

CHAPTER ONE

OF ALTER/NATIVES, MARGINS, AND POST/MODERNITY AT THE RIM

This stretch of the Gechuanjiang harbored at least a hundred-plus fishermen. Just their Xiaozai Village alone had over seventy households. Most moored all year long on the west bank, going downstream to fish every morning and evening, selling the catch to the villagers in Xixi nearby. During the day, they mended fishing nets and fixed roll-hooks. That life was real comfortable—plenty of fish in the water, wine in the flask, and a young wife with big breasts and big buttocks on the boat bedding; even her loud curses felt sweet to him. That's called life!

—Li Hangyu, “The Last Fisherman”

Spring finally returns to Badouzi. Like a mother who is full of life, spring enables infinite vitality and vivacity to reappear on the earth, nurturing innumerable tiny lives to leap, jump and cheer under the sun, in the wind. People busy themselves in a joyful, brisk rhythm on the beach, preparing to welcome the coming fishing season.

—Wang Tuo, “Jinshuishen”

My father's life of ever-chewable richness, from Xiaoxingan Range to Daxingan Range, left much that impassions me, warms me, yet also deeply torments me. I started my life tracing his footsteps to walk out of that splendidly solemn and mighty forest. Looking back from afar at that forest as I come near to completing half of my journey, it is still very close but I have also walked far enough away.

—Zheng Wanlong, *The Totem of Life*

The warmth and bonds of childhood, the landscapes, livelihood, and familiar faces of a rustic hometown, the nurturance and earthiness of roots—these common impressions and images of the native enthrall with their apparent simplicity and authenticity. The organic representations project a sense of native identity that is natural, abiding, and self-referential. Standard definitions of the term in English dictionaries reflect and reinforce such an identity: native, as a noun, signifies “a person born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary); as an adjective, its litany of meaning centers on a radical assertion of “in”—“instinct, inborn, inherent, innate, con-nate, built in, intrinsic, instinctive, intuitive, natural, natural-born, congenital, hereditary, inherited, in the blood, in the family, inbred, ingrained” (The Oxford American Thesaurus of Current English). On the surface, then, the self-referentiality of a native identity seems unremarkable and incontrovertible. Yet, beneath its reference to an apparently self-evident and determinable origin, the signifi-catory significance of the idea of native ultimately lies in the recognition of difference and predicates an implicit opposition: without something “foreign” to pit against, native identification makes no sense. That is, regardless of the visceral intimacy and emotional immediacy with which a particular embodiment of the native may be experienced, the discursive and social practice of demarcating and maintaining a native realm itself is a deliberative act of differentiation and an exercise of power in social relations. Thus an invocation of the native is neither natural nor innocent, however common or commonplace. It is always already an engagement with others, a struggle of naming and meaning over boundaries that mark off literal, symbolic, and cultural territories, as the refrain of “in” in the list of synonyms for the adjectival use of native above makes evident. Precisely because of this constitutive engagement, while distinctions like native-versus-foreign, inborn-versus-grafted, and indigenous-versus-imported are as old as human history, their specific contours and substantive meanings may vary significantly in history, depending partly on the global, national, and local power structures in which they are embedded and partly on the visions of alternatives they embody.

Yet, such engagement with others, mobilization of difference, and imagination of alternatives in the configuration of particular native identities are often overlooked in critical analysis, which predominately associates native identification with conservative nostalgia. Ironically, this is especially the case with current scholarships informed by poststructuralist questioning of origins. What results is a tendency to short-shift historical and contextual specificities and differences in constructions of the native, reducing nativism to a generic form of conservative identity politics akin to collective navel-gazing. Against such a priori dismissal of possibilities of progressive cultural politics in nativism, I argue here the importance of contextualizing nativist discourses not only in their sociohistorical particularities but also in relation to cultural con-

testations and social struggles of the time. With reference to *xiangtu* nativism in Taiwan in the 1970s and *xungen* nativism in the PRC in the 1980s, I explore contemporary nativist discourses in terms of critical intervention in the construction and debate of modernity, which has become an urgent universal concern ever since the West colonized and made the world in its image. Specifically, I examine how their different representations of the native articulate a discourse of identity in/and modernity that interrogates dominant conceptions received from the West, and whether/how nativism constitutes an oppositional discourse that proffers alternative visions of modernity.

For better or worse, modernity has been the sign under which Euro-America constructs, maintains, and legitimizes its global dominance in the past few centuries, radically altering social structures, cultural imaginations, and geopolitical positioning for all coming into its pathway. China was no exception. Displaced from its long-standing self-anointed position of the “Central Kingdom” by this Euro-American discursive construct, China found itself caught in a “storm of progress,” to borrow Walter Benjamin’s evocative phrase. With modernity bearing down on them in the form of Western canons, gunboats, traders, and missionaries, Chinese intellectuals, sharing the fate of countless all over the dominated world, had to confront the dilemma of incorporating or resisting a system of knowledge and a way of seeing that presume to subjugate them and conquer the world. If hybridity emerged as the predominant figure of countermodernity in Latin America and has lately become the privileged sign of inclusive decenteredness in postmodernity and globalization, the Chinese struck a different tone. Arguably because of pride and confidence nurtured by the long history of Chinese dominance in East Asia, Chinese intellectuals kept turning to the native for utopian projections and discursive articulation of alternatives, even in the face of great display of Western power.¹ Indeed, nativism, or the deliberate advancement of a discursive movement advocating a (re)turn to the native, has shadowed Westernization throughout modern Chinese history, emerging in times of intense efforts to “modernize” through importation of Western knowledge, culture, technology, and industry. Within the literary field, nativism has seen different elaborations throughout the twentieth century since Lu Xun made it a vital part of modern Chinese literature in the 1920s. From the critical realism of Lu Xun’s “homecoming” stories to the romantic nostalgia of Shen Congwen’s *xiangxi* stories, the conservative localism of Zhou Zuoren’s “Beijing School” (*jingpai*), and the “national resistance” literature against Japanese occupation in Manchuria, nativism has spanned a wide cultural political spectrum to renegotiate the place of local cultural identification and affiliation in a world of foreign incursion and Western domination. The two nativist discourses discussed in this book are but recent manifestations of a persistent dialectic in Chinese modernity under specific historical conditions.

The entanglement of nativism with Westernization efforts underscores the relational nature of nativist constructs. In contrast to hybridity's destabilization of polar opposites, nativism foregrounds a binary structure of opposition. As such, it raises some fundamental issues of resistance and contestation in the (post)colonial world: In the aftermath of imperialism and colonization, (how) is it possible to claim a realm of knowledge and value outside and independent of the value-coding system and epistemological dominance that is (Western) modernity? If not, what constitutes a viable ground for native (oppositional) claims, and how does it relate to hegemonic modernity? How and to what extent can alternative visions of modernity be articulated in the name of a separate "native" tradition? (How) does the politics of native identification limit oppositional possibilities and articulation of alternatives? These questions have particular resonance in the period under discussion, when postmodernity erupted in the discursive horizon of Euro-America, subjecting the grand narratives of universal modernity to intense interrogation and deconstruction, while East Asia became a celebrated "model" of modernization for its putative success in integrating capitalist development and participation in the new international division of industrial labor with a selective continuation of traditional culture and assertion of "national" difference. In this historical conjuncture of a multinational turn in capitalist practices and a reevaluation of identity and difference in discourses of (post)modernity in the West, the nativist discourses of *xiangtu wenxue* and *xungen wenxue* emerged to articulate alternatives that depart from, if not directly contest, dominant constructions of modernity proffered by the Euro-American center and their respective developmentalist state, Taiwan and the PRC. The specific oppositional articulations of these two nativist discourses and their efficacy in proffering alternatives will be discussed in later chapters with particular reference to their national and local contexts. Here, I will first situate the discourses in a global, relational context and explore its historical specificity in terms of the development of what Bruce Cumings calls "Rimspak" to include East Asia in a new discourse of postmodern global capitalism. I will then explore the oppositional possibilities that nativism may encode in such a historical and discursive context, as well as the theoretical contours of a critical framework for assessing these oppositional possibilities.

