



**IMAGINING THE  
CHINESE DIASPORA:  
TWO AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES**

**Wang Gungwu  
Annette Shun Wah**

Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora  
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies  
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The **Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora (CSCSD)** was established in 1989. The CSCSD will be a permanent force for research and teaching on people of Chinese descent in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific and their interaction with other societies and cultures in the region. It will investigate such themes as the role of transnational communities in an increasingly globalised world, the central but contested role of Sino-Southeast Asians and Sino-Australasians in their local economies, multiple identities, cultural heritage and the political management of minority status.

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Published by the CSCSD, ANU, Canberra, 1999.

© 1999 CSCSD, ANU, Canberra.

ISBN No. 0909524386

Printed by ANU Printing Service, 1999.

## Preface

The ANU's Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora has much pleasure in presenting these two fine lectures as its first venture into print. That of Wang Gungwu is based on the Inaugural CSCSD Lecture, which he gave at the Centre's formal opening on 26 February 1999. That of Annette Shun Wah was a keynote lecture presented the following day to the CSCSD symposium on "reconceptualising diaspora".

The Centre's name and background require a little explanation. Each of the last three words in its title is problematic, and we all have to think twice before getting the order right.

In the everyday usage of most languages outside China, the word "Chinese" is seen as commonplace; the least in need of exegesis. Yet the inadequacy of this single word to cover an extraordinary multiplicity of meanings is the source of both psychological tensions and political danger. This was brought home particularly in May 1998, when the word *Cina* (Chinese) daubed on shop-houses in Jakarta was something like a death sentence. The Indonesians thus fatefully labelled were not asked whether they felt the label appropriate.

The words China and Chinese, similar in most European and Southeast Asian languages, represent colossal simplifications. While it is thought (with no great certainty) to have derived ultimately from the Chin dynasty (221-206BC) which brought political centralisation to China, no subsequent Chinese wanted to identify with this hated dynasty. There is no comparable word in Chinese. The different concepts Wang Gungwu refers to--*han*, *huaren*, *huayi*, *huaqiao*--are modern creations, but even in the age of nationalism Chinese-speakers cannot confuse the range of meanings in the way English-speakers are almost compelled to do by this single term.

The two autobiographies presented below show something of how this term in the mouths of others can close off options and create pressures. We regularly use the one term both for a single language and for a group of languages; for an ancient civilization (equivalent to Greece, Rome and Mediaeval Christendom in the western trajectory); for two modern countries; for the citizens of those countries; and for an enormous range of citizens of other countries, some of whom speak one or more Chinese languages among others, but many of whom have nothing in common with "China" except a distant line of descent, usually in the male line.

Despite these difficulties, the image and reality of "Chineseness" create a host of fascinating and fruitful interactions with all the peoples of Southeast Asia and the Pacific rim. It is these the CSCSD is concerned to focus on. We therefore felt we could not dodge the term in our title, for all its ambiguities.

By "Southern" we mean to demarcate the geographical area of our concerns. Throughout most of the two thousand and more years there has been a Chinese polity, the major movements of population have been southward. Blocked by water, forest, and the stubborn resistance of another Sinified polity in Vietnam, Chinese political authority moved no further southward in the past thousand years. But its people, especially those of the southern maritime provinces, braved the seas to become pioneer traders, farmers and miners in the less populated southlands. As an Australian centre we wanted to look particularly at those interactions to the southward, including Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the Southwest Pacific.

The term "diaspora" is dissected by Professor Wang in the pages below with his habitual clarity. We understand the reservations he has long held about the term. The Centre's position in adopting it is that its modern usage (as opposed to the Jewish origins of the term) specifically

juxtaposes "diaspora" against people of the homeland. Ambivalence and multiple identities are at the heart of the diaspora experience, and this experience is itself central to the way the modern globalising world is constructed. If nationalism arose out of the rootlessness of rural people displaced into urban mass society, diaspora ambivalences arise out of the displacement induced by the cross-border migrations and the communications revolution of a globalising era.

We should here express our debts to those who have made it possible to establish a Centre concerned with this subject at ANU. Firstly to Wang Gungwu himself, who pioneered the study of the Chinese southern diaspora (though certainly not by that name) in Malaysia and then as Professor of Far Eastern History at the ANU from 1968 to 1985. He brought to Canberra Jennifer Cushman, who continued this work until her untimely death in 1989. A Jennifer Cushman Memorial Fund was established in her honour. By far its biggest donation was a bequest left by another former ANU scholar of Southeast Asia, Ben Batson, when he too died a tragically early death in 1996.

