

Failure and Identity

HOW OFTEN DO WE think of cultural humiliation and failure as strengths? What is our commitment to ideality such that we are continually bound to the desire for sovereignty in theories of culture, agency, colonial history, and nationalism? To examine what this ideality actually forgoes in consideration of cultural differences and history, this book is about failure, and the insistence and vicissitudes of its articulation. It places failure in a cultural context that gave rise to nationalism, race, and literary modernity in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century China, a period of struggle for cultural survival and attempted revitalization.

Despite the rich cultural history of nationalism, it has often been divided in focus between literature, history, political science, and international studies. Generally more attuned to the political culture mobilized by nationalism, political scientists emphasize its state and ideological formations as shaped by institutions and international conflicts. Literary scholars, on the other hand, reinvest the category of nationalism with the broader significance of cultural agency and prefer to examine “nation,” its ideological suffix suspended, as a nexus for competing narratives of culture, power, and discourse.

An understanding of not only the historicity but also the figurations of nationalism, however, demands a new, interdisciplinary approach toward how we conceptualize the relationship between nationalism and cultural identities. In many ways, this requires a greater conceptual spectrum for analyzing how individuals operate contrary to their professed motives and how that in itself may be the desired goal. The central issues underlying this project span theories and studies of elite and popular literature, cultural and intellectual history, nationalism, race, and sexuality. To begin, I turn to two political incidents that have constituted the main focus for interpreting nationalism in modern China in recent times.

Perceiving National Injury

Shortly before America's war in Iraq began in 2003, the Chinese government made a less dramatic gesture to the U.S. ambassador to Beijing: The address of the Chinese embassy in Baghdad was provided to prevent another unexpected bombing, as happened in Belgrade in 1999.¹ This recalled one of the most contentious events in Sino-American relations in recent years. The "tragic accident" during the NATO-led war in former Yugoslavia brought on a new wave of nationalism and anti-Americanism in China. It sparked protests and demonstrations across the country as well as in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In what was the largest protest after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, protesters wearing white headbands—used in mourning—wept as they held up the photos of three Chinese killed in the bombing. Slogans such as "Down with U.S. imperialism," "Stop American aggression," "Abolish NATO," and "NATO Nazis" were uttered in anger and outrage. Student banners called for "the descendants of the (legendary) Yellow Emperor" to rally to China's defense. Another banner read, "The Chinese People Cannot Be Bullied." The scale of the incident, perceived as a "barbaric act" perpetrated by the American imperialists, finds its culminating expression in the protesters' retaliatory demand: "Blood debts must be paid in blood."

The sentiments behind these slogans are not unfamiliar to us and, as we will see, go back to the emergence of nationalistic culture in the late nineteenth century. In the precarious balance between domination and victimization, the perceived first- and third-world divide in the contemporary world often invokes the equation of hegemony with military might. Claims of injustice and national sovereignty impinge directly on feelings of outrage touched off by acts of injury. The appeal to the "Yellow Emperor," the mythical founder of Chinese civilization invented by twentieth-century nationalistic rhetoric, underscores the utility of cultural and racial origins in bolstering an injured national identity. In a similar way, the idea of blood retaliation, inciting a more primordial sense of ethnic strife, brings honor into the picture as a true stake, as the Chinese are seen as being pushed and "bullied" into a position of self-defense. Whereas civilization lays claim to superiority, and barbarism to inferiority, here the dichotomy is reversed to shame the superior party with barbarism and honor the inferior with civility.²

In the polarized verbal arena of winners and losers, it is difficult to say which runs deeper: an already deep-seated skepticism toward a perceived Western colonial power or an inherently passionate allegiance to China's sovereignty. The difficulty, indeed, lies in the fact that the two are often not distinguishable. Antiforeignism has always served as a sure catalyst in consolidating national and ethnic communities. Professions of national sover-

eignty occur most passionately with injuries done by perceived outsiders. The familiar political castigation of “traitor to the Han people” (*hanjian*), for example, a figure prominently despised in twentieth-century China as a name for those who collaborated with foreigners or the Manchu and Japanese governments against the Han Chinese, reflects a relatively recent choice of ethnicized national identity. It emphasizes the greater crime of betraying an inner unity over that committed by foreign perpetrators. An earlier figuration can be found in the more general idea of “fawning to the outside” (*meiwai*), a frequent description in the late nineteenth century of obsequious behavior toward Westerners. The shift from an unspecified “outside” to an inside “traitor” corresponds to the turn of nationalism from general xenophobia to conscientious citizenship based on a shared allegiance.

Often, rhetorical recourse to the sanctity of national sovereignty indicates an identity already in distress rather than a self-image of invincibility. Even though official propagations of nationalism usually present a robust picture of innate legitimacy naturalized by great destinies and favored by teleological world systems, they are often extrapolated from a cultural milieu of despair and turmoil. In this way, claimed national injuries, rather than the atrocities committed by foreign perpetrators, have much to reveal about the complex problem of nationalism itself: its intents, passions, and embeddedness in an operating cultural context in which the expression of nationalism is but part of a larger process of creating cultural identities.

Sociological and historical studies of nationalist movements and conflicts often privilege the significance of institutional and state forces over the cultural in the making of national allegiances.³ Nationalism is usually understood as a state-imposed ideology, reinforced by ethnicized affinity, and mostly examined for its instrumental use for particular political ends. In cases in which nationalism is considered a product of culture, the latter is usually relegated to a mobilized rather than mobilizing status. The fact of nationalism has become such an indispensable pillar for claims of sovereignty in the modern world that inquiries into its making often end up reinforcing rather than challenging its ramifications in cultural life. Military intelligence, political profiles, and occasional cinematic graces of the media, accompanied by crash-course segments on the people, geography, and history of a particular country during times of political crises, signal to us that the knowledge of other people’s cultures becomes relevant only on the occasion of political conflicts. We give much less attention to how concepts such as national sovereignty, nationalism, and racial identity and violence grow out of particular cultural contexts layered with historical memories and antagonisms that fuel the emotional resolve of the “nation.”

The cultural sensibilities that shape the specific passions of nationalism can benignly form a community in peace or, more likely, incite violent hatred for others. Their centrality in any given culture does not come to the fore only during times of war and violent confrontations, even though those occasions tend most to remind us of their grave importance. “Where does nationalism come from?” is not a question about origins but, rather, one that reflects our incessant puzzlement over why its continually resurfacing presence today should surprise us. Globalization has not diminished but only brought into starker relief the intensity of the claims of “nation” and ethnicity. In an era of promised technological communicability between cultural localities, the desire for separate and, in many cases, incommensurable ways of life and identities has not faded. The insistent and violent will for ethnic and cultural difference as markers of identities persists amid visions of new world order. It would seem that cultural differences are more often reduced and misunderstood than successfully communicated beyond political needs.

Recognizing this, it is timely to rethink our understanding of nationalism and the possibilities for cultural differences when the difficulty of establishing common grounds is the norm rather than the exception. Already an issue in nineteenth-century China, the problem of making legible national intentions in an international framework was central to the efficacy of foreign affairs, increasingly defined by “diplomacy.” Reviving the issue in a more modern setting, the diplomatic aftermath of the aircraft collision near Hainan Island in 2001 illustrates the importance of the problem in the context of contemporary Chinese nationalism. Following closely on the heels of the embassy bombing, the collision of a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane with a Chinese fighter aircraft quickly focused on how to acknowledge culpability in a way that would be acceptable to both the United States and China. The choice of language was carefully scrutinized. This was an awkward negotiation between not only the two governments but also the Chinese government and its populace, some of whom saw the government as taking a conciliatory approach toward the United States. President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell were reportedly “very sorry” that the incident occurred and that the American plane entered Chinese airspace and landed without verbal clearance.⁴ The Chinese propaganda chiefs agonized over the dozens of different ways one can translate *sorry* into Chinese. In the ensuing months, the wording changed from the initial *yihan*, which can convey a dismissive kind of regret, to *baqian*, an apology that does not really admit to culpability. China had originally demanded that America agree to the use of *daoqian*, which admits guilt. By the time the letter of apology was published, however, *very sorry* became *shen biao qianyi*, which means a “deep expression of apologetic intents.”

