

THE MYTH OF CONSTRUCTING A GREATER CHINA IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE MALAYSIAN-CHINESE IN REFORMING CHINA*

LAW KAM-YEE AND LEE KIM-MING

Hong Kong Institute of Education and City University of Hong Kong

1. Introduction

During the opening ceremony of the 8th National Congress of Returned Overseas Chinese and Their Relatives in July 2009, Wang Zhaoguo, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, and Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, said during an address to Congress that returned overseas Chinese and their relatives have made extraordinary contributions to the nation's revival and the people's well-being in the past six decades. He continued by saying that the country's future prosperity needed continuous contributions from these returned overseas Chinese and their relatives, as well as other overseas Chinese. He thus called on them to actively engage in China's construction and modernisation, and contribute more to promoting the nation's peaceful reunification and maintaining the solidarity of all ethnic groups (Deng, 2009). The CPC showed the highest respect to Congress, with nine members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau present at the meeting, including President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. Since the last three decades of China's opening and reform, Chinese authorities have distinguished themselves with policies that nurture patriotic sentiment and social networks among overseas Chinese communities. Critical evaluations of these efforts, however, are not easily available (Fan, 2009), despite of the large amount of literature on generally reviewing the opening and reform that has been emerging lately. While statistical figures allow a review of the overseas Chinese policy in the economic aspect, obtaining in-depth examination about patriotic sentiment or possible construction of a greater China identity is not as straightforward as it may seem.

It is assumed that Chinese authorities' continued and tremendous efforts contribute to their formula for success. Moreover, the problems of poor integration and the marginalisation of overseas ethnic Chinese in their living places have also prevailed for decades. In Malaysia, for example, the ethnic Chinese do not usually express their sentiments strongly, and the leaders of Chinese merchants strongly discourage the involvement of their own people in radical activities. This, however, does not mean that

* Law Kam-ye is associate professor in the Department of Social Sciences, Hong Kong Institute of Education. Lee Kim-ming is lecturer in the Division of Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong. The authors' thank goes to Hong Kong Institute of Education for funding support of the project (Project No.: RG33/2007-2008).

they generally enjoy good integration in this multiethnic nation. 'Now, everything is separate, and non-Malays feel like second-class citizens in their own country', sighed Lim Kit Siang, the Chinese head of the opposition Democratic Action Party, in an interview with *Time* shortly after serious street revolts in November 2007 launched by ethnic Indians in Kuala Lumpur. Lim Kit Siang has served intermittently in Parliament since 1969 and believes that the current situation is much worse than it was in the 1970s in spite of the fact that the country's economy back then was far less prosperous than today (Beech, 2007: 31). The problem, it seems, does not lie with the existence of a Malaysian-Chinese identity crisis. The problem is that the complexity of its sentiments is beyond the grand agenda of the state.

It is difficult to deny the evidence that implies that, along with the general impacts expected from the tide of globalisation, the real and perceived effects of such globalisation in the Southeast Asian region may have altered the conditions that make nationalism the only form of social organisation open to the modern imagination and education the monopoly of the nation-state. School, in particular, is the institution that theorists of nationalism have long identified as central to the perpetuation of national identity and unity. However, over recent years, globalisation envisioned the creation of transnational networks, where the identification with a particular state did not preclude the nurturing of a transnational identity, or identities for that matter (Lincicome, 2005:179, 188). Such types of transformation that globalisation has brought to bear upon education is presumed to be especially outstanding in Malaysia. The ethnic cleavages between Malays and non-Malays, especially among the Chinese, are well known to students in intercultural studies. Each of the ethnic groups maintains its own culture, and most of their social conflicts, even those which are socioeconomic or political in nature are coined in ethnic terms. In other words, class conflicts and power struggles, although sometimes overlapping within ethnic divisions, are often directly or indirectly reduced to ethnic problems. The Malaysian government pursues what may be called 'pro-Malay' policies, and it is doubtless that ethnic categories remain important in the institutional life of Malaysians, for *bumiputra* ('sons of the soil', indigenous inhabitants) or non-*bumiputra* alike. Higher education is one of the critical domains since it disfavours the ethnic Chinese from acquiring tertiary education domestically (Cohen, 2000; Lee, 2002:5-6). Many well-off Chinese families send their children to Western universities where education is quite expensive (Pong, 1993:247). Mainstream research explains that the studying abroad in Western universities is not only for obtaining a higher degree but also for deliberately seeking qualifications that will help young people secure permanent residence in the West, such as Australia (Lincicome, 2005). Students who do not intend to migrate permanently still prefer to remain in the host country longer for mostly employment- and income-related reasons (Sin, 2006). Mainstream research has conceptualised the studying abroad of Asian youth in migration studies.

However, the less well-off Chinese send their children to Mainland China, especially as the economic ties between China and Southeast Asia have greatly improved in recent years. In 2007, the China-Malaysia bilateral trade was worth a monetary amount of US\$46.8 billion, ranking at the top of all countries in Southeast Asia. Malaysia is

China's third largest trading partner in Asia, and also the second biggest foreign direct investor from Southeast Asia.¹ Facilitating their children in establishing certain *guanxi* for their future careers has become the prevailing concern of Malaysian-Chinese parents. Meanwhile, the overseas Chinese policy of the Chinese government has become more proactive in recent years with the aim of strengthening the emotional ties between overseas Chinese and their hometowns in Mainland China. Higher education is expected to play a certain role in this new strategic orientation, especially for institutions that are operated by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office on the State Council, which are assumed to 'promote the superior traditional culture of the Chinese nation and to unite overseas Chinese into contributing to the nation (Sun, 2004:73)'.

This specific group of young Malaysian-Chinese is an interesting research target for students in intercultural studies who want to explore the logic in the cultural identities of the new generation of ethnic Chinese, particularly in light of the newly argued transnationalism perspective, especially in terms of national identity. This is because the foundation of their diaspora is weak, having been born and raised in Malaysia. However, their country's ethnic policies are assumed to have biases against them, and as a result, they have become 'reluctant exiles' as they pursue higher education in China, the cultural homeland of their ethnic origin. Will a special type of cultural identity be developed during the period when they are supposedly in touch with their 'Chineseness?' In the light of China's keen policy of nurturing a patriotic sentiment and social networks among overseas Chinese communities, how far does the construction of a greater China identity succeed regarding this group of young Malaysian-Chinese? Recently, some studies found that after certain forms of communication and life experiences, changes in the degree of identification to Taiwan or China occurred among Taiwanese businessmen in Mainland China (Chen C.C., 2005; Chen E., 2005). These investigations provide justified ground for the assumptions in this study.

According to Aihwa Ong (1999:4), 'trans' denotes both moving through space or across lines and changing the nature of something. Analytically, globalisation is concerned with transnationality, which is the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space. This has been intensified under late capitalism. Hence, transnationalism refers to the cultural specificities of global processes, which trace the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of 'culture'. In this study, transnationalism is associated with the practices and imagination of the potential elite Chinese, and their varied responses to mobility, and cultural and national identity. In Asia, transnational processes are carried out by cultural practices. Transnational flows and networks have been the key dynamics in the formation and shaping of cultural practices, identity, and state strategies (Ong, 1999:17). On one hand, important studies on translationalism emphasize the role of government institutional processes, which are usually more influential than private organisations (Landolt & Da, 2005). On the other hand, Schiller, Caglar & Guldbrandsen (2006) argue that identity construction may be shared based on religious or social lives.

1 Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are not included. See *China Statistical Yearbook 2008*, National Bureau of Statistics of China, Chapter 17, retrieved on 15th July 2009 from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2008/indexch.htm>.

These ideas inspire this study to investigate the possible construction of a greater China for a group of young Malaysian-Chinese under various dynamic factors.

In Section 2 of this paper, three major theoretical perspectives which examine the implications of Malaysia's 'pro-Malay' policies on ethnic Chinese, with emphasis on transnationalism, are reviewed. Section 3 includes a report from our original case study of a specific group of young Malaysian-Chinese who are pursuing higher education in Mainland China. Based on this study, discussions are made in Section 4 regarding the possible changes to and limitations in the cultural logic of the transnational identity of young Malaysian-Chinese who have intercultural communication experiences in Mainland China.

