

INTERPRETING CHINESE TRADITION: A CLANSMEN ORGANIZATION IN SINGAPORE

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This article examines the objectification of Chinese tradition and the negotiation of identity through studying the activities of a representative clansmen organization in Singapore. A clansmen organization comprises a group of members with a common surname (Freedman 1957:68). Members of each clan claim to share a common descent line and ancestor despite often having no genealogical evidence (Fried 1970:289). To date, there are numerous studies on clansmen associations in Southeast Asia. Most of these focus on the structure and functions of clansmen associations in general (Freedman 1957, 1960, 1965; Carstens 1975; Cheng 1990, 1995; Gamba 1966; Hsieh 1977; Mak 1987, 1989; Tan 1986; Yao 1984; Yen 1995; Yong 1977). Some research emphasized the various strategies that were adopted by the clansmen associations to ensure continuity and development (e.g. Mak 1992). In Singapore, clansmen associations were instrumental in helping new immigrants from China to settle down and seek employment (Suyama 1977:11). Various forms of charitable activities, such as sponsoring education and helping destitute members, were the main preoccupation of these associations (Yen 1986:89, 91; Cheng 1990:61). In addition, clansmen associations are also perceived as a medium for social networking in the business world (Wickberg 1994:70-71, Liu 1999).

Unlike existing studies, which are predominantly concerned with the structure and function of clansmen associations before the 1960s, this paper examines the clansmen association as an agent which interprets Chinese tradition and negotiates Chinese identity. I argue that not only does the clansmen association keep up with the changing emotional and pragmatic needs of its members, it also responds to the growth of the nation state and the changing socio-political environment.

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Liu (1998) pointed out that in response to rapid development in Singapore, the globalisation of the clansmen association and other overseas Chinese voluntary associations helped to revitalize old linkages with the homeland and to reconstruct networks for investment and economic purposes. However, he did not explore how this process of connecting and reconnecting with the Chinese in different parts of the world has an impact on the negotiation of the individual's identity. This paper argues that the recent activities of these associations reveal a process of inventing Chinese tradition and negotiating identity. On tradition, Hobsbawm has argued that many traditions that were believed to be old were in fact of recent invention. An invented tradition is 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (1983:1). Indeed, tradition is often open to interpretation and reinterpretation and is therefore constantly changing.

This paper examines how Chinese tradition in Singapore is objectified and interpreted by the state via the activities organized by the clansmen association. I argue that the political and cultural leaders are the ones who assume the leadership role in objectifying Chinese tradition within the framework of Asian values. I also examine how nationalism motivates the clansmen association to express Chinese identity within the context of a multi-ethnic country. I take the case of the Pang clansmen association and examine how its activities are defined and constrained by the nation-state and yet transcend geographical boundaries. At one level, I argue that the objectified Chinese tradition celebrated within the national boundaries contributes to the negotiation of a Singaporean Chinese identity within the framework of multi-racialism². At a higher level, my paper also examines how the relationship between the Pangs in Singapore and those within the homeland in China, being periphery and centre in Tu's (1991) terms, contributes to the cultivation of Chinese identity in the former. I also examine trans-national Chinese identity by investigating 'lateral' connections in the sense of Clifford (1999:220). These 'lateral' connections, which refer to the relationships between geographically separate members outside the homeland, are important in examining trans-national Chinese identity. For the present study, information was collected from in-depth interviews with different members at the Pang clansmen association in Singapore. Historical documents and magazines issued by the association were also analyzed for an improved understanding of the changing nature of the activities that it conducted. The choice of the Pang clansmen organization, which is a typical small-scale clan, over an elite-based one serves to provide a more representative picture of these associations in general.

² In Singapore, multi-racialism refers to the adoption of an ideology which grants equal status to the culture and identities of the various races, namely the Chinese, Malays, Indians, and others (Benjamin 1997:67, 78). Multiracialism 'ensures race retains a primary aspect of sense-making, both in politics and daily life' (Purushotam 1998:12).

Foundation period: Service provided to the clansmen in the region

Most Chinese in Southeast Asia during the century between 1840 and 1940 came from China. More specifically, these Chinese were mainly from the rural areas of the south-eastern coast of China. Most came as labourers and had not initially intended to be migrants. Instead, when they first arrived they considered themselves ‘sojourners’, with the hope of returning home once they had accumulated enough savings. In reality, many never returned. However, many of them were still very much concerned with the political and economic developments in their hometown. In fact, their common experience in the revolutionary activities in 1911, as well as the Japanese encroachment on China in 1937, forged closer ties between them (Hsieh 1977:94-96; Yen 1976:287-288; Mak 1992:3). At the same time, they were also concerned with their pragmatic needs in this new country, such as getting jobs and shelter as well as building a network of friends. It was under this background that voluntary associations such as surname-based clansmen associations were formed.