The emphasis on apology in addressing international conflicts is in itself interesting. The extent to which an admission of guilt corresponds to righting a wrong is a question that has recently received much attention in discussions of human rights, war responsibility, and political restitution. One scholar argues that the political importance in maintaining a framework of morality with room for adaptation to different cultural contexts demonstrates a new and promising course in building an international community.⁵ Apologies show a willingness to engage historical injustices that is crucial for communal healing and overcoming. Even though this is true, the optimism invested in a global morality, the adaptability of which is based on “vagueness and voluntarism,” may be overstated.⁶ The guilty can initiate a forum inviting victims to come forth; however, the reverse is not often the case. In many ways, discussions of guilt are a luxury allowed by political stability and confidence such that one can afford admitting to a wrong, the egregiousness of which, in all likelihood, can be tangibly compensated for through economic means.

The idea of guilt, however, has a much more complex range of expressions in cultural life and sensibilities than these particular forums for international justice could account for. In the two incidents I have described, for example, guilt lies entirely with the perceived perpetrator. The focus on intent in deriving an apology and locating culpability seems to downplay other, more sensitive questions. Some reports claimed that Americans bombed the embassy intentionally.⁷ Although this claim may support China’s entitlement to an apology, this does not seem to have been the point. Intentionality was never doubted by the Chinese.

Occupying the premise of the controversy is the insistence that any compensation, short of blood, cannot be the right compensation for this injury. Here we have a preference for the abstract and unquantifiable measure of the act, as opposed to something for which a proper compensation may be desired and negotiated. The externalized outrage, as long as it is not appeased, enables a persuasive expression and assertion of national and racial solidarity. Embracing injury and humiliation stirs a profound passion and coalesces with the love for one’s nation. On the wall of the Hainan University dining hall during the detainment of the U.S. spy plane, a large banner read, “Wipe Out Our National Humiliation / Severely Punish the American Military.” Is one to assume that national humiliation, an assault to one’s national pride, can be redressed only through retaliatory violence? Does the condition of humiliation sustain one’s right to call for another’s injury in turn? Or can we understand the degree of the humiliation only by the violence we retroactively commit in its name?

The two disputes with the American military have provided the main fo-

cus for interpreting Chinese nationalism from the outside in recent years. We cannot fully understand the questions they raise, however, if we were to examine only the rupturing moment of nationalism without a deeper grasp of its cultural impetuses. One of the most overlooked dimensions of claimed national injury is that the claim of victimization reserves, among other things, the right to retaliatory violence. Even if only in theory, the idea that injury demands injury in turn reinforces the position of the disempowered with the passions of vengeance. The claim of injury does not always have as its exclusive preoccupation the original cause of distress. Instead, the position of suffering itself generates something more intimate to the building of collective identity. More tangibly, it comes to acquire particular social and political leverage that makes it attractive to hold on to positions of victimhood. In this sense, in emphasizing guilt and social redress as important tools for building dialogues between cultures and nations, we neglect the possibility that the persistence of the conflict may come hand in hand with its productiveness for maintaining a certain cultural and national identity.

In the absence of such an inquiry, historians have found claims of victimization baffling. That victimization could offer a “peculiar source of pride” or become a “badge of honor” has led to the conclusion that there is an increasing professionalization and commercialization of victimhood.⁸ One observer remarks on the trend of competing for historical injustices, such as referring to the Nanjing massacre as the “forgotten Holocaust of World War II” or reducing the Asian American experience to Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*. Another historian of China understands this as a reflection of China’s self-fashioning into a “professional victim.”⁹ In a different context, Anthony Appiah sees in the claim of victimhood a strategy for identity building motivated by the fear of the “shallowness” of one’s relatively trauma-free identity.¹⁰ In these cases, the position of the victimized is utilized to claim an otherwise undeserved cultural recognition. Instead of being tied to acts that directly engender victims, victimhood becomes a fashioned or strategized identity. Concerned that claims of suffering, lacking authenticity, are just a different way of competing for recognition in identity politics, these observers focus on the derivative aspect of victimization and deplore what they see as diluting the distinctiveness of historical injustices.¹¹

Whether historical injustices are distinct, however, poses a question separate from why people claim victimization. Victimization results from different kinds of injustice and abuse and does not in itself argue for the just or unjust recognition of that injury. It does, however, present the state of suffering as being entitled to some kind of compensation. To consider that claim less authentic or derivative misses the reasons for which that position of injury would be socially or culturally desirable. The growing pervasive-

ness of the phenomenon can perhaps be better understood not as a kind of deplorable opportunism but as an important discursive frame for cultural and national narratives. In ways this book shall examine, victimization does not need to be continually attached to a historically real injury to claim and act on authenticity. Victimization is not only empowering in a framework of international justice that mediates processes of restitution; as seen in the Hainan Island incident, the embrace of victimization can shape cultural passions for national and racial identities. It integrates historical humiliations, such as colonial subjugation, into a resilient narrative of self-invention. Rather than glorified sovereignty, the consecration of humiliation is intrinsic to tales of nation building and national identity, especially for those claiming to recover from fallen status.¹²

It would perhaps be more useful to think of victimization not as something new to historical injustices but rather as a modality of cultural identity. Humiliation can be both a response to injury inflicted by another party and the preserving stake of a cultural claim. In the context of twentieth-century China, how this might work as a cultural experience generating specific passions—benign and violent—and nationalistic and racial ideologies is the subject of this book. The challenge is to provide an account of victimization and suffering not as beleaguered conditions but as terms enabling the articulation of a persistent identity. Rather than take victimization as something that must be sanctified with authenticity, one might consider it in its versatility. In this way, one might avoid the problem of privileging some claims of victimization as real and authentic, thereby dismissing others as more opportunistic or even vulgar. We may not always be morally equipped to judge the intrinsic worth of victimization, but we can consider how it operates within a cultural and historical frame as a way of mobilizing the power of identity.

This task bears intimately on a study of Chinese nationalism, culture, and literature, as well as on issues of multiculturalism, ethnonationalism, and the constitution of individual identities, extending well beyond the specific locus of this inquiry. This study of the formation of modern Chinese identity in its national, racial, and cultural configurations recasts these problems in the frame of “failure.” Against our usual conceptions of self-determination, sovereignty, and fulfilled identities, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity* examines the formation of nationalism, racial identity, and literature during the crucial period of nation building in China from 1895 to 1937.

Out of a real political failure marked by imperial decline, military defeats, foreign occupations, and infelicitous reforms, a different order of failure emerged in the late nineteenth century. The rhetoric of failure incorporated defeat into a narrative of resilience. Inaugurated by the tumultuous history

of late imperial and Republican China, failure elaborates on historicity through a rhetorical mode of overcoming and regeneration. This discursive propensity becomes the most productive and pervasive mode of cultural self-perception during the crucial period of nation building. Occasioned by historical crises but worked over by a cultural desire for survival, failure is a modality for overcoming that does not rely on simple triumph as its goal. National narratives are not always committed to a vision of success. The exceptionality of failure in the ideal scheme of sovereignty is what paradoxically holds ultimate sway over the cultural imaginary.

The idea of failure encompasses the range of cultural, political, rhetorical, and literary maneuvers that seek to repair a damaged sense of “nation” and “self” during these formative decades of great turmoil, conflict, and uncertainty. Conceptions of race, nation, and culture developed their own narratives and definitions of a modern Chinese cultural identity. The force of this imperative toward the formation of a modern identity was an imperative unparalleled at this time of westernization, imperialism, and the disintegration of the old social order. Nation was perceived as a much-needed political entity in a new era of globalization. The idea of race (*minzu*)—which means both “nation” and “race” in Chinese—acquired a more precise definition through appeals to evolution and positioning the “yellow race” in relation to “white race.” In the cultural imagination, literary modernity was expressed through the construction of new cultural identities, such as the “New Woman” and the “Chinese national character,” as well as through the combination of Western narrative forms with the Chinese vernacular tradition of the novel. All three developments, however, coincided in their expressions of unease toward the viability of a declining Chinese civilization. They enabled points of tension and divergence where interpretations of race, nationalism, culture, and imperialism took different courses in the making of a nation’s destiny. The unease grew into an insistence on the relentless self-examination of China’s weaknesses. It founded multiple narratives of cultural resilience within the experience of an oppression as productive as it was involuntary.