2. Transnationalism and Post-colonial Ethnic Politics

Two distinct but not mutually exclusive theoretical perspectives in studying the implications of Malaysia's 'pro-Malay' policies on the ethnic Chinese are reviewed in this section. The Transnationalism Approach (which is somehow relevant to theories of cultural globalisation) is argued as an interesting aspect in examining the new dynamics between China and Southeast Asia in recent years. While our case study will reflect the insightfulness of this approach, it will also demonstrate the validity of other approaches relevant to theories of post-colonial ethnic politics that have been widely applied to investigate identity politics in post-colonial Malaysia for decades.

The Chinese Transnationalism Approach

A special emphasis is placed on the Transnationalism Approach in this study because the effects of globalisation, especially in the cultural aspect, have been neglected within the simple static ethnic frameworks of old approaches or the class and state interest dimensions. As summarised by Waters, cultural globalisation is a dual process, both differentiating and homogenising, through the rapid mediation of ideas by electronic communication and personal mobility. On the other hand, globalisation makes certain that previous territorially bound national cultures become transnational and deterritorialised, thus facilitating the emergence of a common global culture. However, the negative impact of globalisation is that it 'weakens the putative nexus between nations and states thereby releasing absorbed ethnic minorities and allowing the reconstitution of nations across former state boundaries' through its differentiating effects (1995:136-7). The effects of cultural globalisation are felt even in Thailand, where the assimilation policy is often regarded as quite successful. As documented by Jory (2000), Thailand has experienced a resurgence of expressions of ethnic culture and identity, especially in popular culture. Nevertheless, will popular culture similarly be the 'catalyst' of Chinese transnationalism in the case of the Malaysian-Chinese?

Ong & Nonini (1997:326) argued that the identity of overseas Chinese was constituted through transnational systems rather than stable cultural entities. As some overseas Chinese have been tremendously successful in the global economy, especially

in the Southeast Asian region and recently, in China, a Chinese transnationalism discourse that revives the old images of Confucian Chinese culture to characterise and romanticise the Chinese culture and identity has emerged (Chan, 2000; Weidenbaum & Hughes, 1996; Redding, 1993). In this discourse, Chinese transnationalism is often explained or examined under the umbrella of peculiar Chinese culture and identity that foster entrepreneurship as well as business networks. Chinese words like *guanxi*, and terms such as 'bamboo network' and 'Greater China' frequently occur in popular and scholarly literature, as well as in the mass media. Both the discursive effects from this discussion and 'real' transnational Chinese interactions, exchanges, and business activities influence the cultural and identity politics in Southeast Asian states, especially in an ethnically divided Malaysia.

As Ong & Nonini (1997) demonstrated, the discourse had produced transnational imaginaries of ethnic self-celebration, which deeply affect the constitution and remaking of the identity of all Chinese, overseas or otherwise. Specifically, Nonini (1997) illustrated the ways that this discourse on Chinese transnational capitalists, and the associated diasporic Chinese identity and culture had constituted in the remaking of the identity of non-elite Malaysian-Chinese by providing alternative and opposed positions to the notions of citizenship and indigenouness that were set by the Malaysian state. However, the 'escape' and realisations provided by these alternative identifications merely recast class, gender, race, and nationality differences in new ways rather than liberate the non-elite Malaysian-Chinese.

Nevertheless, emphasising the Chinese Transnationalism Approach is by no means a denial of the discernment of the perspective of post-colonial ethnic politics.

Theories of Post-colonial ethnic politics

According to the ethnic perspective, the Malaysian political economy is characterised by communalism in terms of an ethnic identity that is based on rather static primordial attachments (Crouch, 1996; Bowie, 1991; Jesudason, 1990). Ethnic tensions were legacies from the colonial period. The British perceived the Malays to be culturally unprepared for any economic role other than in rice-growing peasantry (Alatas, 1977). Thus, the British imported the presumably hardworking Chinese and Indians to Malaya to deepen their territorial exploitation. This created a division of labour on a racial basis, and as a result, ethnic cleavages were developed between the urban mercantile and professional classes of the predominantly non-Malay population and the rural Malay peasantry. This enabled the colonial state to employ a 'divide and rule' strategy (Abraham, 1997) that used the ethno-class consciousness resulting from the ethnic division of labour to inhibit any possibility of the emergence of challenging forces, especially the communist threat that could have transcended racial lines and disrupted the orderly decolonisation process (Brown, 1994:214).

On the other hand, the colonial state, in seeking to monopolize the means of coercion and build the colonial state apparatus, co-opted the Malay rulers (sultans, rajahs, for example) and elites to facilitate its rural, as well as urban governance, and to quell any possible challengers (Kahn, 1996:54-5). As a result, a different ethnic division

was deliberately demarcated along a political dimension. The subsequent post-war ethnic conflicts and fissures, as well as state policies, were partly the consequences of the superimposition of these two totally divergent political and economic ethnic divisions.

However, the accepted thesis is that ethnic demands, in terms of equilibrating Malay political and Chinese economic power, are the key to understanding that a Malaysian political economy cannot be established without first questioning the ethnic categorisation of the '*bumiputra*', the 'Chinese', the 'Malay' and the 'Indian'. Indeed, the very concept of ethnicity is often manipulated by political and economic elites, as well as middle classes, for mobilizing resources to pursue their own interests. As Brown put it, ethnicity should be depicted as an ideology that provides people with 'a simple psychological formula which resolves the ambiguities and uncertainties as to the relationship with society and with the state', and the 'psychological formula employed is that of the kinship myth: the endowment of the 'imagined' cultural community with the attributes of the real family' (1994:5).

Brown's arguments that the malleability of ethnicity and ethnicity itself as psychological and political ideologies are further substantiated by scholars who tried to explain the failure and the continued efforts of the ruling Malaysian elite to construct a national identity that encompasses all ethnic groups (Watson, 1996), to delineate the variety of ideas on nationhood (or nations-of-intent) within each ethnic group (Shamsul, 1996), and to expose the ambiguities and myths of the ethnic category *bumiputra* (Means, 1985; Nagata, 1993). They argued that there was simply no single all-encompassing Malay, *bumiputra*, Indian or Chinese identity. Simply using the static and ideal-typical ethnic categories was inadequate in understanding the ever-changing complex political economy of Malaysia.

Overemphasis on the ethnic divisions within Malaysia produces risks for missing the class dimension in explaining the intra-ethnic variations of involvement in the Malaysian and the world political economy, as well as the making and remaking of their cultural identity. Kahn (1996:71) reminded us that the political demands of culture building, drawing boundaries within and between cultures, and defining the content of different cultures, were in fact the very aims of certain members of the middle class. In fact, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was rooted in the pressure exerted by middle-level Malay bureaucrats and businessmen rather than in the involvement of all ethnic groups (Jomo, 1990:469-471). However, even under the supposedly discriminating NEP, not all Chinese suffered (Brown, 1994:247-8; Jesudason, 1990:139), as the NEP was more purposeful in reaffirming the 'superiority' of ethnic Malays. A number of politically connected big businessmen gained much through the protection of senior Malay politicians or Ali-Baba arrangement (Lim, 1983).

Moreover, the class dimension, intertwined with state institutions which are created and maintained by a small number of the ruling elite, is indispensable in understanding how and why ethnic divisions are maintained and even reinforced. After decades of independence, Malaysia has still failed to establish a national identity or instil cultural plurality. Instead, cultural separatism has been maintained. Freedman (2001) attributed the unsuccessful acculturation of the Malaysian-Chinese to state policies and institutions, especially to educational institutions and policies that were biased. Even worse, the

ruling elite and state managers prefer to reinforce ethnic and cultural boundaries to avoid the Malaysian society from being structured along class lines, which may jeopardise their class interests. Thus, in order to fully understand the cultural and identity politics in Malaysia, ethnicity cannot be treated as a static primordial attachment, but is constantly constructed and remade by class and elite struggles.