MODERNITY IN THE MARGINS, NATIVISM, AND EAST ASIAN PARTICULARITIES

In its relational dimensions, modernity is a diffusionist project, assigned to interpellate others from a center. . . . Modernity [i]s an *identity discourse*, Europe's (or the white world's) identity discourse as it assumed global dominance.

—Mary Louise Pratt

What gets called modernity in China is neither a purely localized matter nor a mere instantiation of a universal discourse. It exists instead . . . as a repeatedly deferred enactment marked by discrepant desires that continually replace one another in an effort to achieve material and moral parity with the West. These deferrals reflect cross-cultural translations that Chinese elites and government leaders undertake as “China” continues to represent, for universalizing projects—and theories—of modernity, the formative “outside.”

—Lisa Rofel

The project of modernity is itself rendered so contradictory and unresolved through the insertion of the “time-lag” in which colonial and postcolonial moments emerge as sign and history, that I am skeptical of those transitions to postmodernity in Western academic writings which theorize the experience of this “new historicity” through the appropriation of a “Third World” metaphor.

—Homi Bhabha

With the postcolonial coming to voice of the marginalized in modernity, the Eurocentrism of hegemonic modernity discourse is increasingly unmasked. Ironically, the recognition of modernity and its later variant of postmodernity as an undeniably Western construction and temporal-spatial delineation of the world serves to underscore its very real effects on discursive significations of and in the rest of the world. As Mary Louise Pratt argues in her illuminative survey, modernity is fundamentally an ideological configuration of power relations placing white Euro-America at the center, with diffusion and interpellation of others as its most central features.² This means not only that the center-margins structure is inherent to modernity, but also that modernity is by definition different in the margins,³ entailing what Homi Bhabha calls a time-lag of cultural difference that is productive of the very understandings of modernity.⁴ Whether characterized as discrepant, dissonant, deferred, belated, pseudo, or contra, modernity in the margins serves to establish and affirm the normativity of the center and its “identity discourse” of modernity.⁵

Unfourtuitously, then, identity looms large as a central issue of modernity in the margins. As prescribed others against which modernity constitutes the center, non-Euro-American societies experience a perpetual identity crisis in their encounter and engagement with modernity. “Progress,” that privileged state in the center’s identity discourse, is translated there into an imperative of “catching up” or reproducing what has already been achieved elsewhere that destabilizes all available grounds of identity formation. This imperative further reinforces the condition of “imposed receptivity” characteristic of modernity in the margins, under which the supposedly backward margin finds itself

compelled to reckon with developments in the center, however incongruous and outlandish they may seem. Thus fragmentation, decenteredness, and coexistence of incommensurate realities become part and parcel of modernity in the margins. Any discursive attempt to make sense of modernity in the margins, then, necessarily involves some forms of double consciousness, as Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking discussion of "the black Atlantic" as a counter-culture of modernity makes clear.

Insofar as nativism engages the question of modernity in the margins, it, too, partakes in double consciousness, despite its claims to the contrary in referencing the native. By virtue of its situation in the margins, it cannot but be, at best, a creative engagement with imposed receptivity, undertaking what Gayatri Spivak calls the catachrestic project of "seizing the apparatus of value-coding."⁶ In this sense, nativism after the epistemic violence of Western imperialism in the name of modernity is already a hybrid discourse, embodying within its discursive structure, in opposition, differentiation, and/or complementarity, assumptions, values, and ways of seeing developed from the experiences and perspectives of the Euro-American center and disseminated through modernity. Still, nativism's open contestation of the dominant Western discourse of modernity marks a conscious departure from contemporary affirmation of hybridity, especially the saccharine strand that celebrates seamless mixing and fusion. Its assertion of an alternative ground of identification rather than an outright embrace of hybridity makes it a distinctive form of oppositional discourse that demands serious consideration of its own terms and the critical possibilities it encodes.

Situating nativism thus in the context of modernity in the margins highlights its critical intervention and historical contingency while drawing attention to its relational nature and contextual specificity. In this light, the advancement of nativism in response to the imposed receptivity of modernity is a contingent praxis that cannot be understood without reference to the particular historical relations of the specific margin to the Euro-American center. In the cases of Taiwan and China, the privileging of the native rather than hybridity as a ground for alternative discourses of modernity is arguably overdetermined by the unique success of East Asia in countering Euro-American domination in the name of modernity.

In her discussion of alternative modernities in China, Lisa Rofel argues that China occupies a distinctive position of otherness to modernity at the center by being "the constitutive 'outside' of western civilization . . . shap[ing] modernity by representing to Europe everything modernity is not."⁷ A key component and signifier of this constitutive outside is of course the long, supposedly monolithic heritage of "Confucian culture," against which Max Weber, in one of the most influential studies of the role of culture in capitalist development, opposes the Protestant or Puritan ethic he considers key to

the emergence of capitalism.⁸ Yet, important as this constitution of the cultural outside has been, not least in reinforcing the tendency among Chinese intellectuals to focus the struggle for modernity on culture and the iconoclastic mode this often takes, the specificities of East Asia's historical resistance to capitalist domination and its changing practices are arguably just as significant, if not more, in shaping the emergence of nativist discourses of alternative modernity in Taiwan and China.

In the world of capitalist domination, East Asia stood out in its capacity to resist full-scale colonization by Euro-America. China of course was long preyed upon by various imperialist powers, but it managed to maintain a formally independent state to the end, a fact often considered a major factor in Chinese intellectuals' propensity to project onto traditional culture their desires and frustrations in modernity.⁹ More important, insofar as colonization occurred in East Asia, the key colonizer was one of its own—Japan—rather than any of the European powers. Indeed, what made East Asia stand out in the history of Euro-American domination is Japan's exceptionality in becoming the first non-Western modern imperialist power while mobilizing a nativist ideology of opposing Western aggression. It was, above all, Japan's legendary ability to withstand direct domination by the Western powers and quickly learn their tricks and trades to rise itself as a modern power rivaling Euro-American dominance (even if in a limited geopolitical area) that generated the particular dynamics and conflicts shaping the experiences of modernity in East Asia in the twentieth century. In colonizing Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria, as well as occupying various parts of Southeast Asia, Japan's efforts to become a competing center of modernity through the establishment of the "Greater Asian Co-prosperity Sphere" complicated the center-margins structure of Euro-American modernity. It made a fragmented China ironically an "ally" of European struggles against fascist aberrations of modernity, boosting Chinese nationalist aspirations and self-understanding of their nation's position in the world despite its plight of semicolonial subjugation. At the same time, Japan's apparent ability to forge its own path to modernity opened up the possibility of an "East Asian" alternative that inspired Chinese intellectuals and state officials even as it threatened their nation's very survival. Temporarily suspended and displaced by Japan's defeat in World War II and the prospect of a socialist alternative with the Communist victory in China, this possibility of an "East Asian" model of capitalist modernity was to become immensely significant again in the 1970s and 1980s, when socialism began to wane in China and the Japanese economy had grown so strong that it seemed poised to displace Euro-America from the center of capitalist modernity.