Nation, Race, and Literature in China, 1895–1937

In a volume titled *We Spit on That Kind of Chinese*, contributors from China as well as overseas Chinese are brought together to scrutinize self-representations of Chinese. In their opinions, these images have distorted and disgraced Chinese culture and identity.¹³ Among the objects of criticism are the dissident Wei Jingsheng and producer Su Xiaokang of the controversial television series *Heshang* (River elegy) in the late 1980s that, in its open cri-

tique of the Chinese government, attracted much national and international attention. The most interesting debate in the volume, however, comes from a series of articles and readers' letters dealing with the controversy surrounding the sign "Chinese and dogs not admitted." This sign is said to have been posted as one of the park rules outside the southern gate of the Huangpu Park in Shanghai until 1928. The first public park in China, Huangpu Park was built in the British concession in 1868. One of the most often-cited reminders of Western imperialism from the so-called one hundred years of national humiliation (*bainian guochi*) starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the equivalence of Chinese with dogs has become synonymous with that colonial history. It epitomizes the humiliation Chinese experienced under Western domination, palpable in everyday life in Shanghai's International Settlement. Thus, when in 1994 someone suggested that the sign was fabricated, an emotional controversy followed.

In a short article published in the Shanghai journal *Shiji* (Century), Xue Liyong briefly recounts the times at which people resuscitated the sign's history in order to promote war patriotism and political goals. Kenneth Scott Latourette mentioned it in *The Development of China* (1917) as part of his denunciation of Western colonialism in China.¹⁴ In 1932, when sentiments against Japanese and Western colonialism ran high, the sign's relation to the humiliating colonial context was brought up again for its perceived political significance. In an article that was reprinted in several journals and newspapers, Xue suggests that the Museum of Shanghai Urban History and Development had fabricated the sign in the 1950s in response to the Korean War and the need to solidify cultural loyalties toward the recent Communist victory. The museum itself never officially opened, but the story of the sign captivated the popular imagination. Witnesses who had lived in Shanghai at the time testified to its existence. Xue, however, dismisses their accounts as confusion with what they actually saw at the museum. Xue states that the existence of this sign cannot be proved. In the 1980s, he explains, there was again discussion about redisplaying this sign in what was formerly the Shanghai Historical Museum. Yet, despite the pressure of popular demand, museum personnel felt it inappropriate to proceed based on inconclusive evidence regarding its origin. In 1989, when the sign and other artifacts were relocated to storage, the movers discarded the sign because the fabrication, Xue emphasizes, was clear even to them. As a gesture of his own protest against the undeserved legendary status of this sign, Xue stomped it to pieces and left them next to a heap of garbage. He claims to have done this for the sake of preempting more unfounded controversies in the future, because "People who would fabricate a humiliating story about China reveal only their rotten Chinese characteristics in doing so."¹⁵

After the appearance of Xue's article, concerned readers sent in numerous detailed descriptions of the sign and its precise location. Well-researched data based on journals, newspaper clippings, and personal memoirs from the late 1870s through the early decades of the twentieth century flooded the publications department. Xue's skepticism was widely perceived as a disloyal attempt to soften the culpability of Western imperialism. Emotional outcries were voiced both at home and abroad. To remind people of the infamy of imperialism, one author urged them to read the suicide letter left by one of the leading martyrs of early twentieth-century China, Chen Tianhua (1875–1905), who took his own life in the hope of awakening the Chinese to the urgency of saving the nation.

As a result of the extraordinary attention given to this controversy, several historians recently reinvestigated the matter. Whether this sign had in fact existed to the degree that would have satisfied both sides of the controversy is, however, not a question I wish to evaluate.¹⁶ Nor is it, apparently, what was ultimately at stake. The editor's own note best captures the sentiment behind the controversy: "Apart from whether this displayed sign is an original or reproduction, the problem lies in the question: Can we then use it to deny completely the historical fact of western imperialism's brutality and its oppression of the Chinese people?"¹⁷ Thus, the crux of the issue lies not in missing factual evidence but in something much less tangible—a humiliating memory that will never cease to remind the Chinese of their national shame. In fact, the editor's own question already predicates itself on the suspicion that the sign did not exist. It matters not whether the object of anti-imperialist patriotism is real, as long as the relation of the Chinese people to it as a humiliating experience continues to be commemorated. In this way, though Western imperialism engendered the event, its historical memory is divorced from this origin. It is not the nation that he seeks to restore, but the proof of its dejection that he wants to reinstate. In a remarkable moment, nationalism is expressed without nation. The passion of injustice one feels in nationalism lives on without the nation's continual and palpable injury. Failure protects the nation from falling into oblivion.¹⁸ In exchange, however, the nation's humiliating past is remembered without nationalistic glory. Thus, between indignation and commemoration, national allegiance implicates itself in a paradox of objectless and joyless allegiance.

The title of one rebuke to Xue's claim states, "Not forgetting national hatred is by no means a rotten Chinese characteristic."¹⁹ Presumably, insisting on the nation's humiliation reflects a desirable national characteristic. After all, one merely shows one's patriotism by not letting the history of oppression disappear from historical memory. On the other hand, Xue is also mo-

tivated by a kind of nationalistic outrage directed at not letting the Chinese be reminded—let alone by a false artifact—of their history of subjugation under Western imperialism. Renan's well-known remark that a nation is founded on collective memories does not seem to take into account memories that do not desire a heroic or honorable past.²⁰ The possibility of the nation as an identity lies, strangely, in its commemorated injury, its failure to secure a proper recognition, not in forgetting through collective amnesia. The nation, however, is not alone in having failed in some way. The sense of failure also extends to individuals, resonating as a certain failure *in them*, imagined as a fault in the Chinese national character. In fact, *We Spit on That Kind of Chinese* is not the only work published in the 1990s that scrutinizes the question of what is wrong with the Chinese national character.²¹ The first complete modern Chinese translation of nineteenth-century American missionary Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* (1890) appeared around the same time.²² Another work published in Beijing, *The Quirks of the Chinese*, deals with every facet of the Chinese character from selfishness to superstition. On the cover is a warning to the Chinese people not to become "the ugly Chinese."²³ Our ugliness, it says, comes from the fact that we do not know that we are ugly.

Judging from the number of works that have appeared since then on the flaws of the Chinese, one may speculate that the preoccupation is unlikely to subside. The intensity of national identity remarkably finds its most convincing expressions in negativity. An unrelenting self-scrutiny leaves no flaw uncriticized, no fault unconfessed. The imperative for every Chinese to understand his or her own shortcomings as a prerequisite to self-improvement asserts that behind every pleasing self-image lies a delusion that must be exposed. Despite this open self-chastisement, however, something intimate to the self remains: If only the Chinese knew they were in fact ugly, they might then perhaps not be so ugly anymore. The promise of redemption lies not in the recognition of an object in need of remedy but in the labor of reflection. If only one would turn against oneself in a moment of truthful recognition, one could then dispel the delusion that lies at the root of Chinese characteristics. Here we distinguish a similar move at work in the identification with the nation. By keeping alive China's humiliation as a nation, one can properly keep intact one's passion for its survival. The urgency of national salvation is forever preserved as the most promising possibility for the nation. As long as one has not exhaustively established the source of China's weakness, that weakness has not yet become fatal. The passionate attachment to the nation, furthermore, entails an impassioned commitment to the scrutiny of one's own failure.

The preoccupation with what is wrong with China, though not always expressed in the same way, has never failed to excite nationalistic imagination throughout the twentieth century. Its different articulations originate from diverse premises but rely on a persistent mode of failure. To begin this inquiry into the power of failure in the shaping of nationalistic, racial, and cultural discourses, Chapter 2 deals with this variegated topography by examining the Chinese intellectual discourse on race in the late Qing period. During this time, the transition from late imperialism to modern national and racial consciousness propelled the cultural imagination into unknown territories. The haunting specter of the nation, which later becomes the focus of intense self-scrutiny in the 1920s and 1930s, first found its precipitating images in the two decades before the founding of the Republic (1911).

In the late 1890s, because of a series of military defeats following the Opium War (1839–42), intellectuals could no longer refute the alarming state of affairs of China's declining international status. Reformers such as Kang Youwei, Tang Caichang, and Liang Qichao attempted different strategies to rationalize China's failure. The theory of social Darwinism provided a way of explaining China's tenuous position in the modern world. The yellow race, it was widely said, was in decline, but this decline was not yet systematically theorized. At the time, this mode of rationalization was indistinguishable from the exercise of cultural imagination. The burgeoning of translated Western literature, a feat pioneered by Lin Shu, the leading translator of European and American fiction widely read by Chinese intellectuals, reflects the intense energy in investigating China's possibility of avoiding the fate met by other races, such as the blacks.