Like many other voluntary associations, the Pangs sojourners formed a clansmen association in Singapore through voluntary participation and donations. Initially, the aim of the association was to help its members get jobs and build friendships, and also to help them settle in the new country, although its role became much more diversified later as the needs of the members evolved accordingly to the changing socio-economic environment. According to my informants, the Pangs in this clansmen association then were from different places in China, such as Chaozhou, Hainan, and Guangdong. The majority of the Pangs were from Fengshun in Chaozhou. Thus, the pioneer ancestor at Chaozhou – Pang Zhen Feng – was adopted as the common ancestor of these clansmen.

According to my informants, rapid growth of the Pang clansmen association occurred in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. On 29 April in 1951, several Pangs in Singapore used the premises of the Sanshui voluntary organization to hold a gathering to discuss the formation of the Pang Clansmen Association (*Special Issue on the Third Worldwide Pang Clansmen Gathering* 1998:69). On 13 May of the same year, twenty-two Pangs came together to further discuss the detailed procedures for forming the association (*ibid.*). The association was officially established on 7 August 1952, with the first committee formally appointed on 5 February 1954 (*ibid.*). As there was a rapid expansion in the number of members, the clansmen association soon moved to Tanjong Pagar. Later, they moved to Serangoon and bought an apartment as a gathering site (*ibid.*:70). In 1958, the association moved to Jalan Besar and bought another apartment with S\$19,000 (*ibid.*). In 1973, the association discovered that this site at Jalan Besar was not designated for non-residential usage and thus had to seek special approval from the government (*ibid.*). On 14 November 1976, the association moved to No. 15 at Geylang Lorong 29, which thereafter became the permanent premises. This place in Geylang, which is a single-storey traditional house, was

bought for S\$ 135,000 Singapore dollars (*ibid.*). In 2000, the house was demolished and a new eight-story building now stands in its place.

It is important to note that the members of the clansmen association in the early days were those who mostly lived in Singapore or nearby Malaysia, both of which were actually part of the same country before 1965. It was only after the independence of Singapore in 1965 that members had to be strictly Singaporeans with the surname of Pang, while Malaysians and other non-Singaporeans were refused entry. In fact, this is a regulation imposed by the new nation state after its formation in 1965. From the 1950s to the 70s, the focus of the clansmen association was mainly on helping and meeting the needs of new clansmen who had just arrived in the country and were not familiar with the rapidly urbanizing environment. In particular, it played an important role in finding jobs for unemployed clansmen. This is indeed a response to the particular socio-economic environment in those days, as job opportunities were mainly found through one's social networks.

Apart from providing substantial help to individual members by way of job introductions, the clansmen association also provides charitable services to those in financial need. In fact, some charity services are extended to non-members as long as they share the same surname of Pang. Each may get from S\$200 to S\$500 for a year. Furthermore, the association helps with its members' funeral expenses through the establishment of a *huzhubu* 互助部 (which literally means 'mutual help section'). The *huzhubu* was set up in 1956 and members who joined this section had to pay an extra dollar for their monthly membership fee. Upon their death, or that of one of their family members, the families are entitled to receive S\$300. In fact, this benefit is also widely found in other clan and territorial associations in which such provisions are their major functions (Freedman 1957:190).

In order to cope with the urbanizing environment, many members encouraged the younger generations to have more education, although they themselves were illiterate or poorly educated. Granting scholarships to the children of members has also been a common practice since the beginning of 1960s. The scholarships were given to primary and secondary school students in the form of prizes, such as books and stationery initially, but have been in the form of cash since 1973. From 1987, these scholarships have also been extended to students at the university level. The funding of these scholarships is supported by the donations of the members and committee members. Donations are often drawn from the cash gifts given by guests at the wedding or childbirth banquets. Today, the total expenditure on scholarships is around S\$3000 per year.

Guardian of Chinese Tradition: Reifying Chinese Tradition and Cultivating Chinese Identity

Although most of the Pangs were once sojourners who intended to return to the mainland when they had earned enough money, many in fact did not do

so. Instead, they settled in Singapore and this caused the Chinese to become the dominant majority in the local community, while the Malays, the Indians, and the others form the minority. As Singapore becomes more affluent with its rapid economic growth, the clansmen association no longer solely plays the role of offering help to its members. Instead, the clansmen association has also assumed a new role in serving the interests of the 'host' country. More specifically, it has become the guardian of 'Chinese tradition' in helping the nation to build a multi-racial society. In Singapore, Chinese tradition is 'invented' within the framework of 'Asian values'. The term 'Asian values' was first coined by Western social scientists to help explain the economic boom and the process of modernization in East Asia. It was subsequently used by the Singapore government as a reference to the positive elements in Confucianism (Hill and Lian 1995:9). In reality, many of these values may in fact be universal and typical. It is, in fact, impossible to characterise 'Asian values' or state their precise differences from 'Western values'. However, 'Asian values' are invented and reified by the Singapore government as a reference to Confucianism, family ideology, filial piety, etc. (Hill and Lian 1995: 9). 'Asian values' are thus objectified as positive elements which are used to promote nationalism and to create solidarity and a common identity among the people (Ho 1977:3). The 'generalized Asian identity implies the distinct Southeast and South Asian identities', and elevates 'a pan-East Asian and Confucian identity as the basis for an Asian logic of modernity' (Wee 1993:738). Chua has also pointed out that the term 'Asian values' refers to a 'cultural reinvention of a past to frame the present' and was intended as a process of 'strategic identification ... for the purpose of contesting other formulations of Asian realities' (1999:577-578). Similarly, Chinese tradition is also 'invented' as a constituent part of 'Asian values' for strategic identification, for creating a unified identity amongst the Chinese. In this context, Chinese tradition is further objectified through the Chinese language, festivals and customs, although in reality Chinese tradition includes a wide range of other practices. Meanwhile, a unified Chinese identity is also imagined and reinforced by suppressing Chinese dialects and promoting the use of Mandarin (*ibid.*).