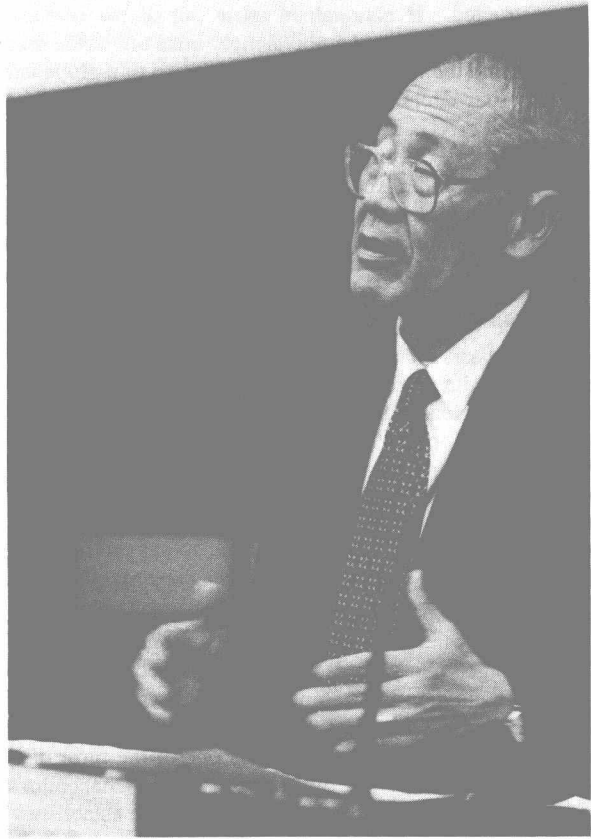
In addition to this source of funding, a three year subvention from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation has provided the basis for establishing this Centre. We believe it is timely that such a Centre be established in Australia to encourage research and discussion of this crucial area. The 1998 events in Indonesia reminded us that even a high degree of cultural integration into a host society does not prevent diaspora Chinese from being both exceptionally creative and exceptionally vulnerable. The Centre has already sponsored a Workshop on the way ahead for Chinese Indonesians in February 1999, the proceedings of which are being prepared for publication. For the Centre to succeed in the longer term, however, it will need support from other sources.

Nobody except Wang Gungwu could have given the Centre's inaugural lecture. He has pioneered the field of Chinese diaspora studies, both through his own work and the extraordinary number of students and junior colleagues he has guided through the difficulties of the field. His presence at the ANU encouraged many of his colleagues to recognise this dimension of the work they were doing. Since its foundation in 1986 he has been President of the International Society for the Study of the Chinese Overseas. His own life, beautifully sketched in his essay below, exemplifies the dilemmas of diaspora existence. He is one of the most distinguished of Chinese Malaysians and of Chinese Australians; he was recently Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong; he is currently a sojourner in Singapore. His lecture establishes the intellectual basis on which the Centre will build.

Annette Shun Wah is another distinguished Chinese Australian of a different generation, gender, birthplace and background. Having made a career in Australian media and film, her autobiographical essay exemplifies the complexities and creativities which a touch of (unwished for) diaspora status can bring even to somebody firmly anchored in their Australian birthplace.

We wish to thank Clare Guenther for producing this booklet, Shen Yuanfang and Michael Godley for editorial assistance, Darren Boyd (Coombs Photography) for the photo of Wang Gungwu, Brendan Read for the photo of *Ching Ming*, and Jude Shanahan for designing the CSCSD logo.

Anthony Reid  
Craig Reynolds  
CSCSD Co-directors



Professor Wang Gungwu, February 1999

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# A Single Chinese Diaspora? Some Historical Reflections

Wang Gungwu

I wish to begin by thanking Professor Reid and his colleagues for their efforts in establishing this new Centre for the study of the Chinese overseas. It had started modestly as a series of lectures to remember Jennifer Cushman, a friend whom we all miss dearly. That series led to the volume entitled *Sojourners and Settlers* which Tony Reid published a couple of years ago.<sup>1</sup> Not content with that, he set out to plan this Chinese Southern Diaspora Centre. He and his colleagues are convinced that the subject of the Chinese who migrated and settled southwards is deserving of serious study, and that the ANU is the right place to locate such a centre. I agree. Australia does need to encourage teaching and research in this field and the ANU has excellent conditions to get this job done well. It is most gratifying to see it take off now. I am delighted that Tony invited me to give the Centre's inaugural lecture. I need hardly say that this is a Centre I want to be associated with. What I have to say this evening is but a small measure of congratulations to the team that made this Centre possible.

