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Blood Lineage

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Bloodline, or lineage, has been a political ideology of many monarchical regimes and aristocratic societies throughout history. The rise of nationalism in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries paralleled the discourse of purity and authenticity of one's blood/race. In the context of national formation, blood is a metaphor for race, ethnicity, and sexuality that enacts loyalty, belonging, and national consciousness. Blood lineage can be a malleable narrative explaining Self and Other, a rigid disciplining tool reinforcing hierarchy, or a fluid signifier for social groups seeking belonging and protection.

In imperial China, rulers adopted blood-based ties to clarify the hereditary rights of power and property, and as a tool for social management in order to distinguish between royalty, civilians, and slaves. For example, the imperial Chinese punishment of collective responsibility—*zhulian jiuzu*, literally 'guilt by association of nine of a group/clan'—and the politics of lineage, or blood relation, played an important role in moulding, disciplining, and confining people to the social roles prescribed for them. People were expected to stay in their place in society, and transgression of the boundaries of their socially or politically ordained bloodlines could be met with severe punishment. In Chinese, *shizu* or *zongzu* represents a group tied by blood relationships as a family or a clan, led by lineage heads (*zuzhang*), with its family history and genealogy recorded as *zupu*. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *zu* took on a nationalistic turn when the founding father of the Nationalist Party, Sun Yat-sen, indicated that Chinese people of the Han or Chinese race (*zhongzu*) had 'common blood,' and they should stand together as *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nationality) as they were facing the threat of national extinction under Western imperialism.¹ Following the turn of the century and the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the Republic of China was founded under the famous slogan—'Five Races under One Union' (*wu zu gonghe*)—to unify Han Chinese people and Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and Muslims, the major

non-Han groups of China as perceived by the Nationalists. Following the Communist victory in 1949, the state ethnologists classified 55 non-Han peoples and stressed the importance of a unified nationality comprised of the Han as the majority ethnicity and non-Han as minorities (*shaoshu minzu*) (see also Bulag's essay in the present volume). Official discourse aside, popular memories and heroic narratives centred on blood lineage also thrived. For example, the Han nationalist imagination proposes a linear history of ancient China in which an immutable Han racial identity continually existed by virtue of descent from the mythological Yan and Huang emperors (*yan huang zisun*).

The 1950s: A New Nation-building

After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of mainland China in the 1950s, the discourse of blood lineage temporarily shifted away from national or racial concerns to struggles over class identity, but the notion of heritability remained. Under Mao's guideline of class struggle, each individual was labelled with a class identity by birth or by family relationships. Despite contradicting the socialist goal of eradicating imperial practices, reckoning by blood was effectively institutionalised by those in power through the practice of class struggle (see Russo's essay in the present volume), as it inverted and brought into being new categories of people who would benefit from the revolutionary order, and those who would be its victims.

During the early 1950s, Mao's land reform and class-motivated purge of landlords virtually removed the authority of reproductive ties between powerful lineage groups within rural communities. Throughout China, previous ruling classes saw massive socialist transformations: land was confiscated from landlords and distributed to landless and poor peasants, and private merchants and capitalist industries gradually became state-owned. Blood became a form to assess one's revolutionary subjectivity through family background (*chushen*) or class labels (*jieji chengfen*). The 'good ones' were reproduced and circulated as revolutionary agents within the national body, and the 'bad ones' were identified as reactionary or bad blooded and outcast. A person's class or family background not only haunted his or her own life, but the lives of their spouse, children, and relatives. In Michael Dutton's words, class-related political problems on personal dossiers spread 'like a virus' and were inescapable like a 'blood-borne disease.'² These unfavorable classes were labeled 'Four Black Categories' (*hei si lei*), which included landlords, rich farmers, counterrevolutionaries, and bad-influencers. After the Anti-rightist Campaign in 1957, 'rightist' was also added to the list, making 'Five Black Categories.'

In non-Han peripheral regions such as Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Muslim-populated Xinjiang, local political groupings, religious authorities, and hereditary leaderships were also dismantled during the socialist reform. Following Western intellectual traditions of social evolutionism, Party cadres and ethnologists depicted Inner Asian pastoral aristocratic houses of power as primitive kinship tribal society (in Chinese *buluo*, or *shizu*), but also denounced them as 'capitalist' since the rich herders were accused of accumulating capital in the form of livestock, thereby reproducing oppressive class relations in pastoral production. State power materialised in omnipresent institutions in these native communities, such as the 'pastoral office' and the 'pastoral production cooperative,' with Han administrators promoting the Party's work and policies in non-

Han regions. The discourse of blood lineage operated on the basis of two contradictory and yet compatible claims: that pastoral people were backward and in need of developmental assistance, and that pastoral political economy was advanced enough to create its own capitalist class that could be subject to persecution.

