Online Cultural Conservatism and Han Ethnicism in China

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Abstract

This research note analyzes the intellectual and ideological contents of cultural conservative discourses on the internet in the past several years in China. Our findings show that online cultural conservatives valorize Han ethnic culture and Chinese cultural tradition at the same time through conflating the two. They also demonstrate that online cultural conservatives reinterpret historical China in order to represent it in a totally positive light and that they vehemently attack the negative images of historical China found in intellectual, official, and popular cultural discourses. They claim that the real culprit that had prevented historical China from progressing into modernity was a non-Han ethnic group (the Manchus). Our analysis on political thoughts of online cultural conservatives shows that they partially agree with Chinese neo-leftists and liberals on critical assessment of contemporary Chinese reality but they diverge greatly from the two schools on the choice of solution for the problems. Online cultural conservatives' proposal is to reinvigorate traditional Chinese culture and their political vision combines international relations realism, cultural determinism, and Han ethnicism.

Keywords: Chinese cultural conservatism, online forums, Han ethnicism

1. Introduction

This research note analyzes the intellectual and ideological contents of cultural conservative discourses on the internet in the past several years in China. In the 2000s, cultural conservatism gradually became an influential force in the general intellectual sphere. One of its wings is composed of cultural conservative intellectual thoughts written in the forms of scholarly articles and books by academics. Another wing contains the social, popular cultural, and educational practices organized by civil organizations and grassroots citizens. We identify online cultural conservative discourses as an additional wing of the cultural conservative movement in contemporary China. This wing of cultural conservatism is strongly influenced by Han ethnicism. Ethnicism against domestic minorities is an important part in Chinese identity formation and nationalism, but few scholars have paid attention to it (Carlson 2009). James Liebold (2010) is the only work who has explored online Han ethnicism and Chinese natoinalism. This study contributes to filling the research gap by interpreting online Han ethncism in terms of its cultural conservative and political theoretical roots.

We find that the contents of online cultural conservative discourses differ substantially from those found in scholarly cultural conservatism. They are not written by the academic elite and they are not written as scholarly pieces that address a scholarly audience. Additionally, some of these discourses are generated through the collaborative efforts of groups. This study's analysis is organized into three sections. The first deals with how online forum participants' valorize and support various Chinese traditional cultures, the second examines how forum participants reconceive Chinese history, and the third section analyzes how forum participants' political stance and thoughts differ from those of the mainstream.

The data of this study have been collected from major online forums that carry cultural conservative discourses in the late 2000s and relevant discourses on general online forums such as *Tianya*. Our main focus is *Hanminzu wang* (Han ethnic group net), which is the single most important source of online cultural conservatism discourses in China. It is the recognized center of discussion of cultural conservative thoughts and the original platform of the Han ethnic dress movement. Its membership reached 119,000 in 2010, greatly surpassing all other specialized online forums on cultural conservatism (the second largest forum has around 30,000 members only). We have read the majority of entries posted on the forum in the past several years. *Hanminzu wang*

supplies most of the citations of this study. But we have also examine cultural conservative discourses on other specialized online forums on cultural conservatism including *tianhan minzu luntan* (Han ethnic group forum), *Han wang* (Han net), *Hanzu wang* (Han ethnic group net), *ruxue lianhe luntan* (Confucius learning alliance forum), *jixia luntan* (jixia forum), *guoxue fuxing luntan* (national learning revival forum), and others. All these forums provide an online platform for discussions on Chinese traditional culture, national history, ethnicity, and traditional scholarship. The last three forums in the previous list tend to limit themselves to relatively technical and erudite intellectual topics, but the rest contain heated debates on politically sensitive historical, ideological, and ethnic matters. *Hanminzu wang*, *tianhan minzu luntan*, *Han wang*, and *Hanzu wang* are periodically shut down by the state and some of their sensitive contents have to be deleted or self-censored.

2. Valorizing Han Ethnic Culture and Chinese Cultural Tradition

An interesting characteristic of online cultural conservative thoughts is their advocating for a comprehensive revival of traditional Chinese culture. They go well beyond asking for the preservation of tradition or gradual reconstruction of tradition through modern elements. They evaluate the entirety of traditional culture positively. They urge contemporary Chinese to embrace traditional social thoughts, religious beliefs, architecture, dress, language, literature, and art. For example, a forum participant says that "China has her own [cultural, ethnic, and political] orthodoxy […] In defending this orthodoxy, we cannot allow any ambiguity or room for negotiation"(Li, 2003). It is difficult to find online cultural conservative discourses that pointedly criticize any aspect of traditional Chinese culture. The wholesale support of traditional cultural expressed here is markedly different from academic cultural conservative discourses since the 1930s, most of which tend instead to admit that there are weaknesses in traditional culture.

