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The Worship of General Yue Fei and His Problematic Creation as a National Hero in Twentieth Century China

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Abstract National heroes are important in the development of nationalist thinking. One important figure in this context is General Yue Fei (1103–42), who unsuccessfully fought the invading Jurchen in the twelfth century. Shortly after his execution, a temple was built in his honour in Hangzhou. Local chronicles show that this temple was constantly renovated in later dynasties. Due to his continuous worship as a loyal warrior—even during the Qing dynasty—his temple became a powerful site of identity. His veneration as a national hero in the course of the twentieth century has, however, posed a problem to a post-1911 China that felt compelled to sustain a multi-ethnic nation-state, whilst at the same time facing the difficulty of not being able to do without General Yue Fei. This article shall make it apparent that his resurrection as a national hero in the twentieth century was possible because of certain narrative strategies that had already been propagated by the Manchurian rulers of the eighteenth century.

Keywords Yue Fei, national heroes, Chinese nationalism, historical memory

In terms of this doctrine [nationalism], the past is always by definition the past of the “nation,” all achievements “national” achievements, expressions of the “national” genius to be preserved, commemorated, or revived because they establish the “national” identity and foster pride in it.

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¹ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 64.

In late imperial China, national heroes formed an important type of symbolic capital in the creation of a new collective identity. They became role models whose achievements and moral qualities were expounded for all Chinese citizens to imitate. Liang Qichao wrote in this context in his famous work *Xin shixue* 新史学 (New historiography), that history is a source for patriotic thinking and should thus be taught to the people so that past experiences—whether positive or negative—are not lost, but used instead as examples for the future. History is therefore not without purpose: it plays a distinct function in the processes of modernization and nation building. In this context, both reformers and revolutionaries published innumerable biographies of heroes in journals such as *Zhejiangchao* 浙江潮 (Zhejiang Tide), *Jiangsu* 江苏 (Jiangsu), *Hubei xueshengjie* 湖北学生界 (Hubei Students), *Minbao* 民报 (People's Newspaper), and *Guocui xuebao* 国粹学报 (Journal of National Essence). It would not only be too easy to consider their efforts as simple continuations of hero biographies, such as those found in traditional historiography, but also too problematic to describe the sudden appearance of national heroes at the beginning of the twentieth century as a mere “invention of tradition” (Eric Hobsbawm). In the process of formulating and creating a new collective identity known as a national identity, it is nevertheless of utmost importance to clarify this problem: how new is Chinese national identity really? What are its origins, and what role did pre-modern collective identities play before 1895? Finally, it has also to be asked how far certain conceptions of national identity may be contradictory or lead to unwanted consequences. In other words, what qualities and concepts must be attended to in order to create a convincing national identity (especially in a multiethnic state such as present-day China)?

The Relevance of National Heroes in the Process of Writing National Histories

In 1899, Liang Qichao wrote in his piece *Yingxiong yu shishi* 英雄与时势 (Heroes and the times) that the course of history is influenced by outstanding individuals. As the Scottish historian, Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), had already demanded in his work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841),² it is

² Carlyle was—as were Herbert Spencer and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach—introduced to Asia through *Shigaku genron* [Discussion of the origins of historiography], written by Ukita Kazutami (1859–1946) and translated into Chinese by Yang Shouren (1872–1911), cf. the review of the Chinese version in *Youxue yibian*, January 13, 1903, 192. Carlyle's views on heroes and heroism also influenced Chinese scholars and revolutionaries such as Ma Junwu, Xu Shoushang, Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Guo Moruo, and Yu Dafu.

exactly these heroes who must be worshipped.³ This was the major reason for Liang's publishing of biographies of European figures such as Otto von Bismarck (1815–98), Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), and the three heroes of Italian unification: Guiseppe Garibaldi (1807–82), Guiseppe Mazzini (1805–72), and Camilio Benso Conte di Cavour (1810–61), as well as those of Chinese heroes like Zheng He (1371–1433), Tan Sitong (1865–98), and Wang Anshi (1021–86).

In contrast to this very simplistic view, nationalist thinkers like Tao Chengzhang (1878–1912) had already become aware of the fact that heroes and national heroes are actually products of historiography. In his major work *Zhongguo minzu quanli xiaozhangshi* 中国民族权利消长史 (The history of growth and decay of Chinese nation's rights, 1904), he wrote:

The hero is a product of history; history again is the stage of the hero. To praise the heroes of the past and to spur those of the future is the responsibility of the historians, but also the people have to participate herein.⁴

The hero is thus part of a narrative created by the historian; and within this narrative, he plays an important role for future China. Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936) emphasized this aspect in a speech he gave on a meeting commemorating the downfall of the Ming dynasty that took place April 26, 1902 in Tokyo. He proclaimed:

Fellow countryman from Yunnan, do not forget Li Dingguo; fellow countryman from Fujian, do not forget Zheng Chenggong; fellow countryman from Zhejiang, do not forget Zhang Huangyan; fellow countryman from Guangxi, do not forget Qu Shisi, fellow countryman from Hubei, do not forget He Tengwen, and also you fellow countryman from Liaoning, do not forget Li Chengliang.⁵

April 26 was the day when the last Ming emperor committed suicide, a day traditionally commemorated by secret societies in the Qing dynasty. Nationalist

³ *Xin Yingguo juren Kelinweier zhuan* [Biography of the Great Cromwell of New England], 1903; Liang Qichao, *Liang Qichao quanji* [Complete collection of Liang Qichao] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), vol. 10, 1114.

⁴ 英雄者历史之产出物也，历史者英雄之舞台也。表赞已往之英雄，而开导未来之英雄，亦历史家之责任，且国民之分应尔焉。Tao Chengzhang, *Tao Chengzhang ji* [Collection of Tao Chengzhang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 214.