Whereas political treatises longed for utopian solutions for the degeneration of the yellow race, fiction reflected as much political allegories as it did the popular appetite for sensationalized adventures. Failure, in another way, inspired rather than devastated. Examining how this works in futuristic fiction, science fantasies, and the larger dialogue on the "yellow peril," Chapter 3 looks at the transformation of the worrisome idea of a race in peril into a celebrated notion of a menacing and triumphant race in popular and fictional imagination. In the last attempts to mediate harsh reality, the cultural sensibilities at the time received the experience of oppression with fantastic ingenuity. With the advantage of historical hindsight, one sees with clarity the trajectory of nationalistic ideology rather than the plethora of those other ideas and fancies that helped to shape it.

Although intellectuals stated the problem with poignancy and eloquence, an array of obscure, unknown cultural opportunists and amateur writers, with their often outlandish views at the fringes of history, allow us a glimpse into the rich milieu to which the intellectual project of national salvation is

indebted. Not only intellectuals but also popular writers and commentators played with the specter of China's irreversible deterioration in the scheme of evolution while trying to comprehend its gravity. Reorienting themselves toward a perceived global struggle for survival, observers and writers used the logic behind the laws of evolution to construct China's proper place of superiority. At times inconsistent, the process of forming this racial rationale oscillated between self-doubt and exuberance. In this framework, the yellow race is rationalized, through inventive rhetorical maneuvers, as the only race of all subordinated races—blacks, browns, reds—capable of posing a portentous threat to white superiority. A race in peril turns into a race capable of inciting fear. The weak transforms into the formidable, and failure becomes strength.

The late Qing period experimented with the experience of subjugation as a source of possible entitlement and also initiated a discursive framework for locating the source of China's decline. In the process of attempting to see in themselves the prospect of both ruination and rejuvenation, late Qing intellectuals and writers set a cultural pattern of ambivalent self-scrutiny. The line of inquiry was more persistent than the object it pursued. The racial framework contradictorily sketched out in the late Qing lent itself to a specialized inquiry into racial improvement in the Republican period. Under the influence of a new and much-heralded scientific spirit, eugenics gave expression to both the cultural anxiety about race and a rational faculty eager to dissect the discomfort. The logic of self-scrutiny easily extended from examining the inadequacies of biological constitution to identifying the spiritual defects of racial, national, and sexual "character." Chapter 4 examines these concomitant discourses of race, eugenics, and the national character.

Significantly, "national character" is variously translated as *guominxing* and *minzuxing*. Both *guojia* and *minzu* have been used to translate "nation." However, *minzu* has a distinctly racial connotation, harking back to the notion of clan (*zu*).²⁴ Racial thinking in modern China draws upon not only Western social Darwinism and racial engineering but also available notions within the Chinese cultural repertoire. This was intended, among other things, to minimize the possible estrangement and resistance to imported Western sources. In the 1920s and 1930s, *eugenics* was variously translated as "study of superior birth" (*youshengxue*), "study of good birth" (*shanzhongxue*, *shuzhongxue*), "study of marriage and posterity" (*hunyin zhesi xue*), and "study of racial improvement" (*renzhong gailiang xue*). The importance of posterity in Chinese culture is a concept readily absorbed into the advocacy for eugenics. Even though the phrase "superior birth, superior nurture" (*yousheng youyu*) can still be seen posted every few blocks in the central part of Shang-

hai in the twenty-first century, it has lost much of its nationalistic connotations from the 1930s.²⁵ During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the period of nation building in China, racial improvement was propagated as the key to national survival. In significant ways, eugenics was not merely an intellectual enterprise. Its indebtedness to the notion of self-improvement, racial or cultural, opened up a narrowly defined social project to a wide variety of unconventional, if not esoteric, ideas, ranging from exercise regimes and breathing techniques to new conceptions of body culture.

In this way, racial decline was not the only category in need of remedy. Critical attention turned to women's undesirable characteristics as another focus of social and literary criticism. Chapter 5 centers on the various proposals and programs outlined for women's new role in the modern society. Beginning with a close examination of the philosophy of a "society based on beauty," advocated by the infamous sexologist and cultural guru Zhang Jingsheng, this chapter traces the issue of femininity through popular sex culture, studies of female perversions and criminality, and literary expressions of the "modern woman." From their physical beauty to their deranged sexual behavior, women were encouraged to reflect on their own ills, liberate themselves from the shackles of traditional China, and assume the responsibilities proper for the "modern woman." Just as the Chinese people were urged to develop a consciousness of being citizens of a nation (*guomin*), women were called on to transform themselves into "new women" (*xin nüxing*).

Available explanations of gender construction and nation in China studies often designate the nation as a coercive institution that exacts definitions of femininity and sexuality.²⁶ Historians often remind us that women played an indispensable role in revolutions in modern China by resorting to empirical evidence to establish the underrepresented presence of women in modern Chinese history.²⁷ Literary scholars, on the other hand, scrutinize the making of gender in great detail without providing more rigorous analyses of how that would bear on the cultural context that makes gender prescriptions necessary.²⁸ In fact, only by taking into account the larger social and cultural context together with particular manifestations does one notice the underlying logic impelling scrutiny of gender, national character, and youth. Everything from the better maintenance of the postal system to the brand of cigarette one should smoke pivots on the question of correcting China's failures. Behind the ostensible optimism of a new and enlightened modern China lies a reluctant, though comforting recognition of a deeply flawed China that only the Chinese themselves could love.

The examination of Chinese "character" as a constitutive element of national strength gave entry to the imperative of national salvation into the individual's interior life. How one behaved in the privacy of one's home, and

even in one's psychic life, directly influenced the health of the nation. The individual's private desires and torments bore the imprint of the nation's demise. Just as racial character was a matter of self-surveillance, interiority became the discipline of nationalistic conscience. Whereas questions of the Chinese racial character and the New Woman impinged directly on the nation's ability to survive, the individual's inner conflicts expressed an uneasy relation to the nation. Sexual torments resonated with perceived colonial oppression. Identity was linked intimately, albeit uncomfortably, with the process of identification, just as nation relies on the appeal of nationalism. Whatever has been exacted from one's identity to make possible the nation as a collective identity is accomplished by coalescing the individual's trauma with the nation's trauma.

The abundance of first-person confessional narratives in modern Chinese literature of the May Fourth period beginning in 1919 attests to this commiserated intimacy. The need for self-dissection, as forcefully called for by Lu Xun, was equated with national salvation. Only by scrutinizing what is wrong with them can the Chinese regenerate their atrophied national spirit. Embedded in the short story form, diary writing became widely utilized to convey the interior dramas and torments of individual writers. Chapter 6 examines the making of individuals' interior life in relation to the exigencies of nationalism by focusing on masculinity and masochism in literature and literary culture. The individual's interior life reflected the conflicted relation with the imperatives of nationalism, and that interiority also provided the space for interrogating one's own identity. Reflecting this intense focus on the individual's inner life and desires, Chinese intellectuals' keen interest in psychoanalysis at the time furnished a new perspective from which to articulate their personal and sexual identities. Male writers expressed the apprehensions of masculinity in masochism and melancholia. Self-torment became a gratifying labor offering respite from the impossibility of exoneration. They took pleasure in narratives of masochistic suffering, taunting the audience with their restless, alternating requests for punishment and expiation. This is expressed not only in the short story collections by Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo but also in the private correspondence between Guo, Zong Baihua, and Tian Han in *Trefoil Collection*.

The psychic grievance of individual torment offered a potent source for impassioned attachments. Chapter 7 examines the appeal of suffering both to individuals and to a collective national identity. The experience of suffering encapsulated the political and aesthetic mood for an era of individual torment and social anguish. Wrestling torment from the privacy of individual psyches, the idea of suffering or depression (*kumen*) provided an expression for the modern epoch too powerful to be claimed by any individual. Lu

Xun's translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbol of Angst* bespeaks not only a literary interest but also a profound concern with the experience of modernity in China. *Kumen* facilitated the expression of a modern China as uncertain as it is sublime. It bridged individual restlessness with societal discontent, allowing the projection of, more than anything else, the intellectuals' anxiety over their felt social irrelevance as the legitimate sentiment appropriate to the project of nation building. Artistic creations became synonymous with suffering, reaffirming the centrality of failure to the tasks of national salvation and revolution.