If modernity was once identified with and centered on Euro-America, that center no longer seemed able to hold by the late 1970s. Even as Euro-America faced severe economic crises with the oil shocks of the 1970s, Japan,

which had been benefiting from U.S. strategic and economic deployment in East Asia as part of the Cold War to recover quickly from its war wreckage and become a formidable engine of the world economy, continued to boast significant growth and provide an unimpeded economic drive for the Pacific region. At the same time, the development of a new mode of flexible capital accumulation and deterritorialized production, of which the subcontracting system commonly adopted by Japanese corporations constituted a distinctive and pioneering trend in East Asia, led to a loosening of the ties between capitalist development and Euro-America.¹⁰ With the rise of multinational companies and the parceling out of the industrial production process to different countries, notably the export processing zones established in newly industrializing countries such as Taiwan, it became questionable whether Euro-America continued to be *the* center of capitalist development and locus of progress, even though the multinational companies still maintained their bases there.

There is of course no direct connection or translation between economic power and cultural dominance, and the relative decline in economic supremacy of the United States in the 1970s does not automatically mean a corresponding loss in ideological domination and cultural legitimacy of Western modernity. But the relative decline, particularly the perception of a decline, opened up a discursive space for rethinking the presumed link between capitalist development and Western culture long accepted in Euro-American circles and their satellites in the margins. Specifically, the general ascendance in economic power of East Asia led by Japan generated interest in what came to be formulated as an “East Asian development model” and, concomitantly, a reevaluation of the compatibility and role of traditional culture, particularly Confucian culture, in modernity. The rise in Japan in the 1970s of a nativist discourse, the *Nihonjinron*, highlighting a set of distinctive national cultural characteristics, a Japaneseness, that remains intact even in modernity also fueled such speculative efforts.¹¹ Out of this discursive opening emerged different attempts to reposition East Asia and renarrativize cultural identity in capitalist modernity by various interested parties across the Pacific, including the media, policy and public opinion makers, and academics in the West, as well as the ideological apparatuses of the East Asian states and local intellectuals. In particular, the possibility of an East Asian modernity inflected with indigenous values and its challenge to dominant universalist conceptions of modernity became subjects of intense intellectual and policy debates in the United States no less than in East Asia. In the United States, it precipitated a discursive reconstitution of global capitalist relations around the new imaginary of the Pacific Rim to harness the emerging sources of economic vitality, as well as speculative projections of a culture-based, economics-driven East Asian challenge to Western supremacy. On the Asian side of the Pacific, the

postulation by Western trained and/or based academics of an East Asian development model harmoniously integrating cultural traditions into capitalist development triggered and reinforced officially sponsored revival of (interests in) national cultural heritages, even as locally based scholars and intellectuals questioned whether and how traditional cultures could indeed remain vital and alive in (capitalist) modernity. With such renewed attention to East Asian cultural traditions and competing articulations of their relationship to modernity, what constitutes native culture and who/what represents the native easily became key sites for contesting modernity and conceiving alternatives in the East Asian societies.

Besides the contested terrain between East Asia and global capitalist development, the global context of this discursive opening also includes a concomitant rethinking of modernity in the name of postmodernity in the Euro-American center. Just as East Asian economic ascendance fostered nativist articulation of alternatives locally, the perceived decline in U.S. economic might and corresponding shift of capitalist momentum toward Asia fed into a general questioning and reexamination of modernity in the center that heralded the emergence of postmodernity. Whether new developments in the capitalist world of the late twentieth century constitute a significantly different historical formation meriting the designation of postmodernity and what exactly defines postmodernity have of course been controversial issues that remain unresolved as the discursive dominance of the postmodern came to pass with the recent ascendance of globalization discourses. Be that as it may, cognates of the postmodern were key terms for interrogating modernity and contemporary conditions in the last two decades of the twentieth century, especially in Euro-America, with theoretical intervention and elaboration by scholars of various persuasions. As such, postmodernity constitutes a critical part of the global context for *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativisms, even if (or precisely because) it is highly debatable.

As the reference to postmodernity rather than postmodernism suggests, what concerns us here is not so much the specific cultural, aesthetic, and literary trend that has become, in the words of Fredric Jameson, "the cultural logic of late capitalism."¹² Despite some innovative attempts to locate signs of such postmodernism earlier in Taiwan and China, it is generally accepted that postmodernism did not become significant in Taiwan and China, if at all, until the late 1980s and 1990s, respectively.¹³ For the period under discussion, in contrast, postmodernity signifying the socioeconomic transformation and historical experience of the global extension of capitalist development through the institution of flexible accumulation, the formation of multinational corporations, and the advancement of technologies (especially information and computer technologies, which greatly facilitated production coordination, financial transactions, capital movements, and media transmissions across the

globe) was quite relevant to Taiwan and China, particularly as a controversial marker of the changing global condition that had become dominant in the Euro-American center.¹⁴ Inasmuch as the global extension of capitalist practices corresponds in part to the Japanese-led ascendance in economic power of East Asia, postmodernity encodes a particular way of understanding local and regional developments in East Asia in relation to Euro-America. Conversely speaking, postmodernity's affirmation of local differences constitutes, in part, a response to the decentering threat that East Asia, particularly Japan, posed to Euro-America's identity discourse of modernity.¹⁵ With the media hype of such publications as *Japan as Number One*, the prospect of multiple centers including an Asian component, if not necessarily Japan assuming *the* center, called into question the established center-margins structure of modernity, rendering it difficult to confirm Euro-America as self-identical with modernity.¹⁶ On this historical ground of a compelled recognition of different modernities in the margins or outside Euro-America, postmodernity resignifies the world from the experience and perspective of the Euro-American center. While registering significant changes in Euro-America's self-imagery and understanding of their relation to modernity and the margins, which facilitate nativist articulations of alternative modernities in the margins, postmodernity underscores the continued global dominance of Euro-American discursive constitution of the world. As a dominant global term, it has critical purchase beyond Euro-America in discussions of "newly industrializing" areas like Taiwan and China, especially for highlighting the mediated connection between local developments and global capitalist practices.

And yet, by virtue of its Euro-American centrism, the global designator of postmodernity alone is not sufficient to define the historical and discursive context in which *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativism emerged to articulate alternatives. What postmodernity signifies in the center corresponds to something quite different in the "newly industrializing" East Asian countries, which, by and large, stayed in the margins of economic decisions and discursive constructions of global capitalism even as they were incorporated into the global capitalist assembly line as outlying satellite factories.¹⁷ The economic practices taken to characterize multinational capitalism in postmodernity, such as off-shore production in export processing zones, are precisely what enabled capitalist development to "take off" in Taiwan and China, resulting in conditions that approximate (earlier) modernity at the center, namely industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of an urban bourgeoisie together with an escalation in social inequality. Also, quite contrary to the decentered order and delegitimation of grand narratives highlighted in postmodernity, these developments took place under the strong authoritarian control of a "modern" nation-state in the name of modernization and national development. The importance of a strong state in orchestrating and overseeing economic development is indeed

highlighted as a key feature of the “East Asian development model.” Thus, countering the global claims of postmodernity, modernity (or modernization) has remained the primary operative concept and hegemonic vision locally, both for the state and oppositional forces within the national space.