⁵ 愿吾滇人，无忘李定国。愿吾闽人，无忘郑成功。愿吾越人，无忘张煌言。愿吾桂人，无忘瞿式耜。愿吾楚人，无忘何腾蛟。愿吾辽人，无忘李成梁。Zhang Taiyan, *Zhang Taiyan quanji* [Complete collection of Zhang Taiyan] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1985), vol. 4, 188–9.

thinkers such as Zhang Taiyan considered this day a symbolic resource that could be used in their fight against the Manchurian government. The reference to the past was used in order to prove a continuity of Han-Chinese identity by presenting corresponding symbols and ceremonies like the one that took place on April 26. Such continuity, of course, never existed in reality and it may be speculated that Zhang Taiyan just “invented” a tradition in order to legitimise his own political aims. Referring back to the history of the Han was, for Zhang, nevertheless—as Feng Ziyou (1881–1958) recounts in his recollection of the Xinhai Revolution—an indispensable asset: without knowledge of Han-Chinese history, the idea of a racial motivated revolution could not be propagated convincingly.⁶

The quotations above show undoubtedly that at the beginning of the twentieth century heroes and national heroes were undoubtedly understood to be Han-Chinese national heroes. This was, of course, a result of anti-Manchu sentiment that especially increased after the Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. When the nationalist movement was, after the successful revolution of 1911, suddenly facing a multiethnic republic, a convincing reinterpretation became necessary if the powerful symbolic capital was not to be cast aside (which was indeed not acceptable because it was too potent). This was made possible by referring to historic narratives that reflected suitable interpretations of being Chinese without referring to ethnic or racial categories. How it became feasible to integrate these narratives into the new vision of China after 1912 shall, in the following, be illustrated in the example of Yue Fei, a leading general of the Southern Song dynasty (960–1290).

The Historical Assessment of Yue Fei

Yue Fei (1103–42), born in Tangyin 汤阴 in the prefecture of Xiangzhou 相州 in today's Henan province, was the son of a farmer and already a well-known fighter in his youth. In the years 1129–30, the Jurchen armies of the Jin dynasty crossed the Yangtze River and advanced into Nanjing and Hangzhou. Due to heavy resistance, they were forced to withdraw. At that time, at the age of 23, Yue joined the fight against the invaders. With thousands of volunteer soldiers, he successfully recaptured (in 1134/35) the Xiangyang fortress on the Han River and drove back the Jurchen and their vassal Liu Yu (1073–1143). In 1138, when Yue was on the verge of recapturing the former Song capital Kaifeng, Emperor Gaozong (reigned 1127–62) decided to negotiate peace with the Jurchen and put

⁶ 欲鼓吹种族革命，非先振起世人之历史观念不可。Feng Ziyou, *Geming yishi* [Reminiscences of the revolution] (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuiguan, 1939), vol. 5, 57.

an end to hostilities. This decision was, as traditional historiography reports, influenced by Chancellor Qin Hui (1090–1155) who was, for personal reasons, interested in peace negotiations that would allow him to keep his powerful post and protect his personal property. As a consequence, Emperor Gaozong concluded the peace treaty with the Jurchen in 1142. In order to be able to implement the treaty, it was necessary to get rid of those who were arguing for the continuation of the war, among them the generals Han Shizhong (1089–1151), Zhang Jun (1097–1164) and Yue Fei. Han and Zhang were bribed, but Yue—known for his incorruptibility—had to be falsely accused of treason and sentenced to death in 1142. His death was—as legend tells us—mourned by the whole country. In 1161, Emperor Gaozong revoked the imprisonment of the families of Yue Fei and General Zhang Xian (?–1142) (Zhang had been executed together with Yue Fei and his son Yue Yun [1119–42]), and his successor, Emperor Xiaozong (1127–94, reg. 1162–89) revoked the death sentence in 1162, presumably to appease public discontent. Additionally, Yue Fei's body was moved to another formal tomb in the Temple of Zhiguo 智果 at Jianmen Linglü Taishan 剑门岭履泰山, today's Qixialing 栖霞岭, near the West Lake in Hangzhou.⁷

In biographies of Yue Fei composed in the late Song dynasty, his military successes were praised and his untimely death due to the intrigue of Qin Hui was lamented. The figure of Qin Hui, in these biographies, in fact plays a more important role than the fight against the invading Jurchen.⁸ Such a perspective continued to exist right into the following Yuan dynasty. The new rulers were, for obvious reasons, interested in downplaying the conflict between the Chinese and the Jurchen (and of course the Mongols), because a discussion on this topic would have put their legitimacy in question. For the same reason, Yue Fei was mentioned in the *Songshi* (The history of the Song dynasty), but without explicit reference to the conflict between the Chinese and the Jin: the Song dynasty collapsed due to the intrigue of Qin Hui and the capitulation of Emperor Gaozong.⁹

The conflict between the Han-Chinese and the Jurchen has been understood as an ethnic one only since the fifteenth century, when the founder of the Ming

⁷ For biographical details see James Liu, "Yüeh Fei (1103–41) and China's Heritage of Loyalty," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXI, no. 2 (1972), 291–7; Hellmut Wilhelm, "From Myth to Myth: The Case of Yüeh Fei's Biography," in *Confucian Personalities*, eds., Arthur Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 146–61.

⁸ For example in the biographies in the *Zhongxing guijian*, written by He Fu or in the *Song dashiji*, written by Lü Zhong. Cf. Li Hanhun, *Yue Wumu nianpu* [Chronological Biography of Yue Wumu] (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1961), 355–7.

⁹ Du Yingtao stresses this aspect in his collection of dramas on Yue Fei composed during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98), referred to the slogan “Exile the Mongols and Restore China.” This slogan seems to suggest that ethnic and/or racial categories were important in the definition of who was Chinese and who was not. As a matter of fact, Zhu did not consider this question to be relevant: for him, the Mongols were part of China, and therefore ethnic and/or racial distinctions were rather neglected and the figure of Yue Fei played no role. This changed when, in 1449, the Crisis of Tumubao broke out, greatly resembling the rebellion that took place during the reign of Emperor Gaozong (1125–27) when Mongol soldiers penetrated into Chinese territory. The crisis very soon led to a new popularity for Yue Fei: new temples were built for Yue, poems composed, theatre pieces written and literary accounts published.¹⁰ Yue Fei was mostly described as a frugal man who kept strict discipline among his soldiers, attached little value to wealth and was concerned about the well being of the people. These were exactly the characteristics that the corrupt soldiers and generals of the Ming did not have. Such a judgement was shared by later scholars like Wang Fuzhi (1619–92) in his *Songlun*, (Discussions about the Song dynasty), Ke Weiqi (1497–1574) in his *Songshi xinlun* (New discussions on the history of the Song dynasty), and Wang Shizhen (1526–90) in his *Yanzhou shiliao* (Historical materials of Yanzhou).¹¹