You are probably so used to the phrase Chinese Southern Diaspora by now that you may be surprised that I should want to reflect on the use of the term diaspora here. After all, I recently called the two volumes of essays which Wang Ling-chi and I edited, *The Chinese Diaspora*.<sup>2</sup> I had to do some heart-searching about that. I have long advocated that the Chinese overseas be studied in the context of their respective national environments, and taken out of a dominant China reference point. It is necessary that each Chinese community overseas be open to comparative study, both among themselves and together with other migrant communities. Our two volumes stressed settlement, as in the phrase *luodi shenggen*,<sup>3</sup> meaning growing roots where you land; and also differentiation among the communities in six continents. The 35 essays emphasise the great variety among Chinese who have found new homes in different parts of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Reid, with the assistance of Kristine Alilunas Rodgers, ed., *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese, in honour of Jennifer Cushman*, St Leonard's, NSW, Allen & Unwin and Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu, eds, *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays*, two volumes, Singapore, Times Academic Press, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> "Luodi shenggen" (literally, fall to the ground, grow roots) was the title of the conference organised in San Francisco in 1991 by Wang Ling-chi and his colleagues of the University of California, Berkeley.

I still have some disquiet about the use of the term diaspora, not because, in English, it has until recently applied only to the Jews (see *Oxford English Dictionary*), nor because the word refers to exile (in Hebrew) or dispersion (in Greek), which are rather specific manifestations of the phenomenon of sojourning and migration.<sup>4</sup> Of course, it is misleading and politically sensitive for the Chinese to be compared to the Jews in the Muslim world of Southeast Asia, but if the reality makes the comparison appropriate, so be it.

My reservations come from the problems the Chinese encountered with the concept of sojourner (*huaqiao*) and the political use both China and hostile governments have made of that term. From China's point of view, *huaqiao* was a powerful name for a single body of overseas Chinese. It was openly used to bring about ethnic if not nationalist or racist binding of all Chinese at home and abroad. In the countries which have large Chinese minorities, that term had become a major source of the suspicion that the Chinese minorities could never feel loyalty towards their host nations. After some thirty years of debate, the term *huaqiao* now no longer includes those Chinese with foreign passports, and is being replaced by others like (*haiwai*) *huaren* and *huayi*, which disclaim formal China connections. The question which lingers in my mind is: will the word diaspora be used to revive the idea of a single body of Chinese, reminiscent of the old term, the *huaqiao*? Is this intended by those Chinese who favour its use? Once the term is widely used, would it be possible to keep it as a technical term in the social sciences, or will it acquire the emotive power that would actually change our views about the nature of the various Chinese communities overseas?

Tony Reid knows my reservations and has encouraged me to look back and reflect on how the Chinese abroad have been studied so far and how the approaches in the past have contributed to the present stage of evolution. This would also give me a chance to examine some of my own premises. My early interest in overseas Chinese history came from three major strands of scholarship. The first was that of the Chinese and Japanese scholars who gave the overseas Chinese a single identity as *huaqiao*, Chinese sojourners. This began with Chinese mandarins at the end of the 19th century, then came the reformers and revolutionaries and their Japanese supporters of the early 20th.<sup>5</sup> Finally the subject was taken up by scholars like Li Changfu, Liu Shimu, Wen Xiongfei and the team in Jinan University in Shanghai who founded, in the 1920s, the first major centre for the study of the *huaqiao*. They were followed by Chen Da, Zhang Liqian, Xu Yunqiao (Hsu Yun-ts'iao), and Yao Nan, the latter three helping to found the Nanyang Xuehui (The South Seas Society) in Singapore in 1940.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. various editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* before and after the 1970s with the many editions of others like *Webster's Dictionary*.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Gungwu, "A Note on the Origins of Hua-ch'iao," in *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, selected by Anthony Reid, Singapore and North Sydney, Heinemann Educational Books and George Allen & Unwin for Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1981. First published in 1977 in *Masalah-Masalah Internasional Masakini*, edited by Lie Tek Tjeng, vol. 7, Jakarta, Lembaga Research Kebudayaan Nasional, L.I.P.I., pp.71-8.