From these very different perspectives—yellow race, racial perils, eugenics, national character, femininity and masculinity, beauty and literary masochism, and confession and suffering—a tale of nation building in twentieth-century China unfolds. It is told many times from multiple locations on the cultural topography, each time differently but consistently in the mode of failure. And it never ceases to be resilient even as it tells a cumulative tale of defeat. The relevance of this complex cultural framework for perceiving oneself in relation to the outside world continues to have its political and social appeal today. In 1991, the novel *Yellow Peril* (Huanghuo) once again revived the specter of the destructive potential of the yellow peril. The trilogy first appeared in a Canadian expatriate newspaper and was subsequently banned in mainland China.²⁹ It envisions a time of political turmoil following the Tiananmen Square incident (1989) under the threat of nuclear war and environmental catastrophe. Most significant is the third volume, titled *Yellow Peril Re-attacks the World*, in which the fulfillment of the prophecy of the yellow peril is brought to life, as billions of Chinese refugees flood into Russia and the United States, forcing the world economy, resources, and land into decline.

Even more recently, the new epidemic of 2003, severe acute respiratory syndrome, recalls the power of cultural anxieties about biological contamination from an exotic origin. Referred to in certain European presses as “China syndrome” or “Asian flu,” the acronym SARS had the unfortunate resonance of “Special Administrative Region,” Hong Kong's official name since the 1997 handover. Conspiracy theories of the virus as U.S. biological warfare against the Chinese met with the retaliatory speculation that China's own biochemical labs unleashed the virus on the populace. The exchange of paranoid accusations hark back to earlier eras of racial and national antagonisms fueled by imagined powers of contamination. Summoning the resolve of patriotic nationalism, Premier Wen Jiabao, on May 4, 2003—the eighty-fourth anniversary of the monumental nationalistic, anti-imperialistic, and new culture movement in 1919—called on the nation to carry forward the May Fourth spirit of “democracy” and “science” in the nation's fight against SARS.³⁰

The continual cultural power of the invocation of racial and national survival follows a tradition beginning in the late Qing period of imagining the rise of the yellow race as menace and master. The future of the Chinese race is envisioned with a hope driven by the promise of a once-derogatory designation. In journals and newspapers from the 1860s throughout the 1930s, the preoccupation with what is wrong with China only intensifies. The preoccupation with failure will become ingrained as a particular consciousness. The question of China's ills ceases to be posited exclusively as such, for by the 1920s and 1930s, it will have been internalized as the constitutive premise upon which every other question is posited. Failure becomes the embedded consciousness of an identity in search of the "Chinese."³¹ Its perpetual lack of fulfillment also enables its intense passion ever to preserve that possibility.

Undoing Idealism

China's nation-building project compels us to think differently, going against our intuitions and desires to deplore abjection and to privilege empowerment. Existing critical approaches toward different national literatures and cultures, however, have not yet adequately met this demand. Before proceeding with the specific analyses of China's culture- and nation-building process, it is necessary to address the conceptual implications it holds for other disciplines. Due to the range of theoretical issues outside the China studies field that the present study engages, this last section will discuss at some length the ways in which certain conceptual approaches designed to deal with cultural alternatives and national literatures have also limited our understanding of the array of possible articulations of different national and cultural narratives.

In the past twenty years, theoretical interest in "third-world literature" has gained focus and intensity, primarily because different national traditions and minor literatures are deemed valuable for a critique of the Western intellectual tradition and literary canon.³² The project of incorporating the peripheries and minor discourses, however, has recently encountered its own limitations. The practice of literary and critical theory has fallen short of its aspirations for dialogic cultures and global literatures. New barriers to proper recognition have risen to replace and even compound old ones, as the criterion for assessing the value and scope of non-Western or minor literatures remains bound to a question of who wields the power of representation.³³ More problematically, a proclaimed ethical reflexivity, as a more socially responsible approach, has also made the motivations behind well-disguised rationalizations even less transparent.

Amid these battles over ethics and responsibility, there has been little room for reflecting on the different implications of these issues in and from other locales that do not observe the same set of ethics. The genesis of Malaysian-Chinese and Singaporean-Chinese literatures in the early twentieth century serves as an example. Originally a diasporic split from mainland Chinese literature, Sinophone literature in Southeast Asia has been considered minor to and derivative of China's modern literature (New Culture Movement of 1915) well after the declaration of a "South Seas color" (*nanyang seci*) literature by a group of expatriate writers between 1927 and 1932. The fact that literary awards in Taiwan, rather than mainland China, have now become a forum of recognition for Malaysian Chinese writers further complicates the notion of a national center for legitimate "national" literary traditions. The often-invoked notion of "cultural China," a concept used to avoid the pitfalls of a singular geopolitical and cultural identity, was in fact first proposed by these Southeast Asian diasporic writers. Despite the intent behind its original proposal, "cultural China" has largely been limited to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, the three most vocal locales in the Chinese heritage world.³⁴

The invitation to participate in a more open cultural forum is tempting. It also comes, however, with its own conditions for speaking. The development of modern Chinese literature as a field in the American academy in many ways reflects the intellectual burden created by this kind of framework. On the one hand, subscription to current multicultural discourses (whether postmodern or postcolonial) has undoubtedly provided a more effective way for modern Chinese literature, or any other third-world literature, to create its own academic identity in a cross-cultural nexus. On the other hand, the distinctiveness of different national literatures and traditions are recognizable as long as they participate in the familiar history of oppression and subjugation. Whether it is to expose the secret neuroses of the imperialist legacy or to empower cultural and political exile as productive margins of alterity, attempts at reexamination often stipulate a tale of national suffering and grievance or of indictment and triumph in the face of Western domination.³⁵ The assumption that empowerment and sovereignty are demonstrated through the degree of extrication from domination, recast as globalization or historically prefigured as imperialism, does not merely underlie analyses of colonial nationalism. The same principle also shapes the way ideas such as individual freedom and self-determination are heralded as universal aspirations, often subsuming cultural differences.³⁶ It is not always clear, however, whether freedom from bondage, in the way it is conventionally understood, is or should always be the desired solution.

The experience with westernization in China demonstrates the importance of this question. As many historians have pointed out, although westernization held the promise of reinventing a new China equipped with modern science and technology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China's optimism was also accompanied by an anxiety over the perceived threat of imperialism.³⁷ A series of foreign aggressions and territorial occupations beginning with the Opium War quickened the pace of disintegration of the imperial order. By the early twentieth century, China's sense of cultural sovereignty was irreversibly shaken. The ambivalent recognition of both China's weakness and its need to emulate the very source of that subjugation for modernization, widely acknowledged at this time, led reformers and intellectuals to endorse a distinct cultural rationale for national survival. Beginning in the late 1890s, intellectual discussions, political tracts, and popular discourse focused on notions of racial peril and cultural extinction. An intense preoccupation with the failure of an empire, culture, and race led to persuasive articulations of modern Chinese national and racial identity.

On first consideration, admissions to failure, national decay, and racial degeneration may not strike one as a positive discourse in any successful nation-building process.³⁸ Indeed, in its everyday sense, failure is a lesson learned or a mistake not to be repeated. It hardly elicits a desire for its repetition. A commitment to failure, however, upsets this premise of success. Among other things, it removes the weight of ideals deemed universal from the workings of agency. Thus, Chinese intellectuals may desire democracy without endorsing the condition of freedom, while writers fantasize about self-inflicted pain without conceding to the position of the abject. One might consider, in light of Lydia Liu's recent provocative analysis, the incursive role of "itinerant signs" that continually reproduce asymmetry in the meanings of words and consequently recognition.³⁹ And the "obsession with China," as so aptly discussed by Chinese intellectual and literary historians for half a century, may in fact display not a mere fixation but a powerful cultural production based on what David Wang insightfully calls a "scar typology."⁴⁰ The very unlikely appeal of failure has precluded the critical examination of how national identities, in countries where Western domination is considered a part of their modern and nationalistic history, can survive in a kind of persistence without triumph. Contrary to the grasp of common understanding, nationalism can proliferate around an ever-precarious sense of survival that engenders the continual emotional investment in the idea of the Chinese nation as a collective destiny.