3. 'Chineseness': Disappointment and reluctance

The data for this study were collected in 2005 from Jinan University through group interviews and questionnaire surveys.² Establishing a case in Jinan is justified, because, since its founding in 1906, Jinan University has been renowned as the 'highest academy for overseas Chinese' in Mainland China, the principal spirit that it evokes is patriotism toward the Chinese nation (Xia & Liang, 2004), which is assumed to 'promote the superior traditional culture of the Chinese nation and to unite overseas Chinese into contributing to the nation' (Sun, 2004:73). In recent decades, it has been the most popular destination of ethnic Chinese students from Southeast Asian societies, and Malaysian-Chinese students have always comprised the largest group.³ Jinan is located in Guangzhou City. As a historical city that has existed for thousands of years, Guangzhou is well recognised as one of the most globalised cities in China today. Some studies believe that Guangzhou's development path and pattern are comparable to that of New York in the USA (Li, 2002). Furthermore, Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong Province, which has been one of the two major homelands of Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia over the past hundreds of years (the other one is Fujian Province). Over the past two decades, there has been frequent interaction in all fields between Guangdong and the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, such as business and charitable activities (Liu, 2005:49). All of these considerations comprise a strong justification for our case study on Malaysian-Chinese students in Jinan. By exploring the ways that the Malaysian-Chinese identity is constituted against the background of a Malaysian political and economic context and Chinese transnationalism, our findings may provide insights for understanding the dynamics of the cultural identification that is involved in overseas Chinese communities and its potential effects on the interethnic interactions between Southeast Asia and China. In a group of young Malaysian-Chinese that are assumed to be disfavoured by their own country's ethnic policies, will a special sentiment of cultural identity be nurtured among them as they pursue their higher education in Guangzhou's Jinan University, which shoulders the mission of building their 'Chineseness'?

2 According to the information given by the student leaders of the Malaysian Students' Association of Jinan University in 2005, there were 79 Malaysian Chinese undergraduate students in the University. For the group interview, four sessions were conducted. In total, over one-fifth of our target population was involved. For the survey, questionnaires were distributed to the target population with the help of two student leaders from the Malaysian Students' Association. Forty-three completed and valid questionnaires were returned. The response rate was 56.6%.

3 Information and opinion provided by Professor Cao Yunhua in an interview conducted in January 2005.

The class background of this specific group of Malaysian-Chinese youth is noteworthy. Most respondents claimed that they belonged to the lower-middle class families in Malaysia. As such, they could not afford the expensive tuition fees in Western and Taiwanese universities, including the high standards of living in those countries. For example, enrolling in a bachelor's degree in medical school (three interviewees were studying clinical medicine in Jinan) and completing the studies in Taiwan was about seven times more expensive than in Mainland China.

In addition to this, their English language proficiency was not good enough to gain admission into Western universities. In light of these issues, Jinan has carried out several admission and recruitment activities, and has enlisted the alumni's efforts in attracting Malaysian-Chinese students to study in Jinan. In comparison with the larger alumni network in Taiwan and the greater cohesiveness and higher portfolios of the alumni in Malaysia's Chinese community, Mainland China is a practical but reluctant choice for these students' overseas education. Their self-identification as non-elites in Malaysia, which is obvious, is also noteworthy.

A number of the interviewees' families indicated that they sent their children to Mainland China because the economic ties between China and Southeast Asia have greatly improved in recent years. They hoped that their children would establish themselves there, or at least nurture certain *guanxi* or 'social capital' for their future careers. Nonetheless, for most students, establishing transnational economic ties was not their reason for studying in China. They may enjoy the prosperity of Guangzhou City, and the efficiency of Guangzhou's urbanisation in recent years may have impressed them very much, but Mainland China was still far beyond their prospects in terms of their pursuit of a transnational career.

The interviewees' perceptions about Mainland Chinese were also poor. Sometimes, they felt that Mainland Chinese were quite 'uncivilized' (some adjectives used included blunt, impolite, and not civil), and some even said that the Malays were far more 'civilized'. The most frequently mentioned example was the Mainland Chinese's notorious habit of spitting in public places, whereas the Malay-Muslims were generally clean and tidy. In contrast to Guangzhou's untidy and noisy streets, the interviewees also felt that the quality of life in Malaysia, even in the suburban areas, was much better.

Becoming closer to China strengthens the consciousness of the Malaysian-Chinese as ethnic Chinese. However, this identification is not nurtured by improved communication and appreciation of China and the Mainland Chinese. The interviewees complained that the Mainland Chinese did not understand them in almost every aspect of life. In spite of their fluent *putonghua* and Chinese features, the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with Jinan University and their schoolmates, some of the authorities in Guangzhou, and occasionally, some of the Mainland Chinese who treated them as 'outsiders' just like other racial groups. In fact, the relationship of Mainland Chinese students with Hong Kong students was much better in comparison to their ethnic relationship with Malaysian-Chinese students, regardless of Hong Kong students' weakness in *putonghua* and 'Chineseness'. In daily communication, Hong Kong's highly globalised economic prosperity and Malaysia's less developed economy seemed to be more decisive dynamics for establishing a relationship with the Mainland Chinese.

As a result, a 'wall' had been deliberately built between the Malaysian-Chinese and the Mainland Chinese. This 'wall' has become a 'mirror' which reflects that in comparison to the Mainland Chinese, the Malaysian-Chinese have a stronger 'Chineseness'. This is reflected in their attachment to Chinese customs and traditions, and their better knowledge, understanding, and admiration of Chinese culture.

An incident that happened to one of the interviewees (coded 'M') is widely known among Malaysian-Chinese students in Jinan and is illustrative of the feeble inter-identification between Malaysian-Chinese and Mainland Chinese students. M once participated in a debate contest. The motion statement was derived from a piece of classical text that was written by the very famous literate Tao Qian (365–427 AD). M's teammates, who were all Mainland Chinese, had little knowledge of the statement and knew nothing about the full text, its historical background, or even its author. M had a very good knowledge of the text, and hence, he tried hard to provide a thorough explanation to his teammates during the preparation. However, they all ignored M's contribution and wasted hours in the library on research until they found that M's explanation was correct. The reason for the teammates' undermining suspicion of M was obvious: they just did not believe (or accepted the fact) that a 'Malaysian' would have such good knowledge of classical Chinese literature.

In each of the group interviews, this story caused the interviewees to express their own disappointment toward their Mainland Chinese schoolmates with respect to Chineseness. They were surprised that Mainland Chinese students seldom celebrated the Dragon Boat Festival (*Duan Wu*) and shared their experiences of ancestor worshipping. They were also declined by Mainland Chinese students in their invitation to accompany them in visiting historical sceneries in Guangzhou. Even after months of interaction, the Mainland Chinese students still perceived them as Malays and not as Chinese.

The interviewees believed that the Mainland Chinese students' perception of the level of development in Malaysia was a factor for the wall in cultural identity. Mainland Chinese students perceived Malaysia as a backward economy.⁴ Hence, it was assumed that the process of 'civilization' (specifically, sophistication in material culture) was slow in Malaysia. An interviewee even related his experience in which he once made a joke by saying, 'Most of the Chinese in Malaysia are still living in suburban tree houses'. A Mainland Chinese student took him seriously and replied to his joke by saying, 'Well, I knew it'. Mainland Chinese students often laughed at the relatively dark skin of Malaysian-Chinese students and made jokes that the latter were *turen* (aborigines). Malaysian-Chinese students spoke proficient *putonghua*, but the Mainland Chinese students often still laughed at it and considered it *tuyu* (aborigines' dialect). Mainland Chinese students preferred Hong Kong students as friends over the Malaysian-Chinese. They believed that Hong Kong students had better taste and richer knowledge in Japanese/Western fashion, computer apparatus, and other Japanese/European high-technology

4 It is difficult to endorse the perceptions of Mainland Chinese students as objective evidence. Malaysia's impressive US\$10,000 per capita annual income is highly appraised by the World Bank. Poverty has been reduced from half the population at independence to just 5% today. In Asia, only the nations of Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and Brunei rank higher than Malaysia in the U.N.'s Human Development Index (Beech, 2007:29-31).

electronic equipment, and Japanese/Korean/Hong Kong/Taiwanese TV drama and pop music, which all comprised the 'culture' that Mainland Chinese students admired. Two group interviews were conducted in a restaurant with a big TV set near the dining table. During the interview, a few of the interviewees' attention were often side-tracked by a Hong Kong TV drama. We asked if they preferred to turn off the TV in order to avoid being disturbed. The response was, 'Please don't, if you don't mind'. One answered, 'We are not really interested in these TV dramas, but we better know a bit in order to get some material for casual chatting with mainland classmates'. Most of the others agreed.

