Preface

Ethnicity as Culture as Identity:
Unpacking the Crisis of Culture in Culturalism

This book is in part a follow-up to a paper published in 1996, titled "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity."[1] At the same time, it is a reply to many queries by scholars over the years who were unsettled by aspects of that argument (including students who offered to write a sequel to it) and my repeated tendency to decline invitations to elaborate on the topic. I suspect that most of the commotion was caused by the obscene title, in which case I would add that it has probably led to many misreadings of the essay. The real subject matter was reflected in the subtitle, which had less to do with Chineseness per se than with muddles in the model involved, when sinologists and social scientists alike transform culture into culturalism. Thus to answer the obvious question, what does Chineseness say about China?, I would say little, at face value. China has been changing, perhaps sui generis, and notions of Chineseness have correspondingly changed as the subtle frame through which actors and institutions ideologically validate their ongoing existence. The same can be said about the various culturalist models that scholars deploy to make sense of China or any other society; they validate in the first instance the disciplinary mindset that inherently governs it.

In the same year, I presented essentially the same argument, albeit directed to a cultural studies or social theory audience, in an essay titled "Discourses of Identity in the Changing Spaces of Public Culture in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore."[2] The ramifications here of Chineseness or culturality as discourse are clearer, especially the politics of subjectivity that invoke it. In both essays, I argue that discourses of Chineseness differ significantly from the concepts of culture that theorists and Asian studies scholars typically utilize in their study of Chinese culture(s) and society(ies). In this regard, the comparison of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore was

deliberately chosen to emphasize that the different ways in which Chinese in diverse societies articulate culturality are largely a product of its embeddedness in different sociopolitical processes, for which we lacked an adequate conceptual language. It was only until later that I spelled out more precisely the nature of this framework, namely geopolitics.[3]

Culturalism, of which Chineseness is a particular discursive representation, is less a social fact sui generis than a crisis invoked not necessarily by the inherent nature of culture but by situations of context. In other words, its imperative resides in essence outside culture. The fact that culture can be codified, systematized, regulated, and even commoditized in ways that are contrary to the spirit of lived experience is in short the source of many crises of modernity, ranging from conflicts pertaining to national identity, inventions of tradition, hegemonies of state, and the domination of culture industries, including mass media. Chineseness has thus been constructed in complex ways in diverse societies, the least of which is from the people themselves. While it is possible and desirable to interrogate Chineseness, one cannot do so without at the same time asking who is speaking for whom and toward what ends? There are also places where Chineseness (and its variants) has been so politicized that one can question whether its discursive manifestation and propagation really has anything to do with culture. Alternatively, one can look at the question in political terms too and ask, is it really necessary to culturalize at all? The content of Chineseness is less seminal than its form and function. On the other hand, it is possible to problematize Chineseness; to demystify, reinscribe, even engender and queer it. But explorations of alternative meanings as cultural critique have not been my primary concern. In the meantime, the ambiguity of ethnicity as culture as identity continues to be a problem endemic to social sciences, which I have elaborated on separately.

In short, this book is no longer about the ambiguities of ethnicity as culture as identity in a Chinese context but rather an effort to transcend such literal discussions of Chineseness and situate them within their respective historical contexts and underlying geopolitical formative processes. To problematize Chineseness as constitutive of an ongoing historical framework, from a comparative perspective and within a transnational or glocal context, serves to problematize the nature of *contexts* that invoke Chineseness as an ethnic or cultural problem, among other things. In the long run, Chineseness is just a superficial reflection of culture's embeddedness or ongoing entanglement with more complex social institutional processes, such as modernity, colonialism, nation-state formation and globalization. A deeper probe into such institutions as processes per se should in turn offer a more nuanced articulation of culturality.

