

Taiwan: The Land Colonialisms Made

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The initiative for this special issue of *boundary 2* was prompted by two reflections, one personal, the other broadly theoretical. The personal refers to my experience of Taiwan over the last forty-five years. I first came to Taiwan in 1969 as a graduate student to study Chinese—out of necessity, since for US students the “real” China was not accessible. After a lengthy gap, since 1990 I have visited Taiwan many times for short periods.

Among the many striking changes that had taken place in the intervening period, there was a fundamental one that strangely did not move to the forefront of my consciousness until my last visit in 2015 when, sitting one morning watching people on the grounds of the Academia Sinica, it struck me how much *the people* had changed. With all the anxieties that

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surely are inflicted upon the people of an island republic by life under constant threat of disappearance into the economic, cultural, and, possibly, political folds of its powerful Mainland counterpart, there was, nevertheless, a seeming sense of comfort in their very behavior and interactions with who they were and what they were there for—a warm “civility,” if you like, that anthropologist David Schak (2009) has written about. It was their comfort with themselves that triggered in me the realization that this unawares had been my accumulating sense of the great majority of the people in Taiwan in my visits after 1990. It contrasted sharply with my impressions from the yearlong stay two decades earlier, when the people foreigners like us were most likely to meet still imagined that they were on the island as sojourners, soon to return to their “real” homes on the Mainland. The desire also perpetuated their division from the majority of the people to whom the island was home, and who were recognizably different culturally from their Mainland settlers. The island seemed to lack the weight that comes with a sense of settlement, its cultures at odds with one another.

How Taiwan got from one state to the other seemed worthy of systematic exploration through the eyes of the Taiwanese population, which in the intervening period had reasserted its presence against the Mainland conquerors, once again changing the course of the island’s history in an unmistakably different direction than the conquerors had envisioned—and continue to do so. Ya-Chung Chuang has shown that social movements in pursuit of democracy in the 1980s not only had significant political consequences in empowering Taiwanese voices but also created new forms of sociability and engendered a new self-image (Chuang 2013). They also laid the ground for similar movements that have followed, most notably the Sunflower Movement of 2014, which have further consolidated the new self-image, if not necessarily the sociability. Today *Taiwanese* refers not just to the pre-1945 inhabitants of the island but to its entire population, which itself is a triumph of the concretely local over the abstractly national. This is not to say that deep divisions and anxieties have disappeared from Taiwanese society and politics. But the Taiwanization of the post-1945 arrivals from the Mainland has largely erased the validity of earlier distinctions between the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders, which now need to be redefined more as orientations to the Mainland rather than in terms of birth or origin. The cultural and historical fabric of this transformation has left its imprint on the population at large. It is this fabric, and not just its form, that calls for closer understanding against a prevalent assumption that Taiwan as a “Chinese” society naturally belongs in “China,” an assumption that has been sanc-

tioned by international agreements based on considerations of power. For a good portion of the island's population, the local obviously is more than the local and is the basis for national claims of its own, which has deep implications worldwide for understandings of "China" and "Chineseness." This came to be one important motivation for putting together a volume that would explore different aspects of this emergent consciousness that has come to shape the island's culture—even for those whose dreams may still lie with the Mainland.¹

The theoretical motivation is more complicated. It involves the relationship between colonialism and historical identity formation, which has not received the attention its importance demands. This may sound strange, as the relationship between colonialism and identity has been at the center of much postcolonial scholarship. The obsessive preoccupation of this scholarship with Euro-American colonialism has limited its historical and theoretical scope, however, and channeled inquiry into the impact of colonization on the colonizer, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the appropriation of the colonial by native subjects in strategies of resistance that mocked the anticipations of the colonizers. These emphases are understandable given the antihegemonic goal of postcolonial criticism to counter Euro-American colonialist assumptions that have shaped modern forms of knowledge, including knowledge of the colonized. What has been lost sight of in the process, however, are the ways in which the colonizer's culture did indeed transform the colonized, setting them in new historical directions, even if the directions taken were not what the colonizers had expected them to be. The postcolonial critique of cultural and epistemological Eurocentrism owes much of its inspiration and language to these very forms of knowledge. Resistance to colonialism is a powerful source of identity formation, but only if we recognize that it already presupposes the colonial as an integral moment.²

The suggestion that colonialism is a source of historical identity does not sit well with nationalist historiography, in which colonial episodes appear as black boxes lost to national history, whose consequences are best erased in the recovery of national integrity and belonging. Colonial episodes appear in this perspective as deviations from the evolution of national identity rather than constituents of its formation. Their cultural effects are

1. For a brief but excellent overview of recent changes and the problems the island faces, see Isett 2016.

2. Similar points have been made, with reference to Japanese colonialism, in Liao and Wang 2006, esp. Liao 2006: 1–15.

deemed undesirable, if not illegitimate, and need to be erased in order for national consciousness to take root.

I think it may be observed fairly that such thinking dominates views of Hong Kong and Taiwan in Chinese nationalist historiography, most fervent presently in the People's Republic of China (PRC). When the PRC government decided to describe the end of British rule in Hong Kong as *huigui*, with its connotations of "returning home," the implication was that Hong Kong had been in involuntary exile for a hundred and fifty years and was now returning to its proper historical path by joining the "motherland." The same kind of dehistoricized thinking characterizes views toward Taiwan as well: that it is time for Taiwan to return to the motherland after a century of separation, first under Japanese colonialism and then as the stronghold for the renegade Guomindang under neocolonial US military and economic power. The Guomindang, ironically, long held to the view of "one China" and still seems to. The same view is also taken for granted, I may add, by many foreigners, among them many students of "China," and is the basis for the so-called One China policy.