Interestingly, the government suggested that clansmen organizations should take up a role in reinforcing Chinese values, 'Asian values' and Asian identity. Clansmen associations are viewed as the roots of Chinese culture and tradition, which in the government's view should be cultivated and preserved. In 1986, the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clansmen Association (SFCCA) was subsequently set up with the support of the government and the seven major kin-based and native-based associations in Singapore³. Today, the

³ Before SFCCA was set up, clansmen associations were not under the control of any organization. However, clansmen associations work closely with other native-place-based organizations and profession-based organizations and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. In fact, individuals are often simultaneously members of these different organizations. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce is comprised of businessmen from different professions and was the most powerful organization representing the interests of the Chinese. This

SFCCA includes one hundred and ninety-one native-based and kin-based associations. It serves as the highest coordinating body of the kin-based and native-based associations in Singapore. The SFCCA aims to promote and encourage communication and cooperation between clansmen associations and native-based organizations. In addition, the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clansmen Associations, which works closely with the government, maintains a website for the Chinese living in different places to know more about Chinese culture and tradition (<http://www.sfcca.org.sg>). Announcements of worldwide gatherings held by different clansmen organizations are also put up on the website. The SFCCA urges the clansmen associations to mobilize its members to support the government in its promotion of Chinese tradition. It organizes grand cultural activities so that the general public may have a better understanding of Chinese language and culture. In addition, it also arranges for a range of activities to celebrate Lunar Chinese New Year in the city centre. It also organizes other activities, such as Chinese language study, Chinese culture lectures, music appreciation, Chinese chess, painting, and Mandarin classes regularly. The SFCCA also promotes the study of Chinese culture and tradition. A historical resource centre was set up in 1986 to keep better records of the development of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The centre publishes books, such as the 'Handbook of Chinese custom and festivals', makes documentaries, as well as runs exhibitions and seminars on the history of clansmen associations and Chinese traditions. A magazine, *Yuan* 源, is also published four times a year to record the development of clansmen associations in Singapore. It serves as a bridge to connect different clansmen associations as well as to inform its members of developments in other clansmen associations in other parts of the world.

As a member of the SFCCA, the Pang clansmen association actively responded to the state's call to preserve Chinese culture and tradition. It is not unusual to observe the leaders of the Pang clansmen constantly highlighting the importance of Chinese tradition in their speeches at clansmen gatherings (*Special Issue on 40th Anniversary [1953-1993] Pang Clan Association* 1994:68). The Pang clansmen association also promotes Mandarin speaking and organizes celebrations of cultural festivals. Since 1981 and 1989 respectively, the association started to have celebrations for the mid-autumn festival and Lunar Chinese New Year. These celebrations are an active response to the nation state's concern over the gradual loss of Chinese values. These celebrations are often highly ritualized events because they are

organization was founded in 1906 and aims to promote business opportunities and defend the interests of the businessmen and the Chinese in general (Chui 1991:95). The Chinese Chamber of Commerce played the role of an informal leader in promoting pro-China activities in the early 19th century. This organization is comprised of Chinese educated Chinese who promoted a lot of pro-China activities. Firstly, it provided political and economic support for revolutionary activities in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Secondly, it provided financial help to fellow-villagers back in the hometowns. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce is different from the Straits Chinese British Association, set up in 1900, which is comprised of local born English-educated Peranakan, who are those with mixed Malay and Chinese descent.

repeatedly performed in a particular way with a specific style and order. Rituals are not an essentially spontaneous activity, but rather a 'self-conscious act' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:7). Ritualised events also carry explicit symbols and messages which relate the ceremony to a larger cultural context (ibid.:16). Taking the example of the celebration of the Lunar Chinese New Year, it is a form of ritual in which certain cultural ideas and traditional social values are propagated. According to my informants, the celebration of Lunar Chinese New Year usually occurs on the Saturday or Sunday immediately following the first day of the lunar calendar. The event starts at around 10:30 in the morning and ends in about three or four hours. On such occasions, the association building will be decorated with flyers. There are about 50 to 60 participants, comprised mostly of families. While performing the celebration, a 'special behaviour or stylization' is observed (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:7). It begins with a New Year speech delivered by the president of the association. New Year blessings and wishes through Chinese idioms are then delivered by the president, and all other participants follow sequentially. Each participant is also given a red packet with two dollars inside⁴. In addition, each of them receives two mandarin oranges, which are a customary gift when relatives and friends visit one another during the Lunar Chinese New Year in Singapore. A buffet meal would then be served, in which raw fish is a staple dish symbolizing growth, prosperity and wealth. The total cost of the celebration is currently around S\$800.