Even though scholars who focus on previously unvoiced narratives of oppression may highlight a certain culpability of imperialism, they also fore-

stall questioning the status of this history.⁴¹ Notions of residual subjectivities that defy and survive subjugation, or subversive and parodic debunking launched from the margins of dominant ideologies, have been inspired by the optimism of revising the notion of hegemony. However, these venues still share the premise that these subversive positions carry the indelible imprint of subjugation, testifying to the authenticity of their suffering as well as confirming the continual role of imperialism in their tales of intervention. Attempts to present different views often resort to the device of claiming an “uncontaminated” tradition and continuity before or following Western presence.⁴² The contention often rests on the issue of whether westernization, as in the case of nineteenth- and twentieth-century China, ought to be considered unique and given disproportionate status or contextualized within a longer historical frame that remains centered on China as the primary point of reference.⁴³

Whether these concepts—one that seeks to level disciplinary boundaries, and the other that essentializes cultural traditions—can challenge or loosen the historical grip on the definition of subjugation or imperialistic domination is a question that cannot be answered by existing approaches toward critical studies. The prevailing assumption that subjects might through different kinds of empowerment regain the autonomy previously denied them has compelled the line of inquiry itself to return continually to the site of injury.⁴⁴ The sanctity of pain remains an absolute condition in which victims as well as vanquishers are bound by suffering and guilt. This drama of social suffering, however, requires reexamination. The appropriate response to victims’ commemoration of suffering is not always predicated on the admission of guilt. Yet, continually invested in the notion of authentic selves and cultures, we seem reluctant to forgo the ideal of recovering a kind of individual freedom before the state of bondage. Despite the often-repeated recognition that individuals enter into social existence under a certain conditional sacrifice and that no “individual” stands outside these given parameters, the recovery of individual freedom as a project of restoration remains a driving impetus behind conceptions of what it means to rehabilitate national or individual autonomy.

We have yet to consider articulations of distinct and coherent national identities based not on sovereignty but on the embrace of “failure.” A conceptual framework appropriate for such a task has to be created. The practice of embracing failure provides an unexpected solution to prevailing anxieties about national and cultural identities. It relieves nationalism of its ideological prominence by examining its interaction with and reliance on other cultural forms of expressing plenitude and survival. To this end, this

study differs from the usual treatment of nationalism, in which “nation” oversees cultural life as its inescapable, dominant referent. Whereas the historical sense of failure is bound with tangible events of deprived sovereignty and national defeats, the concept of failure creates a discursive possibility for considering the value of the struggle for identity outside the commitment to success. Its theoretical implications also challenge the evaluation of the viability of national and cultural survival according to the idea of self-determination. If the recognition of failure, rather than strength, can incite a passionate attachment to the ideas of the Chinese nation or race, then one would have to rethink the extent to which the position of the subjugated actually excludes or compromises the possibility of agency.

One of the ways to approach this problem is to reconsider abjection and victimhood. Abjection and other conditions of psychic pain, such as trauma and melancholy, have contributed to the sanctification of victimhood in current critical discourse. Suffering occupies a narrow scope of interpretation whereby victimization possesses a certain unchallengeable authenticity. More than an analytical category for psychic injuries, abjection has also created an alarming explanatory power for why abject subjects stay as subjects in pain. Often as a project of guilty reflection, the focus on abjection as a state of robbed expression has projected the silent indictment of one’s own culpability. Contrary to this theoretical tendency, a historicization of an abject consciousness in defeat, such as one faced with the overwhelming dominance of westernization in China in the late nineteenth century, reveals a great capacity for psychically renegotiating this condition and reinventing the exercise of agency.⁴⁵

That abjection might have a more promising potential for self-assertion than the absence of any kind of subjugation may disturb our usual sense of preferred social existence. The suggestion that people might of their own volition seek out curtailing circumstances for their social or psychological well-being at least goes against what we would like to believe about the pursuit of individual fulfillment. Yet for countries operating under the imperatives of nationalism and imperialism, defined by defeats and hard-won victories, subjugation generates its own condition of persistence beyond ostensible resistance. The embrace of failure belies not a mentality of submission but a strategy of negotiation. Violence, as Frantz Fanon aptly pointed out, remains the brooding fantasy of the oppressed. No experience of subjugation excludes the “secret defiance” that seeks out some way of avenging itself.⁴⁶

Resistance may be most productive, and certainly persevering, when it is not openly expressed but harbored as an unleashed potential of might. Less

obvious, however, is that rather than rely on covert subversions, the task of reappropriating agency can be accomplished by openly rushing to one's own subjection. In just this way, the incessant preoccupation with failure in the nation-building period in China enabled Chinese intellectuals to interpret China's cultural decay as something they brought upon themselves. At the risk of muting the effects of Western hegemony, they would insist instead that the damage inflicted by domination remains secondary to what the Chinese themselves did not manage to accomplish. In this way, they continued to invest in an identity of themselves, even if disparagingly. The image of a venerable civilization is grasped with even greater tenacity through adaptive rhetoric, despite the pervasive sense of disorientation regarding the viability of China in the twentieth century.

In significant ways, the challenge posed by an understanding of the productivity of failure in the project of culture and nation building in China stands at the crossroads of contemporary Western critical thought. Theories of power and resistance, from peasants in Malaysian villages to contentions over the Western literary canon, often oscillate between wanting to affirm the potential for inventive agency at the margins of legitimacy and returning to challenge the center for recognition from within.⁴⁷ Scholars of nationalism are divided on the intrinsic value of nationalism in view of the power of European Enlightenment discourse it carries. Distinctions between anticolonial, reactionary nationalisms in the non-Western world and Western European nationalisms founder on the issue of origins, as though the focus on different types of nationalisms, such as Eastern and Western, would resolve the ambivalence of nationalism as an ideology as well. Scholars are hesitant to consider the complexity of the motivating passions attached to the nation that are psychologically distinct from patriotism. Psychoanalytical thinking, which seems to offer precisely this much-needed examination of national subjects' interiority, is equally confounded by the resistance of subjects to the fulfillment of their own desires, which turn out to be as much a psychic burden for them to maintain as to disappoint.⁴⁸ The complex and often well-disguised ways in which individuals seek the recognition necessary for their desired identities are also at the core of debates on multicultural politics in the United States.⁴⁹ How subjects are constituted and why that does not always denote subjugation and domination are questions that these discourses are often ill-equipped to answer.

A consideration of failure puts in question the assumed premise of social interaction that subjects are reliable and liable for the recognition they seek. It asks whether an idealized vision of the autonomous subject and social existence, to which such a liability is attached, offers an effective or meaningful way of assessing cultural survival.

Nationalism, carrying its persistent and intensifying appeal into the twenty-first century, provides an obvious locus for such an inquiry. In its extreme expression, love for the nation assumes an unconditional love, a passion that seems to hold explanatory power for fanaticism, violence, self-sacrifice, and martyrdom. People's voluntary sacrifice in the name of nation has been singled out as the strongest testimony to the extreme and dangerous appeal of nationalism. Beyond the simple explanation of extremism and fanaticism, the curious demand that one die for one's nation has also been continually posited as one of the most puzzling aspects of nationalism. Why, indeed, would individuals who identify themselves with the nation as a source of individual fulfillment be willing to forgo their own well-being? One might well wonder what kind of attachment seeks its own destruction and how that is productive of the sentiment of nationalism or collective allegiance.

Given the multitude of conflicts and disagreements that arise with regard to expressions of nationalism, it is surprising how little has been said about that intuited relation we attribute to nation and nationalism. Seldom examined is how nationalism is practiced as though it were simply about something called the "nation." We assume that the passions of nationalism stem from an allegiance to an entity clearly recognized as the nation. However, nationalistic subjects often endorse the sentiment of nationalism without agreeing on a coherent vision of the nation. Separatist movements and ethnic violence are often sparked by disagreements over a single definition of nationhood.

In this way, nationalism no more takes nation as its exclusive object than identification does any particular identity. Inaugurated in the name of self-determination and national sovereignty, desires for nationalism unleash a process rather than embody a goal. Nationalism is not attached to beliefs or ideologies identifiable as those belonging to the nation as such. Categories usually associated with nationalism, such as self-determination, freedom, and sovereignty, are not in themselves capable of eliciting the emotional attachment proper to nationalism. The process of becoming invested in the destiny of the nation predicates itself on the ability to incite and awaken individual passions. In incitement lies the power of nationalism, its susceptibility to individuals' participation. Subjects' perceptions of themselves as participating in this process reify, in a circular way, the sanctity of the nation. The problem does not reside in the question of what is the proper object of nationalistic allegiance, nor does the blame lie with the irrationalities of nationalism as a sentiment. The inconsistencies that plague conceptions and practices of nationalism alert us that nation, as an object of patriotism, is the product of the ambiguities of identification.