Subsequent developments in Hong Kong have shown the fallacy of assumptions that colonial legacies would vanish with the return to the embrace of the nation. The legacies of colonialism have proven to be more deep-seated and enduring than the PRC regime had wished. It would be simplistic to attribute Hong Kong demands for democracy and independence to lingering nostalgia for colonial rule, or even the political and legal norms established under it (H. Hung 2014). Though the legal system it put in place is superior by far to anything that might be expected of the Beijing government, colonial rule did not allow democracy, either. The dissatisfaction with Mainland rule involves many other factors, from increasing inequality and popular frustration at being unable to do anything about it, to the virtual invasion of newfound wealth from the Mainland, which has introduced new social and cultural tensions into Hong Kong society at all levels. The openly acknowledged alliance between the Beijing government and the Hong Kong economic elite adds a class dimension to the struggle for local autonomy against central control. The greedy and crass behavior of many Mainland tourists, with their arrogant, proprietary attitude toward Hong Kong, has material consequences for the population at large in putting pressure on public resources such as education and medical care, not to speak of pressure on everyday commodities, as well as on cultural orientation, pitting the cultural attributes of "real Chinese" against colonialism-infected locals, who in turn claim cultural superiority by dint of

the colonial past. These conflicts have led to the racialization of relations between Hong Kongers and Mainlanders (see R. Hung 2014). Emergent voices in Hong Kong, following the earlier example of Taiwan independence advocates, openly proclaim that “Hong Kong is not China” (“Hong Kong Is Not China” 2015).

It is arguable that the ongoing struggle for democracy in Hong Kong is a legacy not so much of the colonial experience as of the moment of decolonization, when joy over the end of colonialism was conjoined to hopes for a more democratic regime under Beijing’s supervision. As a parting gesture—and perhaps to save face—the British had extracted from the PRC a promise of some autonomy for Hong Kong in the foreseeable future and also a gradual move to full democracy in the enclave to be known as the Special Administrative Region. The hopes engendered by these promises have been dashed repeatedly, even as Hong Kongers outside the ruling elite have suffered increasing social and cultural deprivation, in which the relationship to the Mainland has figured prominently. The frustration has sharpened the sense of difference, for which the most immediate reference is the colonial past, as dramatized on those occasions of anti-Mainland protest when colonial flags have been waved in symbolic challenge to Beijing’s authority and its definition of what it means to be Chinese. One of the ideological “crimes” of the Nobel Prize winner Liu Xiaobo was to suggest that the colonial experience had better prepared Hong Kong (and India) for democracy than the Mainland, which had missed out on it (Weiner 2010). Liu overlooked that in Hong Kong, as elsewhere (especially Taiwan), the democratic impulse may have been a product not so much of colonialism as of the struggles against colonialism and, subsequently, the threat of recolonization by the Mainland. That said, however it may play out in different minds, the colonial past is an unavoidable presence in the assertions of autonomy against Beijing control as a marker of Hong Kong difference.

If the colonial difference legitimizes present demands for autonomy, it acquires a new legitimacy in return as a source of historical identity. Conversely, in its efforts to restrict such autonomy, it is the PRC that now appears as a colonizing power. The reversal is revealing of an aspect of nationalism that is erased in nationalist ideologies: nationalism itself as a form of colonialism—not in the ordinary sense of nations colonizing other nations or ethnicities, but in the sense of nation-building itself as colonial activity. Coloniality in nation-building is relieved somewhat by the real or imagined cultural proximity of the subjects of the nation, as well as the promise of political empowerment, most importantly in their remaking as

citizens with “the right to have rights,” which distinguish the colonialism in nationalism from colonial relations *between* nations. It is more readily visible where the nation-state denies citizenship rights to its subjects while imposing upon them obligations of loyalty and service to abstract notions of nationhood embodied in the state, or, more concretely, as in the case of the PRC, in the party-state.

The question of colonialism in nation-building is an obvious one in settler societies such as the United States, Australia, Israel, as well as Taiwan (Wolfe 2006; Dirlík 2012). The colonial paradigm has also been applied in studies of nation-building in European societies such as France and Great Britain (most importantly, Weber 1976; Hall 2002; Thorne 1999; Rabinow 1989). It has drawn far less attention among scholars of China, with the exception of studies of frontier areas and non-Han ethnicities (Gladney 1991; Harrell 1994; Hostetler 2001; Millward 1998; Perdue 2005; Shin 2006; Teng 2004; Vickers 2008; Yen 2012). What I have in mind here is not the conquest of less powerful ethnic groups in their incorporation into the nation-state, or internal colonization of ethnic groups, but the process of nation-building itself. It is no coincidence that the nation-state and the capitalist economy arose in tandem. Giovanni Arrighi has argued that while the nation is territorial, capitalism flourishes off globalization. The contradiction is only apparent. The nation-state was instrumental in the primitive accumulation of capital through colonization abroad as well as at “home.” If colonial expansion abroad served the globalizing urges of capital, expropriation and dispossession of the peasantry and the “feudal” classes served the cause of primitive accumulation at home by eliminating tributary relations and substituting in their place national management of property and the economy at large. In so-called capitalist societies, the bourgeoisie played a crucial part in this process. Where the bourgeoisie was too weak to undertake this “historical mission,” the task was taken over by direct state intervention, as in so-called socialist societies, through the agency of communist parties. The modern nation-state is as much a product as an instrument of colonialism (Arrighi 1994; Brenner 2003; Perlman 1984). The development of the PRC is exemplary of the relationship between the modern nation-state and the Janus face of colonialism. Hernando de Soto mentions in an interview that his views on capital were met with enthusiasm among officials in the PRC. They have been quite successful in converting “dead” into living capital, of course, for which they are widely admired (de Soto 2011; Zhu and Riedinger 2009). What is expected of them presently is marketization of the land so global capital can join the plunder.