Not only the scholarly discussion of the historical narrative of Yue Fei, but also the literary treatment—which according to Chida Daisuke begins in the Yuan dynasty—were constantly developed during the Ming. *Yongle dadian* (The Yongle encyclopaedia) mentions literary pieces like the *Qin taishi dongchuang shifan* (Qin Hui’s affair of the east window is exposed), the *Jingzhongqi* (The flag of loyalty) composed by Feng Menglong (1574–1645) and the *Da Song zhongxing tongsu yanyi* (Popular historical stories of the revival of the Song dynasty), written by Xiong Damu in 1552.¹² Central to the presentation of Yue are either his military activities or the intrigue of Qin Hui. Yue appears here as a victim and his moral virtues are stressed. Other literary pieces dealing with Yue Fei in a similar fashion are written by Li Mengyang (1472–1529), Wang Tingxiang (1474–1544), Tang Shunzhi (1507–60), Liu Ji (1311–75) et al.¹³

During the Qing dynasty, the official attitude towards Yue Fei became problematic. The Manchurian government, a government of foreign rulers that descended from the Jurchen, could not keep him in the official pantheon, but at the same time, they could not change public opinion that continued to consider

¹⁰ Kasai Naomi, “Wareware no kyōkai—Gaku Hi koji no tsūzoku bungei no gensetsu ni okeru kokka to minzoku” [Bordering “Us”: Nation and ethnos in plays and stories of Yue Fei] (*Gengo bunka ronshū*, 2002), 23.2: 13–48; 24.1: 35–76.

¹¹ Li Hanhun, *Yue Wumu nianpu*, 361–3.

¹² Kasai Naomi, 26–8.

¹³ Li Hanhun, *Yue Wumu nianpu*, 365–7.

him an important role model.¹⁴ In order to resolve this problem, Manchurian rulers like Yongzheng and Qianlong emphasized the moral value of loyalty embodied by Yue and thus were still able to use his powerful symbolic capital. A necessary step therefore was the suppression of parts of the historic narrative (namely the fight against the Jurchen, which, ironically, originally had initiated Yue's strong sense of loyalty as well as his fighting spirit); but without downplaying the intrinsic value of loyalty as a moral duty for all subjects of the Qing. This was done convincingly in an inquisition process that took place in the 1720s during the rule of Emperor Yongzheng.

The Inquisition of Zeng Jing and Its Interpretation by Zhang Taiyan

In the 1720s, a local school teacher called Zeng Jing (1679–1736) tried to topple the (in his eyes) illegitimate Emperor Yongzheng (1678–1735) by inciting the general and governor of Sichuan and Shaanxi, Yue Zhongqi (1686–1754)—whom Zeng believed to be a descendant of Yue Fei—to start an insurrection. In his view (influenced by Lü Liuliang (1629–1683)), only a real Confucian could rule over China, and not a morally questionable person like Yongzheng who had not only usurped power by killing Kangxi, but was also of non-Chinese descent. Zeng tried to prove his case by arguing that Yongzheng was a tyrannical ruler, whose reign was not accepted by heaven and that a rebellion would give Yue Zhongqi an opportunity to take revenge for the murder of his ancestor Yue Fei.

Instead of responding to Zeng's request, Yue arrested Zeng and his student Zhang Xi and sent them to Beijing for interrogation. Contrary to prior cases of rebellious attempts (those of Nian Gengyao and Zha Siting) Yongzheng decided not to execute Zeng, but instead tried to persuade him of his legitimacy as ruler. Yongzheng managed to do so by refuting Zeng's arguments one by one and presenting himself as a forbearing and caring ruler, combining moral virtues like affection, care and responsibility that were indispensable for an ideal Confucian ruler. At the centre of Yongzheng's arguments was, in fact, the relationship

¹⁴ This conflict becomes visible in the drama *Shuo Yue quanzhuan*, composed by Qian Cai, which enjoyed a broad circulation (date of publication unknown, presumably 1684 according to the *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* or 1744 according to the *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng*). In this novel, Yue Fei was irrevocably turned into a hero. The strong idealization of his heroic deeds and the fact that the writer mentions conditions for a victory suggest that this drama was directed against the Manchurian regime, and therefore Qianlong banned this book (a short time later, it was republished during the reign of Emperor Jiaqing, 1796–1820). Wang Liqi, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* [Materials concerning forbidden fiction and drama works of the three dynasties Yuan, Ming and Qing] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 51.

between ruler and subject that he characterized with the Confucian principles of loyalty (*zhong*) and sincerity (*yi*). If he had obtained the mandate of heaven, this would prove that he would be a perfect ruler. Ethnic or racial consideration did not play a role in this context; otherwise one would also have to admit that the legendary ancient ruler, Shun, belonged to the Eastern barbarians (*dongyi*) as stated in the *Mencius*, and thus be obliged to revoke his legitimacy of rule. Yongzheng argued:

The seditious rebels claim that we are the rulers of Manchuria and only later penetrated central China to become its rulers. Their prejudices concerning the division of their and our country have caused many vitriolic falsehoods. What these rebels have not understood is the fact that Manchuria is for the Manchus the same as the birthplace is for the people of the central plain. Shun belonged to the Eastern Yi, and King Wen to the Western Yi. Does this fact diminish their virtues?¹⁵

In other words, the Ming dynasty collapsed due to the chaos caused by the rebellious Li Zicheng, and the Manchus, who brought back social order and peace, were able to become legitimate rulers, although they were foreigners, as Yongzheng admitted himself.¹⁶ The emphasis on moral values and the simultaneous renunciation of ethnic origins was not only a rhetoric strategy of Yongzheng, but also demonstrated that the Manchurian rulers had already accepted Confucianism as a state ideology. The arguments of Yongzheng finally convinced Zeng Jing, who summarized his corrected views in a scripture called *Guirenshuo* (Return to humanity) that was published in the *Dayi juemilu* (Record of how great righteousness awakens the misguided), a book that contained the discussions of Zeng and his interrogators. It was distributed through the whole country in order to resolve the confusion (*juemi*) of the population as to whether the Manchus were legitimate rulers or not. It claimed—with reference to the *Shujing* (The classic of history)—“Great Heaven has no personal attachments, it helps only the virtuous.”¹⁷ Yongzheng thus rejected geographical and/or ethnic

¹⁵ 在逆贼等之意，徒谓本朝以满洲之君入为中国之主，妄生此疆彼界之私，遂故为讪谤诋讥之说耳，不知本朝之为满洲，犹中国之有籍贯，舜为东夷之人，文王为西夷之人，曾何损于圣德乎。 *Dayi juemilu* [Record of how great righteousness awakens the misguided], *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan* [Collectanea of materials on modern Chinese history] (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966), vol. 36, 351–2, 1: 2b–3a; see also *Mencius* 4B1; here taken from Legge, *The Chinese Classics—with a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1969), vol. 2, 730.