Of course, as suggested in the idea of modernity in the margins, modernity is constitutionally different in Taiwan and China from the Euro-American center. Indeed, modernity in the margins is arguably always already postmodern in the sense (per Ernesto Laclau) that the values of (Western) modernity cannot maintain any absolutist hold there, and that it entails an acute sense of the loss of mastery, a recognition of ineradicable differences, and the necessity to take others, especially powerful Euro-America, into consideration. Put differently, the supposedly postmodern experience and condition of fragmentation, decenteredness, and what Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang call “spatial fracturing and temporal desynchronization” are very much a part of modernity in the margins.¹⁸ Postmodernity as a global term, then, conceals significant differences and disjuncture between the contemporaneous experiences and understanding of global capitalism in the Euro-American metropolitan centers and the margins.

Between the designators of modernity in the margins and postmodernity, at issue is not so much a problem of periodization as the problematic that governs what and how alternatives and oppositions to the status quo can be articulated. If the designator of postmodernity captures the changed power dynamics between the Euro-American capitalist establishment and East Asia that enabled the confident articulation of alternative modernities, it also obscures the chain of power relations in effect on national and local grounds. Under the sign of postmodernity, with its inscription of a decentered order, there is no discursive space for the center-margin opposition that structures nativist conceptions of the power relation between the West and East Asian nation-states like China and Taiwan, as well as the related hierarchy between urban centers and rural hinterlands. Without such an oppositional structure, nativist alternatives simply cannot be articulated.

To fully cover the global and local designation of the historical and discursive context for the advancement of *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativism as critical intervention and alternative articulation, then, a simultaneous reference to postmodernity and modernity is needed. For this purpose, I adopt the heuristic term post/modernity. As a sign specifying the historical and cultural conditions under which nativism seeks to rewrite modernity under global capitalism, post/modernity draws attention to coeval yet different discursive identification of the conditions in the Euro-American center and in the margins. Marking both the disjuncture and connected simultaneity between global postmodernity and local modernity, the term highlights tensions between local perspectives and dominant global signification from the Euro-American center. It registers the need to simultaneously attend to different

locations and perspectives along the center-periphery spectrum and across the global-local divides in accounting for contemporaneous experiences and aspirations in the margins. Post/modernity, in short, situates Euro-America and East Asia in the same temporality of global capitalism and highlights the structural relation between practices in the center and developments in the margins while drawing attention to the tensions and incommensurabilities between global and local standpoints in making sense of this contemporaneity. Historically, it corresponds to the chronotope of the last quarter of the twentieth century, before globalization captured the imagination of the capitalist world, displacing postmodernity with the vision of a singular global network of simultaneous if differentiated markets. Discursively, it marks a dynamic opening up of modernity to multiple alternative formulations in response to the global extension of capitalism and shift of economic power toward East Asia.

THE PACIFIC RIM PROJECTION OR
GLOBAL CAPITALISM'S NARRATIVE OF POST/MODERNITY

Pacific Rim Discourse presumes a kind of metonymic equivalence. Its world is an interpenetrating complex of interrelationships with no center: neither the center of a hegemonic power nor the imagined fulcrum of a "balance of power." . . . The Rim was a perfect image for a centeredness with no central power.

—Christopher Connery

The language of the Asia-Pacific myth, with its invocation of "Third-Wave" civilizations and its focus upon the "basic commonalities" of economic prosperity, rhetorically reconciles the tensely coexisting multiple rival capitalisms and usefully blurs potential battle lines among them. Its votaries on both sides of the Pacific Rim become imaginative shareholders in a common utopianized marketplace.

—Alexander Woodside

In the discursive opening of post/modernity, a new geo-imaginary, the Pacific Rim, emerged prominently to give shape to a cognitive (re)mapping of the world according to capitalist imperatives and desires. As such, the Pacific Rim discourse constitutes a particular postmodern articulation of the global discursive context for understanding the social and cultural intervention enacted in the *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativist texts.

Given East Asia's significance in the global shift of capitalist power and the ensuing disidentification of modernity and Euro-America, it is hardly

surprising that capitalism's postmodern narrativization of its global future should take the form of reimagining East Asia and the region's relation to capitalist development. Even as cultural critics in Euro-America tried to make sense of contemporary changes in terms of the postmodern, American futurologists, policy makers, and social scientists projected their hopes, visions, and predictions of global capitalist development onto a construct of the Pacific Rim. In rendering a "growth"-oriented and technology-driven account of the shift in capitalist power underlying post/modernity, Pacific Rim discourse may be characterized as global capitalism's preferred narrative of post/modernity, offering a capital-centered representation of the fluid advancement of global capitalism into a decentered rim. Against this imaginary of a free flow around a hollow center, *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativism's emphasis on the abiding hold of the native place as a locus of marginality in modernity encodes a telling alternative.

Contrary to its image of circularity without origins or ends, the Pacific Rim, as most commentators concur with Arif Dirlik, is fundamentally a Euro-American invention serving primarily Western capitalist interests. It is so in the dual sense that the Pacific region itself has been historically constituted by Euro-American forces of capitalism and colonialism, and that the concept was informed and advanced by Euro-American interests and visions.¹⁹ Tracing the concept's rise in prominence, Alexander Woodside notes that though the idea of a Pacific Ocean free trade zone was first proposed by Japanese politicians and economists in the 1960s, it became significant only with U.S. espousal in the latter half of the 1970s, when the economic achievements and potential of East Asia became apparent, especially after China's adoption of "open-door" policies to attract foreign capital and technology. As a "mobilization myth" of U.S. liberal economists and futurologists, the Pacific Rim discourse features an "international capitalist utopianism" that projects a vision of boundless economic growth based on technological advancement, free trade, and global market integration. Presumably drawing on the historical experience of phenomenal economic development in East Asia, its capitalist utopianism finds expression in two ubiquitous motifs in accounts of the East Asian success story—miracle and dynamism.²⁰ With these two motifs, the East Asian historical experiences are economized and universalized into an exemplary realization of the promises and prospects of global development, "progress," and limitless growth under the capitalist machine, which are open and available to all who are willing to plug into the machine and play by its rules. The World Bank's 1983 report on the "East Asian miracle" mints such a narrativization in attributing economic success in East Asia to "a market-friendly strategy with limited state intervention and a high degree of openness to trade and capital movements."²¹ Following this classic liberal economics narrative of development, the Pacific Rim discourse presents a capitalist dynamism that is

“all on the up-and-up, a whoosh of progress transforming the region,”²² with no sign at all of contradictions between Euro-America and the Asia Pacific or rivalry within the Pacific region that later took on cultural accoutrements and escalated into the open in the form of “Japan bashing.” In this light, the Pacific Rim may be seen as a new imaginary and conceptual construct to manage the shift of capitalist power out of the established Euro-American center with the multinationalization of industrial production and capital accumulation, articulating a common economic concern of prosperity, progress, and development to cover (over) different interests of capitalist elites across national boundaries and cultural traditions.