Politically and culturally, modern states portray themselves as expressions of the national will. It is equally the case—if not more so—that they are also crucial in bringing into existence the nations they claim to represent, not least of all in forcefully fostering a national culture to bind together their inescapably diverse populations. The colonialism in nationalism is visible in the application within nations of lessons learned in colonial rule over others, including the state's assumption of a "civilizing mission" in the creation of a nation out of a disparate population—which certainly has been a concern of Chinese nationalism since the late nineteenth century, as it has been of nationalism in general, especially in what used to be called Third World national liberation undertakings (Harrell 1994). Particularly important has been molding a consciousness of the nation and loyalty to its state, the homogeneity of which is a test of national coherence and durability. The necessity of a dominant culture that guarantees national unity and identity remains a matter of fundamental concern even in states that recognize "multiculturalism" as one of the inevitable consequences of globalization (Anwar 2014). The dominant culture is tacitly understood as the culture of the dominant ethnicity even where this is explicitly disavowed.

Recent scholarship on Taiwanese identity in relationship to the Mainland reveals that these two issues—colonialism as a culturally transformative experience and nationalism as colonial activity—are equally pertinent to Taiwan's historical experience (Vickers 2008; Teng 2004; Liao and Wang 2006; Yu 2012). Japanese colonialism in Taiwan was shorter in duration by a century than British colonialism in Hong Kong. And it could not claim the cosmopolitan capitalism that endowed Hong Kong with a more prominent status in the international economy. But it was arguably equally powerful in shaping institutional structures and cultural sensibilities that set Taiwan's modern development apart from the Mainland. Taiwan under Japanese rule was cut off from the Mainland much more effectively and thoroughly than Hong Kong under the British. Liberation from Japanese colonialism resulted not in rejoining the Mainland but in occupation by the Guomindang, who, driven into exile for nearly four decades, viewed the island as its temporary headquarters, finally resigning itself to accommodating the occupied population politically and culturally in the creation of an independent Taiwan. That independence is now threatened by the Communist Party regime on the Mainland. For the Beijing regime, the proposed unification is "reunification" of two "Chinese" societies separated by colonialism and civil war. To opponents of unification, who believe that the two societies have followed divergent trajectories for a century, the "reunifica-

tion” is a colonial takeover of one nation by another. As in the case of Hong Kong, the colonial past (including, for opponents, both Japanese and Guomindang rule) is very much the subtext of claims to difference. Leo Ching has described concisely the contradictions that have been generated by the triangular relationship between Taiwan, Japan, and the PRC:

From the identification with Chinese nationalism as the necessary impetus for colonial emancipation to the postcolonial disillusion with and antipathy toward Chinese rule, China has played an important role in forming and deforming Taiwanese self-consciousness and its equivocal relations to Japan. Put differently, the triangulation between colonial Taiwan, imperial Japan, and nationalist China formed the terrain where contradictory, conflicting, and complicitous desires and identities were projected, negotiated, and vanquished. Although the current debate over Taiwanese independence and reunification with China is a post-Japanese phenomenon, the Japanese colonial period remains a powerful subtext in which the questions of “Taiwanese consciousness” and “Chinese consciousness” are embedded and contested. (Ching 2001: 7–8)

We may add that in its broader sense, which includes “settler colonialism,” colonialism has a much longer history in Taiwan. As an island society, Taiwan reveals colonialism in a historical depth that is not as readily observable in long-settled societies defined by the political entities into which they have been incorporated. Indeed, Taiwan’s historical formation may be viewed as a succession of colonialisms: the initial settlers of the island indigenized over thousands of years were colonized and displaced by settlers from the Mainland during the Ming but especially during the Qing dynasties, by the Dutch colonial unification of the island, by Qing incorporation of the island into its administrative structure, by half a century of Japanese colonialism, followed by the Guomindang after World War II, and presently by the ongoing threat from the Mainland (Andrade 2010; Fujii 2006). Colonization and resistance to it have framed the forces that have propelled the island’s cultural formation, giving it a unique identity of its own which is not merely a local version of some abstract “Chineseness” but an independent identity, the product of a process not of “sinicization” but Taiwanization. Its break with the Mainland since the late Qing is more often than not viewed as a problem in “Chinese” nation-building and consolidation, interrupted for half a century by Japanese colonialism. As Thomas Gold observes in a recent article, however, Taiwan was never

really “Chinese” (Gold 2014).³ Even if we consider the Qing “Chinese,” Qing colonization of Taiwan was cut short by Japan, which completed the task of colonizing and unifying the island. As I will discuss below, Taiwan became a Japanese colony before the Qing became Zhongguo/China. The emergent Taiwanese identity, as Leo Ching observes, was a product of the interplay between an emerging “Chinese” identity on the Mainland, the affiliation with Japan under colonialism, and a resistant local identity.