¹⁶ *Dayi juemilu*, 1: 2b–3a; 42b–43a.

¹⁷ 皇天无亲，惟德是辅。 *Dayi juemilu*, 1/1, translation follows Legge 1969, 490, vol. 3.

origin as relevant criteria.

In the late phase of the Qing dynasty, nationalist thinkers like Zhang Taiyan traced their anti-Manchu attitude back to the inquisition of Zeng Jing. In a speech given in 1933 on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution, Zhang recalls that his grandfather Zhu Youqian and his reading of the *Donghualu* (Records from the Eastern Flower Gate) allowed him to become acquainted with the fate of Zeng.¹⁸ Influenced by social Darwinism and convinced of the necessity of a racially motivated nationalism, Zhang did not accept the view of Yongzheng and refuted the possibility that non-Han-Chinese could become rulers of China, even if they were Sinicized and fully accepted Han-Chinese culture (including Confucianism). In the same way, he rejected the statement from the Mencius that Yongzheng propagated.¹⁹ Zhang was instead calling for total resistance as exemplified by the steadfast and loyal general Yue Fei. Yet, although the necessity of racial thinking was emphasized, his definition of being Chinese did not stop there. Political-moral values were considered, in the same way, important and were combined with the idea of race, thus allowing a more flexible definition than the constraints of race alone. The perfect role model was here again, Yue Fei, who in the first years of the 20th century rose then to a previously unknown popularity among nationalist thinkers.

The “Creation” of Yue Fei as a National Hero at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

As seen above, during the Qing dynasty, Yue Fei was not only a hero of the Han-Chinese, but also a hero of the Manchus. When nationalist sentiment began to rise in the years after the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, the universal acceptance of the values embodied by Yue Fei were questioned. Up until 1912, these values were temporarily interpreted in a purely racial sense. This happened for two well-known reasons: first, the influx of social Darwinism and other related ideologies that stressed race and racial descent as the most meaningful category, and, secondly, the growing criticism of a dynasty unable to implement necessary reforms. As a consequence, Yue Fei became the national hero of the anti-Manchu movement and was understood to be a symbol of the new nation-state that was yet to be established.

¹⁸ Jiang Yihua, *Zhang Binglin pingzhuan* [Biography of Zhang Binglin] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2002), 15.

¹⁹ The same rejection can be found in Wang Jingwei's text *Minzu de guomin* (The racial nation) where he traces Kang Youwei's view that the Manchus also belong to the Chinese nation (as formulated in his *Bian gemingshu*) back to the influence of the *Dayi juemilu*. Cf. *Minbao* [People's Newspaper], no. 1 (1905).

Although this reinterpretation of Yue Fei was based on traditional values like loyalty and steadfastness, his presentation as a national hero was a successful recreation that proved to be useful in the fight against the foreign rulers. This became obvious in many journals, revolutionary and literary writings that appeared after 1903. Among those, we have to especially mention *Zhongguo minzuzhuyi diyi ren Yue Fei zhuan* (The biography of the first Chinese Nationalist—Yue Fei) that was published in the journal *Hubei xueshengjie* and depicted Yue as the first national hero of China, being a role model for all other following heroes like Wen Tianxiang (1236–83), Zhang Shijie (1236–79), Shi Kefa (died 1644), He Tengwen (1592–1649) and Zheng Chenggong (1624–62). In 1906, the poet Jiang Zhiyou (1866–1929), published an article called *Lun Zhongguoren chongbai Yue Fei zhi xinli* (On the Psychology of the Chinese Worship of Yue Fei) in the journal *Xinmin congbao* (New Citizen), which tried to analyse the reasons why the Chinese worshipped Yue Fei and his spirit. He writes that, according to the findings of the contemporary Japanese historian Ichimura Sanjirō, traditional biographies of Yue like that in the *Songshi* can not—due to many contradictions—be considered reliable sources. The only dependable approach to understanding the historic figure of Yue Fei would be to have a closer look at spiritual reasons:

Concerning our Chinese people, we can surely claim that its national spirit contains a craze for worshipping heroes. This spirit can surely strengthen our state and preserve our race. It is also the reason for the development of national strength and the construction of institutions.²⁰

According to Jiang, heroes appear in a time of crisis and danger, and if there a hero does not show up in the current crisis, one must decide to build an altar, burn incense and welcome future heroes by worshipping Yue.²¹ In 1904, the scholar Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) and Bo Wenwei (1876–1947), a military leader in the republic, founded, in Anhui province, the King-Yue-Society (Yuewanghui 岳王会), which propagated heroism and patriotism, and was aimed at fighting

²⁰ 我中国人殆可谓国民心理中具有一种崇拜英雄狂，而此心理实能强固其国家，维持其种族，而为国民势力所由发展、事业所由建树之一原因。Jiang Zhiyou, “Lun Zhongguoren chongbai Yue Fei zhi xinli” [On the psychology of the Chinese worship of Yue Fei], *Xinmin congbao* [New Citizen], no. 72 (1906), 84.

²¹ Jiang Zhiyou, “Lun Zhongguoren chongbai Yue Fei zhi xinli,” 86–7. It has to be added that Jiang belonged to a group of moderate reformers who did not advocate a radical racism, but reforms like the founding of a constitution. Therefore, Yue Fei is for Jiang not an explicit anti-Manchu hero, but first of all someone who could incite the Chinese to strengthen the country.

against the autocratic government of the Qing.²² Bo emphasized:

Yue Wumu fought against the Jurchen, and was steadfast until his death. We must continue his will and fight with all our force against the Manchus.²³

This society, led by Chen Duxiu, was secretly organized. Famous nationalists became members, such as Xiong Chengji, Xu Xilin and Shi Renjun. After a failed uprising, the Yuwanghui lost its power and the members that were not arrested by Qing authorities entered the Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui 同盟会) in 1905.