When necessary, the Party-state was tactical and flexible in instrumentalising lineage as a political tool among the pastoralists; at other times, the state obliterated those lineages when they threatened perceived national interests. As the denunciation of local non-Party authorities continued, Party cadres also reflected on their lack of understanding of pastoral social structure, especially the great social power and influence endowed to lineage heads. They realised pastoral lineage heads were crucial targets for cooptation after careful indoctrination. This method effectively assured the mobilisation of powerful local leaders to assist in the dissemination of Party policy, propaganda, and new modes of socialist animal husbandry. For example, in northern Xinjiang, Han ethnologists surveyed the Chinggisid lineage of the Kazakh noble Tore clans in detail and evaluated their productivity, eventually restructuring them into major production brigades as a form of state 'socialist primitive accumulation' (see also Hayward's essay in the present volume).³ On the eve of Mao's Great Leap Forward, inter-ethnic relations became tense as increasing areas of pastoral lands irreversibly became agricultural with a huge influx of Han settlers into traditionally non-Han regions. As the overwhelming scale of socialist transformation in ethnic minority borderlands led to resistance in these regions at the end of the 1950s, the Party simply denounced the resistance as 'local nationalism' (*difang minzu zhuyi*), a 'counterrevolutionary' crime to be purged. The ever-shifting target of blood lineage in pastoral regions exemplifies the fluid nature of blood in twentieth-century Chinese politics.

The Politics of Communist Lineage in the Cultural Revolution

During the Cultural Revolution, the idea of blood lineage (*xuetong*) was revamped and gained a sinister level of national popularity. At the same time, Mao's notion of the class line (*jiejī luxian*) opened a path out of one's background on the basis of one's revolutionary devotedness and political behavior. Those from good family backgrounds, called the 'Five Red Categories' (*hong wu lei*) including poor and lower-middle peasants, workers, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary cadres, and revolutionary martyrs, declared that they were the legitimate successors of the socialist revolution and 'red by birth' (*zi lai hong*). The 'Five Black Categories' were expanded to 'Nine Black Categories' (*hei jiu lei*) with new additions being capitalists, capitalist roaders, traitors, and spies. In 1966, a couplet began to circulate after appearing in the Beijing Aeronautical Engineering Institute. It read: 'A hero's son is a real man; a reactionary's son is a rotten egg' (*laozi yingxiong er haohan, laozi fandong er hundan*).

At first, high officials in the CCP criticised this blood lineage idea and stressed that one's political behaviour or expression (*zhengzhi biaoxian*) was also important. However, in practice, the hierarchical categorisation and political naming prompted discriminatory policies aimed at innocent individuals with bad family backgrounds or class labels. It stamped indelible institutional marks on the countless bodies of the 'Nine Black Categories,' whose children were euphemistically referred to as 'teachable offspring' (*ke jiaoyu hao de zinu*). In fact, they were deprived of any political and social

participation rights. Under this regime, they had to earn leniency or better treatment through good 'political behaviour' such as making a clean break with their reactionary parents and family backgrounds. Some cases resembled the imperial penal style of 'implicating associates' in scrutinising the class labels of up to three generations. The 'teachable offspring' were often excluded from opportunities, such as joining the army or acceptance to schools. They were subjected to unequal pay and reform through labour, and their unbearable humiliation and torture led to numerous unnatural deaths.

Yu Luohe, a young worker from Beijing, made a powerful counterargument to the Red Guards' principle of blood lineage. Having suffered enough from the negative impact of his father's 'rightist' background, in 1967 he published the essay 'On Family Background.'⁴ Quoting Marxist and Maoist theories, Yu pointed out that one's family background should not be equated with political identity and revolutionary consciousness. Moreover, the principle of blood lineage could not justify violence against people without a good family background—in this sense the so-called 'Five Red Categories' were actually the oppressors. Yu's argument shook the foundation of the Party's revolutionary legitimacy by rendering illegible the categories of class struggle. Without a clearly identified set of heroes and villains, the machinery of class struggle would break down. The Party became desperate for a consolidation of self-identity, ideological control, and epistemological certainty. The principle of blood lineage came in handy because it isolated people into different categories and stratifications and screened the political disloyalties of those who could challenge the Party's status quo. As a result, top officials chose not to follow through with their criticism of blood lineage but instead exploited it as a social governing mechanism. Yu's call for equal human rights as intrinsic to socialism eventually touched the sensitive nerves of Party authority. In 1970, he was executed for the crime of 'organising counterrevolutionary groups.'

For non-Han pastoral societies in the Cultural Revolution, the system of class labelling established new hierarchical political categories that replaced previous ones and significantly frayed the fabric of society and family. Mongol landlords who leased land to Han peasants were denounced and disenfranchised in the name of class struggle. In Tibet, class struggle heightened internal divisions and led to tens of thousands killed in struggle sessions and sent to reform through labour. In northern Xinjiang, pastoral nomadic nobility formerly protected their lineages by disallowing their women from marrying men of lower statuses, at least in principle. This was reversed after Party cadres conducted struggle sessions denouncing landlords and aristocrats, and they went as far as forcing marriage across class differences.