The most socially relevant characteristic of online cultural conservative thoughts is that they equate Han ethnic culture to Chinese culture and the Han ethnic group to the Chinese. This is the ethnicist logic found in a large number of online cultural conservative discourses.

> We are looking forward to Han ethnic group's invigoration and China's gaining of wealth and power! Alas, I feel sorry that our countrymen's sense of belonging to the Han ethnic group is too weak! In order to awake the Han spirit in everyone and to raise ethnic pride, we need to popularize the classical culture of the Han ethnic group (Longfeifengwu, 2009)!

The conflation of China and the Han ethnic group strongly encourages Han ethnocentrism. Although there are a large number of non-Han ethnic minority groups presently living in China, forum participants are either dismissive of these groups or hostile to them. The less populous minority groups are seen in the historical Sino-centric view as weak, conquered, and uncivilized peoples. The larger minority groups— Manchurians and Mongolians in particular — are conceived in the historical lens of blood feud enemies that deserve revenge and suppression by the current Han majority.

The animosity of online cultural conservatists does not solely target non-Han ethnic minority groups, however. Forum participants often criticize the Chinese government's destruction of traditional Han culture and neglect to formulate national cultural strategies.

> The irresponsible abandonment of one's cultural tradition is even worst than cultural plagiarism. […] We shall realize in the future that complacent leaders in the Propaganda Department who celebrate China's "connecting to the global" and the intellectual scums who unfaltering advocate "discarding China and adopting the West" types of thoughts are actually the destroyers of our ethnic culture. […] Without an indigenous culture, how does an ethnic group cohere, develop, and prosper? (Yulun, 2007).

Forum participants think that policies of the Chinese state focus one-sidedly on the economy and GDP figures. Until very recently, cultural policing has been relegated to a very secondary place in both local and central official agendas, and traditional cultural revival seldom receives government institutional support and funding. It was carried out mostly by self-organized civil groups and grassroots individuals. These civil groups have in many occasions sought official recognition or endorsement of different programs of Han ethnic cultural revival. But the central state refused in the majority of cases. The state and the mainstream public will not easily be moved to devote attention and resources to Han ethnic cultural revival. A typical complaint among forum participants is that because Western style living is China's reality, the revival of Han ethnic culture can only be carried out on the personal level by individuals.

Aside from criticizing the Chinese state, forum participants fault the mainstream general public for choosing to embrace modern Western culture and abandon Han ethnic cultural tradition. As a result of the cultural

preferences of the contemporary Chinese public, contemporary China has become "a mere vassal of the world system constructed by the West" (Hongtian, 2009). Forum participants adduce examples of Chinese cultural achievements, compare them with medieval Europe and the contemporary West, and argue for the superiority of Chinese tradition. Some forum participants admit that modern and contemporary Western cultures contain positive elements, but they also argue that such elements are not absent in Chinese tradition. Confronted with the question of why modern China has failed to compete with the West in economic, military, political, and scientific terms, they argue that the cause of failure is not to be found in Chinese tradition itself but the Manchu invasion of China and the Manchu-contaminated culture of the Qing dynasty. They based this argument on the fact that Chinese military, economic, and cultural power did not compare unfavorably with the West until the late 18th century.

Forum participants worry about the Chinese public's embrace of non-Chinese Asian cultures in addition to its veneration of Western culture. Japanese and South Korean popular cultures have attracted a large number of youthful fans in China. From a historical Sino-centric point of view, the fact that Chinese youths should admire Japanese and Korean culture is very insulting because Korean was culturally colonized by China for hundreds of years and Japan has always been at the cultural margin of the China influenced sphere. Interestingly, online cultural conservatives are not entirely dismissive of Japanese and Korean cultures. They also see the two countries as evidences that illustrate the significance of reinvigorating traditional culture in China. They interpret the current success of Japan and Korea in terms of the determination of two country's states and publics since historical times to embrace Chinese tradition and preserve their own ethnic cultural tradition. These two countries serve as examples that contrast against the cultural follies of the contemporary Chinese state and public. A number of forum participants explicitly urge the Chinese state and public to 'treat Japan as our teacher' even though they are otherwise anti-Japan.