Besides Lunar Chinese New Year, the celebration of the Lantern Festival is another highlight in the Chinese calendar. This is held on the weekend immediately before or after the 15th day in the eighth month of the Lunar Year. The celebration starts around 7:30 p.m. and ends around 11 p.m., usually costing about S\$1,000 for the whole event. In 1998, the Pang clan celebrated the festival together with other associations, such as the Hui An Association on the same street. For that year, the whole street was decorated with ribbons and lanterns. At every Lantern Festival celebration, members and their families gather at the association and participate in lantern riddles, fun fairs, games, singing, lucky-draws, mooncake-eating and meals.

One of the highlights of the celebration is the story-telling contest in Mandarin. The participants in this competition, all children of Pang clansmen, are divided into two groups on the basis of age. Each individual has to tell an interesting story using standard Mandarin. The Mandarin-based story-telling competitions and the promotion of Mandarin as a means of conversation among members are the association's active response to the state policy. The state raised a concern over the decline in the use of 'Asian languages', which are believed to be carriers of cultural values (Clammer 1985:133). The younger generation of Chinese have, in fact, grown up within a multi-racial environment and are able to learn English and Mandarin in school.⁵ English is

⁴ It is a customary practice for the Chinese to give and receive red packets containing money during the Chinese New year.

⁵ The language policy in school offers English as the first language and Mandarin, Malay or Tamil as the second.

the most common language today since it facilitates inter-racial communication, and hence many Chinese do not speak proper Mandarin or any Chinese dialect and do not care about their culture.⁶ The 'Speak Mandarin campaign' was launched in the late 1970s, with the emphasis on developing the ability to speak fluent Mandarin and encouraging a reduction in the use of Chinese dialects (which were at that time more frequently spoken by the Singaporean Chinese at home and in everyday life). Slogans such as these were used by the government to promote Mandarin: 'Make Mandarin the Common Tongue of our Chinese Community' (1979); 'More Mandarin, Less Dialects' (1980); 'Let's Speak Mandarin', 'Learn Mandarin, Speak Mandarin' and 'Let's Speak Mandarin in Public Places' (1981) (Purushotam 1998:73).⁷ This encouragement to speak Mandarin is aimed not only to improve students' results in the study of the Chinese language in schools, but also for the maintenance of cultural identity, namely Chinese identity (Hill and Lian 1995:87).⁸ The 'Chinese culture and tradition' is indeed a contemporary political construction jointly promoted by the state and its people in response to the decline in cultural awareness in Singapore.

Furthermore, ancestor worship, an important part of Chinese tradition, has also gained a greater significance since the 1990s, although it has been a central activity right from the foundation of the clansmen association. Freedman pointed out that ancestor worship in clansmen associations demonstrates filial piety, memorialism and social solidarity among the worshippers (1957:218). Today, the religious element of ritual performance has declined with secularisation taking place in Singapore⁹. Ancestor worship is both a means of expressing filial piety as well as an explicit symbol of Chinese tradition. Through the performance of this ritual, members and their children are educated in the importance of ancestor worship and the historical origins of the Pang ancestor. According to my informant:

We are Chinese regardless of where we live. We ought to know the origins of our ancestors. We need to teach our descendants about our ancestors who were from China. If the older generation does not promote ancestor worship, the younger generation will be

⁶ Language is perceived as an important symbol for culture. In Singapore, the cultures of Malays, Chinese, and Indians are believed to be taught most effectively through their respective languages (Tay 1992:104).

⁷ Asian values are objectified as family ideology and traditional virtues, such as filial piety and diligence (Hill and Lian 1995:154). This policy was launched in order to emphasize bilingualism, which includes English and a second language that is the one used by one's own ethnic group (Hill and Lian 1995:80, 87).

⁸ The speaking of Mandarin is encouraged also for pragmatic reasons, because Mandarin serves as *lingua franca* for all Chinese living in different places (Hill and Lian 1995:87-88).

⁹ Clammer pointed out that secularisation is a process at work in modern Singapore. It is a process by which 'a rationalization of man's world view takes place.' He suggested that secularisation has thereby undermined religious practices and ritual performances (1985:50). I argue that the ritual performances have been granted new meaning in the changing social context.

ignorant. To understand Chinese culture, we must start from understanding ancestors. We ought to promote Chinese culture and Chinese values.