Finally, why identify? Identity is, strictly speaking, a subjective relationship that does not by definition necessitate an inherent tie to culture, although many seem to think it does. This marks the transition from geopolitics to pragmatics. As Wang Gungwu rightly pointed out, "the Chinese never had a concept of identity, only a concept of Chineseness, of being Chinese and of becoming un-Chinese."[4] This then begs the question, what is identity, as a concept and strategic process of negotiation? Erik Erikson, who made identity crisis a keyword for our times, argued that it was not just a marker of personal status but relations of "sameness" in a group, if not shared values. If traditional Chinese lacked a concept of identity, then without doubt it became a staple of culture in the era of modern nation-states, where *rentong* literally means assimilation or boundedness to a group. In this sense, the politics of identity should involve by definition strategic choices about relations to groups and their underlying value judgments. Thus, what is the relevance of Chineseness? It involves in sum the construction of meaning and its relevance to the strategies of life choices in relation to groups and values.

The subtitle of the book follows conceptually what I (Chun 2009) first called "the geopolitics of identity." The more explicit focus here on identification underscores the point that identity is more than the fact of being or an attribute of personal status. Identity is the product of a process of becoming (socializing and assimilating). One rarely defines oneself ipso facto or sui generis. On the contrary, the fact that modern identity (national above all) compels one to have one implies that it is hardly a matter of negotiation or personal choice. Identification as strategic negotiation is still rooted in our boundedness to an ongoing social and political context. To term this larger ongoing process *geopolitics* means first of all that it is concretely rooted in what Dirlik (1999) aptly calls "the politics of place." Whether politics is framed by colonialism, nationalism, capitalism, or globalism is a matter of definition that must be carefully distilled from ambiguities and contradictions in the given literature. On the other hand, this process as a regime of practice may resemble more closely what Foucault (1991) characterizes as "spaces of dispersion" in the formation of socializing and culturalizing possibilities that give birth to discursive identities.

Ten of the twelve chapters in this book are either updated revisions or serious rewritings of essays that appeared in diverse academic journals, namely *History and Anthropology*; *Critique of Anthropology*; *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*; *Cultural Studies*; *The Journal of the Hong Kong Sociological Association*; *Contemporary Asian Modernities: Transnationality, Interculturality and Hybridity*; *Suomen Antropologi*; *Macalester International*; *Communal/Plural: Journal of Transnational*

& Crosscultural Studies; *Theory Culture & Society*; *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*; and *positions: east asia critique*. Needless to say, they were not written with area studies specialists as the main intended reader, but motivated by dialogues with a wider multidisciplinary audience. The essays presented herein are re-presented with the hope of making specific points about the ongoing history, culture, and politics of respective societies, but within a systematically consistent framework of analysis that may serve ultimately as a more appropriate discourse of comparison.

Introduction

Beyond Chineseness:
Frames for a Differential Calculus of Historical Process

> Textual regimes, documentary forms, and image repertoires *work* as projects to socially organize our lives by decontextualising. This routinised, pleasurable legitimation work all too often goes unremarked—e.g., tax forms, census returns, landownership registries, passport photographs, signatures and the murmuring volume around 'I.D.' (a word we should always speak in full: *Identification*) are part of the taken for granted *mediations of modernity*. They compel us . . . to represent ourselves in certain, often minutely specific, ways; taken as a whole cartography of power, they freeze us through these programs of power into mythic statuses of sedimented language. We become our ID.
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> —Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer,
> "From 'The Body Politic' to 'The National Interest' "

Framing Cultural Discourses Within Situated,
Ongoing Sociopolitical Regimes

To lump together Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and overseas Chinese communities or to define their shared characteristics and fate as Chinese-speaking societies would invite easy criticism. Yet when looking seriously at any one of them as discrete places and experiences, it is difficult to avoid essentializing them in terms of given disciplinary frames of reference and inherent assumptions. From an Asianist perspective, presumed cultural affinities and shared historical interactions usually form the basis of categorization and comparison, even as the relative importance of other thematic considerations tempers one's interpretation of the above. Social scientific and historical analyses offer their own theoretical grid but always within the framework of specific presumably value-free concepts, definitions, and outcomes. The implicit framing of such

societies or their populations as part of a Greater China or East Asia already makes them relevant to each other in particularistic ways vis-à-vis societies in different parts of the world. Needless to say, one cannot deny the overt lineage of historical traditions and institutional systems that characterize text-book accounts and provide a ground for the ongoing present. However, the influence of such traditions as an a priori framework for that history can be questioned. Similarly, East Asian models of culture or society within the scholarly literature are typically coded in analytical terms whose legitimacy is ultimately based on their presumed objectivity or value-free status. If any-thing, identity is refracted, as though omnipresent and sui generis, from such interpretations of history and civilization.