The impact of forum discussions of Han ethnic culture and Chinese tradition do not stop at the level of intellectual discourse. The *Han wang* forum has successfully nurtured and developed a social movement that promotes a particular element of Han ethnic culture to the urban public in a high profile way: the hanfu (Han ethnic dress). The definition of hanfu is contested, but it basically include the dress and accessories adopted by the Han ethnic group from the Han dynasty to the Ming dynasty. Online cultural conservatives often lament that too few elements of Han ethnic culture except the language are being revived in the daily lives of contemporary Chinese. Promotion of the hanfu as a dress that is viable for contemporary occasions represent an effort to revive an additional element of traditional culture. Cultural conservative internet forums and their virtual communities became the main base upon which the hanfu movement grew. Emotional and intellectual exchanges among hanfu lovers and wearers are conducted in the forums. The organizing of hanfu events is coordinated online. Debates on particular pieces and issues of the hanfu are carried out in the forums. Broader debates on the hanfu's contemporary meanings and viability are initiated by hanfu supporters in the largest online forums of China including *Tianya*.

3. Re-evaluating Chinese History

The popular image of historical China is ambivalent in contemporary Chinese discourses and the minds of the Chinese public. One the one hand, historical China is recognized as one of the world's greatest civilizations and it is something in which contemporary Chinese generally take pride. On the other hand, at least until recently, images of historical China in China have been generated mainly through iconoclastic lenses of the Mayfourth generation and orthodox Marxism. Common negative images associated with historical China include feudalism, social backwardness and anti-democratism, collectivism and the suppression of individual freedom, and technical backwardness and the suppression of science.

Forum participants construct arguments against these negative images — especially those inspired by Mayfourthers and Marxists — and reinterpret historical China in a primarily positive light. They do not particularly rely on the conventional praise of historical China as one of the greatest ancient civilization of the world. For example, they do not emphasize spectacular buildings or ancient artifacts that date from thousands of years ago. Instead they tend to emphasize that historical China was progressive and advanced. They draw our attention to the political system, bureaucracy, technology, and examination system and compare them to Western counterparts in the same historical periods. They point to China's numerous successful military conquests over non-Han peoples. One of the most common and currently relevant negative images of historical China is that the China polity was authoritarian. In order to counter this image, forum participants scramble to search for politically progressive elements in historical Chinese society. A favorite example of theirs is the growth of the urban citizen class in the Song dynasty.

> The Song dynasty is often described as a decadent, weak period in history textbooks in contemporary China. Historians are also embarrassed to write about the dynasty's lack of military accomplishments. […] But I am doubtful of such interpretations. […] One may instead say that Song dynasty is the Chinese historical period that came closest to developing capitalism. The spectacular economic developments in Song could not have been achieved without a good political and cultural superstructure (Guo, 2008).

At the same time that academic historians in China are thinking about the 'Joseph Levenson' conundrum and discussing how the Chinese economy in the Ming dynasty declined in global importance, online cultural conservatives argue that Ming China was the most powerful nation on Earth at that time and trace how Ming social systems affected the West. A forum participant points to the 'sprouts of capitalism' and progressive social transformations in the Ming dynasty.

> [The social situation of the Ming dynasty] was similar to that at the eve of the English Revolution. A large mass of vagabonds emerged. The concept of hiring labor to work for money was established. Individuals and civil society became more self-consciousness of their significance. Proactive demands and desires for social reform increased. […] With the awareness of personal rights, regular folks no longer tolerated abuses by elites. […] In the latter half of the Ming dynasty, rights became more institutionalized and class conflicts became more pronounced. People sought to construct a just and uncorrupted social order. That moment was the crossroad between the new and the old; the critical juncture that impregnated the early modern Chinese idea of the social contract (Xianyangshi, 2007)

If Ming social developments were so desirable, why did early modern China (18th and 19th centuries) still failed to generate democratic political structures, industrialization, capitalism, and enlightenment. The explanation offered by online cultural conservatives is Manchu rule. They argue that after the Manchus successfully invaded China and established the Qing dynasty, many of the progressive social transformations have been forcefully set back or reversed. The Qing was regarded by forum participants as the darkest and most conservative period in historical China. The blame for historical China's backwardness is thus shifted to a non-Han ethnic group. Criticisms of the Han ethnic group are limited to minor issues such as the lack of collective spirit, ethnic internal strife, and dovishness in dealing with non-Han tribes.