<sup>6</sup> The numerous publications of the scholars at Jinan University in the 1920s and 1930s are listed in Xu Yunqiao's (Hsu Yun-ts'iao) useful bibliography, *Nanyang wenxian xulu changbian*, Singapore, Dongnanya

The second strand was that of the colonial officials and the scholars they encouraged and commissioned to study the Chinese in the different territories of Southeast Asia. This was developed from their early trading experiences with the various kinds of Chinese which the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English dealt with as they expanded their trading interests in Southeast Asia and the China coast. Later, the Dutch, British and French administrators studied their respective Chinese groups with particular care.<sup>7</sup> They saw the Chinese both as potential allies and as possible threats to their regimes. In the 20th century, Victor Purcell began writing seriously about them in the 1930s and, when he produced his comprehensive study for Southeast Asia in 1951, he emerged as the best example of this group's work.<sup>8</sup> The British Colonial Office after the war funded excellent scholars like Maurice Freedman and Tian Jukang, and their field research set new standards of anthropological enquiry.<sup>9</sup>

The third strand was the work of more recent field scholars, including sociologists and anthropologists who had wanted to study China but were forced to turn to the overseas Chinese when the communist victory in 1949 made it impossible for them to work in China itself. The leading figure in this strand was the American scholar Bill Skinner who worked on the Chinese in Thailand, while others worked on the distinct communities in Indonesia, Malaya, the Philippines and also Cambodia.<sup>10</sup> The China orientation of the

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yanjiu so, 1959. Chen Da's renowned work on *qiaoxiang* (sojourner villages), *Emigrant Communities in South China*, was published in 1940, the year the Nanyang Xuehui (South Seas Society) was established.

<sup>7</sup> Some early examples were works by J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, Singapore, 1879; and Gustav Schlegel, *Thian Ti Hwi, The Hung League or Heaven and Earth League*, Batavia, 1866. The French scholars like Paul Pelliot and Henri Maspero paid more attention to Chinese history and culture than to the Chinese overseas, but their work did illuminate important aspects of China's relations with the Indo-China states.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, London, Oxford University Press, 1951 (2nd edition 1965). His more detailed study of *The Chinese in Malaya*, first published in 1948, was also authoritative for decades.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Freedman's *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore* (1957) was first presented as a report to the Colonial Social Science Research Council and the Government of the Colony of Singapore. Tien Ju Kang's *The Chinese of Sarawak: A Study of Social Structure* (1953) was also an offshoot of the scholarly work supported by the British government at the London School of Economics. Both of them were students of Raymond Firth who had reported on social science research in Malaya in 1948 and prepared the ground for their field research. Other notable scholars were Alan J.A. Elliott who reported on Chinese spirit-medium cults in Singapore (1955); and Marjorie Topley whose research was on the social organisation of women's *chai-t'ang* in Singapore (1958).

<sup>10</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (1957) and *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (1958), Ithaca, Cornell University Press; Donald E. Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang: A Changing Minority Community in Indonesia*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1960. For Malaya, notable studies were by Lucian W. Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1956; and William H. Newell, *Treacherous River: a Study of Rural Chinese of North Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1962. The two Ph.D. theses of George H. Weightman (Cornell) on the Philippine Chinese and of Jacques Amyot (Chicago) on Chinese Familism in Manila were both completed in 1960. Also, the excellent historical study by Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965. For Cambodia, the work of William E. Willmott was done for the London School of Economics, *The Chinese in Cambodia*, Vancouver, The University of British Columbia Publications Centre, 1967; and *The Political Structure of the Chinese Community in Cambodia*, London, The Athlone Press, 1970.

scholars in the latter two strands was obvious when Freedman and Skinner led them to come together to launch the very productive and significant London-Cornell project that studied Hong Kong and Taiwan as the only Chinese societies that were accessible to non-Chinese scholars. The second and third strands inspired a new generation of scholars, including Southeast Asians of Chinese descent.<sup>11</sup>

It is significant that none of them used the term diaspora, and all of them treated the term *huaqiao* that emphasised the oneness of the overseas Chinese identity with reservations. Maurice Freedman, who was editor of the *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, and knew the Jewish connotations of diaspora best, did not consider the term appropriate for the Chinese. Instead, non-Chinese scholars favoured two distinct approaches: firstly, the study of varieties of *huaqiao* in different environments and the Chinese characteristics each of them retained and secondly, the study of the conditions under which the Chinese might assimilate and accept their place as citizens of the new nation-states of Southeast Asia.<sup>12</sup>