Surely, ancestor worship reflects filial piety. More importantly, it is also an important representation of Chinese tradition. Through participation in ancestor worship many of the Pang clan felt their linkage with 'Chinese tradition' had been strengthened. In fact, many of my informants emphasized that 'ancestor worship is a Chinese tradition and that is why we are here, to participate in our tradition.' Like many other clansmen associations in Singapore, which hold biannual ceremonies to worship ancestors (Freedman 1957:216), the ritual of ancestor worship at the Pang associations is also organized biannually, on the birthday (23rd of the 2nd Lunar month) and anniversary of the death (1st of the 8th Lunar month) of the imagined pioneer ancestor Zhen Feng. Roast pig, chicken, duck, fish, rice, vegetarian food, fruits, incense and joss sticks are usually present on these occasions. The total cost of the ceremony is currently around S\$1000. The ancestor worship performed in August is often followed, on the same day, by the annual dinner, which is held in the open space outside the association's building. It is not uncommon to observe in this annual dinner a total of 25 tables, with ten clansmen at each table. Indeed, it is an opportunity for the clansmen to gather and strengthen ties. A sense of solidarity among the clansmen is also symbolically achieved through such joint participation.

Apart from this worship done by the Pangs to their common ancestor at the collective level, individual Pangs also performed ancestor worship to their respective deceased kin, whose tablets were mostly placed in the premises of the clansmen association¹⁰. There are around two hundred tablets held at the hall in the building housing the clansmen association. Among them, 109 tablets were occupied and 10 were reserved but currently vacant, while 99 others were available for sale. The price of tablets ranged from a few hundred dollars to one thousand two hundred. The higher the price, the better and more prominent would be the location of the tablet. Some bought the tablets upon the death of their parents, while others did so even before their parents' death, presumably to secure a tablet with a desired location.

In sum, the activities of promoting Mandarin, celebrating different Chinese festivals and performing ancestor worship are the key programs conducted by the clansmen association in Singapore today. These activities

¹⁰ The deceased ancestors are grouped systematically in the ancestor hall in south-eastern China. Only those who have contributions to the lineage or who are virtuous would have their tablets placed here. The contribution could be a financial one or in other forms, such as honouring the lineage by winning a position in the imperial bureaucracy. The location of the tablets depends on the contribution of the individual. In Singapore, the location of the deceased's tablets depends on the amount of the money that the descendants pay. In the homeland, the dead are grouped systematically in relation to their living descendants, because the ancestral halls in the homeland are differentiated into many sub-lineage halls so that people of each segment are related to the particular sub-lineage (Freedman 1957:214).

reveal three themes. Firstly, they contribute to the process of objectifying Chinese tradition in everyday life. Secondly, such activities express and reinforce Chinese identity, as well as the sense of solidarity among the members in the association. Thirdly, these activities also demonstrate keen support to the state's policy of reviving Chinese tradition and reinforcing the identity of Singaporean Chinese. In other words, through performing these activities, the second, third, and fourth generation migrants actively respond to the call of the state in the 'host' country they reside. These activities are ways to express the sentiment of nationalism and the sense of loyalty towards the country in which they were born and brought up. In other words, Singaporean Chinese identity and nationalism are observed through practicing and displaying the objectified and shared traditions in the 'imagined community'¹¹. The devotion to the 'host' country is very different from the situation in the early Republican period, when a large proportion of the activities carried out by clansmen organizations were intended to support revolutionary objectives in the 'homeland' – Mainland China (Chui 1991:96). Substantial financial assistance was granted to the homeland by the different clansmen associations when the Sino-Japanese war broke out (ibid.:98-99; Cheng 1990:61). The struggle between the Kuomintang and their communist opponents during the 1940s also triggered the differentiation of these clan associations along pro-communist or pro-Kuomintang lines (ibid.: 101-102). In contrast, activities conducted by today's clansmen associations reveal how the younger generation of migrants has become localized to the 'host' country. Indeed, the concern of clansmen associations today is mainly with the survival and cultivation of Chinese tradition in order to support the 'host' – the Singapore state.

Ambivalent feeling towards the homeland

Apart from the celebration of traditional festivals in Singapore, visits to their 'homeland' are also important opportunities for the Pangs to further negotiate their identity. In the following, I will show how the 'homeland myth' is exploited by the Pang clansmen in the negotiation of their identity. I argue that these activities also reinforce their identity of being Chinese Singaporeans.

According to my informants, the Pang association has organized two ancestor worship trips to Chaozhou since 1989. In each trip, there were about 50 to 60 participants. In Chaozhou, there is an ancestral hall that is more than nine hundred years old. This ancestral hall was abandoned and was turned into a school during the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, the Pangs there wanted to rebuild the ancestral hall and mobilized overseas clansmen to contribute financially towards the renovation effort. Donations were made to the Pangs in Chaozhou by Pangs in Hong Kong and in Southeast Asia,

¹¹ 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation would never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1983:15).

including Thailand and Indonesia. Part of these funds was in fact used to reconstruct the path to the grave of Zhen Feng. In 1990, the Pangs in Hong Kong and Singapore decided to extend this project further. They decided to tear down six small houses inside the ancestor hall, all of which were built during the Cultural Revolution (Chan 2001). The Pangs in Singapore then wrote to the local county government in Jiayang, Chaozhou, applying for the removal of these houses and for permission to refurbish the ancestral hall, a request which was eventually granted by the government.