Identity is not synonymous with culture, history, or society. It is by nature a discourse, a social construct whose emergence and change is grounded in other deep frames of reference that have been evolving and remaking themselves locally in response to mutating conditions at large. I argue that encounters with modernity involve colonialism, nationalism, and global capi-talism, among other conditions, which constitute a different point of depar-ture, but the current interpretations prevailing in this literature are themselves problematic, and thus require proper qualification. More importantly, the ways in which these conditions at large impose themselves in any context are also historically sensitive and inextricably intertwined with the specificities of local practice, the engagement between which produces diverse experiences.

Concretely speaking, something must be said about colonialism in Hong Kong, cultural nationalism in postwar Taiwan, the collusion of Party and capitalist oligarchy in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the state's disciplining of race and modernity in Singapore, and the shifting association of Chinese overseas between diasporic and settler ethnicity. These condi-tions at large are not mutually exclusive processes. Colonialism is present in all the above contexts, albeit more as a state of mind or historical legacy. Nationalism is present everywhere too, though in diverse forms. Above all, it is important or necessary to view each societal context as a conceptual frame of reference that can elucidate an underlying field of interaction and articulate the particularity of experiences, which provide the basis for engendering identifications of all kinds. In the end, direct relevance to shared assumptions of Chineseness or culturality is at best secondary.

The Contradictory Tensions of Colonialism as Inscribed and Practiced

The advent of postcolonial theory in cultural studies and humanities in the 1990s raises pertinent questions as to what exactly is new not only in

reference to earlier generations of colonial studies but also to an institution that had effectively declined over a half century ago. Apt criticisms raised by McClintock (1992), Shohat (1992), and Dirlik (1994) regarding the pitfalls of the term *postcolonialism* suggest that one is dealing less with literal definitions of the phenomenon, which has produced its own lineages of political and intellectual discourse in the postcolonies, than a peculiar epistemic mind-set that should be understood in its own terms, despite being flawed by its inherent academic metropolitanism and subtle Eurocentricness (in the sense that it was sparked by a crisis of mind within Western literature rather than issues endemic to fields of colonial studies per se). McClintock criticizes the narrow, distorted usages of the term *postcolonial* to assert that the phenomenon of colonialism is perhaps more rampant than scholars have recognized in order to suggest the wider relevance of postcolonial critique, while Dirlik distances "Euro" postcolonialism from native traditions of postcolonial critique, which on the contrary have always been rooted in ongoing, local political struggles, and thus a different genre of postcolonial theoretical agenda, in order to advocate the priority of thought in praxis. While there are merits in an earlier, more literal and socially rooted postcolonial critique (postcolonialism$_1$), notably in the form of critical Fanonism, subaltern studies, and so on, that gave new impetus to the advent of a more recent postcolonial theory (postcolonialism$_2$), I think the latter postcolonialism$_2$ also offers constructive avenues for theoretical development.

One way to define the advent of postcolonial$_2$ theory is to view it as a sophisticated take on the politics of difference, enhanced with reference to its articulation of a notion of colonial subjectivity. It is not coincidental in this regard that the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* in particular serves as the conceptual template on which a subjectivity of racial difference becomes generalized. Whether one understands this in terms of Bhabha's poststructuralist reading of Fanon's colonized subjectivity in the mirror of self, JanMohamed's rendition of Fanon's Manichean allegory, or Spivak's tendency to view all discourse as colonialist, among other diverse interpretations, the symbolic dynamics of difference that are abstracted from a *presumed* situation of absolute power that is colonial domination become in turn the basis of a global theory (see in particular Gates [1991]). This then magnifies the role of culture.

In other words, culture in difference or the culture of difference becomes the language for a new postcolonial$_2$ speak. To some extent, this is what scholars working in the field of colonial studies regard as the main attribute of postcolonial$_2$ theory. While this constitutes a dominant strain of thought within the broad domain of postcolonialism$_2$, it is hardly the most sophisticated or pathbreaking version of a postcolonialist$_2$ paradigm. The influence here of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in redefining the

field cannot be underestimated. Aspects of culture and difference are salient to his interpretation of Orientalism and its relationship to colonialism, but the collusive relationship between discourse and power or of the role of discourse in obfuscating and sublimating the violence of domination adds a rather different dimension to the *presumed* dialectics of difference between colonizer and colonized.

