity, national values, national consciousness, national culture, national conduct and national identity, national obligations must be subordinated to state obligations, which principle needs to be clearly stipulated in the Constitution.

The above-mentioned policy and its practice have brought an unexpected consequence: the various ethnic groups that make up the Chinese nation are becoming more and more substantial and pursuing self-development, while the Chinese nation is inevitably moving towards virtualization, and even gradually becoming a fictitious name. (Zhou, 2016, p. 21)

First of all, the Chinese nation is not virtual, because the Chinese nation-state has become a powerful entity, with the strong leadership of the Party and the strong support of the military, and how can the Chinese nation be virtual or nominal? According to China's specific national conditions, the Han nationality, the largest part of the Chinese nation, accounts for 91.11% of the population in 2021.

It is hard for other minorities to overtake the Han, so they are called ethnic minorities. Secondly, it is not only reasonable but also necessary for each nation to become more and more substantial and pursue its own development. It is not a zero-sum game or a trade-off between the Chinese nation-state and the various nations, because the two belong to different interfaces, that is, the political interface and the national cultural interface.

“The various ethnic groups that make up the Chinese nation become more and more entity nation and develop independently. As a whole, the Chinese nation naturally becomes more and more groundless and emptiness” (Zhou, 2016, p. 21).

It is inevitable that ethnic groups will become more substantial and develop independently. In fact, as a “whole Chinese nation” or a single nation/state-nation does not exist. “More and more empty” seems impossible to talk about, because China has a strong state entity of “Chinese nation (-state)” with the strong party and the military. It is not a wise choice to envisage a national entity as a whole, because of the internal and external effects of such a bold vision and its profound impact, the lack of a thorough constitutional design and in-depth investigation of the will of the various nations.

“It is opposed to placing the identity of the various ethnic groups that make up the Chinese nation above that of the Chinese nation. The risk of the Chinese nation being deconstructed has also risen sharply” (Zhou, 2016, p. 23).

Actually, Chinese national identity is equivalent to national identity, because in fact it is the connotation of Chinese national state or nation-state. Here we should follow the constitutional system and democratic mechanism and make mandatory institutional arrangements for the relationship between the state and the nation.

The political identity of the Chinese nation-state is the primary and basic requirement, and the national identity of the ethnic groups should be subordinated to the political identity of the state, which should be the guiding principle of the national policy. “The risk of the deconstruction of the Chinese nation has suddenly increased”, this kind of blind exaggeration of the risk in fact lack of realistic basis. Here the concept of “nation” has a variety of interpretations: One can be interpreted as “a nation-state”, and the other can be interpreted as “ethnic groups”. If the existing national minorities are rigidly set as “a nation-state”, then there is a dangerous tendency to deduce it literally. Only mechanically copying the Soviet nation-state theory in the 1920s and 1930s produced a negative logical effect. However, if the ethnic groups are understood as “race”, they belong to the lower levels of the nation-state, literally and will not conflict with the state, and can be interpreted in a consistent way.

### **The Argument on “Nation” or “Ethnic Groups”**

“The European and American countries do not define these groups as nations in the context of the increase in the number of ethnic groups in the country and the growing demand for collective rights, they define them as an ethnic group” (Zhou, 2016, p. 24).

It is a question worthy of asking. Most countries in the world are a single nation-state, that is, a nation-state. Only a few big countries are nation-states made up of various ethnic groups, such as China. As a nation-state, the United States is called ethnic groups, not peoples, which is also the “national race” pattern of most countries in the world. Here, the author raises questions that are worth discussing. Should China change the name of “nation as” to “ethnic groups/races” in future? Thus, the nation refers exclusively to the national state, and “ethnic group/race” refers exclusively to the present ethnic groups.

### **The Important Judgments and Further Discussions**

“It must be based on a solid nation. The Chinese nation is the nation of the Chinese nation-state” (Zhou, 2016, p. 24).

“A solid state-nation (or a national race) as the basis”, the current judgment is neither theoretical basis, but also lack of practical basis. The Chinese nation is composed of all ethnic groups, or the Chinese nation is a people-state or nation-state, not a “state-nation” (or national race) from the perspective of ethnology, because the nation-state can be referred to simply as “state”, it is not a “state-nation” from a nation-state, so a multi-ethnic state cannot be called a “nation-state”.

“It must rely on the national integration of the Chinese nation, to build and consolidate the Chinese nation into a unified and cohesive nation” (Zhou, 2016, p. 25).

Although Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe (2013, pp. 111-116) are in similar terms, national integration is not necessarily the inevitable path of Chinese great revival and the Chinese dream. If the Chinese nation becomes a unified and powerful nation, it is bound to have structural conflicts with such elements as national identity, national belief, national values, national autonomy and national self-determination. All ethnic groups are the comprehensive result of continuous conflict and integration for thousands of years, which does not depend on the will of human beings, and all kinds of resultant forces work together. It is feasible to adjust the relationship between the ethnic state and the ethnic minorities in part, but the Chinese nation as a unified and powerful nation still lacks the basic theoretical and practical basis. It seems to be a utopian fantasy that is neither necessary nor possible.

In the discussion of the Chinese nation, we can neither strengthen the national characteristics of the various ethnic groups that make up the Chinese nation, nor give up the “root” for the “minor details”, nor interfere with the “main line” with the “essential factors”. (Zhou, 2016, p. 25)

Within the context of constitutional democracy, shouldn't national identity be strengthened? For the Chinese nation, which is the “root”, which is the “minor details”? Mencius once said, “the people are the most important, the state is second, and the king is the least important”. The people-based thought cannot be shaken; the people and all ethnic groups are the greatest “roots”. All for the people is the fundamental goal, the people and all ethnic groups cannot be called “minor details”.

The ultimate value goal of any discussion of the Chinese nation remains the “main line” of serving the people, rather than any other political options. In a word, the first is that the nation and the state belong to the vision of national culture and politics, and the nation should not be weakened, but should strengthen and highlight its characteristics.

The second is that the relationship between the nation and the state is the unity of opposites, and the basic frame of the conflict and adjustment between them is the frame of democratic constitutionalism. The state shall respect the national autonomy and self-determination of all ethnic groups, and all ethnic groups shall be subject to the national identity, civic values, civic acts, civic obligations and citizenship of the state.

Third, we should not regard national autonomy and national consciousness as the weakening of the state entity, and they are not a zero-sum game.

Fourthly, the model of nation-state may be suitable for the single nation-state in Europe, but China does not conform to the reality of the single nation-state, so the author suggests to change the concept of “nation” into the concept of “ethnic groups or races” at the next level, which can not only be in line with the modernization of the country, but also avoid the misunderstanding caused by the single nation or the state-nation.

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