The particular cultural politics of this management is accentuated in the trope of the rim, which is decidedly American in conception and usage, but masked in scientific aura. Whereas the metaphorically, if not geopolitically, neutral term “Asia Pacific” was and is generally used on the Asian side, the Pacific Rim has been the preferred reference with most currency in the United States. In substituting the rim for Asia, the American term conveniently elides cultural and historical constitution of the region beside and beyond the Pacific, as well as the contradictions between Euro-American and Asian constructions of the region. The term Pacific Rim’s geological origin lends a scientific aura that underlines the discourse’s proclivity for technology and economic rationality to the exclusion of cultural signification.²³ Metaphorically, the rim also evokes a sense of frontier that echoes the earlier American frontierism of “going west” toward the Pacific to discover wealth and create a man of oneself.²⁴ It renews and enlivens the dream of an infinite capacity of expansion into the future and progressive transformation of the world seen as space rather than historically, socially, and culturally constituted places. The brave new world of the Pacific Rim, as a rim, connects and unites capitalist pioneers into a dynamic nexus of growth and advancement with no fixed centers, out-sides, or hierarchical divides. Always on the edge of development, it circumscribes and encompasses all into the capitalist dream, rendering antiquated and obsolete the other Euro-American image of the Pacific as a timeless paradise, an “escape” from the protean power of capitalism.

This myth of the rim is of course an ideal American imagery of the Pacific region, subject to challenges and alternative formulations from those with eyes more trained to the concrete data and politics of trans-Pacific exchanges. As Arif Dirlik stresses, the Pacific region is rife with contradictions that the Pacific Rim discourse is intended to suppress, not least the “failure” of Euro-American capitalism to contain the “success” of East Asian economic development within its cultural narratives.²⁵ In a self-consciously benchmarking overview of the Pacific Rim, Peter Gourevitch notes a vigorous debate over the role of culture, specifically Confucianism broadly conceived as the East Asian cultural tradition, in bringing about the East Asian miracles.²⁶ Par-

ticipating and having a stake in the debate were not only American futurologists and social scientists specializing in East Asian societies, but also diasporic intellectuals and the East Asian states and local scholars. Just as the Pacific Rim discourse elides the significance of culture in its economic representation of the capitalist “success” of East Asia, cultural traditions figure centrally in competing narratives of the “East Asian economic miracle” advanced by those identifying with the Asian side. In broad strokes, if the Pacific Rim myth promotes a form of universal class-based narrative that locates and celebrates the wellspring of East Asian miraculous growth in the unfettered operation of capitalist forces through free trade and open markets, counternarratives highlighting particular cultural factors in the East Asian success were advanced from the Asian side, often with reference to “native” perspectives, to suggest a culturally inflected capitalism beyond monolithic Euro-American domination.

Common to these counternarratives is a deterritorialized transnational Confucian culture that presumably challenges the supremacy of Western (Protestant) culture in cultivating the right ethic for advancing capitalist development in post/modernity. In a popular, influential version of these narratives, Herman Kahn identifies the “neo-Confucian cultures” of Taiwan and South Korea as a key factor in the two countries’ rapid development and summarizes the kernel of the “Confucian ethic” into two related sets of characteristics: “the creation of dedicated, motivated, responsible, and educated individuals and the enhanced sense of commitment, organizational identity, and loyalty to various institutions.”²⁷ Following Kahn, Roderick MacFarquhar proposed “the Post-Confucian Challenge” while Peter Berger put forward the “East Asian Development Model” to highlight the cultural dimension in East Asia’s exceptional success in capitalist development.²⁸ With few variations, what came to distinguish East Asian culture in these accounts is a Confucian tradition of orientation toward the collective rather than Western culture’s emphasis on the individual. That this rather reductive formulation of a common ground among the diverse cultural traditions of East Asia is motivated by a deliberate contrast with Western culture, especially the Protestant ethic Max Weber identified at the origins of capitalism, is particularly evident in Hung-chao Tai’s summary formulation of “the Oriental alternative”:

The cultural setting [of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore] has created what may be called an Oriental or affective model of economic development, which emphasizes human emotional bonds, group orientation, and harmony. It stands as an alternative to the more established Western model of development. The latter may be called a rational model, which stresses efficiency, individualism, and dynamism.²⁹

In openly proposing an “Oriental” alternative, this diasporic scholar was obviously capitalizing on the newfound economic power of East Asia to challenge Euro-American hegemony (though the use of “Oriental” ironically betrays his continued subjection to the very hegemony he sought to challenge).³⁰ Such a challenge went in tandem with the Pacific Rim discourse in the 1980s, when the East Asian states entered the fray and took an active part in asserting their national/cultural identity even as they sought to consolidate their economic ascendance through further integration into the global capitalist system. The revival and promotion of interests in Confucianism lay at the heart of these state efforts. Starting in the 1980s, state-sponsored conferences on Confucianism and/or East Asian culture, especially the relationship between Confucianism and economic development/modernization, were regularly held in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and even the People’s Republic of China, generating copious discussions in conference volumes, scholarly journals, and cultural magazines.³¹ While many, especially “local” scholars living and working in the East Asian countries, expressed skepticism toward arguments about a particularly congenial connection between Confucian culture and modernization, or a common (neo)Confucian culture in East Asia, these proceedings and discussions nonetheless normativized the centrality of Confucianism to East Asian cultural identities and legitimated the efforts to make a Confucian-based cultural tradition relevant to modernity in East Asia.

Inasmuch as these discussions assert cultural differences between the Asian and Euro-American sides of the Pacific and affirm the importance of cultural factors in economic development, they suggest efforts at an alternative account of the historical shift in capitalist power that the Pacific Rim discourse seeks to manage and contain. Yet, in articulating (neo)Confucian or East Asian culture to capitalist development, they also uphold and underscore the value of capitalist development and its centrality to modernity in East Asia. As such, they are arguably more a variant than a counterhegemonic alternative to the Pacific Rim discourse. Like the Pacific Rim discourse, they subscribe to a developmentalism that affirms capitalism as the motor for universal economic progress while registering the advance of multinational capitalism beyond singular Euro-American dominance and the attendant disarticulation of capitalism from Western cultural traditions. In this sense, they are an Oriental articulation of the Pacific Rim, even as or precisely as they seek to counter the cultural barrenness and fill in the empty form of the geological Rim with substantial representation of the Asian contents of the Pacific. Together with the Euro-American version of the Pacific Rim discourse, they constitute the hegemonic discursive context against which *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativisms posed significant alternatives.

MARGINALITY, OPPOSITIONALITY, AND NATIVISM AT THE RIM

If the Pacific Rim discourse, in its tacit affirmation of the possibility of other cultural articulation with capitalist modernity, encodes an alternative conception to the Euro-American identity discourse of modernity, *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativisms can be seen as yet a different articulation of alternative modernities arising from the same historical context of post/modernity. While the two nativisms are not necessarily deliberate contestation of the Pacific Rim discourse, especially *xiangtu* nativism whose key texts predate the heyday of the Pacific Rim discourse, they advance alternative constructions that give different meanings and significance to the key concerns, motifs, and images of the Pacific Rim in both the American and Oriental versions. Foremost is their focus on the native as marginality, which interrupts and interrogates the developmentalism driving Taiwan and China's state construction of modernity that also finds expression in the Pacific Rim discourse's language of growth and progress. As later discussions will detail, in both *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativisms, this focus broadens the concerns of modernity beyond issues of capitalist economic development. It also enables *xungen* nativism to explore local cultures that contest the hegemonic representation of Confucianism as *the native/national/East Asian culture*.