While Orientalism operates at one level of creating difference through the gazing of the Other in legitimizing the authority of self, it operates at another level of negating difference or domination by colonizer of colonized through the neutrality of discourse. The Orientalist describes and orders reality through systemic observation, coding, and writing. The extent to which he successfully dominates the Other and sublimates the violence of colonial power is a function of the extent to which the Other acquiesces to the system of knowledge within which he is inscribed, not unlike the way people in a modern disciplinary society govern themselves in reference to their conformity to or adoption of institutional norms of thought and behavior. In short, postcolonialism$_2$ can be about the dynamics of cultural difference in the articulation of a critical theory. On the other hand, I suggest also that postcolonialism$_2$ can be about the critical articulation of difference, where difference has already been *discursively* neutralized.

Needless to say, the history of colonialism everywhere has been amply documented; at least, there is no dearth of primary materials and secondary scholarly sources available. Yet one rarely assesses the facts in reference to the authority or presumed objectivity that cloak the writings within which they are embedded. It should be little surprise that even the best scholarly works are written in a way that legitimate the inevitability of prevailing institutions and mind-sets. It should be little surprise also that narratives championing unilineal progress conveniently suppress at the same time exploitative and contradictory aspects of the system. Finally, when the history of colonialism is written as though colonialism does not exist or has been effectively sanitized or purged of its violence, this is a further symptom of Orientalizing. In fact, Orientalism is not peculiar to colonialism and should be a general, abstract process. At issue then is the nature of colonial governmentality and its possible collusive relationship with capitalism, nationalism, and other processes of rule. As ongoing transformative system, it involves not only concrete policies in practice but more importantly interactions at the local level that ultimately engender changing cultural spaces, class dynamics, and public spheres.

From the perspective of institutional history, the evolution of colonial-ism and empire can, of course, be viewed as a changing lineage of policies and practices, which is a product of its relationship to ideologies and theories of the times that diffused globally in particular ways. Yet at another level,

these historical transformations have in the long run produced a complex hegemonic process that is reflected in various regimes of rule. Insofar as they overlap with other institutions, such as nationalism and capitalism, they share a common field of discourse.

The postcolonial₂ approach outlined above may be the product of theoretical debates that seem to be most explicitly relevant to the study of colonial societies, *literally* defined, but it is certainly not limited to them. The general import of a cultural politics of difference and the collusive nature of institutional ideologies and practices in the hegemonic construction of its authority are pertinent also to nationalizing regimes and legitimizing processes of the state.

Reading Nationalism as Culturalist Narrative and Political Process

Before its rediscovery in the 1980s within critical circles of cultural studies, historical theory, and literary theory, there had already been several generations of scholarship on nationalism. There has been no shortage of historical ruminations in the 1950s and 1960s on the nature of nationalism, not to its mention ideological roots in nineteenth-century philosophies of history. The birth of the Republic of China in the aftermath of the 1911 Revolution made the nation-state an unambiguous presence both in China and elsewhere in the world. The rise of nationalism has in many ways marked the transition from tradition to "modernity" in standard narratives of world history. To the extent that we attribute this historical rise to the effect of concrete historical forces, such as colonialism and modernization, it has also been easy to associate the form of the nation-state to its Western diffusion, however defined. At the same time, the Chinese rendition of the nationalism as "the principle of peoplehood" (*minzu zhuyi*) has been the end product of intellectualizing by Chinese thinkers leading up to the fact. It intersects in some ways with the nature of the general (abstract) phenomenon, but it is also a peculiarly cultural definition that reflects interpretations of its essential nature. The nation's formation as a concrete sociopolitical institution has been heterogeneous rather than uniform globally, and its intellectualizing at a local level has always been intimately intertwined with, and thus directly reflective of, its concrete particularities. The relationship between the general nature of its diffusion (or modernity in its broadest sense) and its cultural particularities has been the source of ongoing confusion in the literature, insofar as such theorizing has usually been the primary result of one or the other position. Everything is still open to question.