With 'foreign money' (i.e. overseas remittances) from these overseas Chinese, those involved in the reconstruction had priority in acquiring building materials, and so the renovations ran smoothly. The term *huaqiao* 華僑 has been created by the Chinese government to identify those Chinese living overseas and to offer them certain benefits, such as priority in acquiring building materials while renovating an ancestral hall. The hidden agenda of the PRC government is to create stronger ties between people in rural China and their kin overseas, so that more foreign investments will be forthcoming in the future.¹² In other words, the 'homeland' state exploits the sentiments of the overseas Chinese for its own interests. This utilitarian incorporation of the overseas Chinese has turned 'the national imaginary into a trans-national imaginary, in which diasporic cultural formations create new forms of community under conditions of globalisation' (Grewal 1999:801). Indeed, the overseas Chinese and their homeland have become reconnected in new ways, whereby the homeland state attempts to mobilize the resources of the overseas Chinese for its own economic development. This is very different from the situation in the early 20th century when politicians like Sun Yat-sen solicited support among overseas Chinese for overthrowing the Qing dynasty.¹³ In other words, the homeland has shifted from mobilizing political support to soliciting economic support.

By 1991, the reconstruction of the ancestral hall in Chaozhou had been partially completed. Many Pangs in Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Hong Kong returned to celebrate the partial completion of the refurbishment as well as to gather for ancestor worship. Several hundred people from different parts of China and Southeast Asia clustered in their remembered homeland and attended the ceremony. It is the shared imagined kin ties and displaced experiences outside the 'homeland' which bind them together. There were a total of 1,489 ancestors tablets placed in the ancestral hall in Chaozhou in 1991. The deceased Pangs from 39 places in China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan had their tablets placed there. Among them, 96 tablets had been added after this latest refurbishment of the ancestral hall. Some informants from Singapore bought tablets for their deceased parents or grandparents who had previously longed to return to their homeland. Some elderly Pangs also made plans to have their tablets placed

¹² Similarly, the Indian government also focused on overseas Indians as potential investors and thus the term 'non-resident Indian' had been coined (Grewal 1999:801).

¹³ Mak pointed out that the overseas Chinese in Singapore and Malaya became more unified through supporting the 1911 Chinese revolutionary activities in Mainland China (1992:36).

there after their death, while some others were against the idea. Instead, they would rather have theirs placed in the clansmen association in Singapore. In fact, most of the younger Pangs whom I spoke to were unlike their grandparents, who had a much deeper attachment to their homeland.¹⁴

On the one hand, a Chinese identity is reinforced through the refurbishment of the ancestral hall in Chaozhou, in which the Pangs from Singapore and from the homeland felt as one big family. On the other hand, a boundary is drawn between the Pangs from Singapore and their counterparts in Chaozhou. Indeed, it is not difficult to observe that the former group does not feel entirely positive about their trips to China. Their feelings towards their homeland are ambivalent. Many of them have a sense of attachment towards their homeland and are touched by the friendliness of their kin there. Some went with fragmented accounts of their hometown which they had gathered from their parents and grandparents and were nostalgic about searching for their roots. Many also travelled there together with their children, in the hope that they too would also learn more about their roots. At the same time, some are suspicious about the continuous pleas for donations to renovate the ancestral hall in Chaozhou. Many are worried about the management of these funds and whether corruption is involved in the process. Thus, the sentiment of the Pangs towards the homeland is not an entirely positive one. In reality, the Pangs in Singapore have mixed feelings towards their homeland in Chaozhou. In their conversations with me, many Pangs often compared Singapore with China. They appreciated life in Singapore and were proud of it, but felt frustrated by the practices in their homeland. They in fact feel more at home when they are 'in exile' while living outside China. By comparing the quality of life in these two places, they were indeed engaging in the process of drawing a boundary between themselves and the mainlanders, thus asserting their identity of being Singaporean Chinese. In other words, the Pangs' visits to their homeland helped to reinforce their identity as Singaporean rather than as 'Pang'. 'Nationalism' is reproduced through the trans-national exchange.

The triumph of the host country in winning the sentimental attachment of the Pangs in Singapore is further revealed from the display of the photographs of Singapore's President in the premises of the clansmen association. Apart from the ancestral tablets and the portrait of their pioneer ancestor Zhen Feng, the portraits of the President and First Lady were also placed prominently in the meeting hall. These portraits were obtained from the Ministry of Information and the Arts, and the voluntary display of these pictures reveals a nationalistic sentiment. This is very different from the situation in the Republican period, when Sun Yat-sen's picture was often placed at many clansmen associations in Singapore. Indeed, the choice of having the pictures of the President and his wife reveals a sense of strong attachment towards the host country. This also shows how the modern

¹⁴ At the beginning of the century, many of the sojourners chose to return to their hometown upon retirement.

nation-state has, in the words of Nonini and Ong, controlled the individual's identity through its 'disciplinary practices' (1997:23).