The interviewees also believed that to a certain extent, the university's policies caused part of the problem. Malaysian-Chinese students were *hua qiao*. The university authority did not emphasise their identity as *hua* ('Chinese'). On the contrary, they emphasised their identity as *qiao* ('living overseas'). Therefore, they were encouraged to organise their own student associations but were discouraged from involvement in the student unions of Jinan. The university had classes for overseas students but seldom integrated them with mainstream Mainland Chinese students. Malaysian-Chinese students did not perceive this as acts of caring or promotion of their welfare, but as acts that differentiated them from the other students.

The interviewees also fully recognised the difficulties and unlikelihood of cooperating with the Malays back home. As one of them remarked, 'Of course, we can live peacefully with the Malays. However, doing something more than daily routine interactions, like greetings and casual conversation, will be difficult. You see, we have different cultures, religious beliefs, and outlooks (in life)'. However, they also thought that the Malays and the Malaysian-Chinese could co-exist peacefully in general. They further said that the elite groups of the Malays and the Chinese were similar with respect to learning English as their major language, studying overseas, especially in Western countries, and investing in businesses without any regard to ethnic factors. However, they recognised that there was class division or discrimination between the Malay and the Chinese population in their country. Many state policies affecting all citizens, may they be Chinese, Malays, or Indians, were influenced by the elite groups. The ordinary Malay population had no voice in the creation of state policies. As Anthony Milner argued (1998:168-9), 'The majority community in Malaysia, therefore, is to be seen, at least in part, as the product of ideological work. The innovative Malay ideologues... operated in the context of the challenge of dynamic Chinese minority, and in some situations they actually defined Malayness with reference to Chineseness'. The considerate and tolerant attitudes of the interviewees made us believe that they would have certain a understanding and endorsement of Milner's analysis.

It was also a very common experience for a Chinese person to be asked by a Westerner about whether or not he or she was Japanese or Korean. Despite recognising the unfair treatment of Malaysian state policies toward ethnic Chinese, most of the interviewees still identified themselves as Malaysian when asked if they were Malaysian, Malaysian-Chinese, or Chinese. Their emotional ties towards their Malaysian homeland have not been weakened by their experiences in China. They were born and raised in Malaysia and as such, they thought that it was only proper to say that they were Malaysians and that they identified with Malaysia in a national sense. Only two identified themselves as

Malaysian-Chinese, and one identified herself as Chinese, but these three interviewees admitted that such identification was deeply influenced by their families and was not a result of their own experience from studying in Guangzhou. It would have been very natural for them not to feel particularly attached to China, however, considering that their encounters in China were rather demeaning and alienating.

Most of the interviewees also noticed that their parents would identify themselves as Chinese, but only in a cultural sense. They were encouraged by their parents to study in Mainland China to establish transnational economic ties, but without any patriotic aspirations toward the Chinese nation. Except for the parents and families of two interviewees who had business experiences, all of the interviewees' parents were only acquainted with China through the local mass media in Malaysia. However, most of the information provided by the mass media is focused on China's economic growth, while its other aspects are neglected. Furthermore, the interviewees believed that their parents did not know much about China's problems on economic disparities, environmental destruction, governmental bureaucracy, and the perceived low quality of civilisation which may hinder the country from further development. Hence, the families' socialisation of their national identification toward China was not strong. Meanwhile, the interviewees were enrolled in different major areas of study, such as clinical medicine, journalism, international politics, economics, foreign trade, business management, and Chinese linguistics. Interestingly, most of them did not have any ambition to stay in Mainland China to pursue their respective careers, nor did they have any optimism toward the so-called 'social/cultural capital' that they might possibly gain from their Guangzhou experience.

The mindset of the Malaysian-Chinese students that was expressed in the group interviews was compatible with the overview reflected in the questionnaire surveys. With regard to their feeling toward Malaysia, none of the respondents felt negatively toward it: 72% felt 'pretty good' and 28% felt excellent. With respect to their impression toward the Malay population, an overwhelming majority (81%) had a very good or good impression, while a mere 5% thought otherwise. A few of the respondents, 14% in all, remained neutral.⁵ Despite the numbers, however, less than one fifth of the respondents (19%) were able to completely accept the Malay lifestyle. More than half (63%) could only accept it partially, while the rest were equally split between neutral and unwilling to accept it. The good impression and acceptance of the Malay and their culture may be due to the social compartmentalisation between the two ethnic groups. Among the respondents, only 35% had Malay friends or acquaintances, while the rest (65%) seldom interacted with the Malay population; thus, there was rarely any conflict. Moreover, their identification with Malaysia also explained their feelings toward the country. When asked to choose from a number of identities that was most fitting to them, 46.5% chose Malaysian while 53.5% chose Chinese Malaysian. None of the respondents chose Overseas Chinese or Chinese as their desired identity.

5 A similar survey on Jinan's Malaysian-Chinese students was conducted in 1999 by Cao (2004). Our survey's findings are similar to Cao's findings in 1999.

These findings are not surprising. As Kent (2005) reported, while some Malaysian Chinese saw themselves as more Chinese than the Mainland Chinese, others saw their perspectives, values, and tastes as more westernised than those of the Mainland Chinese, especially those of the younger generations born after Malaysia gained its independence in 1957. For the younger generations, they saw themselves as Malaysian. China was merely the origin of their ancestors, not their motherland.

Even though all of the respondents thought of themselves as Malaysian or Chinese Malaysian, less than half (47%) wanted to stay in Malaysia permanently, 23% wanted to migrate to the Western world, and 30% had no idea where to live permanently (Table 1).⁶ Although 60.5% of the students thought that they should try their best to integrate into Malaysian society despite difficulties, 39.5% thought that their Chinese cultural legacies were undeniable and had to be preserved. The failure of the cultural assimilation of the Malaysian Chinese seemed to be the main reason for the finding that few respondents intended to permanently live in Malaysia.

Table 1

Do you intend to live permanently in your residing country (Malaysia)?

Yes, I do.	20	46.5%
Want to migrate to Western countries	10	23.3%
Want to migrate to Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Macau	0	0.0%
Want to migrate to China	0	0.0%
No idea or other	13	30.3%

Note: The values listed do not add up to 100% due to the rounding of some numbers.

It is interesting to find that none of the respondents wanted to migrate to China despite their Chinese heritage. With regard to their feelings toward Mainland China, almost half of them (46.5%) did not particularly care about the country, 28% felt negatively, and only 25.6% felt alright. The results were even worse with respect to the respondents' feelings toward the Mainland Chinese. A high of 62.8% of the respondents felt negatively, 32.6% felt neutrally, and only 4.7% felt alright about them. Their negative feelings and impressions precluded them from integrating into Mainland China. Less than one third (30%) thought that they could integrate into the Mainland Chinese society, but 42% thought otherwise. The rest (28%) remained neutral.

Some scholars argue that the overseas Chinese can use their cultural knowledge and ethnicity to establish some sort of partnership with the Mainland Chinese for

6 In 1999, Cao (2004: 39) found that 70% of the respondents he studied would like to stay in Malaysia permanently. Only 1% wanted to migrate to the West and 1% wanted to migrate to China. The rest of the respondents, 14% specifically, had no idea where to stay.

pursuing more global business opportunities. However, not all Malaysian-Chinese see it this way. Indeed, a number of them regard the Mainland Chinese as competitors, worrying about the flooding of Chinese goods into their domestic markets (Kent, 2005). In our survey, none of the Malaysian-Chinese students preferred to work in China after graduation, 44% wanted to go back to Malaysia, while 56% favoured working in both China and Malaysia.