The transformation of China as a modern nation, its prominence in the global arena and the wealth of prevailing scholarship on Chinese history, especially with regard to nationalism, should be obvious reasons, on the other hand, for being wary of alternative interpretations. Influential works by John Fitzgerald, Prasenjit Duara, Peter Zarrow, and Wang Hui, among others, cover in fact a wide diversity of approaches in this regard. Fitzgerald's (1996) work has focused largely on the role of social classes and political actors eventually leading up to the Nationalist Revolution. Its emphasis on concrete processes differs from Duara's (1995) introspection on narratives of history. The "Chinese narrative of History" can be juxtaposed not only against European ones but also against multiple, competing narratives of community. For Zarrow (2012), the same narratives of region, civil society and the state become objects of intellectual rumination. Unlike Duara's system of nation-states, Zarrow's is an abstract reflection on an underlying "political culture" based on notions of citizenship and sovereignty, among others, which legitimated the nation-state. These political principles that gave birth to the Chinese state "after empire" become in Wang Hui's (2014) terms the basis of a deeper conceptual transformation from empire to nation-state. In this regard, intellectual history becomes the terrain for discoursing heavenly principle (*tian li*) as the cosmological nexus of empire. While one cannot deny that such principles have been the source of ongoing debate in successive eras of neo-Confucian thought, Wang's discussion of the emergence of modern identity, as though just the end products of Western concepts of sovereignty and citizenship in a process of political reconsolidation after the demise of empire, leaves much to be desired.

I am less interested in the grand transformation from empire to nation, which is without doubt an undeniable aspect of an important political transformation, than in the evolution of nationalism (ultimately "nationalizing") in the ongoing present and its interactional dynamics with political and cultural processes. Without downplaying the role of concrete institutional and other factors that have contributed to the specific historical emergence of the nation-state globally, Anderson (1983) and Gellner (1983) have pointed to its abstract cultural constitution as the inherent defining characteristic. For Anderson, the modern nation might have been an imagined community, but more importantly it was a genre of empty, homogenous space that transcended whatever ethnic, religious or other attributes (even citizenship and sovereignty) that scholars have typified as concretely essential to nationalism. Community's rootedness to a colloquially based imagination was similar to Gellner's understanding of this culture of the nation, which not only contrasted with its hierarchical, specialized nature in the age of empire but also had to be universally inculcated in the minds of citizens in order for a nation to persist. The embeddedness of Anderson's imagined

community in political ideologies and Gellner's emphasis on the primacy of mass education both accented in different ways the function of politics and policies in engendering various underlying cultural imaginations. The nature of such legitimizing regimes should in turn highlight the politicizing constructions of citizenship but also the rationalization of distinctive culturalizing mind-sets that drive them.

Geoffrey Benjamin (1988) aptly characterizes the nation-state as "the unseen presence." Contrary to social scientific definition, he argues that the modern nation-state is an artifactual, imitable, and ideological institution, maintained by processes of ideological mystification, in which both overt politics and scholarship have been responsible for the active *maintenance* of the nation-state's invisibility. Philip Abrams (1988) has made similar claims about the state in arguing that the state is not the reality that stands behind the mask of political practice but rather the mask that prevents us seeing political practice as it is. As he (1988:76) put it, the state is "a third-order project, an ideological project. It is first and foremost an exercise in legitimation—what is being legitimated is, we may assume, an unacceptable domination." Taken together, Benjamin and Abrams's emphasis on the various regimes of mystification that buttress its reified nature as territorially discrete, systemically regulated standard linguistic community, bound by uniform rights and identities, gives a rather different spin on the nature and ideological function of citizenship and sovereignty. Needless to say, prevailing theories of nationalism have, if anything, been obsessed with the superficial presence of nation-states, marked by discrete territoriality, standard cultures or traits, and so on, even as they elude uniform definition in such terms. What Anderson and Gellner do not emphasize explicitly enough is that whatever this imagined community is, it had to be radically new, to transcend the "primordial sentiments," in Geertz's (1963) terms, characteristic of traditional societies. This novelty is at the same time the source of its contested nature, its need for legitimation, and hence the basis of ideological mystification that obscures its unacceptable domination. Culture can in this sense be manifested in diverse discourses and practices. In other words, the cultural aspects of this imagined community define not only the distinctive or historically particular features of nation-state formation but more importantly the nationalizing imperatives underlying it.