Melissa Brown has shown in her book with the provocative title *Is Taiwan Chinese?* that sentimental ties to places of origin on the Mainland have varied over time with changing political and economic circumstances, putting to rest any notion of Taiwan’s “Chineseness”—or, for that matter, the category of “Chineseness” as such—as an unproblematic category (Brown 2004). “Nation-building” at each stage involved political and cultural coercion and displacement in what was but a long-term process of colonization and anticolonial resistance. Taiwanese nation-building was not part of but parallel to nation-building on the Mainland, which also distinguishes Taiwan from Hong Kong and brings its situation closer to the more widely understood sense of colonialism as the conquest of one nation by another.

It is this sense of separate nationhood that is the greatest threat to the self-image of the PRC as “China,” identified with its dominant Han ethnicity. Recognizing Taiwan not merely as a provincial variant of Han culture but as a separate national formation with a distinct identity of its own formed out of interactions between Aboriginal cultures, successive waves of Hoklo and Hakka immigrants from Southeastern China, and post-1945 “refugees,” stamped by complex legacies of the island’s colonial experience, calls into question the ideology of “sinicization” (*Hanhua*, literally “becoming *Han*,” or *tonghua*, literally “assimilation,” which also assumes the dominance of Han culture), which is a fundamental assumption of the civilizational process that underpins the idea of “China” as a coherent national

3. The historiography of competing claims on Taiwan is examined in Croizier 1977. See also, for history from Taiwan “perspectives,” Chuang 2011 and Tu 2014. Chuang (preface by the Taiwan independence leader P’eng Ming-min) condemns Chinese nationalism as an expression and instrument of despotism and hegemony, and Confucianism as a “philosophy of slaughter” (*chu-sha che-hsueh*) that condoned slaughter of the empire’s victims. Tu argues for a history based on “circles of affinity” (*tongxin yuan*), beginning with the local and expanding to encompass the world (67). The controversy is by no means over, as is indicated by another recent effort to revise history textbooks. The proposed changes would reaffirm the “Chineseness” of Taiwan by using the Koxinga connection to render it into a Ming dynasty acquisition (Tsoi 2015b). For the immediate opposition the changes provoked, see Cole 2015.

entity. It suggests not merely ethnic plurality as a marker of “Chineseness” but also that rather than anchor a timeless “Chinese” identity, Han ethnicity itself was subject to temporal and spatial variation as it came into contact with other ethnic identities in the land mass marked as “China.” “De-sinicization” was as much part of the civilizational process as “sinicization.” As Brown puts it,

Taiwan is a global hot spot now because it is transforming its national and ethnic identities in ways that have unwelcome implications for the PRC’s national identity and ethnic politics. Between 1945 and 1991, Taiwan’s government portrayed Taiwan as ethnically Han and nationally Chinese, even claiming that it was the lawful government of mainland China. Since 1987, for the obvious political purpose of justifying their distance from the PRC, people in Taiwan have increasingly claimed Taiwanese identity to be an amalgam of Han culture and ancestry, Aborigine culture and ancestry, and Japanese culture (but not ancestry), in the making for almost 400 years, and separate from China for the entire twentieth century. . . . An independent Taiwan . . . raises issues for ethnic territories under Chinese authority: if Taiwanese are allowed to “leave” the nation because of ethnic differences, then why not Tibetans, or Turkic Muslims (such as the Uighur), or even Cantonese? Taiwan independence could have a domino effect that would break up the PRC, like the USSR or, worse, Yugoslavia. (Brown 2004: 2–3)⁴

The separatisms to which Brown refers are very much on the minds of PRC leaders. Why Uighurs and Tibetans would wish to separate from the PRC, or at the least strive to achieve genuine autonomy, should be obvious, as they are colonized peoples in the most unambiguous sense of that term. Both Tibet and Xinjiang were forcefully annexed to the Qing Empire in the eighteenth century, in what was conceived by the Manchu rulers as a multiethnic empire. They enjoyed some measure of independence after the fall of the Qing in 1911 in the absence of an effective central government during the republic. They were brought under PRC rule after

4. See also Brown 2004: 22–34 for an illuminating discussion of the “ideology of sinicization.” Former president Lee Teng-hui, who favored Taiwan independence, spoke of “seven Chinas.” He was also the sponsor of a volume by Hsieh et al. 2005 that sought to deconstruct the ideas of China/Chung-kuo and Chinese/Chung-kuo jen and argued for a separate Taiwanese identity (see chap. 1, 13–37, for the deconstruction of China and Chinese). See also Dirlik 2011.

1949, and, as homelands for non-Han minority nationalities, were formally designated as “autonomous regions.” That designation has been progressively evacuated of meaning over the years as the new nation-state representing the dominant Han ethnicity has been much less tolerant of difference than its imperial predecessors—which has usually been the case in the transition from empire to nation, further exacerbated in this case by the ethnic (Han) content of the nationalist revolt against “alien” Manchu rule (Esherick et al. 2006).⁵ The PRC violently suppresses demands among its minority populations for political autonomy and participation (except in service to the Party). Typical of the “civilizing mission” that has served as an excuse for colonialism in general, it has engaged in cultural genocide, while at the same time putting its dying minority cultures on display for popular consumption. It controls and ruthlessly exploits resources in both Tibet and Xinjiang; their impoverished populations are progressively marginalized by Han settler colonialism sponsored by the state. Statistics vary, especially in the case of Tibet, but the numbers indicate that both Tibetans and Uighurs have become minorities or are on the verge of becoming so in their so-called autonomous homelands. There is little question about their marginality. As the recent case of Professor Ilham Tohti testifies, cruel jail sentences or worse await intellectuals whose crime consists of pleading for better treatment for their people, while “terrorism” is the new excuse in the PRC (as elsewhere) for eliminating radical opposition. The regime recently has taken to scattering Uighurs across Han regions in an effort to quell the ongoing uprising against its rule (Wong 2014; Jacobs 2014; “China Warns” 2014; Buckley 2014).