Moreover, when we asked our respondents whether or not a strong China would help raise their status in Malaysia, 54% thought so, but a rather sizable 37% thought otherwise. Only 9% remained neutral. When this question was cross-tabulated with the preferred place-of-work question, however, an interesting psychological struggle within the Malaysian-Chinese ensued. Of the 19 students who preferred working in Malaysia, 90% believed that a strong China would help them domestically. However, for the 24 students who preferred working transnationally, only 25% thought so (Table 2). Why would the students who believed that a strong China would be beneficial to them paradoxically want to work in Malaysia instead of China or transnationally? This was because all of those who preferred to return to Malaysia had negative feelings toward the Mainland Chinese. Only 47% of the 19 students had a positive impression of China and believed that they were able to integrate with the Mainland Chinese culture (Table 4). In addition, all of the respondents preferred the Malaysian-Chinese identity and thought that their Chinese background had positive effects on their career. Only 11% of them intended to live in Malaysia permanently, 42% wanted to migrate to Western countries, and the rest, another 47%, had no idea where to live. These results suggest that the students 'preferred' to go back to work in Malaysia not because they highly identified with Malaysia but because they disliked the Mainland Chinese very much. Ironically, they treated China instrumentally and subjectively, and hoped for a strong China to lessen Chinese discrimination in Malaysia.

Table 2

Whether a strong China will help by place to work.

Will a strong China help domestically?	Where to work after graduation?		
	Malaysia	Commuting between China and Malaysia	Total
Absolutely yes	8 (42.1%)	4 (16.7%)	12 (27.9%)
Yes	9 (47.4%)	2 (8.3%)	11 (25.6%)
No idea	0 (0.0%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (9.3%)
No	2 (10.5%)	14 (58.3%)	16 (37.2%)
Absolutely no	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	19 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	43 (100.0%)

Of the 24 students who wanted to work transnationally, surprisingly, 20 of them (83%) preferred the Malaysian identity (Table 3). Their identification with Malaysia was further demonstrated by the fact that 75% of them preferred living in Malaysia permanently. Eighteen of the 24 (75%) felt neutrally toward China, 14 of them (58.3%) felt neutrally with regard to their overall impression of the Mainland Chinese, and 12 of them (50%) felt neutrally with regard to their ability to integrate to the Mainland Chinese culture (Table 5). Unlike their other counterparts, 14 of the 24 respondents (58%) did not believe that a strong China would help them domestically (Table 2). However, 75% of them thought that their Chinese background would help them in the development of their career.

Table 3

Preferred identity by place to work.

Preferred identity	Where to work after graduation?		
	Malaysia	Commuting between China and Malaysia	Total
Malaysian	0 (0.0%)	20 (83.3%)	20 (46.5%)
Malaysian-Chinese	19 (100.0%)	4 (16.7%)	23 (53.5%)

Table 4

Feelings about China, the Mainland Chinese, and the culture of students who want to work in Malaysia.

	Feelings about China	Overall Impression of Mainland Chinese	Ability to integrate to the Mainland culture
Excellent	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Good	9 (47.4%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (47.4%)
Neutral	2 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Negative	8 (42.1%)	19 (100.0%)	10 (52.6%)
Terrible	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Table 5

Feelings about China, the Mainland Chinese, and the culture of students who want to work by commuting between China and Malaysia.

	Feelings about China	Overall Impression of Mainland Chinese	Ability to integrate to the Mainland culture
Excellent	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Good	2 (8.3%)	2 (8.3%)	4 (16.7%)
Neutral	18 (75.0%)	14 (58.3%)	12 (50.0%)
Negative	2 (8.3%)	8 (33.3%)	6 (25.0%)
Terrible	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.3%)

4. Limitations to the construction of a Greater China Identity

Instead of surrendering to the totalising impact of globalisation as an economic rationality, other sociologists have turned toward studying 'the local'. They examined the ways through which particular articulations of the global and 'the local' produced 'multiple modernities' (Ong, 1999:4). Arjun Appadurai argued that such a 'global production of locality' happened because the transnational flow of people, goods, and knowledge became imaginative resources for creating communities and 'virtual neighbourhoods' (1996:178-9). 'Multiculturalism' has gained its status as a worldwide currency because it implies that not only is the world a heterogeneous cultural mix, and this is something that everyone already knows, but it also includes the cultures of individual nation-states. Therefore, a debate that crosses national boundaries is whether or not multiculturalism can unify a nation (Thomas, 2004:136). Regrettably, after experiencing a deeper level of cultural exposure, Malaysian-Chinese students' transnational identity that predisposes them to 'Chineseness' has been so far nonexistent, if not impossible to achieve. Our case study adheres to the negative conclusion.

Limitations of China's Overseas Chinese Policy

The pragmatic ideology during the era of economic reform which started in the late 1970s has been overwhelming in China's policy-making arena. Economic development is the core concern of almost every social policy of the Chinese government. Overseas Chinese policies are not an exception. Policy makers are mainly concerned about attracting foreign investments (or finance capital in various forms) and developing trading business (Guo & Nie, 2004; Xia, 2004). Fairly speaking, its success in these aspects has been remarkable. For instance, two decades since the onset of the economic reform, more than 70% of all foreign capital has come from overseas Chinese with a total of about \$160 billion. Taking Guangdong Province as an example during the

same period, the officially approved donations from overseas Chinese amounted to 15 billion RMB, while charitable establishments launched by overseas Chinese totalled over 26,304 projects (Liu, 2005:49).

However, the sustainability of the policy's economic function has drawn certain concern from the policy's think-tanks in recent years. The management of overseas Chinese capital, sooner or later, will be shifted from the older generation comprised of immigrants who originated from Mainland China, to the younger generation comprised of local-born nationals of societies abroad. In order to utilise the special racial linkage of the new generation of overseas Chinese with China in the economic domain, in addition to further improving the investment conditions of the Chinese market, strengthening emotional ties and the identity of 'Chineseness' among ethnic Chinese should be a proactive strategy of the policy (Zhao, 2004:9). Another function that the overseas Chinese policy has especially emphasised in recent years is partnerships with overseas Chinese in strengthening the Beijing government's united front to engineer unification with Taiwan. Beijing hopes to instil patriotism toward Mainland China among overseas Chinese in order to isolate Taiwan's independence ideology. Hence, the instrumental-value of overseas Chinese policy's socio-cultural aspect is rising to a higher agenda. China's think-tanks of policy advocates, in working on overseas Chinese affairs, should consider promoting 'affection' among overseas Chinese as the solid foundation for the policy (Shi, 2004:82). Under Hu Jintao's administration, the objectives of China's overseas Chinese policy are anchored in mobilising overseas Chinese to support China's modernisation thrust through financial investments, realising reunification, facilitating the development of better relations with various countries in support of China's 'peaceful rise' strategy, and strengthening emotional ties and Chinese cultural communication between *qiaoxiang* (the hometowns where many of the overseas Chinese originated) and overseas Chinese communities. (Ngok, Cheng and Cheng, 2004: 175, 182).

In light of our case study, some goals aforementioned were not satisfactorily achieved. The Chinese government's effort in using traditional festivals or occasions, such as the 'root-seeking' summer and winter camps, to strengthen emotional ties is probably instrumentally meaningful for the older generation who has business ties with China (Cheng and Ngok, 1999). However, for the younger generations of Malaysian-Chinese, 'Chineseness' in Mainland China is not that 'real'. Utilitarianism and economic rationality still dominate China's overseas Chinese policy, and hence these are reflected in most of the apparatus of the policy, including 'the highest academy for overseas Chinese'. The reflections on the policy, with less emphasis on the country's interest and more on the people's concerns (Liu, 2005:50-1), and less materialistic interest and more on the affection level, are not well taken by current policy makers and operators. Even the party secretary of Jinan, as the top authority of the university, demonstrated his indifference to such reflections (Jiang & He, 2003). The Malaysian-Chinese youth did not seek their roots in their China experience, neither culturally nor sentimentally.

'The university's foremost responsibility is to hold out against the current trend of remodelling itself as a business organisation. At the same time, it should alert society against transferring the norms of commerce to cultural institutions', as Subramani argues (1998:161-2). From the experiences of our interviewees, Jinan as a university

specialised in the education of overseas Chinese but failed in its mission to nurture cultural transnationalism. In fact, a scholar in Jinan also criticised the university's failure to make use of its advantage in terms of its multi-racial student population to achieve multicultural education (Wen, 2005:93). According to Wen's own survey conducted in 2003, in terms of knowledge in Chinese history, literature and the arts, and attitudes toward patriotism and social awareness, Mainland Chinese students lagged behind the ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia (Wen, 2005:90-1). Hence, the university failed to enhance multiculturalism in the student community by taking on an active and positive mode of intercultural communication.