Disjunctures of Class and Ethnicity in an Era of "Transnational" Globalization

Arjun Appadurai's (1990) characterization of disjunctures in the global cultural economy and Kenichi Omae's (1990) account of the borderless world

have in different ways accented the metamorphosis of global capitalism in the late twentieth century. Multinational corporations, for one thing, do not appear to follow the flag anymore, and subcontracting of the production process globally has made the notion of cultural origins anachronistic. Appadurai's accent on the chaotic flow of ethnoscapes, financescapes, and so on is predicated in large part on Lash and Urry's (1987) proclamation of "the end of organized capitalism" and the breakdown between core and periphery in the modern world system. But as in the case of Omae, the literal focus is on the increasing demise of national barriers and boundaries that has transformed in effect the nature of economies, societies, and cultures. Not only have economies been transformed by labor migration (see, e.g., Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 1994) and societies by changing patterns of settlement and diasporic identity (see especially, Lavie & Swedenberg 1996). Culture itself has moreover become the site of transnational hybridization (Nederveen Pieterse 1995).

The advent of transnationalism as a challenge to nationalizing boundaries and orthodox political regulation has represented the underlying impetus behind Greater China, the notion of cultural China, Sinophone theory, and to a lesser extent the liminal status of Taiwan in the arena of international relations and the global economy. Whether it ultimately represents a destabilizing feature of a prevailing order or an emancipatory alternative remains to be seen. The detotalizing tendencies of transnationalism have always been the consequence of *both* decentralization of direct state control from above as well as localized resistance from below.

The establishment of duty-free trade ports in Hong Kong and Singapore can be viewed, through its denationalization of economic consumption, as a commoditization of culture and society in general. From the perspective of utilitarian economics and libertarian politics, the opening of the market economy is an entity that enables the triumph of individual freedom. In practice, it makes access to resources and power, whether it is in the form of commodities, status, or influence, a consequence of class access or control. In the context of a preexisting colonialism and nationalism, social class competes with political stratification or allocation of resources and power by the state or other political organs. At least in most typical cases of market liberalization, deregulation of the economy has been accompanied by decentralization of political control from above. The exception to this rule is the recent advent of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." The applicability of neoliberalism in specific contexts can also be debated. More importantly in the context of overlapping and competing institutional processes, identity in terms of nation, class, or ethnicity can be politicizing and depoliticizing.

Epistemic Moments Within Transformations of Place:
A Schematic Outline

We live in an era of apps (that resist totalizing). Each of the places discussed in the sections below represent autonomous societies in their own right and have spawned their own histories and scholarly literature. My objective is less to offer systemic interpretations of their history or culture or even to suggest that there are integrated analytical frameworks that one can apply for this purpose. Foucault defined discourses, strictly speaking, as "spaces of dispersion." In this same sense, there are in each venue epistemic moments that depict or exemplify distinctive transitions. They constitute frames, episodes, or junctures for the interaction in the abstract of geopolitical forces. It would not be imprecise to characterize these fields as spaces as well.

The establishment of the Nationalist (KMT) regime in Taiwan after World War II is in a literal sense a continuation of the Republican government on the Chinese mainland. But the construction of its peculiarly cultural nationalist policies and institutions is a complex product of its relationship to many forces. The most obvious one was its Cold War engagement with socialist China. Another was the challenge of recovering and transforming fifty years of Japanese colonial rule. Juxtaposed against both was its underlying relationship to the West, especially the constant shadow of US military protectionism. It is not necessary to ruminate at length here on the nature of geopolitics in the sense of international relations. My focus is more on how geopolitics in these terms provides the ground for engendering a polity defined by peculiar relationships between ethnicity, culture, and nation. In the case of Nationalist Taiwan, Chineseness becomes a master discourse that pits tradition against radical socialism and its culturalness against Japaneseness. As a construction, it is systematically politicized, which has ramifications for how it interprets traditions, such as Confucianism, as a source of its conservatism. Through its dissemination of Sun Yat Sen's Three Principles of the People (filtered further by Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement ethics), Nationalist ideology is in strict terms an ambivalent doctrine that weds conservative tradition and scientific modernity, uneasily to say the least. Its rationalization is a product of its institutional inculcation in all aspects of education, society, and politics. In light of all of the above, national identity is not simply a politicized (Nationalist) worldview but more precisely a cultural code of conduct that roots a sense of political community to assumed ties to ethnicity and culture as totalizing entity. The latter is hardly arbitrary; its legitimacy had to be newly imposed, systematically inculcated and reinforced. Most importantly, its intrinsic dualism as cultural