Brown’s reference to the possibility of Cantonese separatism raises even more profound questions about the colonial in nationalism that are directly pertinent to the case of Taiwan. It may seem far-fetched to speak of Guangdong breaking away from the PRC, but judging by central government efforts to prohibit and discourage the use of Cantonese, the possibility is one that causes some anxiety to the leadership. Southern China is culturally different from the North, which is evident most conspicuously in its many languages that are radically different from the “Mandarin” of the North. Its peoples are mixtures of the Hua invaders from the North with local peoples indigenous to the South. It long has been open to the outside

5. Recently, proliferating expressions of nostalgia for past imperial states make much of the restriction of ethnic diversity under the nation-state, which casts the latter in a negative light.

world, supplying for five centuries the vast majority of Chinese Overseas. Hong Kongers are mostly Guangdong people who share a common language and basic features of everyday culture. Hong Kong under the British was cut off from the rest of Guangdong only on rare occasions, such as the Hong Kong–Canton general strike in 1925–27. The boundary between Guangdong and Hong Kong was porous even during the period of revolutionary communism on the Mainland from 1949 to 1978. Since the beginning of “reform and opening” in 1978, the economies of Guangdong and Hong Kong have been closely integrated, leading the PRC’s development. The South is still the most powerful economic region of the country. The Special Economic Zones are mirror images of Hong Kong, with a reputation for progressiveness. Given Cantonese consciousness of their own local identity, it is easy to see why establishing the hegemony of Mandarin over Cantonese should be a concern for the central government in Beijing. Control over language is a common feature of colonial rule, as it also is of nationalism (Churchman 2011; Roberts 2014).

Guangdong is a reminder of the PRC as colonial formation in a more profound historical sense. South China, too, is a product of many colonizations—from the initial occupation by the Yue people of South Asian origins (possibly related to the Taiwan Aborigines who, in turn, are the original Austronesians going back five thousand years) (Chang and Goodenough 1996: 43; University of Auckland 2009), to the conquest of the Yue two millennia ago by the Hua (or Huaxia) from the North, followed by successive Hua settler colonialisms. As the South was transformed by these colonialisms, it in turn transformed the colonizers, resulting in local cultural formations. While local differences may be most visible in the South, moreover, military conquest and migratory settlement were crucial in the production of local cultures throughout China. No less important, the whole area known as “China” was subject to repeated invasion by nomadic peoples from the North and the cultural transformations they wrought. “China” as geographical space changed over time as did the people included in the term “Chinese.”⁶ The area designated as “China” varied with changes in the boundaries of ruling dynasties, as did the composition of “Chinese.” We may recall that until the Ming–Qing period, “China” was divided more often than not, with competing states of different ethnic origins vying for

6. We may recall in this context the more complicated notion of “China” offered by scholars such as Wolfram Eberhard, Owen Lattimore, Karl Wittfogel, Edward Schafer, Peter Boodberg, Morris Rossabi, and Laurence Schneider, among others.

supremacy. “China,” moreover, reached its greatest expanse under two “foreign” dynasties, the Yuan and the Qing (which are nevertheless claimed with some ambivalence as “Chinese”). The PRC today claims as “China” the territories of the Qing under which the empire reached its broadest expanse. Judging by its claims in the Southeast Asia and East Asian Seas, moreover, it seems prepared also to lay claim to whatever lands and seas may have appeared in imperial maps, regardless of their status at the time.

These are well-known facts, and yet their significance has been lost in their containment in reified categories of “China” and “Chinese.” The fundamental question these terms throw up is: If the region has been the site for ongoing conflicts over power and control between peoples of different origins, and varied over time in geographical scope and demographic composition, which also left a mark in the many differences within, what does it mean to speak of China (or *Zhongguo*) or Chinese (*Zhongguo ren*, or *Hua-ren*), or to write the history of the region as “Chinese” history (*Zhongguo lishi*)? These terms and the translingual exchanges in their signification have been the subject of considerable scholarly scrutiny in recent years.⁷ “China,” a term of obscure origins traced to ancient Persian and Sanskrit sources, since the sixteenth century has been the most widely used name for the region among foreigners, possibly due to the pervasive influence of the Jesuits, who “manufactured” “China” as they did much else (Jensen 1998). The term refers variously to the region (geography), the state ruling the region (politics), and the civilization occupying it (society and culture), which in their bundling abolished the spatial, temporal, and social complexity of the region.⁸ Similarly, “Chinese,” as either noun or predicate, suggests demographic and cultural homogeneity among the inhabitants of the region, their politics, society, language, culture, and religion. It refers sometimes to all who dwell in the region or hail from it, and at other times to a particular ethnic group, as in “Chinese” and “Tibetans,” both of whom are technically parts of one nation called “China” and, therefore, “Chinese” in a

7. Some recent examples are, Liu 2004; Wang 1992; Shin 2006; Zhao 2006: 3–30; Eshe-
rick 2006; Dirlik 2011, 2013; Bol 2009; Hsieh et al. 2005; Ge 2011, 2014; Ren 1998; Wang
1982. Duara 1997 has offered an extended critique of nationalism in history writing with
reference to the twentieth century.