We all know that, early this century, the Chinese were compared with the Jews in Europe.<sup>13</sup> After Nazi persecution and the Holocaust, more recent scholars have been hesitant to use the comparison directly. The first person to raise the issue with me was not a student of the overseas Chinese, but of Indonesia. This was the late Harry Benda. His family were victims of the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia, he lived for many years in Dutch East Indies and he returned to study the new nation of Indonesia.<sup>14</sup> He suggested to me when we met in 1959 that the fate of the Chinese there could be similar to that of the Jews in Germany and I disagreed with him. In fact, as far as I know, he refrained from using the term diaspora in his writings. This was perhaps because he did see each Chinese community as seeking to develop its own distinctive identity away from the one that nationalist Chinese scholars and officials, and some local community leaders, had tried to impose on them. He knew that new political conditions in Southeast Asia during the 1950s were forcing the Chinese to re-consider what nationalism meant for them outside China.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Tan Giok Lan, Mely, *The Chinese of Sukabumi: A Study in Social and Cultural Accommodation*, Ithaca, NY, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1961; Anthony S. Tan, *The Chinese in the Philippines: A Study of their National Awakening*, Quezon City, R.P. Garcia, 1972. The first of Leo Suryadinata's many writings dates from his Master's thesis in 1969 at Monash University, "The Three Major Streams of Peranakan Politics in Java, 1914-1942" (later published in 1976). Tan Chee Beng's Cornell Ph. D. thesis was completed in 1979, later published as *The Baba of Melaka: Culture and Identity of a Chinese Peranakan Community in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya, Pelanduk Publications, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> Freedman's reports, Skinner's early books and the work of the Willmott brothers and Weightman are good examples of the first, and Purcell and the later Skinner of the second.

<sup>13</sup> The first comparison was attributed to Prince Vajiravudh of Thailand. He was inspired by nationalist movements in Europe and sought to develop Thai nationalism. From his observations of the Chinese in Thailand, he drew analogies with the Jews in Europe and embarked on educational policies that would enable the Chinese to assimilate; Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Honolulu, University Press of Hawaii, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Benda had a sharp eye for Indonesian politics, especially the potential power of the indigenous Muslim traders who considered the Chinese as their rivals; *The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesia Islam Under the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945*, Den Hague, Van Hoeve, 1958. Although he did not write about Chinese communities, he was keenly interested in them in Indonesia and Malaya (then West Malaysia and Singapore). We spoke several times on the subject prior to his taking the post of the first director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore in 1969.

I did not set out to study the Chinese overseas. My interest was always in Chinese history. This is partly because I started life as a Chinese sojourner, a *huaqiao*, someone temporarily resident abroad. If circumstances permitted it, such a person would look foremost to China. I was no exception. My father had come to the region to teach in high schools in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca before becoming a principal of the first Chinese high school in Surabaya, where I was born. After he left Surabaya, he became assistant inspector of Chinese schools in Ipoh, in the state of Perak. This was a town with a Chinese majority, with the Malays in nearby suburban kampongs and most Indians housed by European-owned companies or government agencies. Among the Chinese, the tin miners in the Kinta valley were mostly Hakka, and the shopkeepers in the town mostly Cantonese. There was also a mixture of Hokkien, Teochiu and Hainanese, and smaller numbers who spoke other dialects. In short, it was a multicommunal town under Anglo-Malay administration, fairly typical of those in the four Federated Malay States of Malaya.

I was made aware very early that many of the sojourner families I grew up with thought in terms of returning to China one day. Others were ambivalent. They were happy to be out of China, to have a relatively secure living, and seemed content with a local polity that did not interfere much with their lives. Among the Chinese friends I made in the English school that I attended I found many to whom China meant little. Their families had adapted fully to local living and typically spoke, read and wrote Malay and English better than they could any kind of Chinese. To them and to most of the teachers, my concern for the condition of China and for things Chinese was not readily comprehensible.

The events that highlighted the question of Chinese identity for me were the Japanese incursions into China that reached a climax in 1937 with a full-scale invasion. By that time, most Chinese were well accustomed to the rise of Chinese nationalist sentiment among the Chinese resident abroad. China politics had been brought to Overseas Chinese sojourners at the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup> It attracted their interest because of the anti-Chinese discriminatory acts around the world, the most virulent occurring in the migrant states of the Americas, Australasia and South Africa.<sup>16</sup> Such acts in Southeast Asia were less hurtful, on the whole, because the colonial powers, unlike the working classes of the