The Illusion of Huaqiao's 'Cultural Hometown'

Within China, the neo-liberal economic reform normalises new ways to value human activity and 'worlding' China, which places China in a re-imagined world. The ethos that it produces is intimately tied to the emergence of a bourgeoisie, and the ways that it does so are related to consumption. The dizzying economic growth of the late 1990s produced contradictory affective energies. 'Chineseness' failed to denote the 'local' in one context and the transnational (not to say cosmopolitan) in another context. (Rofel, 2007:111-4) Guangzhou is one such typical globalising city. In comparison to the economic setback that was experienced by Malaysia after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 (Case, 2005), Guangzhou's rapid economic growth is admirable. However, the biased bourgeois way to value human activities is seen as inevitable, and 'worlding' China by a cosmopolitan 'Chineseness' is regrettably deformed. If the student community in Jinan could be regarded as a representation of *qiaoxiang*, Malaysian-Chinese students' disaffection with Mainland students revealed that the latter is 'worlding' China at a fanatic level of Western/Japanese popular culture through a Hong Kong and Taiwanese style of 'translation'. Furthermore, via consumption and related activities and standards, it pursues the exclusion of the less-Westernised and less-wealthy 'others'. Such bias provides the reason why the Mainland students in Jinan viewed the Malaysian-Chinese as outsiders, even though the latter spoke fluent *putonghua* and had good knowledge of the Chinese culture. In a cultural and affective perspective, Guangzhou or Jinan as the *xiang* (hometown) of the Malaysian-Chinese youth is only an illusion.

It is more frustrating to explain the illusion in the perspective of nationalism. Craig Calhoun argued that nationalism was a rhetorical system for pursuing 'projects of large-scale collective identity' (1994:304-36), while generally, dignity was a powerful term in the rhetorical system of nationalism. In recent years, much has been written about dignity in contemporary East Asia. There seems to be something culturally specific about dignity in the civilisation legacy of East Asia. Moreover, the forms that modern nationalism assumed were shaped to a large degree by the encounters among the neighbouring states themselves. The intra-regional dynamics of East Asian nationalism bears out this particular legacy. National equality and national dignity take root across different political vocabularies and cultures of the region. There have been repeated efforts over the past century to engineer pan-regional coalitions against Western imperialism or global capital, and yet, there are equally consistent efforts to deflect or defeat these (Fitzgerald, 2006:5-6). Regrettably, one cannot see the shared legacy of

East Asian nationalism in the stories revealed by the Malaysian-Chinese students in Guangzhou. Even worse, their stories may be comparable with the serious Chinese-African student conflicts in Nanjing two decades ago.⁷ By studying the case of Chinese-African student conflicts in Nanjing, Michael Sullivan argued that the cultural factors that have influenced contemporary Chinese racist attitudes toward Africans have roots that go far back in Chinese history. The people of Africa, as well as Southeast Asia, were considered by the Han Chinese to be 'barbaric' in essence, which was below moral-philosophical standards to be assimilated into superior China (*Huaxia*). Another cultural factor concerned the aesthetic premium on the lightness of skin colour. The Han Chinese considered individuals with lighter skin as having a higher social status than dark-skinned people. As a result of contact with the dark-skinned seafaring peoples of Southeast Asia from the fourth century onwards, the Han Chinese held an image of them as barbarians. Guangzhou was the main trading port and settlement area of dark-skinned slaves after the early 12th century. By the name of *Kunlun*, the negative image of Africans and other dark-skinned peoples as sub-human 'savages' was established, and this has remained an important cultural phenomenon into the 20th century (1994:440-1). Hence, modern nationalism entered East Asia from outside the region along with the battleships, merchant marines, and missionaries of Europe and America. The Chinese response to the crises resulted in a synthesis of racially determined attitudes toward non-Chinese people with the nascent development of Chinese nationalism. This nationalism brought a new hierarchical order of values, which stressed dignity and equality, but only partially, and it went along with strong resentment mixed with an inferior complex toward the West and arrogance against 'backward' objects (Liu, 1994:151). Liang Qichao, the most influential and reform-minded intellectual leader spanning the period from the Late Qing to young Republic China, as well as other senior intellectuals, perceived the Chinese race as technologically inferior to the white race. However, like the white race, the Chinese are culturally superior to the black barbarians in India, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Liang's thoughts revealed the bias of many Chinese with regard to Africa and the Third World as symbols of China's backward past, which they wished to escape (Sullivan, 1994:442). Sullivan's historical-cultural analysis of racist discrimination against African students by Mainland Chinese students in Nanjing provided a comparable framework for reflecting Mainland Chinese students' implicit racist attitudes toward Malaysian-Chinese students in Jinan. Why else did the former laugh at the latter's dark skin? Why did the former truly believe that the latter was living in tree houses in Malaysia's suburbs? Why did the former not accept the fact that the latter would have a good knowledge of classical Chinese literature? Why did the former laugh at the latter's proficient *putonghua*, call it *tuyu* (in addition to the general meaning of 'aborigines', the Chinese word *tu* also has an implicit racist meaning of 'savages'), and prefer Hong Kong students (who spoke appalling *putonghua*, but were highly Westernised) as friends over the Malaysian-Chinese?

7 In the last week of 1988, hundreds of Chinese students took to the streets in Nanjing to protest against the government's inadequate handling of the alleged murder of a Chinese by an African student in Hehai University. It worsened to serious racist anti-African protests and conflicts. For the details, see the work of Sullivan (1994:444-56).

Over the past two and a half decades of opening the Chinese economy and of economic reform, both Guangzhou City and Jinan failed to facilitate the emergence of a new face of 'Chineseness' across different Chinese societies, showed the least cultural linkage between globalising China and 'Chineseness', and did not inspire the identity imaginaries of the ethnic Chinese, not to mention the development of transnationalism. Malaysian-Chinese students from the lower-middle class were able to enjoy studying abroad with fewer expenses, and their daily life was comparable to that of their rich counterparts in Western societies. Paradoxically, Guangzhou's advanced economy and highly globalised urban setting attracted the young ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia in pursuit of a higher education, but they also undermined the transnational imagery of this historic Chinese city in the minds of the ethnic Chinese.

The New Generation's View on Malaysia's Identity Politics

The current Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah claims that the ruling coalition is composed of parties representing various ethnic communities. It has adopted a power-sharing formula for over 50 years, so every community gets a seat at the table when it comes to governing the country. Everyone participates and everyone's voice is heard (Beech, 2007:31). Many non-Malays do not seem to agree with such claims and their sense of alienation starts early in government primary schools that used to be essentially secular but now feature Islamic prayer halls. Today, only 6% of Chinese parents send their children to such schools, while in the 1970s, more than half of the parents sent their children to government primary schools (Beech, 2007:31). Nevertheless, the issue of racial disintegration raised by the younger generation of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia today is not viewed in the same manner by the older generation. This is especially the case for the lower-middle class, whose expectations regarding their upward social mobility may not be as strong as those of the elite class (Mu, 2005). Their understanding of the history of discrimination against the ethnic Chinese is not as 'bitter' as that of their parents or of the upper class. In urban areas, for example, the impact of NEP three decades ago was that the well-educated Malays earned more than the well-educated Chinese, while the poor Malays earned less than the poor Chinese (Mazumdar, 1981:201). Such understanding seems to be more acceptable among the young generation of Malaysian-Chinese. Their national identity as 'Chinese-Malaysian' is much stronger than as *huaqiao* in Malaysia. Some socio-political activists strongly believe that sooner or later, the terminology 'Chinese-Malaysians' would replace 'Malaysian-Chinese' in the discourse of Malaysia's identity politics. The new generation's national identity is firmly rooted in Malaysia; hence, they will become one of the hosts of the society, and the ambiguous identity of *qiao* will be wiped away (Tang, 2005:101). Such view is positively echoed by Malaysian anthropologists, such as Tan Chee Beng (2000). Young Malaysian-Chinese are more tolerant of Malaysian government policies, with special empathy for ex-Prime Minister Mahathir's good will to the ethnic Chinese during his 22-year rule (Phoon, 2004:78-84). While the Malaysian government's 'pro-Malay' policies are undeniable, plans for the resolution of problems on inequality and ethnic difference, without option for a discourse on 'multiculturalism', are set in place (Fenton, 2003:135). Cao's study in Jinan found that on one hand, the Malaysian-Chinese youth took note of the

Malaysian government's partial ethnic policies; on the other hand, they also appreciated the leeway for preserving their 'Chineseness' (2004:55). Another survey in Taiwan that studied Malaysian-Chinese tertiary students' political culture also found that on one hand, they noticed the Malaysian government's partial ethnic policies; on the other hand, they had a certain trust in the government's will to resolve the 'side-effect'. The Chinese consciousness by itself, patriarchy, and apathy toward politically sensitive issues were obvious in the survey's findings (Cheng, 2007:212-3). Our study's findings are thus compatible with previous findings and reveal a certain degree of prudence from the young generation as they cultivate closer relations with China. In the old cultural logic of the 'tug-of-war', globalising Mainland China's 'Chineseness' seems to be too weak to redirect the affection for Malaysia of the young generation of ethnic Chinese in order to mobilise across and 're-produce' a transnational identity.