Because online cultural conservatives hope to promulgate a more positive image of historical China, they spend as much effort debunking existing negative images of historical China as re-evaluating Medieval Chinese history. Forum participants lament that the image of historical China has been systematically distorted by the government, academia, and mass media. In the thread 'A sure way to destroy a nation is to destroy its history: history of the Han ethnic group in dire straits,' a forum participant expresses a typical line of critique made by online cultural conservatives.

> History is a solemn and grave matter for a nation, especially for a nation that has a long history and prioritizes historical writing. […] Unfortunately, history has already lost its noble status in our times. It is being randomly and willfully distorted. Distortion of history has reached an intolerable degree in the present. This disrespect for history is extremely dangerous (Tiexuehanhun, 2008).

They point to four sources of this distortion. The first can be dated back to the Qing dynasty, during which the state strategically censored certain historical views and rewrote certain histories in order to suppress Han ethnicism. The second is derived from iconoclasm of the Mayfourth. The third is associated with dogmatic Marxist and communist interpretations of Chinese history that can be found beginning from the Mayfourth and to the present. The fourth is the intentional and unintentional mis-representation, Orientalization, and trivialization of historical China in commercialized mass media products in the post-reform period.

Forum participants attacked academics, the mass media, and officials for distorting truths pertaining to historical China. They criticized academics for holding erroneous intellectual beliefs, officials for adhering to dogmatic ideology, and the mass media for selling out to commercial interests (Yilinxiaowei, 2008). An example of mass media products being criticized is what online cultural conservatives call 'Qing Dynasty Court dramas' (*qinggongxi*), a sub-genre of television drama that gained popularity since the 1990s. A detailed critique of Central China TV's Qing dramas have reach a hit rate of 6.5 million in the *hanminzu wang*, demonstrating that an enormous number of netizens were interested in debating on the issue. Another type of critique finds fault with the whitewashing of the crimes of the Manchus and unsympathetic understandings of the Han ethnic group. An example is a thread that attacks contemporary Chinese textbooks for misrepresenting the Manchurian

invasion of China. It is posted on the sub-section on 'Rectifying Historical Perspectives' in the *hanminzu wang* forum.

> Errors in current Chinese history textbooks begin from historical accounts of the Manchu invasion. These textbooks conceptualize the invasion as a civil war. This conceptualization fundamentally misrepresents some of the central characteristics of Qing society. Because the Manchus were initially in head-to-head conflict with the Han ethnic group in terms of culture, language, and ethnic interests, objective observers must recognize that the Manchurian invasion is a foreign invasion and that the Qing state is a colonial state (zhihuishi, 2007).

4. Demarcating the Distinctive Political Stance of Online Cultural Conservatives

In the relatively ideologically tolerant context of the post-reform period, non-orthodox Marxist schools of political thoughts gradually gain public circulation in China. There are two schools that have exerted lasting influence on intellectual and public discourses: liberalism and neo-Marxism/neo-leftism. These two schools became established in the 1980s. In the 2000s, cultural conservatism emerged and it has to some extent established itself as the third influential non-orthodox Marxist camp of political thought in China (Xu, 2006: 112). This section analyzes the political thought of online cultural conservatism by means of contrasting it against Chinese liberalist and neo-Marxist political thoughts. We will show that online cultural conservatism concurs with Chinese liberalism and neo-leftists on some aspect and yet deviate greatly from them in others.

Because online cultural conservatives view historical China in a completely positive light, they tend not to reject the authoritarian and centralized political structure adopted for thousands of years in Imperial China. Online cultural conservatives' hope to restore imperial political arrangements fundamentally conflicts with Chinese liberals' proposal for a Western styled democratic system for future China. Nonetheless, a number of forum participants think a restoration of historical Chinese political structure does not necessarily imply a future authoritarian Chinese government. They conceptualize the conflict between liberalism and cultural conservatism in terms of different styles of democracy instead of the degree of popular political representation. They envision a Chinese styled democratic polity that is not modeled after modern Western ones.

> I am not against the concept of the 'universal' [values] as such. But we Chinese have what we consider universal. Why adopt foreign conceptions of what is universal? Similar to the 1960s and 1970s in Taiwan, mainland China needs to comprehensively reinvigorate Chinese culture. Collective ethnic values can be established in this way. The dreams wished for in modern Chinese slogans such as Westernization, Reform, Constitutionalism, Mr. Science, and Mr. Democracy can then be fulfilled in a single stroke. At that point, the problem of the 'universal' automatically dissolves (Guo, 2008).