mindset exudes a normative, hegemonic presence that has long survived its Cold War origins, even after the emergence of Taiwanese consciousness, and overlaps contradictorily now with the advent of the transnational economy and, most recently, the evolution of an ever greater China

The historical transformation of Hong Kong is more complex than has been portrayed by its superficial change from British colony to Special Administrative Region (SAR) within China. Its nature as colony and its ambiguous aftermath must be problematized in multiple ways. Its metamorphosis from a "barren island," colonial trading post and cultural satellite of Guangzhou into free trade port and dynamic center of cosmopolitan hybridity, among other things, can viewed in the context of a mutating colonialism at its fulcrum. On the surface of things, its social and economic transformation has transcended the stereotypical analyses that have typified most theoretical discussions of colonialism elsewhere in the literature. Even from the outset, Hong Kong has been an atypical colony. Its colonial caste polity overlapped with its ongoing integration with China in all other respects, marked by open borders and cultural continuity. Contrast with British colonies elsewhere, however, begs critical scrutiny of the apparent fictions of "indirect rule" as well as the incommensurable relationship between policy and practices. Contrary to definition, colonialism does not disappear after 1997, and simply mutates with the change of regime, along with the collusive relationship of capitalism to politics. The polity is different from the cultural nationalism engendered in Taiwan, characterized by different relationships between ethnicity, culture, and nation, among other things, which have spawned a different kind of identification, whose politicization has continued to mutate after 1997.

In the PRC, the recent evolution from a Maoist socialist society to one transformed by a free market capitalist economy has become a major focus of debate. Theoretical discussions of an earlier era that explored "the sprouts of capitalism" in grand theories of comparative modernization have largely been replaced by those, on the other hand, emphasizing the policy shift of Deng Xiaoping in kick-starting the free market economy and those advocating a *longue durée* view of global capitalism, between which various other institutional approaches tend to situate themselves. Political policies and economic reforms aside, I argue that it is possible to view the underlying transformation in broader terms, of changing geopolitical spaces. In the process, the breakdown of socialist humanism as a system of social and political values eventually paved the way for a nationalist identity based on the cultural legitimacy of history and civilization. If anything, nationalist renaissance provided popular support for success of any economic development, which in turn colluded with postcolonial narratives to reverse centu-

ries of Western imperialist domination. Perhaps unlike the rise of capitalism in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, the determination of the state to control economic development by regulating political access to privileged resources made it especially prone to corruption and ties of *guanxi*. The transformation of *guanxi*, which has traditionally been a secondary and nuanced aspect of a cultural complex dominated by notions of face and personal rapport (*renqing*), into a tactical strategy and life routine per se can be seen as a paradigmatic feature of that broader sociopolitical transformation. In institutional terms, the focus of debate has been on a misplaced neoliberal characterization of the new PRC policy. Unlike the state's management of free market policy and economic development in Singapore, the brunt of the PRC's state domination has been on maintaining Party support and political correctness as a compromise to profit maximization and on promoting business collusion in political ventures abroad. Adam Smith in Beijing has in the longer view been the least significant aspect of it.