5. Conclusion

Some observers assert that Malaysia has suffered from midlife anxiety in recent years. Religion has divided the multicultural society by a conservative strain of Islam. The nation's diverse ethnicities increasingly live in parallel universes. The economy is challenged by regional competitors. It is little wonder then that up to a million Malaysians, mostly white-collar talents who are needed to keep the economy flourishing, have simply given up on the country since it gained independence. By the government's own estimate, 70,000 Malaysians, majority of which are ethnic Chinese, have renounced their citizenship over the past two decades, although far more have emigrated without officially abandoning their nationality. Many local companies are leaving too, investing heavily offshore such that as much money now leaves Malaysia as it enters the country (Beech, 2007:30). Research in recent years has paid much attention to the government policies of China in attracting financial capital at the transnational level, especially across Chinese societies in Southeast Asia. From an entrepreneurial perspective, engineering cultural capital creates benefits for both sides' strategies. Not only do Chinese authorities benefit, but business investors from Southeast Asia benefit as well. An evident dynamism prevails within Chinese-owned enterprises, one that has been attributed to intra-ethnic cooperation (Gomez, 2006:362). Nevertheless, this kind of view also coexists with the evidence that competition rather than cooperation among Chinese-owned firms may be more severe, and there is more evidence of interethnic corporate ties. Edmund Gomez further argued that there was little evidence that a common ethnic identity promoted economic pursuits and helped unify a community (2006:362-3). Some studies on small- and medium-scale ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia also indicated that the entrepreneurs' strategic position to exploit the opportunities brought about by China's economic rise was not necessarily tainted by any diasporic sentiment or putative ties with ancestral lands, but because these entrepreneurs have been 'othered' by indigenous compatriots (Wee, Jacobsen & Wong, 2006).

The transnational business success of overseas Chinese throughout much of Southeast Asia provides good case studies from which answers might be sought for the question, Are the values of Southeast Asian Chinese more inclined to generate

high levels of transnational entrepreneurial drive and dynamism than those of other cultures in the region? (Mackie, 1998:129) Such types of economic transnationalism may possibly derive certain political benefits for Beijing in its cross-strait rivalry against Taiwan (Baginda, 2002:244). Whether transnationalism will develop a certain thrust for change in the cultural identity of the young generation of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia or not becomes a new concern. From our study of a specific group of young Malaysian-Chinese who are now mingling with 'Chineseness' in one of the most globalised cities in Mainland China, the sentiment of being 'othered' is strongly prevailing among them, and they are disappointed by the 'Chineseness' of their counterparts in China. Transnationalism probably provides a weak cultural logic for their identity reconstitution at this stage. Four decades ago, based on his studies in Thailand, R. Coughling (1960) argued that Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese's identity was a type of compromising politics, that is, their psychology would settle with both China and the resident country. On Coughling's conceptual ground of 'double identity', Hsieh (2006) further argued that due to the drastic changes that have happened over the past few decades, such as the stagnation of immigration from China and the decolonisation of Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese engaging their national and cultural identity in different subjects is no more a sneaky thought; it is now a reality that has to be recognised. Despite the findings in our case study of Malaysian-Chinese students in Guangzhou, however, one question remains: Are trade and investment strong enough to cultivate the soil of 'Chineseness' so that the Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese would transnationally choose to engage their cultural identity in China?

References:

- Abranam, C. E. R. (1997). *Divide and Rule: The Roots of Race Relations in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: INSAN.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Alatas, S. H. (1977). *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. London: Frank Cass.
- Baginda, A. R. (2002). Malaysian Perceptions of China: From Hostility to Cordiality. In Herbert Yee & Ian Storey (Eds.), *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Beech, H. (2007). Identity Crisis. *Time*, December 10, 28-32.
- Beech, H. (2005). Deals and Diplomacy. *Time*, May 30, 14-21.
- Brown, D. (1994). *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Bowie, A. (1991). *Crossing the Industrial Divide: State, Society, and Politics of Economic Transformation in Malaysia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Calhoun, C. (1994). *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwells.
- Cao, Y. H. (et al.) (2004). *Dongnanya Huaren di Zhengzhi Canyu [Political Participation of Southeast Asian Chinese]*. Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe.
- Case, W. (2005). Malaysia: New Reforms, Old Continuities, Tense Ambiguities. *Journal of Development Studies*, 41(2), 284-309.

- Chan, K. B. (Ed.) (2000). *Chinese Business Network: State, Economy and Culture*. Singapore: Prentice Hall.
- Chen, C.C. (2005). The Transition of the Identification for Taiwanese Businessmen in Mainland China: Theoretical Induction and Inference. *East Asia Studies*, 36(1), 228-274.
- Chen, E. (2005). Ecopolitics Change and Party Identity Value Choosing of Taiwan Businessmen in the New Century. *Southeast Asian Studies*, 153, 43-47.
- Cheng, J. & Ngok, K. (1999). Government Policy in the Reform Era: Interactions between Organs Responsible for Overseas Chinese and *Qiaoxiang* Communities. In Leo Douw, Cen Huang, & Michael R. Godley (Eds.), *Qiaoxiang Ties: Interdisciplinary Approaches to 'Cultural Capitalism' in South China*. London: Kegan Paul International.
- Cheng, Q.H. (2007). *Tantao Dongnanya Qiaosheng di Zhengzhi Wenhua [Inquire to the Political Culture of Overseas Chinese Students in Southeast Asia]*. Taipei: Lantai Chubanshe.
- Cohen, D. (2000). At Colleges in Malaysia, Chinese Need Not Apply. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 16, A47-49.
- Coughling, R. (1960). *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Crouch, H. (1996). *Government and Society in Malaysia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Deng, S. (2009). Top Leaders Attend Congress of Returned Overseas Chinese. Retrieved on 15th July 2009 from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/14/content_11705392.htm.
- Fan, S.P. (2009). Qiaowu Zhengce [Overseas Chinese Policy]. In Luo Jinyi and Zheng Yushuo (Eds.), *Zhongguo Gaige Kaifang Sanshi Nian: Bian yu Chang [Changed and Unchanged: Thirty Years of Reform in China]*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press.
- Fenton, S. (2003). Malaysia and Capitalist Modernisation: Plural and Multicultural Models. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 5(2), 135-147.
- Fitzgerald, J. (2006). Introduction: The Dignity of Nations. In Sechin Y.S. Chien and John Fitzgerald (Eds.), *The Dignity of Nations: Equality, Competition, and Honor in East Asian Nationalism*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Freedman, A. L. (2001). The Effect of Government Policy and Institutions on Chinese Overseas Acculturation: The Case of Malaysia. *Modern Asian Studies*, 35(2), 411-440.
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gomez, E. (2006). Chinese Networks and Enterprise Development: Malaysian Investments in China. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 36(3), 350-363.
- Guo, X. N. and Nie, J. (2004). Deng Xiaoping Qiaowu Sixiang Tantao [An investigation of Deng Xiaoping's thoughts on overseas Chinese affairs]. *Xinan Minzu Daxue Xuebao*, 25(5), 421-423.
- Hsieh, J. (2006). Identity of Southeast Asian Chinese: a reflection of R.J. Coughling's theory of double-identity. *Taiwan Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 3(2), 3.18.