Another argument constructed by forum participants is that democracy is ultimately built on the basis of value consensus, a common culture, and a collective ethnic spirit. Hence, democracy cannot be realized in the present cultural vacuum in China; it can only succeed when traditional ethnic culture gains broad public recognition and becomes the value system of the nation. They also argue that existing democratic politic systems have taken their current shape a result of the particular values and ethnic cultures of Western nations. China does not need to copy all of these Western details —voting and representative systems for instance — before it can install democracy. Their ideal is to have China invent and adopt a democratic political system on the basis of Han ethnic culture, value, and historical institutions. This political vision does not entirely dismiss liberalism and yet it deviate considerably from Chinese liberals emphasis on adopting modern Western political institutions.

Online cultural conservatives are generally critical of the Communist state for its long standing and sometimes violent suppression of historical Chinese culture. Online cultural conservatives are also generally skeptical of all theoretical camps of Marxism for their Western origins and claims to universal validity. Apart from these two important points of conflict, however, the political thought of online cultural conservatives do not fundamentally reject Chinese Neo-leftists' political insights on contemporary China. Chinese Neo-leftists problematize the socio-economic inequalities, cultural nihilism, and political corruption brought about by the advancement of market capitalism in contemporary China. They advocate the regulation of market capitalist forces and in particular global capitalist power by a truly socialist Chinese state. Online cultural conservatives do not disagree with this Chinese Neo-leftist political vision. Forum participants criticize socio-economic injustices in contemporary China as often and as angrily as Neo-leftists do. The difference is that online cultural conservatives would not accept a state guided by socialist principles to be the solution. They instead rely on an authoritative state constructed on the basis of historical Chinese political institutional formats and a cohesive society of citizens glued together by a collective spirit of the Han ethnic group. For example, many forum

participants complain that a major problem in China is the lack of value consensus (Zhiguansiwei, 2008). If there was a consensus, forum participants think it would be much easier to deal with unregulated market capitalist exploitation of the masses, local political corruption, and global neo-colonization of China through economic means. Similar to Neo-leftists, online cultural conservatives mistrust laissez faire markets and the capitalist class. But their theoretical basis for the mistrust is not exactly socialism, but the marginalization of the merchant class in Confucian political thoughts and historical Chinese social institutions.

An element in the political thought of online cultural conservatives that separate itself markedly from existing schools of political thought in China is its realist (in the international relations sense) rendition of Han ethnicism. A favorite citation by forum participants is the Chinese adage 'the heart of someone who does not belong to my ethnic group must be different, weird, and dangerous' (*feiwo zulei, qixin biyi*). They see domestic and international ethnic relations in terms of a permanent battlefield in which each ethnic group tries to maximize economic and military influence at the expense of others. The actions of ethnic groups are not based on concerns of peace or justice but self-interest.

Domestically, online cultural conservatives' realist ethnic view conflicts with the Chinese state's goal of maintaining harmonious inter-racial relationships. They harshly criticize Chinese ethnic policies for advantaging non-Han ethnic minorities and disadvantaging the Han. For example, they think of the one-child policy as an insidious device to suppress the growth of the Han ethnic group. Internationally, online cultural conservatives' realist ethnic view leads to a militarist, belligerent stance that also clashes against the 'peaceful great power' image cultivated by the state. For example, many forum participants hope China can use military power to settle current territorial disputes and others suggest to revive the historical Chinese cultural value of 'aspiring to the martial arts' (*shangwu*) (Tangyan, 2009). They view with skepticism any kind of humanitarian intervention and coordinated international campaigns.

Cultural determinism is another distinctive characteristic of the political thought of online cultural conservatives. When Chinese Neo-leftists think about how to use the state to regulate market capitalism and when Chinese liberals focus on anti-authoritarian political reform, online cultural conservatives seek to construct a society of 'great harmony' (*datong*) by profusely borrowing from Han ethnic cultural resources. The kind of harmony they conceptualize is primarily a nation-wide consensus and self-identity constructed on the basis of common acceptance of Han ethnic culture. Secondarily, harmony refers to a balance between historical Chinese cultural values and modern Western technological and economic institutions. This partial acceptance of Western culture is not dissimilar to the slogan of 'Chinese core and Western means' (*zhongti xiyong*) proposed in the late 19th century. In order to achieve these two forms of harmony, forum participants propose to initiate a Chinese cultural renaissance (Guo, 2008). For example, they often refer to traditional Chinese social political ideas including 'intellectual orthodoxy' (*daotong*) and 'rule by ethics' (*dezhi*). They argue that many of the current social problems can be solved by reviving such institutions and beliefs. Specific reforms of economic, political, and technological institutions are needed but they are only the instrumental part of society. They recognize cultural values as the base upon which instrumental institutions function.