With regard to the overseas Chinese, the emphasis, in reference to sinological concerns, has mostly been on its marginality or removal from the center, reflected best by the concept of diaspora. Correspondingly, appeals to cultural China and Sinophone theory have in their own ways endeavored to counter the privileging of the center by promoting multivocality and cosmopolitanism. However, I argue that the concept of diaspora, like that of the subaltern, has been maligned as an identity that symbolized ethnic degradation. Its situation of social disenfranchisement can also be viewed as a project of geopolitical positioning, which can by nature change. The increasing unpopularity of diaspora as a term among Nanyang Chinese, once called "Jews of the East," can thus be contrasted with its increasing popularity among Asians in North America. This change in cultural imagination, where authorial subjectivity of speaking, writing, and intellectualizing is only part of broad-based lifestyles and practices, is in the long run the product of its positional situatedness in their respective societal regimes.

In Singapore, the dominant narrative centers on the birth of its modern, disciplinary society and the role of the state in engineering its underlying practices. In many respects, it runs counter to the prevailing model of cultural nationalism. At the same time, the influence of postcolonialism plays a rather different role in contrast to Taiwan and Hong Kong. The ethnic makeup of Singapore's population in a dominant Malay, Muslim milieu and the state's strategy in balancing intrinsic tensions between tradition and modernity in order to embrace a radical path toward national identification represent a rather different terrain of geopolitics. In this regard, disinterested domination by the state grounded in a British rule of law, micromanagement of social organization and practices, a free market economy, and appeal

to Asian values of cultural community have been promoted as a uniquely integrative framework. Its unusual geopolitics and the state's role in forging a unique strategy to it thus form a peculiar blueprint for socioeconomic development, ethnic stratification, and its nationalizing mind-set.

In light of the above experiences, a postcolonial subjectivity can ultimately be seen as an epistemic mind-set for Asian studies but only after recognizing the latter's groundedness in the division of labor of international academia and its "ethnicizing" production of knowledge.

Postwar, Post-Republican Taiwan

Civilizational Mythologies in the Politics of the Unreal

Prisons serve as a clear example (of total institutions), providing we appreciate that *what is prison-like about prisons is found in institutions whose members have broken no laws.*

—Erving Goffman, *Asylums*

One man's imagined community is another man's political prison.

—Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy"

Prologue

I argue that the dynamics of ethnicity in the context of Taiwan's nation-statism has been more thoroughly misunderstood than understood by scholars. If anything, the Republic of China in Taiwan is the typical incarnation of a monocultural nationalism, yet Taiwan's experiences have clearly run counter to the norm, especially in ethnic terms. In most other places, such as the former USSR and Yugoslavia, as if to vindicate *The End of History* in Francis Fukuyama's (1992) terms, crumbling socialist regimes have given way everywhere to the real face of ethnonationalism. In places such as South Africa, after blacks were given the vote, they voted quite naturally for majority rule. Only in Taiwan, where everyone knows that native Taiwanese constitute three-fourths of the population, did people (in its first free elections in 1989) vote decisively for a KMT regime by a three-to-one margin that was dominated by alien mainlanders. Any impartial analyst would have concluded that ethnicity per se accounted for little. If anything, Taiwan should have become independent long ago; so what is the real problem here? In actuality, ethnic realities have never been an object of doubt.

They have always, on the other hand, been clouded by political discourses disguised as cultural realities. Yet scholars in and of Taiwan consistently refuse to confront the fictive nature of these discourses for what they are. A politics of ethnicity couched in such terms is driven at a deeper level by an impoverished, even vulgar, definition of politics.

　　If normal politics is unreal, how unreal can it get? During the first PRC missile crisis, while trying to explain the incomprehensible calm that enveloped most of Taiwan in the face of PRC saber-waving and the Western media's depiction of an Iraqi-Kuwaiti−like crisis in the making, I wrote (mostly to the horror of PRC colleagues) that China would not invade. This would be like cutting off one's arm, just because it began to shake uncontrollably. Yet in the midst of all this commotion about reunification and independence, few of us bothered to ask, what kind of "unification" were people really talking about? I think for many Chinese (on both sides), 500 years is not a long time to wait for reunification. One of the popular myths about the fall of the Manchu Qing dynasty noted that someone discovered a dusty placard in the imperial rubble, proclaiming "Restore the Ming," as if to suggest that it was worth waiting 268 years for this. In this postmodern, globalized era, the very thought of it is totally unreal. What are people fighting and dying for *in actuality*, if not an anachronistic fiction? What deserves detailed scrutiny is the extent to which such fictions are institutionally inscribed.