- Jesudason, J.V. (1989). *Ethnicity and the Economy: The State, Chinese Business, and Multinationals in Malaysia*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Jiang, S.Z. & He, W.N. (2003). Huaqiao Gaoxiao Jingwai yu Haiwai Xuesheng Wenhua Suzhi Jiaoyu Tantaoy [An investigation of the education on cultural quality for overseas students in higher education institutions for overseas Chinese]. *Gaojiao Tansuo*, No.2 of 2003, 57-59.
- Jomo, K.S. (1990). Whither Malaysia's New Economic Policy? *Pacific Affairs*, 63(4), 469-499.
- Jory, P. (2000). Multiculturalism in Thailand: Cultural and Regional Resurgence in a Diverse Kingdom. *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*, 4(1), 18-22.
- Kahn, J.S. (1996). Growth, Economic Transformation, Culture, and the Middle Classes in Malaysia. In Richard Robison & David S.G. Goodman (Eds.), *The New Rich in Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Kent, Jonathan (2005). Chinese diaspora: Malaysia. BBC News, Kuala Lumpur, retrieved September 15, 2006 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4308241.stm>.
- Landolt, Patricia and Da, Wei Wei (2005), "The Spatially Ruptured Practices of Migrant Families: A Comparison of Immigrants from El Salvador and the People's Republic of China," *Current Sociology*, Volume 53(4), 625-653.
- Lee, M.N.N. (2002). *Educational Change in Malaysia*. Monograph Series No.3. Penang, Malaysia: School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Li, S.H. (2002). Niuyue yu Guangzhou: Chengshi Guodu di Yizhong Lishi Jiaodu [New York and Guangzhou: a kind of historical perspective of urban transition]. *Tansuo*, 134.
- Lim, M.H. (1983). The ownership and control of large corporations in Malaysia: the role of Chinese businessmen. In Linda Y.C. Lim & L.A. Peter Gosling (Eds.), *The Chinese in Southeast Asia, Vol.1*. Singapore: Maruzen Asia.
- Lincicome, M. (2005). Globalization, Education, and the Politics of Identity in the Asia-Pacific. *Critical Asian Studies*, 37(2), 179-208.
- Liu, H. (2005). Zhongguo Gongchandang yu Xinzhongguo Qiaowu Shiye [Chinese Communist Party and the new overseas Chinese affairs career]. *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Xuebao*, 9(1), 46-51.
- Liu, X. (1994). Sociology of Resentment and Modernity. *Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences*, 4, 128-52.
- Mackie, J. (1998). Business Success among Southeast Asian Chinese: The Role of Culture, Values, and Social Structures. In Robert Hefner (Ed.), *Market Cultures: Society and Morality in the New Asian Capitalisms*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Mazumdar, D. (1981). *The urban labor market and income distribution: a study of Malaysia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Means, G. P. (1985). The Orang Asli: Aboriginal Policies in Malaysia. *Pacific Affairs*, 58(4), 637-52.
- Milner, A. (1998). Ideological Work in Constructing the Malay Majority. In Dru C. Gladney (Ed.), *Making Majorities*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Mu, M. (2005). Research on Malaysian Chinese and ethnic relationship. http://members.fortunecity.com.chikian/pol_mag/pol_mag010.htm, retrieved on 18 May 2005.

- Nagata, J. (1993). From Indigene to International: The Many Faces of Malay Identity. In Michael D. Levin (Ed.), *Ethnicity and Adorignality: Case Studies in Ethnonationalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ngok, K., Cheng, P. & Cheng, J. (2004). China's Overseas Chinese Policy in the Globalization Era: Challenges and Responses. *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development*, 3(1), 157-182.
- Nonini, D. (1997). Shifting Identities, Positioned Imaginaries: Transnational Traversals and Reversals by Malaysian Chinese. In Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (Eds.), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.
- Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Ong, A. (1997). Chinese Modernities: Narratives of Nation and of Capitalism. In Aihwa Ong & Donald Nonini (Eds.), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.
- Ong, A. & Nonini, D. (1997) (Eds.). *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.
- Pan Y.X. (2004). Kangyi yu Shuncong: Mahadi shidai di Malaisiya Huaren Zhengzhi [Protest and Compliant: Malaysian Chinese Politics under Mahathir Era]. *Haihua yu Dongnanya yanjiu*, 4(2), 54-86.
- Pong, S.L. (1993). Preferential Policies and Secondary School Attainment in Peninsular Malaysia. *Sociology of Education*, 66(4), 245-261.
- Redding, S. G. (1993). *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Caglar, Ayse and Guldbrandsen, Thaddeus C. (2006), "Beyond the ethnic lens: Locality, globality, and born-again incorporation," *American Ethnologist*, 33(4), 612-633.
- Shamsul, A. B. (1996). Nations-of-Intent in Malaysia. In Stein Tønnesson & Hans Antlöv (Eds.), *Asian Forms of the Nation*. Surrey: Curzon.
- Shi, H.R. (2004). "Zhonghua Minzu" zhi Wojian – Qiaowu Gongzuo zhong di Yige Genbenxing di Wenti [My view of the 'Chinese nation' – the fundamental question of the work for overseas Chinese affairs]. *Zhongguo tese Shehui Zhuyi yanyiu*, No.2 of 2004, 79-82.
- Sin, I.L. (2006). Malaysian Students in Australia: The Pursuit of Upward Mobility. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 15(2), 239-251.
- Subramani. (1998). The End of Free States: On Transnationalization of Culture. In Fredric Jameson & Masao Miyoshi (Eds.), *The Cultures of Globalization*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Sullivan, M. (1994). The 1988-89 Nanjing Anti-African Protests: Racial Nationalism or National Racism? *The China Quarterly*, 138, 438-457.
- Sun, Y. (2004). XinShiji Huaqiao Gaocheng Jiaoyu di Fazhan Ceive [Development strategy of the higher education for the overseas Chinese in the new century]. *Liaoning Shifan Daxue Xuebao*, 27(3), 72-75.

- Tan, C. B. (2000). Socio-cultural Diversities and Identities. In Lee Kam Hing & Tan Chee Beng (Eds.), *The Chinese in Malaysia*. Malaysia: Oxford University Press.
- Tang, N. F. (2005). From Malaysian Chinese to Chinese Malaysian: A Reflection of the concept 'overseas Chinese'. In M. Tam (et al.), *Rethinking and Recasting Citizenship: Social Exclusion and Marginality in Chinese Societies*. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
- Thomas, B. (2004). (The) Nation-State Matters: Comparing Multiculturalism(s) in an Age of Globalization. In David Leiwei Li (Ed.), *Globalization and the Humanities*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Waters, M. (1995). *Globalization*. London: Routledge.
- Watson, C.W. (1996). The Construction of the Post-Colonial Subject in Malaysia. In Stein Tønnesson & Hans Antlov (Eds.), *Asian Forms of the Nation*. Surrey: Curzon.
- Wee, V., Jacobsen, M. and Wong, T. (2006). Positioning strategies of Southeast Asian Chinese entrepreneurs. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 36(3), 364-384.
- Weidenbaum, M. & Hughes, S. (1996). *The Bamboo Network: How Expatriate Chinese Entrepreneurs are Creating a New Economic Superpower in Asia*. New York: The Free Press.
- Wen, F. (2005). Cultural Quality Education in a Multi-cultural Background: A Case Study of Jinan University. *Southeast Asian Studies*, 153, 90-94.
- Xia, L.P. (2004). Shilun Deng Xiaoping Qiaowu Sixiang di Sange Fazhan Jieduan [An attempt to discuss the three developmental stages of Deng Xiaoping's thoughts on overseas Chinese affairs]. *Bagui Qiaokan*, No.4 of 2004, 28-31.
- Xia, Q. and Liang, B. (2004). 'Bainian Qiaoxiao' – Jinan Daxue ['Overseas Chinese academy with a hundred years' – Jinan University]. *Jiangsu Gaojiao*, No.3 of 2004, 132.
- Zhao, H. Y. (2004). Guanyu Qiaowu Ziyuan Kechixu Fazhan di Jidian Sikao [About a few points of thinking on the sustainable development of the overseas Chinese resource]. *Bagui Qiaokan*, No.2 of 2004, 8-10.