> Democratic political systems are a means. It is an 'instrumental value.' It can also be recognized as a universal value from this perspective. But it is not the most profound or important value. […] Political legitimacy is not constructed upon particular democratic institutions in the physical realm, but value consensus in the cultural realm (Zeng, 2007).

Online cultural conservatives generally see institutional reform as an instrumental means and the real core of the solution in terms of ethnic cultural reinvigoration. That is why the lion's share of discussion found on *hanminzu wang* forums deal with culture and history. The majority of threads in Chinese online forums, regardless of whether they are dominated by liberals, Marxists, or pro-government discourses, focus on current affairs, policies, social problems, the environment, and contemporary social issues. A much smaller portion of threads in these forums deals with issues of culture and history. This contrast puts into relief online cultural conservatives' belief that concrete social issues can ultimately be solved through battling current mistaken negative images of historical China and promoting traditional Chinese culture. Some of the forum participants of *hanminzu wang* have gone farther than others in elucidating how traditional Chinese culture can contribute to solving concrete social problems. These forum participants are receiving a lot of attention and applause among online cultural conservatives. For example, a participant proposes to treat the historical Chinese political theoretical concept of *minben* 'people-orientedness' as a founding stone of the Chinese nation. His thread, in which he elaborates the *minben* idea and outlines how it applies to contemporary Chinese conditions, has reached a 50 million hit rate (Dahanzhifeng, 2009).

5. Conclusion

The previous analysis demonstrates that online cultural conservatives valorize Han ethnic culture and Chinese cultural tradition at the same time. Their valorization efforts are primarily invested on online discourses. But they have also organized real-world movements, the most successful among them being the hanfu movement. The previous analysis also shows that online cultural conservatives reinterpret historical China in order to represent it in a totally positive light and they vehemently attack the negative images of historical China found in intellectual, official, and mass media discourses. They claim that the real culprit that had prevented historical China from progressing into modernity was a non-Han ethnic group (the Manchus). Our analysis of the political thoughts of online cultural conservatives shows that they partially agree with Chinese Neo-leftists and liberals on critical assessment of contemporary Chinese reality but they diverge from the two schools on the choice of solutions. Online cultural conservatives' proposal is to reinvigorate traditional Chinese culture and their political vision borrows from and Han ethnicism, cultural determinism, and realism.

The three major aspects of online cultural conservative discourses that this study identified distinguish them from Chinese academic discourses on cultural conservatism. The negative part is that the majority of online cultural conservative discourses are not serious scholarly research. But they also compare favorably with scholarly cultural conservatism in certain aspects. They deal with a broader variety of issues with which the public is concerned. They also dare to face a broader variety of issues because anonymity on the internet affords them such freedom. They can harshly criticize the state. The state censor certain threads and occasionally close down the cultural conservative online forums. But online cultural conservatives have returned and continued to clash with the official line on all kinds of sensitive topics. Cultural conservatism in many countries colludes with political conservatism. But is online cultural conservatism in China a politically conservative movement or not? Given its fundamental conflictual relationship with the state, it can neither be easily branded as a politically conservative movement. Yet given its explicit support for Han ethnicism, it is not a progressive social movement.

The major irreconcilable conflict between online cultural conservatives and the state is that whereas the state pursues a partly assimilationist and partly multicultural policy of non-Han minorities within Chinese national borders, online cultural conservatives propose a militarist, Han ethnocentric one. Online cultural conservatism may therefore affect ethnic relations in China in the future, perhaps in a dangerous way. Future research on the topic is hence urgently needed. For example, how has online cultural conservatism in contemporary China teamed up with a militarist version of Han ethnicism? Cultural conservatism can develop in many different directions and ethnicism is not a necessary result. Is the cause mainly intellectual (eg. Han ethnic teachings found in Chinese historical texts and literature) or social political (eg. an oblique way to express dissatisfaction with the social reality in contemporary China)?

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