Briefly, *xiangtu* nativism's figuration of the native in terms of exploited labor mapped variably onto hierarchical oppositions between the nation and the West, and between the urban and the rural inserts questions of social justice and the value of a traditional moral order into the consideration of the meaning and ends of modernity, challenging the Pacific Rim discourse's presumption of economic development as the indisputable yardstick and goal of modernity. Whereas *xiangtu* nativism tends to reaffirm Confucianism in its representation of the traditional moral order, the deliberate mapping of the native onto a "primitive" hinterland characterized by a marginalized ethnified regional culture in *xungen* nativism explicitly challenges Confucian values and their hegemonic claim to representation of the native/national/ East Asian culture. In sum, in foregrounding marginality, the two nativisms highlight the persistent structuring effects of center-margins power dynamics in post/modernity and resignify the figure of the rim, thus articulating alternative visions of modernity in the margins that recenter social inequity and underscore issues of class, gender, ethnic and/or regional disparity in mapping the past, present, and future. Rather than a frontier of capitalist growth and expansion, the native place located in the margins is a rim of neglected values and traditions that stand against the ruthless exploitation and instrumental mentality of capitalist modernity.

To explore the two nativist discourses as such an intervention into the narrativization of post/modernity, however, requires an interruption and

displacement of the entrenched conception of nativism as a conservative identity politics keyed to nostalgic nationalism. Situated against the domination and hegemony of capitalism and Western culture in modernity, nativist claims outside Euro-America tend to be critically mapped on a superimposition of oppositions between the rural and the urban, and between the nation and the West. The dominant conception of these terms along a universalist trajectory of modernization further translates the spatial imaginary into a temporal frame of the past versus the future, tradition versus progress. Thus, the invocation of nativeness to anchor one's being and orient one's action in the contemporary world easily becomes harnessed to nostalgia and aligned to cultural and political conservatism.

Such a spatiotemporal positioning is evident in established critical readings of nativism in modern Chinese culture. A telling example is David Wang's summary characterization of the *xiangtu* line of modern Chinese literature from its inception in May Fourth writings in the 1920s to its reincarnation in the *xungen* movement of the 1980s in mainland China. Contrasting *xiangtu* writings with urban literature, Wang notes that the former highlights "such themes as the clash between traditional, rural values and modern, urban civilization; the confrontation between intellectual-revolutionaries and peasant-conservatives; [and] nostalgic evocations of the past or of childhood."³² In its unassuming association of nativism with a nostalgic orientation toward the rural and traditional past, this characterization reveals entrenched spatiotemporal assumptions about nativism as a modern discourse. Indeed, the nostalgic nature of nativism and its articulation of rural-urban and traditional-modern oppositions are so taken for granted that it becomes a platform for critical advancement in discussion of modern Chinese culture. Wang's insightful development of the term "imaginary nostalgia" to discuss certain nativist work is made on this very ground. While the term productively underscores the nuances and complexity of the nostalgic orientation in nativism by suggesting that the past to which nativism turns is not strictly representational, but incorporates imaginary elements motivated by present desires and concerns and steeped in intertextuality, it simultaneously affirms nostalgia as the structure of feeling and signification in nativism. Even as it opens up imaginative readings of nativist texts, it locks nativism within the spatiotemporality of nostalgia. Imaginary or otherwise, a nostalgic turn to a traditional past marks Wang's delineation of the nativist impulse in *xiangtu* literature.

Nativism's tie to conservative nostalgia is even more pronounced in Rey Chow's categorization of Chinese cultural resistance to colonialism.³³ To highlight the radical alternative offered by postcolonial cultural productions in Hong Kong, Chow situates nativism against postmodern celebration of hybridity as the two common but problematic poles framing contemporary cultural practices. Her critique of nativism centers on what she calls the "total-

izing nativist vision of the Chinese folk,” which is entwined in “a nostalgia for ever-receding origins” that shores up “the practice of centrism.”³⁴ Nativism, in other words, engages in a nostalgic mobilization of the idea of a monolithic folk in support of the dominant culture. This characterization is noteworthy on two related fronts, each bringing up issues that are central to our critical assessment of the oppositional possibilities of nativism. First, there is an implicit identification of nativism with nationalism and the native with the folk/nation, which is also discernible in Chow’s book, *Primitive Passions*, where, with the term “primitive” standing in for native, she criticizes “Chinese intellectuals’ tendency to see everything in terms of the primitive that is China—to the exclusion of other issues, other peoples, and other struggles elsewhere.”³⁵ As a correlative to this native-nation identification, Chow further links nativism to centrism and the “suppression of the fundamental impurity of native origins.”³⁶ On account of this suppression of difference, nativism is deemed antithetical to postmodernism and its signatory celebration of “hybridity,” “diversity,” and “pluralism,” of which Chow is no less critical for being contemporary culture’s readily proffered panacea for the malaise of monolithic cultural domination in modernity. In positing such an opposition, Chow explicitly grounds nativism in a modern cultural paradigm of nationalism, linear temporality, and monolithic identity. With this grounding, nativism’s critique of modernity is inextricably tied to nostalgia for an (imaginarily) wholesome past and its political possibilities as an alternative articulation of modernity can only be retrogressive and conservative. Chow’s critical schema thus exposes the consequential link of nativism to nationalism and the modern paradigm that underlies nativism’s common critical reception as a nostalgic response to the challenges of a Western-dominated modernity.

Significantly, the association of nativism with a conservative politics opposing hybridity and diversity is not limited to debates on modernity. It also figures centrally in discussions of postmodernity, notably David Harvey’s widely influential study on the condition of postmodernity.³⁷ As a form of place-based identity politics, nativism is, in Harvey’s critical framework, a fundamentally “reactionary” response to the (post)modern experiences of time-space compression intensified under the regime of flexible accumulation in late twentieth-century capitalism. At its root lies the desire and quest for “secure moorings in a shifting world,” where experiences of fragmentation, insecurity, and ephemerality are pervasive under global capitalism’s exploitation of spatial differences and uneven development to maximize profits through increasing financial and production mobility. This desire fosters an aestheticization of politics that displaces class solidarity with place-based identities and traditions, hindering the emergence of global political opposition and reinforcing the very condition of fragmentation that enables mobile capitalism and flexible accumulation to thrive.

Despite its unrelenting negative assessment, by virtue of situating place-based politics in the postmodern development of capitalism, Harvey's analysis suggests the possibility of reading nativism as a cultural response to postmodernity that is coeval with the ascendance of postmodernism in Euro-America. Inasmuch as nativism is often associated with conservative third world resistance and postmodernism with first world cultural currents, this accordance of coevality productively avoids the pitfall of temporalizing cultural differences into backwardness that plagues such universalizing theoretical undertakings. Yet, Harvey's global analysis from the perspective of capitalist development still perpetuates a reductive universalism that makes no distinction among place-based identity politics by different social groups in different locations within the global capitalist system. Particularly significant is its elision of differences in oppositional possibilities between nativist identity politics in the Euro-American center and the margins. If, as argued earlier, modernity in the margins always entails negotiations with powerful others that dislocate and decenter identity, the possible meanings of affirming a place-based identity—a native position—in the margins will be quite different from those in the center, however destabilized and shifting the center may have become.