<sup>15</sup> Some historians date this from the appointment of the first imperial Qing Consuls in Singapore from 1877; others would say that China politics began when the followers of Kang Youwei and those of Sun Yat-sen sought financial support from the overseas Chinese in Japan, Southeast Asia and North America. In terms of modern political activity involving large numbers of the *huaqiao*, I favour the latter view. For the former, see Wen Chung-chi, "The Nineteenth Century Imperial Chinese Consulate in the Straits Settlements," M.A. Thesis, University of Singapore, 1964. For the latter, see Wang Gungwu, "Sun Yat-sen and Singapore", *Journal of the South Seas Society (Nanyang Hsueh-pao)*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1959; Yen Ching-hwang, *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution, With Special Reference to Singapore and Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Tsai Shih-shan, Henry, *China and the Overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868-1911*, Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 1983. Edgar Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1982. Charles A. Price, *The Great White Walls are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australia, 1836-1888*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1974. Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California, 1850-1901*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1979. Malanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa, Hong Kong*, Hong Kong University Press, 1996.

European migrant states, found the Chinese useful to their trading and industrial enterprises.

Chinese nationalism spread quickly through the schools and newspapers that mushroomed in the 1910s and 1920s. In this atmosphere, *huaqiao* studies received overt political support in China. I became aware of this literature through my father and his teacher and journalist friends, but thought little of it. What was real was the propaganda conducted to arouse overseas Chinese to save China from the Japanese. After 1937, teams of people travelled around to raise funds for the war in China, to exhort all Chinese to buy Chinese manufactured goods and boycott everything Japanese.<sup>17</sup> A concerted effort was made to persuade overseas Chinese to think in terms of a single Chinese nation, something like what a single and united Chinese diaspora might imply. Success included collecting large donations sent to help the war effort and recruiting young Chinese workers and students to return to China to serve in the armed forces.<sup>18</sup>

During the Japanese occupation period, the sense of Chinese identity grew among everyone of Chinese descent. It was forced upon them, since they were seen as potential enemies. It did not matter if they cared for China, or were more loyal to local or colonial regimes. This background explains why many saw themselves simply as Chinese. It was natural that they should study the Chinese language and live as Chinese and, if they had the chance to do so, return to serve China. For myself, I prepared myself to return to China one day, and studied Chinese with my father with increasing interest and commitment.<sup>19</sup>

This did not cut me off from a rich variety of friendships. In study, in play and in the neighbourhood around my home, especially after the end of the war, I spent far more time with my Malay, Indian, Eurasian and non-Chinese speaking Chinese neighbours and schoolmates than with Chinese who thought like I did. The growing sense of being Malayan was something I understood and sympathised with, as it became clear that a new country would some day emerge from the colony-protectorate that the British had put together. That empire was coming to an end. The feeling of a local nationalism was growing among my friends.<sup>20</sup> I would like to have shared it with them, but I had a prior duty, and in 1947, I entered my father's old university in Nanjing.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Yoji Akashi, *The Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement, 1937-1941*, Lawrence, Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1970. Stephen Leong Mun Yoon, "Sources, Agencies, Manifestations of Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Malaya, 1937-1941," Ph.D. thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Yoji (1970), pp. 113-158. At the "Workshop on the History of the Malayan Emergency" held at the Australian National University in February 1999, Chin Peng, not yet 16 years old in 1939, spoke candidly of his wanting to return to China to fight the Japanese during the early years of the Sino-Japanese War.

<sup>19</sup> It was not entirely voluntary. For my benefit, my father offered to teach classical Chinese to the sons of his friends, and regularly challenged me to do better than the boys who had studied in Chinese schools and were older than me by three to four years. I managed to hold my own and, as my Chinese improved, became absorbed in more difficult literary texts.

<sup>20</sup> This became acute during my last months back at Anderson School, Ipoh, from September 1945 to December 1946. The person who most impressed me with his growing national consciousness was the person I shared my desk with, the late Aminuddin Baki. He was, at his untimely death in 1968, the Director of Education of the Federation of Malaya.

<sup>21</sup> My father graduated from the Southeastern University (Dongnan Daxue) in Nanjing in 1925, and had always hoped that I would go to his alma mater, renamed National Central University (Zhongyang Daxue) in