Seldom, however, do we think of nationalism as a process of identifica-

tion due to the value we place on nationhood as sovereignty. We seem willing to take the authenticity of nation at its word as much as we unquestionably accept the authenticity of suffering. In just this way, most inquiries into nationalism have attempted to naturalize the conjoining of nation and nationalism, primarily because they equate nationalism with the building of state ideology.⁵⁰ In this view, nationalism trickles down to the populace, who are instigated or indoctrinated into endorsing ideologies of the state in the name of nationalism. Insofar as cultural experiences of nationalism are distinct from state ideology, the latter possesses the coercive power to reshape and even supersede the former. However, nationalism constructs distinct cultural experiences, because it relies on passions that are intimate to individuals rather than to the nation. The empty abstraction “nation” itself elicits no emotional response. The most powerful tropes evoked in nationalistic rhetoric are often those already familiar and reinforced in cultural life. Nation appeals to kinship, to the naturalness of familial attachment. One’s country is, after all, the fatherland or the mother country. The purity of the love for the nation is often declared as a more exalted way of self-fulfillment than romantic love. In times of war, it is one’s own mother, wife, and sister who are pillaged, a favored metaphor for driving home the sense of peril threatening each masculinized citizen.⁵¹

However, all this still explains little, if anything, of the nation itself. Love for the nation is, after all, not the same as love for one’s own family or of oneself, both of which are often sacrificed for the nation. In cases of intense nationalism, usually accompanied by a history of colonialism, allegiance to the nation is measured directly against personal sacrifice. In such cases, love for the nation may draw not from the positive feelings one has for the success of a larger entity called the nation but from a complex psychic relation predicated on failure, the willingness and even the desire to fail.

At the core of nationalism lies a perpetually incitable sense of injury. Nationalism does not rely on just any kind of emotion. Rather than pride, feelings of injury provide the most versatile and undying desire for ambition. The reconstitution of national identity is always pursued with the utmost conviction and energy after suffering successful attacks, such as in the two Sino-Japanese Wars (1894–95, 1937–45) and, in the American context, Pearl Harbor and September 11.

The fundamental paradox of nationalism is its testimony not to greatness but to the need for greatness. Oddly, its persuasion and legitimacy derive from the lack of precisely those elements on the basis of which its ideology can be reified. The identity of the nation must be perceived as having failed in some way in order for nationalism to come to its rescue. The endangerment of nation legitimates the pretext for nationalism. A nation for which

one cannot enjoy an exalted image is the driving displeasure behind the nationalistic impulse.

Through relentless appeals to one's sense of shame, guilt, and hatred, nationalism becomes palpable to individuals through incitement. Nation is indeed not possible epistemologically without its coalescence with something more intimate to the subject's interior topography. Nowhere is the entity nation palpable without its reliance on expressions that cannot be claimed as its own. One loves the nation through something else, or one feels the perils of the nation through the threat to one's own person, the imagery of one's mother and daughter raped in times of conflict with other nations. In this way, assaults on the nation often translate into discourse on the endangerment of one's own body. To partake in national pride requires knowing intimately one's own sense of shame, for love for the nation is always prompted by an inadequacy of that love. When the occasion arises, one must even be willing to bring that destruction upon oneself as an honorable sacrifice to show just how much one does indeed love the nation.

These feelings of self-berating, conscience, and guilt are the points of fixation around which the psychic life of the individual also unfolds. For this reason, what nation invokes is also infinitely displaceable. The transmutation of nation surfaces everywhere and in all forms during times of national crises. Its persuasiveness, however, does not stem from its obviousness but, rather, relies on its metaphorical promiscuity. Whether it is the brand of toothpaste one uses—as it was in China during the height of the anti-American goods boycott in 1905—or the killing of sparrows under Mao's ordinance, the nation's urgency parallels invasions of one's health and belongings. Metaphors of bodily harm to individuals abound in discussions of the nation's importance to its people's survival. The appeal to the fear of disease and deformity elicits a far greater sense of peril than good health. Likened to the health of the individual, the health of the nation claims immediacy. It is not coincidental that successful evocations of degeneration accompany corrective programs of social reform, nation building, and eugenics. As long as the nation never reaches this state of good health, it can continue to exist as an urgency demanding unconditional devotion. The conviction of failure, rather than sovereignty, makes nationalism possible.

As powerfully evocative as the image of impending ruination is, feelings of inadequacy alone cannot sustain nationalism. Dejection without hope does not elicit the proper nationalistic subject. Compensatory love must be voluntary in its sacrifice. Nationalism does not in itself command this allegiance, for the sentiment of loving the nation means to love it *as though* it were something else. In order for nationalism to appear to enjoy this allegiance, subjects would have to willingly embrace, in a moment of identifi-

cation, the imperatives of the nation as their own. Perils of the nation are perceived most poignantly when viewed as an extension of the individual's subjective attachments. The required sentiment of national survival easily finds resonance with the survival of one's own desires. Rather than the nation making the demand, subjects exact this voluntarily from themselves. This constitutive moment of complicity, however, is not always readily visible, as passions for the nation become indistinguishable from one's own conviction in the significance of one's death. In this way, the willingness to desire one's own sacrifice not only desires failure but, significantly, fails desire. Indeed, as we will see, the theme of thwarted love predominates in Chinese literature throughout the nation-building period. To escape the imperatives of both one's sense of selfhood and the nation's directives, the protagonist often chooses to renounce love in favor of patriotism.⁵² Often voluntarily sacrificed for the nation, sexuality also eroticizes nation as a sexual object.

Strangely, love for the nation constitutes an inward experience that has often been singularly mistaken for an external allegiance. The nation shares an intimacy with individuals, and nationalism appears to promise this indissoluble link. Yet how this intimacy is possible and continually renewed presents a question that reinterrogates the individual's allegiance to the nation. The centrality of sexuality in the individual's passionate attachments to the nation contributes to our understanding of identification. Nationalism makes possible the nation.⁵³ Critical attempts to provide this link through sexuality have largely been limited to unveiling nation as a constructed category through cultural myths, fables, and the imaginary.⁵⁴ How its constructedness relies on the continual psychic participation of individuals in the complicated processes of identification remains unexplored.

The question of how nation and nationalism are severed by the intrusive and disjunctive passion of the subject requires a narrative of interiority. Nationalism's continual sway over the individual's needs to express collective allegiance passionately and even violently prompts us to reexamine the enabling psychological constituents. The naturalized tie between nation and nationalism might thus be better understood as the uneasy relation between identity and identification.

Psychoanalysis, in this way, has contributed much to our understanding of how cultural perceptions interact and shape social realities. It posits a sobering view of the constructed condition of social existence and how individuals survive it. The intertwinement of subject and object, interiority and exteriority, posits the problem of self and other in ways that have exerted a deep influence on the discourse of contemporary cultural and literary studies. Its stature in this way, however, has come up against much crit-

icism, especially regarding the assumption that the language of psychic topography applies across different cultural terrains. Nonetheless, the narrative premise of psychoanalysis has something else to tell us about the theoretical tendency to prefer the position of subjects under siege.

The basic notion that subjects are in search of a foreclosed object, the fulfillment of which constitutes their desires, uncovers a tale of frustrated interior life. In many ways, subjects are, on this psychoanalytic premise, doomed from the start because this relation to the object remains both primal and irreplaceable. Hence the adage of “too little, too late” necessarily plagues whatever attempt the subject makes to retrieve the sense of well-being that she or he once felt with the object as part of the world and self-perception. The state of deferred gratification proves both necessary and interminable, creating an insurmountable distance between desire and its fulfillment.

Such a tragic necessity has been useful for critical thinking. Previously, subjects were explicated in terms of desire. Thwarted, unconsolated, and frustrated, they were driven by a desire that could end only in dissatisfaction, reinforcing the futile search for the ultimate fulfillment. Longing and the unending torture of unfulfilled love were taken, in cultural and literary studies, as solemn testimonies to the human condition in terms of class, gender, and nationality. Because desire is constantly at odds with the demands of political and social reality, the torturous negotiations subjects must conduct to eke out a viable social and psychological existence are channeled into narratives of domination, subjugation, and oppression. Resistance against hegemony, be it class, race, or gender, is also cast in these terms of psychological hardship. The burden of maintaining sanity in the face of deprivation, violence, and trauma, especially in contexts of national histories and colonial violence, is considered an unfortunate but inevitable component of social existence. The operating assumption remains that, given the choice, individuals would not opt for subjugation and would pursue instead a life guided by freedom and self-determination.