The symbolic capital of Yue Fei was also an important asset for another revolutionary group, the Restoration Society (Guangfuhui 光复会), was founded 1904 by Cai Yuanpei, Tao Chengzhang, Lu Xun, Wei Lan and Gong Baoquan. Its oath “Restore the Chinese race and recapture our mountains and rivers” actually goes back to Yue Fei and refers to the restoration of political sovereignty by the driving away of the Manchus. It is interesting to observe that later (Marxist) historiography called the Xinhai events a revolution, but in the China of that time the term *guangfu* was significant in almost the same manner. Zhang Taiyan, often called a revolutionary, noted in his 1906 article “The Virtue of Revolution” that:

What I call revolution is not revolution, but restoration. It means restoration of the Chinese race, restoration of Chinese territory and restoration of Chinese governmental power. Such a realized restoration can be called revolution.²⁴

In this sense, the revolution of 1911 was backward directed, despite the effort to push Chinese modernization in the foundation of a modern nation-state. In order to legitimise the claim of sovereignty by the Han, Zhang Taiyan did not refrain from presenting the picture of an eternally existing national community, a

²² Cf. Shen Ji, “Xinhai geming shiqi de Yuwanghui” [The King-Yue-Society during the Xinhai Revolution], *Lishi yanjiu* (Historical Research), no. 10 (1979), 37–45; and Chang Hengfang, “Ji Anqing Yuwanghui” [Record of the King-Yue-Society in Anqing], *Xinhai geming huiyilu* [Reminiscences of the 1911 Revolution], 1–8, ed. Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi quanguo weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui [Research Committee for Materials on History and Culture, National Committee of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference] (Tianjin: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1981), vol. 4, 438–41.

²³ 盖岳武穆抵抗辽金，至死不变，吾人须继其志，尽力排满。Bo Wenwei, “Wushi nian jingli” [Memories of the past 50 years], *Jindaishi ziliao* [Materials on Modern History], vol. 40, no. 3 (1979), 4–62.

²⁴ 吾所谓革命者，非革命也，曰光复也，光复中国之种族也，光复中国之州郡也，光复中国之政权也。以此光复之实，而被以革命之名。Zhang Taiyan, *Zhang Taiyan zhenglun xuanji* [Selected writings on politics by Zhang Binglin] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), vol. 2, 309.

community that was autonomous, independent and self-determining. Such an understanding was the major basis of Han-Chinese nationalism at the end of the Qing dynasty and presented Yue Fei as a national hero that was worth emulating. Such an interpretation turned out to be problematic in the years after 1912, when the new republic was suddenly conceptualised as a nation of five ethnicities.²⁵ If Yue Fei should continue to be a role model for the Chinese, he had to become a hero of a multiethnic China that included his former enemies, the Jurchen, Mongols and Manchus. This was a problem that the dramatist, Gu Jianlu, realized in the 1930s, when Yue Fei was turned into a powerful symbol for the fight against Japanese imperialism (1936). How this became possible can only be understood from a historical perspective that takes his ritual veneration into consideration. Since the time of the Southern Song dynasty this veneration has taken place in temples to Yue Fei.

The Worship of Yue Fei and the Significance of His Temples

The first temple dedicated to Yue Fei was built in 1170 by the local population of the E prefecture, in today's Wuchang (Hubei). After Yue had driven away the Jurchen and recaptured the region around E in 1134, he stationed his troops there for more than seven years. After his death, the local population mourned and decided to build a temple called the Temple of the Loyal Martyr (Zhongliemiao). For political reasons, this temple was first destroyed in the Yuan dynasty, rebuilt in 1519, but, in 1862, permanently destroyed in the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion. In 1937, a pavilion dedicated to Yue Fei, was erected in the hope that it should mobilize the local people in the fight against the Japanese invasion. Another important temple was built in 1450 in his birth place of Tangyin in Henan province, originally called Jingzhong miao 精忠庙, later renamed to Song Yue Zhongwuwang miao 宋岳忠武王庙. In addition, there are only two other places where Yue Fei was and still is worshipped: a temple in Zhuxian in Henan province (Yue won a battle against the Jurchen here) and his most famous temple in Hangzhou, the place of his death.²⁶

This list shows that—contrary to the countrywide worshipping of Guan Yu, the

²⁵ Compare the discussion by Andō Kumiko, “Son Bun no gozoku kyōwa hihan to Tai Kitō no renpō kyōwasei ron” [Sun Yat-sen's objection to “Wuzu gonghe” and Dai Jitao's theory of federation], *Shisō* [Journal of Historical Studies], no. 46 (2005), 13–41; Murata Yūjirō, “Sun Zhongshan yu xinhai geming shiqi de ‘wuzu gonghe’ lun” [Sun Yat-sen and the discussion of the theory of “Republic of Five Nationalities” in 1911], *Fuyin baokan ziliao—Zhongguo jindaishi* [Photocopied journal materials—Modern History of China], no. 1 (2005), 84–91.

²⁶ *Yuemiao zhilüe* [Chronicle of Yue Fei's temple], 1879, *Zhongguo cimu zhi congkan* 53 [Collection of Chinese Temple and Tomb Chronicles] (Yangzhou: Guanglin shushe, 2004), 116.

famous military general and later God of war—the public presence of Yue was locally limited. One of the reasons therefore is the fact that steles of Yue were erected after his death only in places the general had actually visited (except for his temple in Taiwan, built in 1899 after the Chinese defeat by Japan).²⁷ Furthermore, they were mostly erected by local or regional magistrates, and not by the imperial court. Though this means that the collective memory of Yue Fei had, in its early phase a local character and was not an issue of the central state, it does not mean that his locally limited presence implies a limited potential of identification. According to Pierre Nora, the worship of heroes can only be authentic when it happens at places that are in a distinct relation to the hero, e.g., his place of birth, the place of a great success or the place of his death.²⁸

Nevertheless, the fact that Yue was only worshipped locally does not mean that the worship of Yue was not related to the state and/or the nation. Firstly, Yue fought for the state. This reference was always present, although Yue was only praised for his moral virtues in the time before nationalist thinking. Secondly, state authorities—local ones as well as those of the central state—always played an important role in his worship. The state cult of Yue Fei began to take shape in Yuan times and reached its heyday during the Ming dynasty: in 1371 Yue was declared innocent. In order to dignify his heroic deeds and at the same time those of the Ming who had driven away the Mongols, it was decided to offer sacrifices at his tomb in Hangzhou each year.²⁹ In 1457, the vice prefect of Hangzhou, Ma Wei, proposed a reconstruction of the temple and Emperor Yingzong (1427–64, reign 1436–49 and 1457–64) composed a calligraphy that consisted of the two characters *zhonglie*, meaning loyal and steadfast.³⁰