Dramatic political changes in China changed my life. The civil war was about to reach Nanjing, the university closed down, and this led me to rejoin my parents in Ipoh at the end of 1948.<sup>22</sup> When China became communist the next year, I was enrolled at the University of Malaya in Singapore and back among the kinds of friends I had made in school. Most of them were English-educated Chinese who had grown up in cities and towns with Chinese majorities.<sup>23</sup> It was easy for me to identify with them as Chinese, although it was clear that most of them had never been *huaqiao* sojourners like me. For them, they were home, and the projected nation of an independent Malaya was full of promise. For me, the turbulent Chinese nation had become increasingly an abstract entity dedicated to an ideology that seemed alien to the region. Through the prevailing anti-colonialism in Malaya and an Anglo-socialist perspective, I became reconciled to acquiring a new national identity. It was the first step to moving away from being a sojourner towards a conscious decision to settle outside of China. What I would become eventually was still uncertain, but learning to be a citizen of the Federation of Malaya was a beginning. Nevertheless, the commitment to know China remained: that is, to finish what I had started to do, to understand what could have gone wrong with that ancient civilisation, and what future it still had. Between sojourning and settling down in one place, I discovered that being Chinese was not a handicap but an anchor. Turning thus to the study of Chinese history seemed to be the most natural thing to do.

Thus, I set my mind to be a Chinese historian. Despite the pull of the politics of new nationhood in Malaya, I held to this course. But nation-building was a delicate matter, and new approaches towards history were required. I joined my colleagues to stimulate research on Malayan history, especially so that we might train a new generation of national historians among our students. For myself, I would contribute by studying the Malayan Chinese as they evolved from sojourners to citizens, as they learnt what it meant to be Malaysians. I had given a series of radio talks in 1958, which were published as *A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese*.<sup>24</sup> My work on Chinese history had enabled me to relate the story from the beginning of Chinese relations with the region--the Nanhai trade, to the Cheng Ho naval expeditions and the defensive tributary system, and then to the coolie trade, the Nanyang merchant networks and the patriotic *huaqiao*. I read the local writings, the historical documents, and also the new scholarship on the changing Chinese

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1928. He brought me to Nanjing in the summer of 1947 to sit for the entrance examinations; the results were published in the *Zhongyang Daily News* on 6th September 1947. I was admitted to the Department of Foreign Languages.

<sup>22</sup> I was at National Central University from October 1947 to December 1948. After the Nationalist armies were defeated at the great battle of Huaihai (Northern Jiangsu) in December 1948, I decided to return to Malaya to rejoin my parents.

<sup>23</sup> The University of Malaya, comprising the King Edward VII Medical College and Raffles College (Arts and Science), had its foundation Day on 8 October 1949. It was the only university in British Malaya (Singapore and the newly established Federation of Malaya) and two-thirds of its students were from the Federation. Almost all its students were products of the English schools of the two territories. A clear majority was Chinese, with significant numbers of Ceylonese, Indians and Eurasians. The Malays were greatly under represented in the early years of the university's history.

<sup>24</sup> Singapore, Donald Moore, 1959. Reprinted in my essay collection *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia*, St. Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin, 1992, pp. 11-39.



communities with greater attention, notably the work of Western social scientists of the 1950s. At the same time, the most dramatic developments in the country included the steps taken in the years 1961 to 1965 to form a new Malaysian federation by joining together several former British territories with large Chinese communities.<sup>25</sup> This provided me with a focal point to embark on a comparative study of various Chinese communities trying to adapt to new political realities.

The Malaysia merger was accompanied by Indonesian Confrontation and ended as a failed experiment that threatened good relations between Chinese and Malays. 1965-1966 became a pivotal year for my research. The ejection of Singapore from Malaysia was a bitter blow. In the region, the Vietnam war had begun in earnest and the Sukarno regime ended with a terrifying bloodletting.<sup>26</sup> It was a turning-point for Southeast Asian development. Even more dramatic was the unchaining of Mao Zedong and his effort to consolidate the revolution in China with a Proletarian Cultural Revolution. No one expected that this would eventually lead to the unravelling of Mao's vision in the midst of extensive anarchic conditions.

My interest in Chinese history was revived by the incredible stories reported about China. Was there method in Mao's madness? Was it necessary so that the revolution could escape from the deep-rooted Chinese past? Also, my work on Chinese history had gained attention, and I had to make a difficult choice. Should I stay and continue studying the Chinese in the region at a crucial point of change, or to return to my first love, the history of China as it was being reexamined and reinterpreted to meet the transformations on the mainland? In the end, it seemed to me that, at the ANU, I could hope to do both, to study China itself while remaining in the larger Southeast Asian neighbourhood. In Australia, I would never be far from at least the many groups of overseas Chinese close by.