Ghosts of Blood Lineage Today

After the Cultural Revolution, the CCP abandoned the principle of blood lineage, but the generation who benefitted from it had already attained high positions in powerful national-level political and economic organs. Many of them have gone on to earn profits for their entire family from corrupt practices and abuses of power capturing the prosperity produced through the privatisation of public goods during the reform era. Numerous cases have been exposed illustrating the ways in which these second-generation elites and bureaucrats enjoy above-the-law lifestyles and hold billions of

dollars in offshore accounts. It has been an unspoken rule in China that the offspring of elite groups inherited their fathers' privilege, as people have given them nicknames such as 'officialings' (*guan er dai*), 'red second generation' (*hong er dai*), or 'princelings' (*tai zi dang*).

The ghost of blood lineage continues to haunt the non-Han regions in the twenty-first century as a new era of state racism dawns. While pseudotraditional symbols of 'Chinese culture' such as the Han costume movement, Confucian rituals, and virtue training schools for women mushroomed in mainland China, Tibet and Xinjiang have been increasingly subjected to state-led exploitative development projects at the expense of native peoples and lands. A temporary pluralism and multiculturalism in the reform era has given way to Han-centred empire-building aiming to root out ethnic, religious, and cultural differences as social deviancy and disease. This is simultaneously shaped by Western discourses fostered by the US 'War on Terror' and global Islamophobia. China's use of this discourse has fostered its own industrial complex of 'terror capitalism'—high-tech Orwellian social control targeted mainly at Turkic Muslim and Tibetan populations.⁵ Up until now, over one million Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other ethnic minorities have been detained indefinitely in 'concentrated reeducation and transformation centres' (*jizhong jiaoyu zhuanhua zhongxin*), without indictment or fair trial. On Chinese social media, they are portrayed as 'terrorists' or 'religious extremists' to justify their detention, and their religion as an ailment in need of a cure. An official was quoted saying: 'You can't uproot all the weeds hidden among the crops in the field one by one—you need to spray chemicals to kill them all. Reeducating these people is like spraying chemicals on the crops. That is why it is a general reeducation, not limited to a few people.'⁶ The CCP initially shifted away from the racial/nationalist discourse of mid-twentieth-century political movements, but it has rekindled those flames by explicitly combining the discourse of blood lineage with ethnicity in places like Xinjiang.

This hypercriminalisation process is unprecedentedly aided by cutting-edge technologies of biodata collection and surveillance networks. Since the end of 2016, a military technology used in national defence was applied in Xinjiang under the name 'Integrated Joint Operation Platform' (*yitihua lianhe zuozhan pingtai*). Its security system instantly gathers data on an individual from multiple sources such as banking, medical, and travel histories to analyse, make predictions, and generate lists of suspects. Human Rights Watch reports that on this system Uyghurs who have been arrested before or deemed 'unsafe' are differentiated and their personal dossiers are tagged in a different colour.⁷ Xinjiang residents also have been required to fill out a 'Population Data Collection Form' and report whether they are Uyghurs, whether they are 'persons of interest' (beyond a scale of one to five, there exists an extra *te*, or special security level), whether they are relatives of a detainee, relatives of someone being subjected to crackdown and punishment, whether they are tagged by the *yitihua* platform, and whether they have contacts abroad and how they are related.⁸ They also must submit detailed information including religious habits, whether they have passports, have travelled abroad, and so on. The Party-state's population control measures have metamorphosed into a highly organised blood lineage classification system with layers of class, political, racial, and geographical inputs. Based on the collected data, officials

then categorise people in terms of reliability into three groups: safe, average, and unsafe. The collected family information enables the authorities to track down and terrorise people even when they are out of China.

While Uyghur and Kazakh masculinity is ostensibly tamed through carceral governance in Xinjiang, women's bodies are turned into the next frontier for the state to deploy its settler politics in sexuality and reproduction. In its initial nation-making process in the early 1950s, in order to solve the gender ratio imbalance, the paramilitary settlers of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps recruited thousands of female students, soldiers, and prostitutes from Hunan and Shandong provinces to populate the settlements. Following Mao's dictate of 'anti-Han chauvinism' and maintaining border stability, inter-ethnic marriage between Han settlers and local Muslims was strictly prohibited. Though the Han population kept rising in the past decades, low rates of Han-minority marriage are seen as an indication of ethnic tension in Xinjiang, while Uyghurs view the avoidance of such interethnic marriages as a type of resistance.⁹ The state turned a hard line in 2014 and started to offer incentives to encourage interethnic marriage.¹⁰ From 2015 onward, propaganda depicting secularised, mass weddings as 'new fashion weddings' to illegitimise Islamic *nikah* ceremonies and other native marriage customs as a form of 'counterterrorism' work has become prevalent.

From the debate on blood lineage and class labelling, to today's detention of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, blood is a powerful symbol used by the Party-state to envision and sometimes cleanse its political and national body. As the CCP no longer needs to mobilise ethnic minorities as a united front (see De Giorgi's essay in the present volume), it has embarked on a mission to establish itself as an ever-expanding Chinese nation focussed on Han interests. From imperial China to revolutionary movements to the war on terror, the discourse of blood lineages remains a flexible political tool for the state. As the marriage of biotechnological surveillance techniques with Mao-era political ideas about blood lineage in Xinjiang suggests, the principle of blood lineage is still an important concept for understanding Chinese politics and society, and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

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