During the Qing, the worship of Yue Fei was first stopped: in 1726 Yongzheng removed him from the pantheon of the Ming because he wanted to prevent possible ethnic conflicts, since the Manchus considered themselves to be descendants of the Jurchen (such behaviour brings to mind of the habit of *damnatio memoriae* in the Roman Empire). Contrary to that, Qianlong praised Yue Fei in poems, visited his tomb and temple in Hangzhou several times (1765, 1780 and 1784) and organized worship ceremonies.³¹ In his poems, Qianlong stressed Yue's moral virtues and claimed that he only failed due to an intrigue at

²⁷ Sun Jiang and Huang Donglan, “Yue Fei xushu, gonggong jiyi yu guozu rentong” [Narratives of Yue Fei, public memory, and national identity], *Ershiyi shiji* [21st Century], vol. 86 (2004), 89–100.

²⁸ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989), 7–24.

²⁹ The establishment of state shrines to Yue Fei began in 1449 after the Mongol invasion of the Ming, when the Ming emperor, Yingzong, had been temporarily captured by the Mongols.

³⁰ *Yuemiao zhilüe*, 1879, 116.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 116–25.

the court, planned by people like Qin Hui, who were only interested in materialistic aims.³² Qianlong's intention was surely to smooth the ethnic tensions between Han and Manchurian by blurring ethnic boundaries. In this respect, his understanding of Yue Fei as a role model does not differ much from that of his father, Emperor Yongzheng. The consequence of such a positive assessment by Qianlong was that Yue's tomb in Hangzhou turned into a tourist destination, as Feng Pei reports in the epilogue of his chronicle of the temple.³³ A closer look at the local chronicles of Hangzhou reveals that this judgement is actually true, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

The Temple of Yue Fei in Hangzhou—Its History and Characteristics

Twenty years after his death, general Yue Fei was exonerated and properly entombed in 1162 near the West Lake in Hangzhou. For many years, his family was not able to build a temple for their ancestor; indeed, not until 1221, when the court of the Southern Song dynasty handed over the Zhiguo temple. It was renamed Yue Fei gongdesi 岳飞功德寺, (later Baozhong yanfu chansi 褒忠衍福禅寺), and is the predecessor of today's temple.³⁴

The temple of today is built in the style of the Kangxi era and consists of several buildings, like the main hall “Hall of the Loyal Fighter” (Zhonglieci 忠烈祠) and the “Hall of Loyalty” (Qizhongci 启忠祠) (the latter became a memorial hall in 1984). These buildings contain statues of Yue Fei, exhibitions and descriptions of his life. Furthermore, stone steles and calligraphies praising the heroic deeds of Yue can be found throughout the whole area. In the vicinity of the tomb, there are four kneeling statues with bare chests that depict the four adversaries of Yue Fei, namely chancellor Qin Hui, his wife Wang (who persuaded him to execute Yue), judge Moqi Xie (he convicted Yue) and general Zhang Jun (who deserted and withdraw his troops on the order of Qin Hui). When the temple was built in 1221, those statues did not exist; they were only set

³² Ibid., 29–30.

³³ Ibid., 597.

³⁴ The following depiction of the history of the temple is mainly based on Wang En, *Yue Fei mumiao* [Tomb and temple of Yue Fei] (Hangzhou: Xinhua shudian, 2005); Huang Donglan, “Yue Fei miao: Chuangzao gonggong jiyi de ‘chang’” [The Yue Fei temple: Creating a place of public memory], *Shijian, jiyi, xushu* [Events, memory, and narrative] ed. Sun Jiang (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2004), 158–77; Sun Jiang and Huang Donglan, “Yue Fei xushu, gonggong jiyi yu guozu rentong,” vol. 86 (2004), 89–100; Yue Fei yanjiuhui and Yue Fei mumiao wenwu baoguansuo, *Yue Fei mumiao beike* [The stone inscriptions at the temple and tomb of Yue Fei] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998); *Qianlong Hangzhou fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Hangzhou prefecture, Qianlong edition], 1779.

up in 1513 by the commander of Zhejiang, Li Long. The statues, made of bronze, were often beaten, urinated and spat on. As a consequence, their heads began to fall off, and approximately eighty years later, they had to be remade by order of Fan Lai, vice justice supervisor of Zhejiang (who also added the fourth figure of Zhang Jun, which originally did not exist). In the following centuries, similar demolitions and reconstructions of these statues took place.³⁵

In the same way, Yue's temple was occasionally destroyed in the course of history, like during the conquest of Southern China by the Mongols or by fire incidents. Each time it was quickly rebuilt, either by Yue's family or by local officials who often used their private funds for financing reconstruction and repairs. One such instance took place in the years 1335–40, when the military commander of Hangzhou, Li Quanchu, organized a complete restructuring of the temple (later, private donations by local officials became quite common). Furthermore, Huang Donglan points out in her research that repairs and reconstructions of the temple were, during the Yuan dynasty, only organized by descendants of Yue Fei, as the Yuan court was—for obvious reasons—not much interested in continuing worship. After a fire incident destroyed the temple completely in the 1360s, it was rebuilt only during the era Jingtai (1450–56) by the vice prefect of Hangzhou, Ma Wei, who asked the imperial court for the donation of an inscription showing the characters *zhonglie* (loyal and steadfast), which was granted. Important renovations of the temple further took place during the Ming, supervised by eunuchs like Mai Xiu (1501), Liu Jing (1509) and Wang Tang (1517). In 1558, Censor Hu Zongxian, on his way to fight against Japanese pirates on the coast of Zhejiang, contributed large sums of money for the organization of rituals to boost the fighting spirit of his soldiers and also for the conduction of necessary repairs. Local chronicles of Zhejiang province, and especially those of Hangzhou that were edited during the Qing, report that proper maintenance continuously took place. In 1695, the prefect of Hangzhou, Li Duo, renovated the temple: the temple halls *Qizhongci* and *Zhonglieci* were rebuilt and statues of the generals Zhang Xian, as well as Niu Gao, were erected. In 1731, additional repairs took place, supervised by Jiang Chengjie, the Vice Superintendent of postal services.³⁶ For this purpose, the military commander of Zhejiang, Li Wei, donated a huge sum of money as well as an archway containing the inscription “willing to make sacrifices and loyal.” Similar projects took place in 1651, 1695 and later in 1801 (supervised by the famous scholar and province governor, Ruan Yuan, 1764–1849), as well as in 1865 after the

³⁵ Peng Guodong, *Yue Fei pingzhuan* [Biography of Yue Fei] (Chongqing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1945), 59, 99.