I came to Canberra in 1968 and proceeded to indulge myself in all the books, pamphlets, journals, magazines, newspapers and miscellaneous documents that came out of the Cultural Revolution that had intensified in deadly earnest since 1966. This material was not available in Malaysia during the many years I worked in Kuala Lumpur. It took years before I felt I had caught up on Chinese affairs. Nevertheless, the first two articles I wrote at the ANU were "Chinese Politics in Malaya" and "Malaysia: Contending Elites".<sup>27</sup> I could now study both China and the Chinese communities outside. And because of that, the interplay between China's view of those communities and the view of themselves by

<sup>25</sup> I was inspired by the enthusiasm of my colleagues to edit *Malaysia: A Survey* in response to this development. This was published by Praeger in New York and Pall Mall in London in 1964.

<sup>26</sup> Reliable accounts of the events of 1965-1966 in Indonesia are still hard to come by. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson and Ruth T. McVey. *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 Coup in Indonesia*, Ithaca, NY, Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1971. Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, Clayton, Victoria, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990. In contrast, books on the Vietnam war abound. Robert D. Schulzinger's *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, provides a concise summary of the main features of the war.

<sup>27</sup> "Chinese politics in Malaya," *The China Quarterly*, London, no. 43, 1970, pp. 1-30; "Malaysia: Contending Elites," *Current Affairs Bulletin*, Sydney, vol. 47, no. 3, December 1970, pp. 1-12. In addition, I also commented on the May 1969 riots in West Malaysia, "Political Change in Malaysia," *Pacific Community*, Tokyo, vol. 1, no. 4, 1970, pp. 687-696.



the Chinese outside was never far from my mind. This interplay has guided my main writings till this day.

By seeking to connect both perspectives, I have not accepted China's view that China alone has the capacity to give the overseas Chinese what they need in order to remain Chinese. Chinese officials have always underestimated the resources the Chinese overseas have been able to muster to cultivate new kinds of Chineseness among themselves.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, there has also been a sense of cultural inferiority that has often dogged those outside China. It seems to me that this has made them too modest about their achievements, whether in business, in education, or in technical skills. Their self-estimation has never been stable or well-judged, and they were wont to move from cultural cringe one moment to naive boastfulness the next.<sup>29</sup> There are many levels and dimensions in the subtle and uncertain relationships between China and its wandering peoples.

As for scholarly approach, I never tried to do what Maurice Freedman and Bill Skinner did systematically, which was to use what they learnt from the Chinese overseas to explain Chinese society itself.<sup>30</sup> Nor did I focus on the many past and present patterns of Chinese assimilation, nor agree with the studies that looked only at the new norms in Chinese responses to Southeast Asian nationalism. Instead, my work has tended to move between two wishful but ambiguous positions. One was China's wish to see all Chinese abroad as ultimately sojourners, as members of one extended Chinese family whose loyalty and patriotism they could hope to count on when really needed. The other was the desire among Chinese emigrants and settlers that their children would remain culturally Chinese to some degree and ensure the lines of descent for at least a few generations.<sup>31</sup>

Immersing myself in Chinese history has helped me understand how much China has been both repelled and fascinated by the large numbers of Chinese who have done well by living abroad, by the reasons why so many no longer wanted to return, and by what has made them replace Chinese culture with alien ways. At the same time, keeping up with the latest research on localised Chinese in each respective country around the world has also enabled me to see these communities in many lights. On the one hand, it is obvious that

<sup>28</sup> The different estimates stem from the quality of Chineseness expected. Those in China measure this in terms of how much the Chinese outside are still like those in China and remain loyal to what China stands for. Those who have settled abroad are normally content if they speak the language, observe certain customs, and are able to employ Chinese ways and connections effectively. It is, however, important that their Chinese origins be respected and there is no discrimination against them as Chinese.

<sup>29</sup> I have only anecdotal evidence, but enough to recognise among Chinese overseas the cringe that colonials have about their countries of origin. Like former colonials from Britain in Australia, there are also expressions of a similar exasperation about those who come from the "home country". In some cases with the Chinese, this is followed by self-congratulation about how well they have done outside China without China's help. These extreme attitudes may be found everywhere, not least in Southeast Asia.

<sup>30</sup> The two best examples of Freedman's work would be "Lineage Organisation in Southeastern China" (1958) and "Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung" (1966). Other major essays have been collected in *The Study of Chinese Society*, G. William Skinner (ed.), (1979). Skinner also has a similarly enviable record of contributing profoundly to Chinese sociology: *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China* (1964) and the reference work *Modern Chinese Society: An Analytical Bibliography* (1973).

<sup>31</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Among Non-Chinese," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Cambridge, Mass., Spring, 1991, pp. 135-157; reprinted in *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*, Tu Wei-ming (ed.), Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 127-146.