It is precisely an emphasis on this crucial difference that allows critics such as Trinh Minh-ha to affirm nativism as a productive oppositional strategy for the colonized amid prevalent negative assessment of its politics. Trinh's appreciation of nativism hinges on a distinction between two invocations of "native" that highlights the term's variable valence depending on its location of enunciation, and thus the critical importance of attending to contextual differences in references to the native.³⁸ Evoking the world of difference between its use against others and for oneself, she suggests that in contrast to being othered as natives, which relegates one to the margins of history according to the dominant, colonizing culture, native self-identification strives to recenter a marginalized culture and tradition as the ground in which to root oneself and on which to project and build an independent future. From this perspective, nativism in the margins is fundamentally a project of reclaiming a denigrated identity in an act of postcolonial self-affirmation. In place of a native origin that is primordially fixed on a centrist idea of the folk/nation, the focus here is the oppositional impulse behind nativist constructions in a struggle against marginality. In other words, from a supposedly conservative orientation toward the past and primordial origins, critical attention is shifted to exploring what contemporary interests, desires, and concerns are expressed and contested in discursive efforts to reclaim and reconnect with some forms of the native and cultural traditions that have been marginalized.

Stuart Hall's affirmation of the return to roots as the ground on which margins came into representation in recent decades corroborates such a posi-

tive reading of nativism's oppositional possibilities in post/modernity. As Hall points out, while a return to the local is often a response to the global post-modern, it has a special significance and history for those in the margins.³⁹ Historically, the related moves of returning to some kind of roots, rediscovering hidden histories, and locating another place of enunciation were crucial for the coming to voice of the margins. Inasmuch as the center covers over, with universal claims, the particular traditions, histories, and contexts in which its representations and discourses are situated, those in the margins must rediscover their place of "origins," their past, and their "roots" to reclaim their voices and develop their own discourses and representation. A nativist return to roots is, in this light, a key discursive strategy in the struggle against marginality.

With such a shift from nostalgia to marginality as the theoretical fulcrum and interpretative lens, nativism is no longer inextricably tied to an ideological consolidation of the nation and the attendant suppression of differences in native origins, which account for much of its negative reception as reactionary identity politics. Instead, it is keyed to power relations, which can cover a multitude of social differentiations including class, gender, and race/ethnicity. From this critical perspective, there is nothing inherently regressive or conservative in nativist discourses. Nor does a nativist call for return to the homeland necessarily inscribe an exclusionary identity. Hall's emphasis on the mediatory role of narration and desire in the discursive return to a homeland and the recovery of a marginalized identity makes this clear.

Indeed, in drawing attention to nativism's negotiation of the very power structure of consolidating a center through the marginalization of others, the critical focus on nativism's underlying oppositional impulse opens up the possibility of identifying therein multiple lines of opposition to oppression and marginalization beyond a general nationalist resistance to Western domination. That is, insofar as nativism is understood primarily in terms of an attempt to reaffirm the devalued and marginalized in specific relations of power under a Western-dominated post/modernity, the native that is reaffirmed can be variously inflected with multiple social differentiations such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, region, religion, and/or generation besides nationality, depending on the particular power relations against which it situates itself in concretizing and substantiating marginality. By the same token, nativism needs not be seen as necessarily antithetical to postmodern attention to diversity and differences, even if in addressing specific power relations, it tends to stay largely within the either-or binarism of modernity.

It may be countered, with certain credence, that inasmuch as this notion of the native is deeply entwined in the history of colonialism and Western domination, its postcolonial maneuver in the name and hands of the marginalized would still amount to little more than derivatives of Western colonial

discourses. In this vein, the danger of nativism making real the imaginary identities of the native to which Western colonial power has subjected the peoples under its domination has frequently been sounded. Or, as Ben Xu argues in his discussion of nativist cultural theory in China during the 1990s, the spirit of opposition to the West and imperialism ends up generating only a negative construction of the native, an identity of “past hurt, pain, or injury” that leaves the native forever under the shadow of the West.⁴⁰ Given the staying power of the rhetoric of alterity and the seductive simplicity of polarized identities, this danger of nativism reconfirming the power of colonialism and Western hegemony needs to be heeded and taken seriously. Yet it is just as important not to let the potential danger dispose us toward a facile dismissal of nativism and blind us to the oppositional possibilities of specific nativist constructions. The very double-edgedness of the term “native” in our recent history of colonialism and imperialism means that its mobilization in the (re)construction of identity and (re)claiming of traditions for a congenial future requires close examination and critical vigilance.

It is perhaps worth noting that to focus on the oppositional impulse behind nativist constructions and to acknowledge the possibility of nativism interrupting the binary oppositions of modernity to engage polymorphous differences certainly does not entail overlooking the exclusionary or centrist tendencies of many nativist practices. Nor is it to deny that nativism often appeals to some “natural,” “innate” qualities as the native foundation. Rather, it is to consciously maintain a productive distinction between the native and the nation, to keep open the multivalence of the native, and to create a critical wedge between nativism and the modern paradigm of universal teleology and monolithic identity so that the oppositional potentialities of specific nativist critiques can be explored rather than shortchanged to a standard mode of nostalgic nationalism.

In view of the common conflation of nativism with nationalism, a critical framework that foregrounds the conceptual distance between the ideas of native and nation is especially important for understanding the specificity of nativism as an oppositional discourse in and of post/modernity. Arguably because of the *prima facie* importance of the nation-state in Western experiences of modernity, the ideological valorization of the nation-state into the proper, at times even natural, unit of collectivity in modern Western discourses, and most significantly, nationalism’s consequent centrality in anti-colonial struggles for independence, nativism is easily associated with, indeed often taken to imply, nationalism of some kind. Yet, as Kwame Anthony Appiah reminds us, there is an irreducible chasm between nativism and nationalism, for not only are they “different creatures,” but they “fit together uneasily.”⁴¹ However closely related they might have been in the historical struggles for national independence, nativism and nationalism are set apart

conceptually by their distinctive core notions. Insofar as the term “native” evokes natural belonging to a particular place and the culture and tradition “rooted” in that place, it has no necessary connection to the nation as a collective unit. The native place, in other words, can be a village, town, region at the subnational level, or an entire continent at the supranational level. Indeed, considering the “imagined” nature of the nation and the technology involved in such imagination, as Benedict Anderson’s influential study points out, any linking of the native to the nation is a laborious process not to be taken for granted. If nationalism and its imaginary and symbolic constitution of a common folk as the natural subject of a nation-state are quintessentially parts of modernity, the transmutability of nativism’s cultural reference to local traditions and practices suggests the possibility of different articulations of time, space, and sociality. In fact, nativism’s invocation of the local place may in some instances be a subversive contestation of the authoritarian nationalism of the modern nation-state, as detailed analyses of Taiwan’s *xiangtu* nativism and China’s *xungen* nativism in the following chapters will show.

NATIVISM, PLACE-BASED IDENTITY, AND DIFFERENCE

Given nationalism’s embeddedness in hegemonic discourses of modernity, to maintain a critical distance between nativism and nationalism also means attending to nativism’s possible interruption, suspension, or refusal of the universalism, linear temporalization of space, and what Horkheimer and Adorno called “abstract identity” of modernity.⁴² This entails taking seriously nativism’s literal emphasis on and rhetorical construction of place and locality as a discursive site for interrogating the meaning of modernity and imagining alternatives in the margins rather than translating it temporally into a nostalgia for origins and the past. In this critical light, nativism can be seen as a deliberate turn to the local and the particular embedded in specific places, with an insistence on the situatedness of human experiences and visions of modernity.⁴³ Against the global claim and globalizing force of capitalism in post/modernity, specifically, such a turn to the place-based local encodes an affirmative recentering of the marginalized, enabling a reinscription of past territorialization of social relations to engage the politics of identification and representation in a world in which previously underdeveloped places are relentlessly incorporated and transformed into replaceable units of production and manufactured markets of consumption under capitalist post/modernity.