8. It is noteworthy, in light of ongoing conflicts over the South and East “China” Seas, that
these seas, known simply as “Southern” and “Eastern” oceans (*Nanyang* and *Dongyang*)
in imperial geography, were given “Chinese” tags by Europeans. It is difficult to say how
much this naming has contributed to the PRC’s (and, earlier, the Guomintang’s) prop-
rietary claims on these seas, but it unavoidably conveys such impression to the outsider.

political sense. In most usage, the term is identified tacitly with the majority Han, who themselves are homogenized in the process in the erasure of significant intra-Han local differences that have all the marks of ethnic difference.⁹ Homogenization easily slips into racialization when the term is applied to populations—as with “Chinese Overseas”—who may have no more in common than origins in the region, where local differences matter a great deal, and their phenotypical attributes, which are themselves subject to variation across the population so named.¹⁰ Equally pernicious is the identification of “China” with the state, which shows in daily reporting in headlines that proclaim “China” doing or being all kinds of things, anthropomorphizing “China” into a historical subject abstracted from the social and political relations that constitute it.

The reification of “China” and “Chinese” has temporal implications as well. “Chinese” history constructed around these ideas recognizes the ethnic and demographic complexity in the making of the region but still assumes history in “China” to be the same as history of “Chinese,” which in a retroactive teleology is extended back to Paleolithic origins. Others appear in the story only to disappear from it without a trace. The paradigm of “sinicization” (*Hanhua, tonghua*) serves as alibi to evolutionary fictions of a “five-thousand-year-old” “Chinese” civilization and, even more egregiously, a “Chinese” nation, identified explicitly with the Han nationality

9. The term *minzu* absorbs ethnicity into “nationality.” From that perspective, there could be no intra-Han ethnicity.

10. The racist homogenization of the Han (not to speak of “Chinese”) population is contradicted by studies of genetic variation. There is still much uncertainty about these studies but not about the heterogeneity of the population, which, interestingly, has been found to correspond to regional and linguistic variation: “Interestingly, the study found that genetic divergence among the Han Chinese was closely linked with the geographical map of China. When comparisons were made an individual’s genome tended to cluster with others from the same province, and in one particular province, Guangdong, it was even found that genetic variation was correlated with language dialect group. Both of these findings suggest the persistence of local co-ancestry in the country. When looking at the bigger picture the GIS scientists noticed there was no significant genetic variation when looking across China from east to west, but identified a ‘gradient’ of genetic patterns that varied from south to north, which is consistent with the Han Chinese’s historical migration pattern. The findings from the study also suggested that Han Chinese individuals in Singapore are generally more closely related to people from Southern China, whilst people from Japan were more closely related with those from Northern China. Unsurprisingly, individuals from Beijing and Shanghai had a wide range of ‘north-south’ genetic patterns, reflecting the modern phenomenon of migration away from rural provinces to cities in order to find employment” (Fletcher 2009).

descended from mythical emperors of old, of whom the most familiar to Euro-Americans would be the Yellow Emperor.

One of the most important consequences of the reification of “China” and “Chineseness” was its impact on the identification of the region and the self-identification of its dominant Han nationality. Until the twentieth century, these terms did not have native equivalents. The area was identified with successive ruling dynasties, which also determined the self-identification of its people (as well as identification by neighboring peoples). Available transdynastic appellations referred to ethnic, political, and cultural legacies that had shaped the civilizational process in the region but suggested little by way of the national consciousness that subsequently has been read into them. As Lydia Liu has observed, “The English terms ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ do not translate the indigenous terms *hua*, *xia*, *han*, or even *zhongguo* now or at any given point in history” (Liu 2004: 80; Wilkinson 2000: 132).

Contemporary names for “China,” *Zhongguo* or *Zhonghua*, have a history of over two thousand years, but they were neither used consistently nor did they have the same referents at all times. In their origins in the late Zhou dynasty, the terms referred to the states that occupied the central plains of the Yellow River basin. In the “middle period” (eighth to the fifteenth century), according to Peter Bol, “*Zhong guo* was a vehicle for both a spatial claim—that there was a spatial area that had a continuous history going back to the ‘central states’ (the *zhong guo* of the central plain during the Eastern Zhou)—and a cultural claim—that there was a continuous culture that had emerged in that place that its inhabitant ought to, but might not, continue,” and should be translated preferably as “the Central Country” (Bol 2009: 2).¹¹

The term assumed its modern meaning as the name for the nation in the late nineteenth century (used in international treaties, beginning with the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia in 1689). Its use “presupposed the exist-

11. Ge Zhaoguang and Zhao Gang have also found evidence of this broader use of *Zhong Guo*. Ge is particularly insistent on the existence of *Zhongguo* from the late Zhou to the present, with something akin to consciousness of “nationhood” (*ziguo*, literally “self-state”) emerging from the seventeenth century not only in *Zhongguo* (under the Qing) but also in neighboring Japan and Korea. The consequence was a shift from Under-Heaven (*tianxia*) consciousness to something resembling an interstate system (*guoji zhixu*) (Ge 2014: 9). Ge’s argument is sustained ultimately by *Zhongguo* exceptionalism that defies “Western” categories. At the latest from the Song dynasty, he writes, “this *Zhongguo* had the characteristics of ‘the traditional imperial state,’ but also came close to the idea of ‘the modern nation-state’” (25).