Celebrating Chinese identity beyond the border of nation state

Not only have the Pangs in Singapore established contact with their homeland in China, they also interact regularly with the Pangs dispersed outside China in other parts of the world. It is indeed the rapid movement of people, capital, culture, information and technology in the era of globalisation which has facilitated closer ties between people living in geographically separate places. If China is the centre and the dispersed populations outside China are the peripheries, as has been suggested by Tu (1991), then not only are the linkages between the centre and the peripheries important, but the ties between peripheries are also significant. The lateral connections between 'peripheries' are well observed through frequent exchange visits between clansmen in Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Bangkok since the 1980s.¹⁵

In 1983, the England Pang Clansmen association visited the Singapore Pang Clansmen Association (*Special Issue on the Third World-wide Pang Clansmen Gathering* 1998:71). In 1983, the Singapore Pang clansmen association visited the Bangkok Pang clansmen association. In 1984, when the Singapore clansmen association celebrated its 35th anniversary, other Pang clansmen associations based in England, Taiwan, Thailand, Jakarta, Selangor and Pahang also came to join in the celebrations. Indeed, the lateral connections between the Pangs living in different places have become increasingly significant in the age of globalisation (*Pang Clan Association* 1990:32; *Lianhe Zhaobao* 22.2.1984). In 1987 and 1988, Pangs from Beijing, Jakarta and Thailand also came to Singapore and visited the Pang clansmen association (*Pang Clan Association* 1990:24). Similarly, in 1991 and 1992 the Pang clansmen association organized trips to visit the Pangs in Sarawak and Selangor in Malaysia (*Special Issue on 40th Anniversary [1953-1993] Pang Clan Association* 1993:151, 158).

Since the 1990s, these lateral connections between Pang clansmen in different parts of the world are no longer restricted to only those in Southeast Asia, but now they are also becoming a global event in which Pangs further away participate. These global events are now being held on a regular basis, starting from the First World-wide Pang Clan gathering in Malaysia in 1994. The Second World-wide Pang Gathering was organized in Taipei two years later (*Special Issue on the Third World-wide Pang Clansmen Gathering* 1998:25). The third one was held in Malaysia's Johor Bahru in 1998, while the fourth one was held in Thailand in 2000. In 2002 it was held in Singapore. Four objectives may be observed from these worldwide gatherings. Firstly, they aim to promote contact between Pang clansmen living in different places.

¹⁵ Clifford uses the term 'lateral connection' to describe the relationships between people scattered in different places outside their homeland (1999:219).

Secondly, they facilitate business cooperation between Pangs in different places. Thirdly, they enable veneration of the ancestor. Lastly, they also enable members to collect more information about the genealogy of the Pangs and to compile a communication list for those living in different places.

The motivation of the lateral connections between the Pangs living outside China is mainly driven by the shared, displaced experiences of living outside the homeland. Although these experiences may vary from location to location, the ancestors of these people usually moved out of China because of war and hardship in the homeland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is also the concept of *zongqing* 宗親 which draws these people together. *Zong* literally means descent, while *qing* denotes closeness. The term *zongqing* implies that those who share the descent line should be close to one another. Since they share the common surname 'Pang', they consider one another to be of the same descent line and in all likelihood also share a common ancestor who lived several thousand years ago. It was not uncommon to hear my informants identifying these gatherings as meeting up with *zongqing*. As one of them further explained, the meetings with people from affiliated clansmen associations overseas gave them an opportunity to experience 'Chinese familism' and thus reinforced their identity of being Chinese at a higher level.

Significantly, the gathering of Pangs from different parts of the world reveals that they are not only concerned with their counterparts in the homeland, but are also keen to strengthen ties with other clan members who live outside China. Indeed, it is important to note that the exchange visits between the Pangs living outside China are becoming more regular than their visits to their homeland. The shared experience of living outside their homeland was a unifying force which brought these people together. In other words, the homeland is not left behind or static, as Schein has argued (1999:698); it is a magnet for drawing people outside it together. This also shows that the ties between those dispersed in different places are growing in importance relative to those between the respective Pangs and their homeland. The interaction between those outside the homeland was driven by the lateral axes and reinforced Chinese identity in a wider sense. This is quite different from the practice in the last century, when members were strongly attached to the homeland, while the interaction among the Pangs outside of it was relatively limited.