³⁶ *Qianlong Hangzhou fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Hangzhou prefecture, Qianlong edition], vol. 8, 11–2.

destruction by the Taiping, supervised by the Administration Chief of Zhejiang, Jiang Yili.³⁷

A closer look at the local chronicles published during the era of Yongzheng (1731–35) and Qianlong (1779) shows that the name used for the temple was not the present-day name *Yuewangmiao* 岳王廟 (which it only got in 1801 during the renovations done by Ruan Yuan), but was *Zhongliemiao*, “Temple of the Loyal Fighter.” This proves that in the first half of the Qing dynasty, the propagation of the Confucian virtue of loyalty was considered to be more important than the actual heroic deeds of the general that were characterized by ethnic conflict between the Han and the Jurchen. In other words, the ethnic conflict was downplayed by placing more emphasis on moral values that were independent of ethnic or racial categorizations. For the same reason, it was only Yongzheng who added a biography of Yue Fei in his description of the temple and who lists the official titles that were bestowed on Yue: shortly after his death (in 1225), Yue was bestowed the title Wumu, then that of a “Loyal Fighter,” and finally in the year 1371, the title “Warrior King of E.”³⁸ As Yongzheng had argued with the rebellious Zeng Jing, the heroic deeds and, especially, Yue’s sense of loyalty, were to be praised, without challenging Zeng’s questioning of his legitimacy as ruler.

The descriptions of the temple in the local chronicles of Hangzhou show that during the Yuan and Ming dynasty the maintenance of the temple was mostly organized by either descendants of Yue Fei or by local officials. This of course does not mean that the figure of Yue Fei was only present in the local consciousness, it just corresponds to the condition of authenticity Pierre Nora emphasises: *lieux de mémoire* can only be authentic if it can be linked to distinct historic events that actually took place at the *lieux de mémoire*. For example, statues of Lenin in the former German Democratic Republic which were built countrywide were less convincing manifestations of collective consciousness than his mausoleum in Moscow. In the same way, Yue Fei was also only worshipped at distinct places he had actually visited or had connections to.

This locally limited presence of Yue Fei began to change during the eighteenth century. Whilst the rulers of the Yuan and early Qing dynasties were only facing the problem of allowing the presence of their former enemy without inciting resistance, emperors like Yongzheng and Qianlong could allow open veneration of Yue. Furthermore, only in their time did the central state become a leading agent, such as when Qianlong personally visited the temple several times and

³⁷ *Zhejiangsheng Hangzhou fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Hangzhou prefecture, Zhejiang province], 1888, 380–2.

³⁸ *Qing Yongzhengchao Zhejiang tongzhi* [Zhejiang gazetteer of the Yongzheng period in the Qing], 1731–35, 280 juan, (Zhonghua shuju, 2001 reprint), vol. 15, 6156.

participated in worship rituals.³⁹ The Qing were able to ensure an astonishingly historic continuity of the presence of Yue Fei in historic and literary narratives as well as his worship, which was a common characteristic of all Dynasties since the Song (and up until today). This was—next to the historic continuity of his veneration—made possible by Manchurian rulers like Yongzheng who, being invaders just like the Jurchen, tried to prove the legitimacy of their rule by claiming to adhere to Confucianism as their leading political ideology. It was decisively Yongzheng who, by referring solely to Confucian values in his political writing *Dayi juemilu*, and at the same time taking Yue Fei out of his original historic context, was able to transform Yue Fei into an imperial hero. Refuting the position of Wang Fuzhi, who claimed a relationship between lineage and morality, and putting the view of Mencius (that ruler Shun belonged to the Eastern barbarians) in the foreground, the Manchus were not only able to legitimise their rule, but also to transform Yue into a hero of the empire who could be worshipped by each and every subject of the Qing, regardless of ethnic, cultural or racial background. Consequently, the Chinese state and especially Qianlong were able to engage in the maintenance of the temple and propagate Yue's moral virtues as universally valid, independent of any racial or ethnic categories.⁴⁰ Such an interpretation is, of course, not shared by postmodern critics in the twentieth century, who try to present an alternative to the homogeneous nation-state, which—originally based on the belief that nation and state shall be congruent—they consider to be unthinkable in the case of multiethnic China. Such an alternative enables each ethnic group to be represented as an equal and full member of the community, without suppressing or distorting its proper history. Such a view is considered to be politically correct, but may not always be accepted, as the following example shows.

The Refutation of a Postmodern Interpretation of Yue Fei—the Difficulty of Revising History

That it is problematic to depict Yue Fei as a national hero in a multiethnic China

³⁹ Each time Qianlong visited the temple, it was properly renovated and decorated, which was again mostly done by local officials. As the conquest of Southern China in the seventeenth century cost a lot of victims, Kangxi and Qianlong were especially eager to integrate local people of this region into the new dynasty, by investing money in order to build representative buildings and temples, or by conducting extra official exams (*boxue hongru* 博学鸿儒), as in 1679 for candidates from Zhejiang.

⁴⁰ The veneration of Yue Fei by the Manchus is described by Pamela Crossley in the introduction to her book *Orphan Warriors—Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

is not only true from the viewpoint of postmodern thinking, but has also been demonstrated most eloquently by the writer Gu Jianlu in his drama *Yue Fei zhisi* (The death of Yue Fei). While Yue was intensively used as a historic role model in the fight against Japanese aggression, Gu stated critically that:

It is irrefutable that it (the performance of this drama) is a very ungrateful job. If I characterize the figure of Yue Fei as being too loyal, he resembles a national hero and this enables people to criticize me as a lackey of nationalism. Of course, there are also people who regard Yue as a military leader (like me when writing this piece) and want to repeat the past with a new and progressive worldview. This is surely the best intention, but what is the attitude of society towards Yue Fei? Would it not be better to characterize him otherwise, instead of being insulted as a lackey of nationalism? How could I accept such an ungrateful job?⁴¹

The problem Gu mentions here is the fact that in the twentieth century Yue Fei has always been considered a national hero of the Chinese nation, but was actually a national hero of the Han-Chinese, who in the twelfth century fought against ethnic groups that were now part of China. If his fight against the Jin was emphasized too strongly, it would do harm to the national unity, thus the term *minzu yingxiong* 民族英雄 had to be reconsidered. It is questionable in how far the term “national hero” can be dismissed if Yue Fei is still to be considered an important symbol for future Chinese. If this is to be communicated successfully (i.e.: convincingly), the narrative of Yue Fei must not only be without contradictions, but must also leave aside all possible conflicts that may arise from potential political instrumentalization.