tence of a translingual signified ‘China’ and the fabulation of a super-sign *Zhongguo/China*” (Liu 2004: 77). As Bol puts it more directly,

In the twentieth century “China/*Zhongguo*” has become an officially mandated term for this country as a continuous historical entity from antiquity to the present. . . . [T]his modern term, which I shall transcribe as *Zhongguo*, was deployed in new ways, as the equivalent of the Western term “China.” In other words the use of “China” and “Chinese” began as a Western usage; they were then adopted by the government of the people the West called the “Chinese” to identify their own country, its culture, language, and population. This took place in the context of establishing the equality of the country in international relations and creating a Western-style nation-state, a “China” to which the “Chinese” could be loyal. (Bol 2009: 4; Hsieh et al. 2005: 31)¹²

The idea of *Zhongguo* as a fiction based on a “Western” invention obviously goes against the claims of a positivist nationalist historiography that would extend it, anachronistically, to the origins of human habitation in the region and claim both the region’s territory and history as its own.¹³ Properly speaking, *Zhongguo* (or *Zhonghua*) as the name of the country should be restricted to the political formation(s) that succeeded the last imperial dynasty, the Qing. Even if the modern sense of the term could be read into its historical antecedents, it does not follow that the sense was universally shared in the past, or was transmitted through generations to render it into a political or ideological tradition, or was part of popular political consciousness. A recent study by Shi Aidong offers an illuminating (and amusing) account of the translingual and transcultural ironies in the deployment of terms such as “China,” “Chinese,” or *Zhongguo*. The author writes, with reference to the early sixteenth-century Portuguese soldier-merchant Galeoto Pereira, who had the privilege of doing time in a Ming jail and subsequently related his experiences in one of the earliest seminal accounts of southern China:

12. We might add that the celebrated “Sinocentrism” of “Chinese,” based on this vocabulary, is a mirror image of “Eurocentrism” that has been internalized in native discourses.

13. European (including Russian) Orientalist scholarship provided important resources in the formulation of national historical identity in other states, e.g., Turkey. For a seminal theoretical discussion, with reference to India, see Chatterjee 1986. With respect to the importance of global politics in the conception of “China,” we might recall here the Shanghai Communique (1972) issued by the United States and the PRC. The communique overnight shifted the “real China” from the Republic of China on Taiwan to the PRC.

Pereira found strangest that Chinese (*Zhongguoren*) did not know that they were Chinese (*Zhongguoren*). He says: “We are accustomed to calling this county **China** and its inhabitants **Chins**, but when you ask Chinese (*Zhongguoren*) why they are called this, they say “[We] don’t have this name, never had.” Pereira was very intrigued, and asked again: “What is your entire country called? When someone from another nation asks you what country you are from, what do you answer?” The Chinese (*Zhongguoren*) thought this a very odd question. In the end, they answered: “In earlier times there were many kingdoms. By now there is only one ruler. But each state still uses its ancient name. These states are the present-day provinces (*sheng*). The state as a whole is called the Great Ming (*Da Ming*), its inhabitants are called Great Ming people (*Da Ming ren*). (quoted in Shi 2014: 8–9; boldface in the original)¹⁴

Nearly four centuries later, late Qing officials objected to the use of terms such as “China” or “Zhongguo,” pointing out that the name of the country was “the Great Qing state” (*DaQing Guo*), and intellectuals who played a seminal part in the formulation of modern Chinese nationalism such as Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan were quick to point out the shortcomings the term presented as a name for the nation. It was twentieth-century nationalist reformulation of the past that would invent a tradition out of an ambiguous and discontinuous textual lineage. It is noteworthy that despite the most voluminous collection of writing on the past in the whole world, there was no such genre before the twentieth century as *Zhongguo lishi* (the equivalent of “Chinese” history)—some, like Liang Qichao, blamed the lack of national consciousness among “Chinese” to the absence of national history. The appearance of the new genre testified to the appearance of a new idea of *Zhongguo* and the historical consciousness it inspired. The new history would play a crucial part in the “siniciza-

14. For the original reference, see Pereira 1953: 28–29. *Da Ming* and *Da Ming ren* appear in the text as *Tamen* and *Tamenjins*. Interestingly, the account by de Rada in the same volume states, “The natives of these islands [the Philippines] call China ‘Sangley,’ and the Chinese merchants themselves call it *Tunsua*, however its proper name these days is *Taibin*” (260). According to the note by the editor, *Tunsua* and *Taibin* are respectively *Zhong hua* and *Da Ming* from the Amoy (Xiamen) *Tiong-hoa* and *Tai-bin*. Shi recognizes that “the invention of the Chinese dragon” presupposed “the invention of China,” which is also the title of a study by Catalan scholar Olle Manel (2000). Jonathan Spence credits Pereira with having introduced lasting themes into European images of China (Spence 1998: 20–24).

tion” of the past (*guoqude Zhongguohua*) and, tautologically, provide legitimation for the new national formation (see also Dirlik 2011: 173–180).¹⁵

The paradigm of colonialism is most important for disrupting the naturalization of “China/Zhongguo” in nationalist narratives of national becoming. It by no means denies the existence of a social or cultural basis for the nation. As was noted above with reference to the legacies of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan, colonialism creates not merely oppositions but also new cultural affinities that in the long run become part of the cultural fabric of society. The area we know as “China” is the product of many colonizations (Fitzgerald 1972; Wiens 1954). Foremost among them is Han/Hua colonization, which today defines the nation as well as its cultural constitution. But colonization also leaves its traces in ruptures in the cultural fabric of the nation that belie claims to cultural homogeneity. The formation of “China/Zhongguo” owed as much to forceful inclusion as it did to benign assimilation. Brown’s observation that “de-sinicization” was as much a part of the national formation of “China” as was “sinicization” captures the contradictory forces that have gone into the making of “China/Zhongguo.” It also underlines the historical contingency of cultural and political identity (Brown 2004: 28–33).¹⁶ It is necessary, as Leo Shin suggests, “to not take for granted the ‘Chineseness’ of China,” and to ask “how China became Chinese” (Shin 2006: xiii). As the discussion above suggests, how “China” became “China” is equally a problem.