In each of these gatherings, a group of thirty to forty Pangs from Singapore would participate. Many participants from Singapore also recorded their trips on videotape and in photographs. As recalled by one of my informants who attended the gathering in Taiwan, more than a thousand Pangs and their families from different parts of the world were there and some even wore traditional costumes as they performed rituals at the ancestral hall (see also *Special Issue on the Third World-wide Pang Clansmen Gathering* 1998:24-25). One could further pursue Watson's claim on the acceptance of particular standardized rituals and suggest that it is indeed the participation in the rituals of ancestor worship in these gatherings which validates one's

Chinese identity (1988:3-19). Rituals do not only link commoners to a national culture though the 'emulation of local elites' (Cohen 1991: 119), but they also connect people living in different nations, thereby forming a form of imagined community.¹⁶ It is the joint participation in the rituals of ancestor worship which binds them together as one imagined community, thereby transcending national boundaries in a post-national world.¹⁷

With continuously rising trans-national movement, the role of the state becomes problematic. Some have argued that 'economic citizenship' has emerged and trans-national flows challenge state sovereignty, while others suggest that nationalism is not likely to end (Ong 1999:215; Grewal, Gupta and Ong 1999:661). However, Ong has further pointed out that the issue 'is no longer one of the state 'losing control' but rather about how the state has taken an 'active role in refashioning sovereignty to meet the challenges' (Ong 1999:215). She suggested that in the face of the trans-national movement of capital and economic resources, the state has become flexible in the management of sovereignty. Grewal argues that nationalism is invoked as an opportunity for the marketing of products by trans-national corporations, as in the case of the dressing of Barbie in a sari (1999).

Similarly, the case discussed here also shows that the state is adaptive toward cultural exchanges. The Chinese state, for instance, has indeed managed to make use of the trans-national movements of people to meet its own interests. In Singapore, the increased contact between the Pangs living there and those elsewhere has not undermined the power of nation-state. Following Ong (1999: 215), this present case also shows that the nation-state has played an active role in refashioning sovereignty to meet the challenges of globalisation. I argue that the trans-national exchanges have in fact contributed to an enrichment in Chinese culture and tradition, and have also led to a renegotiation of Chinese identity within the framework of multiculturalism in Singapore. Indeed, the state is also active in encouraging these cultural exchanges between Chinese living in different places. It recognizes that these exchanges can serve as a means to reinforce 'Chinese tradition' and to create a stronger Chinese identity within a multi-racial Singapore, thus adding colour to the national identity. In other words, Chinese in Singapore have developed a stronger sense of citizenship through these exchanges. This deviates from Ong's (1993:770) claim that Asian governments failed to promote a strong sense of modern citizenship among the Chinese in their countries. In Singapore's case, the activities conducted by the clansmen association in the last two decades reflect the strong interference of the state in moulding national identity.

¹⁶ 'All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact ... are imagined' (Anderson 1983:15).

¹⁷ Anderson (1983) pointed out that imagined communities are first created by print capitalism and later extended by electronic capitalism. Appadurai (1996:8-23) further argued that mass-mediated sodalities transcend national boundaries in a post-national world.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined the way in which the clansmen association objectifies Chinese tradition and negotiates Chinese identity in a changing socio-economic and political environment. I have argued that as Singapore encounters globalisation, the clansmen association has assumed a different role. Instead of predominantly looking after the pragmatic interests of the fellow members, it has assumed a new role in reinforcing the 'disappearing' Chinese tradition and identity. In the process of doing that, Chinese tradition has been reinvented.

By highlighting the various activities organized by the organization, this paper has examined the different levels of identity. The complex ways that Chinese identities are shaped within the nation state and within the context of global flows are discussed. I have argued that the clansmen association is the medium through which the nation-state revives the objectified Chinese tradition and reinforces Chinese identity. Indeed, the nation-state has disciplined individuals via the clansmen association. It is through performing the ritualized celebration of festivals and through promoting Mandarin-speaking that a Chinese Singaporean identity permeates further into the local community. It is, however important to note that these activities were first objectified as 'Chinese tradition' by the nation-state. Thus, conducting these activities also reveals active support for the government policy of reviving 'Asian values and traditions'; they are therefore also an expression of nationalism towards the 'host' country. In other words, Chinese identity is negotiated within the discourse of constructing Singaporean identity.

In addition, it is also the homeland visits to China and the ancestor worship there which bind the Pangs from different places together, forming a larger imagined community in a post-national world. China serves as a powerful symbol which drives Chinese people living in different places together to negotiate their heterogeneous identities. The trans-national exchanges between the Chinese living in different locations have an impact on how nations are imagined. In Singapore, the increased contact with the Pangs living elsewhere has not undermined the power of the nation-state. The trans-national exchanges have rather contributed to an enrichment in Chinese culture and tradition, and have also led to a renegotiation of Chinese identity within the framework of multiculturalism and nationalism. In other words, the nation-state has successfully played an active role in refashioning sovereignty to meet the challenges of globalisation (Ong 1999: 215).

On the one hand, the 'lateral connections' between the Pangs in different localities around the globe reveal how Chinese identity has extended beyond the borders of the nation-state. On the other hand, the national identity is not necessarily in conflict with the Pangs' attachment towards their homeland and their ties with other Pangs living in other parts of the world. While the activities in the 'homeland' have drawn the Singaporean Pangs closer to the Pangs in China, these activities also led them to realize the differences between themselves and their counterparts living in mainland China. In the process of drawing a boundary between themselves and the mainlanders,

the Pangs further asserted their identity of being Singaporean Chinese. Indeed, the trans-national flows did not lead to the end of nationalism, but rather a reworking of it (cf. Grewal, Gupta and Ong 1999:661).

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