An attempt to depict Yue Fei’s deeds in a politically correct manner (without reference to the term *minzu yingxiong*) failed in late 2002. In the winter of 2002–03, the People’s Education Press published a new guideline for history education in middle schools which emphasized that Yue Fei can no longer be worshipped as a distinct national hero:

Only outstanding individuals like Qi Jiguang and Zheng Chenggong who fought against invaders from outside can be called national heroes. Those like Yue Fei and Wen Tianxiang, although they have surely played an important role in the fight against ethnic exploitation and suppression, cannot be called national heroes.⁴²

⁴¹ Gu Jianlu, *Yue Fei zhisi* [The death of Yue Fei] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), 12–3.

⁴² *Jiangnan shibao* [Jingnian Times], December 9, 2002.

It was argued that a veneration of Yue Fei as a national hero would do harm to national solidarity and would cause offence to ethnic minorities which historically were his enemies. This postmodern reinterpretation of Yue was heavily rejected in the media because it seemed on the one hand to diminish the importance of Yue's historic deeds and on the other hand to distort history as it was customarily taught. The debate even went so far that Mongols and Manchus became engaged in the discussion and criticized the new guideline for distorting history (a criticism that has so far only been directed against Japanese interpretations of World War II history, a comparison often made in the debate). There were two major points to the criticism. Firstly, Yue had fought as a representative of the Southern Song dynasty against the Jurchen in order to maintain the independence and freedom of Song. Secondly, in the time of Yue, there were already ethnic groups living in China in whose name Yue also fought, thus he would not solely be a hero to the Han, but a hero of the multiethnic Chinese nation of the Song dynasty, who was also later venerated by the Mongols and Manchus.⁴³ The universal criticism finally led to a revision of the guideline. A representative of the Ministry of Education in Beijing stated in a press conference that the historic judgement of Yue shall remain untouched. Possible reinterpretations of the national hero that had temporarily been discussed were of a pure academic nature and were not supposed to be taught in school.

Conclusion

Nationalism demands that nation and state shall ideally be congruent and form a so-called nation-state. This is, in the case of a multiethnic empire or state, of course not realizable, and talking about *minzu guojia* or *minzu yingxiong* would not only be misrepresentational, but also misleading, especially if we take into consideration that (in contrast to the European case) China never fully has differentiated between nation and state. This is, first of all, due to the problem of translation. The term *minzu*, being part of *minzu yingxiong*, is semantically blurred: it can refer to “nation,” but also to terms like “state,” “ethnic group” and sometimes “race.”⁴⁴ None the less, the possibility of understanding the term

⁴³ Yue Yifeng, *Zhuanghuai jilie* [My breast is filled with raging emotion] (Beijing: Jindun chubanshe, 2003), 251–4.

⁴⁴ See Marc Andre Matten, “Guanyu ‘nation’ yiming de yixie sikao—Jiadam de quanshixue gei women de qishi” [Some reflections on the translation of ‘nation’ into Chinese—Insights from Gadamer’s Hermeneutics], *Dongya shijiao xia de jindai Zhongguo* [Modern China from an East-Asian Perspective] ed. Peng Minghui and Tang Qihua (Taipei: Zhengda lishixi, 2006), 329–62.

minzu as an expression for both “nation” and “state” makes it possible to continue to use *minzu yingxiong* as a useful concept (despite postmodern objections). Yet, it has to be stressed that this, at the same time, consequently means that the state becomes the proper representative of the Chinese community, and not the nation: fighting for the interests of a single *minzu* (nation) is considered to be counterproductive to the general interest of the state, namely national unity and strength. Accordingly, when taking into consideration that Yue’s depiction as a defendant of the Chinese nation (and not the state) became only possible at the end of the Qing dynasty (when the Han nation opposed the Qing state), one might easily argue that the worship of Yue as a national hero resembles an invented tradition (with a dynastic hero transformed into a national one). In fact however, this tradition was only short-lived, as for a nation-state that does not conform to the European, it was not feasible to define the collective called China with sole reference to ethnic and/or national characteristics, as this would easily imply the exclusion of those who do not conform to these characteristics. Therefore, being patriotic in China thus means fighting for and defending the state, and not primarily the nation (unless of course one refers to the supranational community called *Zhonghua minzu*, which again can turn out to be problematic).⁴⁵ Yue Fei can accordingly only continue to be worshipped because of the so-called de-contextualization of his virtues (which may also be referred to as de-ethnicization), which became expressions of patriotism everyone could adhere to, independent of racial and/or ethnic categories.⁴⁶ Ironically, this was made possible by an originally foreign ruler like Yongzheng, and thus conclusively, I would argue, the function of the narrative of Yue Fei being a source of collective identity has a longer history than that of Chinese nationalism: the propagation of Yue Fei as a role model for the Chinese collective in the eighteenth century and modern China does not differ much; his emergence as a political symbol is thus not a creation or invention of modern times.

⁴⁵ As a consequence, Yue Fei should rather be understood as a “state hero,” which corresponds to the conclusions of John Fitzgerald, cf. Fitzgerald, John, “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 33 (1995), 75–104. One could also choose the term *duominzu yingxiong* [多民族英雄] for labeling Yue Fei, as implied by Wang Ke, *Nijū seiki Chūgoku no kokka kensetsu to minzoku* [Nation Building and Ethnicity in 20th century China] (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 2006).

⁴⁶ Being patriotic is nowadays a major virtue in the People’s Republic of China, after class-consciousness lost its convincing power and ethnic consciousness become unfeasible. For the context of Yue Fei, cf. also Li Xihou, “Yue Fei yu Shaoxing heyi” [Yue Fei and the Peace Treaty of Shaoxing], *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* [Studies in Chinese History], no. 3 (2003), 121–33.

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