It is an open secret that the sense of “Chineseness” that supposedly unites the PRC and Taiwan has varied with changing political but especially economic circumstances. As in the case of Hong Kong, the economic elite apparently displays the greatest interest in complying with PRC wishes in the pursuit of economic opportunities offered by the Mainland. The pursuit of a pro-Beijing policy by the Guomindang government under President Ma

15. Shi Aidong’s study of “the invention of the Chinese dragon” offers an amusing illustration of how the dragon, rendered into a symbol of “China” by Westerners, has been appropriated into the Chinese self-image extended back to the origins of “Chinese” civilization. It is not that the dragon figure did not exist in the past, but that a symbol that had been reserved exclusively for the emperor (and aspirants to that status) has been made into the symbol of the nation.

16. History is crucial to enforcing what Brown calls “narratives of unfolding,” which are as much about forgetting as they are about remembering. For a recent report on the attack on academics “scornful of China” or their deviations from official narratives, see “China Professors” 2014. Such attacks, usually blamed on pernicious “Western” influence, betray little recognition of the “Western” origins of the idea of “Zhongguo” they seek to enforce.

Ying-jeou represented another shift in the ongoing conflict over Taiwanese/Chinese identities in favor of the latter—at least it did until the so-called Sunflower Movement in spring 2014 against closer economic ties to the Mainland, and, more recently, the struggles for democracy in Hong Kong, which have led to some reconsideration of moves toward political reconciliation and compromise. Closer economic relationships have not necessarily done away with the sense of separateness on either side of the Taiwan Strait. In mid-April 2015, the PRC rejected Taiwan's application for membership in the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, presumably out of displeasure at Taiwan's use of "China, Taipei," rather than "Taipei, China," which acknowledges Taiwan as part of "China."

Differences and mutual suspicions are apparent not only in state-to-state interactions but also in popular consciousness (Satoshi 2013). The pursuit of career opportunities on the Mainland by Taiwanese youth has not alleviated resentment against the denial of their Taiwanese identity, or a suspicion of the Mainland among the population at large. Likewise, some Mainland students in Taiwan recently "filed a complaint with National Chengchi University (NCCU) after staff referred to them as 'Chinese students' (*Chung-kuo liu hsueh-sheng*, literally "Chinese foreign students") rather than 'Mainland Chinese students' (*lusheng* or *nei-ti lai te p'eng-yu*, literally "Mainland students" or "friends from the interior"), which they saw as the proper way to describe themselves" (Cole 2014).¹⁷ In a recent interview, the newly elected popular Taipei mayor, Ko Wen-je, acknowledged Taiwan's debt to its colonial past and added that, "the longer the colonization, the more advanced a place is. It's rather embarrassing" (Tsoi 2015a).

Given disparities in size, power, and international prestige, division over the desirable relationship between the two countries is a problem, especially for Taiwan. For sentimental, pecuniary, or geopolitical reasons, the lure of the PRC seems irresistible to many in Taiwan, as it does to the rest of the world. Economic interest and a benign orientalism override whatever qualms outsiders may have about the PRC regime's oppressive policies at home and aggressive expansionism abroad. Given the widely prevalent assumption that Taiwan is "Chinese," calls for independence are easily dismissed as misguided denials of reality, if not for their destabilizing consequences for the already highly unstable status quo in Eastern Asia.

17. According to another report, the Mainland students objected to being described as being from *Chung-kuo* and "foreign students" (*liu hsueh-sheng*) instead of Mainland student (*lu-sheng*) or "friends from the interior" (*nei-ti lai te p'eng-yu*). See "Ch'eng 'Chung-kuo'" 2014. For conflicting Taiwanese attitudes toward the Mainland, see Sui 2014.

It is important, nevertheless, to resist the confusion of geopolitical with historical realities. In the Chinese nationalist perspective, whether on the Mainland or in Taiwan (or Hong Kong), unification will bring to an end the colonial legacies of division. For Taiwanese, Hong Kongers, and others who believe in the possibility of different ways of being “Chinese”—or not being “Chinese” at all—it appears equally legitimately as the latest chapter in the colonial history of the region. In this perspective, coloniality is as much a problem within the nation as it is in the relations between nations.

The conflict between the two conceptions of nationhood and colonialism is not peculiar to “China” or East Asia but is indicative of the strains in the global system of nation-states that globalization has forced out into the open. The outcome in every case is contingent on the alignment of geopolitical forces. Overcoming the burdens of the past is crucial to the ability of nations to dispose of those forces freely in accordance with contemporary realities and popular democratic aspirations. History needs to be rescued from the nation, to be sure. It is equally, if not more, important in the realization of such freedom that nations be rescued from the histories of their making that easily turn from mirrors to prison houses of identity. The recognition of the colonial in the making of the nation is a first indispensable step to that end.

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