However, to live up to this ideal that drives cultural and social critiques, considerations of psychic survival are held up against what amounts to an appealing but impossible state of being. For instance, recent attempts to use melancholia to analyze injured identities, racial and sexual, continue to invest in the idea that there are certain representations that curtail individual freedom from its ideal state of exercise.⁵⁵ The one injured is, by definition, a victim of the structures of power and domination. Melancholia, as the condition of grief, deprivation, and trauma, has come to preoccupy reflections on the psychic repercussions from social injury.

Melancholia has become useful for cultural analyses because it provides a topography for tracing shattered identities whose occasion of detriment is

brought on by prescribed norms of race, gender, and class. The detriment is inescapable, as it predicates, to varying degrees, the possibility of having an identity at all. However, although credited with founding this insight, psychoanalysis itself does not always unambiguously corroborate this tale of trauma that has come to structure theories of racial and sexual anxieties. For Freud, if we return to one of the foundational studies of melancholia, the melancholic seems enabled rather than incapacitated by suffering in his or her ambivalent need to demonstrate it with insistence and compulsion.⁵⁶ On the one hand, the melancholic is characterized by withdrawal and disinterestedness in the surrounding world; on the other hand, the melancholic has a need to address and demonstrate his or her symptoms before an adjudicating audience. The melancholic is characterized by an “insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure.”⁵⁷

The insistence and eagerness with which the melancholic tirelessly acts out the conflicted relation with the loved object casts doubt on the degree to which the melancholic is, as she or he professes, bound to the agent of distress. The compulsion to demonstrate incites, rather than submits to, the pain of loss. If melancholia is likened to a wounding, as it has been in psychoanalytical literature, it is, oddly, a wounding that enjoys the labor of repetition, of rewounding itself. Freud himself overlooks this oddity and believes that the melancholic’s rebellion is merely a symptomatic reenactment of the fundamental trauma being suffered, and despite the displayed revolt, the melancholic is ultimately in a “crushed state.”⁵⁸ It is, however, not clear whether the melancholic subject is incapacitated by the haunting specter of the loved object or in fact exorcising the state of paralysis by turning it into his or her own creation through psychic labor. In other words, it is not certain whether the psychoanalytical premise assumes the inevitability of doom or offers the possibility of relief only by way of detriment.

Significantly, internalized along with the object are the various attachments, love or hatred, that the melancholic subject once had with the object. The relation to the object, rather than the object itself, provides the focus of reenactment. The object cannot be loved or hated, memorialized or murdered, without this relational displacement. We are looking not for an object whose restoration would be ultimately satisfying but a reenactment of the subject’s relation to it.⁵⁹ For the melancholic, the point of fixation is not the love once known and lost but the love never really known.⁶⁰ The significance of the lost object cannot be maintained throughout the melancholic morphology of dejection, withdrawal, disinterestedness, public self-reproach, eagerness for communication, militant self-aggression, and anticipated punishment without itself undergoing a process of transpositions. Suggested through these performances of the melancholic labor is, in fact,

another facet of the psychic economy of grief. The penchant for drawing attention to one's suffering takes on a specifically pleasurable dimension.

The economy of melancholia, then, is no longer restricted to mourning but carried over into a kind of triumph in persistent labor. All forms of psychic survival have, after all, a "crushed state" as their originating premise. Yet this price of social existence need not be interpreted solely in terms of that shattering. To survive is to have already begun the disengagement, one should remember, from that moment of psychic trauma. The efforts at reappropriating trauma carry significance in themselves, apart from the "shadow of the object."

In this way, we require some other explanation for the afterlife of an agency that triumphs over loss without exuberance. The insistence of grief points to the proximity of a resilience that is unaccounted for in the focus on melancholia. The vocabulary of psychic grief needs a different language of pain that mediates the excess of pain with the possibility of survival. An unobvious but appropriate choice is the logic of masochism. Distinct from and even antithetical to melancholia's disinterest in pleasure, masochism fetishizes the experience of perverse pleasures in circuitous ways that would seem to be a far cry from the inward grieving over a cherished, loved object. Yet if we consider perversion in its etymological sense of "turning away" from something, be it normalized sexuality or the proper process of mourning, then masochism and melancholia produce two mutually reinforcing orders of psychic survival.

How masochism achieves mastery is helpful in revising the psychoanalytical understanding of how one escapes a psychic allegiance to a loved but overbearing object such as the nation. If we consider nationalism as constituted in injury rather than pride, and if that sense of failure somehow figures as voluntary love, then we can conceive how the painful mode of failure remains productive and consoling for an injured national consciousness. Masochism, in this respect, demonstrates how the psychic labor undertaken in the name of an object becomes reappropriated as self-preserving labor. Identification, articulated in this way under the reign of the object, enables the subject to survive under authority in an inventive way. The masochist escapes authority by adhering most faithfully to its laws and prescriptions to the point of fanatic participation. Pain is pursued with ticklish pleasure. In order not to let any moment of pain go to waste, the masochist meticulously plans the execution of his punishments. The significance of rituals, as once argued by Theodor Reik, belongs to part of the masochist's control over his fanaticism, an intended passionate allegiance that he never completely gives.⁶¹

If melancholia teaches us anything about preserving an object of love such as the nation, masochism shows how dubious this commitment can be. The

embrace of guilt and shame does not admit to the culpability of a crime. It does, however, harbor that culpability as the impetus for atonement. The compensatory remorse, in turn, does not terminate with time or deed. Instead, it proliferates as something that continues to drive one to interminable labor, to life. From this perspective, individual freedom lies in neither the overcoming of defeat nor the restoration of a certain proper identity. Rather, it consists in the intimate knowledge that one has failed and that this failure can and should be compensated through the exercise of one's own labor. Preserving the object in oneself as part of one's identity belongs to a process of identification propelled by unrequited guilt and shame.

A theory of interiority can give us only the contours of the psychic life. Yet placed in the specific context of national and cultural histories, it shows that distinct narratives of survival and failure are not incommensurable as viable, simultaneous narratives of nationalism. From the perspective of nationalism, a consideration of the subjects' interior life offers invaluable insights into how passions informing this attachment are shaped in the cultural imagination. As though anticipating the inevitable challenge to regroup considerations of the psychic life in the history of nationalism and cultural modernity, the introduction of Freudian psychoanalysis in China in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, was met with objections on the grounds of cultural specificity. However, leading Chinese proponents found innovative ways of recasting the theory of psychic life in light of China's particular predicament with nationalism and modernity. Self and nation were two irreconcilable categories often contending for the expressions of desire and recognition. China's unique sense of crisis and euphoria during these formative decades led intellectuals and writers to address psychoanalysis, as a theory of the "modern" self, in terms of both failure and rejuvenation. In this sense, psychoanalytical theories were appropriated as a cultural rhetoric in specifying the desires of selfhood and the imperatives of the Chinese nation. The imperative of nationalism in China gave theories of interiority a distinct cultural inflection.

An examination of the particular historical circumstances does not only demonstrate how we can understand psychoanalysis in the Chinese framework. How Chinese writers inflected the theories of interiority through their personalized literary culture of confessions provides an equally compelling narrative of melancholia and masochism unexplored by psychoanalytical and cultural theories. In a way that opens up the question of psychic injury to the broader scope of cultural modalities for experiencing and articulating suffering, failure can offer us invaluable insights into the formation of passionate attachments to nation and identity.

Fundamental to identity, the maintenance of failure is asserted over and

above a deeply felt sense of inadequacy. For identity to remain a possible category for desire, failure in this way must be preserved. This is true for nations that find new impetus and energy after humiliating defeats, such as China after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. It is also true for psychic identities that thrive on threats to their own disintegration through either rewounding or self-wounding. The notion of failure articulates the underlying economy of nationalism, racial melancholia, and cultural masochism in diverse terrains of political, social, and literary expressions. It shows how the consecrated object to which one professes allegiance—be it the nation, the loved one, or authority—is offered to the threat of destruction in order for that allegiance to be possible. With an appeal as detrimental as it is persuasive, failure inaugurates a moment of promised reconstitution in which China's tale of nation building unfolds in the late 1890s.