The oppositional potential of *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativism’s alternative configuration of/at the Pacific Rim arguably lies precisely in this focus on local rendition and inflection of historically grounded places, especially as/in the margins. As global capitalism’s narrative of post/modernity, the Pacific Rim

discourse inscribes an interchangeability of places as spaces of capitalist development and a universal teleology of technological and economic progress that accords little significance to local representation and figuration of the diverse localities in the Pacific region. Even with the Oriental insertion of a (neo)Confucian component to the Pacific Rim, the specificity claimed is still a transnational East Asian cultural difference that is deterritorialized and devoid of local signification of its social meaning in different places. In calling attention to local constitution of meanings and construction of identities rooted in concrete places, *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativism establish alternative grounds for imagining and narrating post/modernity that challenge the teleology of capitalist development and its hegemonic worlding of modernity.

To understand how such a focus on local signification of the native place can go beyond nostalgic conservatism to effectively negotiate the meaning of modernity, we need a conception of place that is open to dynamic interaction rather than fixed in geological space. Here, Doreen Massey's elucidation of the irreducibly social constitution of places is useful:

Places . . . are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations . . . their 'identities' are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them . . . [and] those identities will be multiple (since the various social groups in a place will be differently located in relation to the overall complexity of social relations and since their reading of those relations and what they make of them will also be distinct). And this in turn implies that what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time.⁴⁴

This conception of place as open, contested, and constituted through interaction—including differences and conflict—brings out the variability, multiplicity, and heterogeneity that are potentially inscribed in the place-based identity and cultural construction of nativism. With such a conception, place-based identity is definitely not confined to a monolithic, fixed cultural category. Rather, it is embedded in a nexus of social relations and processes that make up the contested terrain of the variable local in post/modernity, inextricably tied to relations and processes that actualize, reconfigure, disrupt, and reconnect familiar social categories such as class, ethnicity, and gender. In other words, the place that grounds native identity in nativist discourse, variously conceptualized as the “homeland,” the “native village,” or “roots,” is to be seen not so much as a fixed location as a particular situatedness specified by a nexus of social relations and processes that, however, do not remain uncontested and unchanged. As textual analyses of *xiangtu* and *xungen* writings in the following chapters will show, though “*xiangtu*” or “*gen*” generally references a partic-

ular geographical location, such as the fishing village of Badouzi in Wang Tuo's *xiangtu* fiction or the Heilongjiang border area in Zheng Wanlong's *xungen* works, this specific place is constituted not so much by its geographical location as by the social relations and moral order that give it its distinctive feature—the patriarchal order of selfless maternal sacrifice in Wang Tuo's fishing village or the moral economy of an autonomous yet caring masculine subject in Zheng Wanlong's border zone. In its capacity to engage relations of power and domination pertaining variously to gender, ethnicity, class, and other social categories of producing and managing identities in post/modernity, this socially defined place enables nativist writers to enact different interruption and interrogation of dominant constructions of modernity in their particular mappings of the native.

In view of such variability in nativism's place-based identity politics, a wholesale dismissal or celebration of nativism as a strategy of resistance and opposition is clearly untenable. The oppositional possibilities encoded in specific instances of nativist construction depend on what and how power relations are engaged in the discursive process. Only through a careful excavation of the ground—the native place as a discursive construct of social relations within particular situatedness—on which each nativist text configures its figures of modernity can we explore tension between its challenge to and continued reliance on dominant modalities of modernity, and determine its politics of identity and difference in inscribing alternatives.

Particularly, inasmuch as nativism mobilizes identity politics and local differences to challenge universalist notions of/in modernity, a critical assessment of its oppositionality calls for a close examination of how it grounds and deploys difference. Just as differences can be mobilized to destabilize entrenched categories and wrest open a space for new articulations of modernity and identity under certain conditions, existing boundaries and hierarchies can be consolidated in the name and interest of preserving differences against the relentless, homogenizing force of modernity, like the (neo)Confucian articulation of Pacific Rim discourse. Relatedly, differences and otherness may be appropriated to consolidate the social and discursive power of various national elites as well. Though situated in the margins vis-à-vis Euro-American construction of modernity as well as their respective states' project of modernization, *xiangtu* and *xungen* nativisms are not immune to the pernicious danger of appropriating otherness and marginality, given the multiple axes of power crisscrossing their locations of discursive production. As noted earlier, much of the oppositional vitality of these nativisms lies in their flexible construction and signification of place that allows the encoding of different power relations covering the range of sociality from gender, ethnicity, and class to age and generation. This, in effect, compounds the possibilities of appropriating marginality and otherness and consolidating existing power

structures in the guise of maintaining differences against cultural homogenization through Westernization. In particular, the class, gender, and ethnic makeup of the intellectuals mobilizing the nativist discourses suggests a propensity for male intellectual appropriation of the voices and marginalized positions of female subalterns to shore up the moral authority of their discursive opposition and articulation of alternatives, as detailed analyses in the following chapters will corroborate.

Mindful of the potential treachery of nativism's identity politics of multiple differences, my examination of specific instances of *xiangtu* and *xungen* discourses will interrogate how they delineate and situate themselves in the global-national-local nexus of post/modernity, whether/how they mark their locations of articulation, and how their politics of difference are articulated and play out in this nexus. Specifically, the interrogation would include questions along the following lines: What are the acknowledged and unacknowledged global, national, and local contexts of the discourse? How are the global, national, and local conceived and mapped in the discourse? Where is the native place located in this mapping? Against what is the assertion of native identity and local differences directed? In particular, is the native counterposed to the homogenizing forces of global capitalism with its valorization and universalization of the market penetrating into and commodifying every aspect of life? Or is the native pitted against the hegemony and domination of Western culture, expressing a primary concern with modernization as Westernization that leaves the social and political-economic impacts of capitalist transformation and their relation to everyday life and cultural experiences unexamined and uncritiqued? How is the native positioned and local differences aligned vis-à-vis the perceived domination? What social categories are the differences mapped onto? Is the native identified with the nation? If so, how is the nation conceived, and how does it relate to the state? In addition, (how) is the native mapped onto social relations of class, ethnicity, and/or gender? Are differences allowed within the mapping of the native? (How) is the mapping of the native complicitous with the status quo or replicating existing power hierarchies? Finally, what subject positions are mobilized to speak for and assert local differences? (How) is otherness or marginality deployed structurally in these positions? Together, these questions probe the politics of difference in a particular nativist discourse along the global-national-local nexus, enabling a dynamic assessment of the oppositional potentials and limits of the discourse's engagement with post/modernity. It is my contention that only such a dynamic assessment can illuminate nativism's variable purchase and significance as alternative articulation of modernity under global capitalism, and thereby deliver us from the pitfall of a blanket dismissal of nativism for reputed conservative nostalgia, overlooking the richness of its persistent contemporary appeal.