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CCAS Statement of Purpose

Critical Asian Studies continues to be inspired by the statement of purpose formulated in 1969 by its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). CCAS ceased to exist as an organization in 1979, but the BCAS board decided in 1993 that the CCAS Statement of Purpose should be published in our journal at least once a year.

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed, 28–30 March 1969
Boston, Massachusetts
Making "orchid flags" for China's Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong (AFP photo/Robyn Beck)

Hèunggóngyàhn—Hong Kong Identity  Japanese Organic Farming
Western Marxism in Post-Mao China  Kerala People’s Science Movement
Transnational Networks and Hindu Nationalism
Screening China  Not Quite Han—China’s Ethnic Minorities

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The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (ISSN 0007-4801) is a refereed quarterly journal that welcomes unsolicited essays, reviews, translations, interviews, photo essays, and letters about Asia and the Pacific, particularly those that challenge the accepted formulas for understanding the Asia and Pacific regions, the world, and ourselves.

Manuscripts should be submitted in quadruplicate, and generally should be unpublished and not under consideration for publication elsewhere. For more details on our philosophy and publishing requirements, send for a copy of "Guidelines for BCAS Authors" or visit the BCAS Web site on the Internet: <http://csf.colorado.edu/BCAS>.


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- Gail Omvedt, “Rural Women and the Family in an Era of Liberalization”
- Hélène Bowen Raddeker, “‘Death as Life’: Political Metaphor in the Testimonial Prison Literature of Kanno Suga”
- Santi Rozario, “Development and Rural Women in South Asia: The Limits of Empowerment and Conscientization”
- Symposium on Prasenjit Duara’s Rescuing History from the Nation, with contributions by Uradyn E. Bulag, John Fitzgerald, and John Lie, and a response by Prasenjit Duara
- Notes from the Field: Govind Kelkar and Wang Yunxian, “Farmers, Women, and Economic Reform in China”
- Notes from the Field: David Seddon, “The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Nepal”
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After more than a decade of dedicated and professional service to the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars Bill and Nancy Douc have retired as managing editors of the journal. We invite you, our readers, to join with the editorial and advisory boards of the Bulletin in expressing heartfelt thanks to Bill and Nancy for a job well done. — Tom Fenton

Note that all editorial and administrative correspondence for BCAS and the Bulletin should now be sent to our new office in Oakland: BCAS, Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106, USA. Fax: 1-510-835-3017. E-mail: <tfenton@igc.org>.

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Back issues and photocopies of out-of-print back issues are available from BCAS. Write for a flyer listing all of the available issues or visit the BCAS Web site (see below). Microfilms of back issues of the Bulletin are available from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106, USA.
Hèunggóngyàhn: On the Past, Present, and Future of Hong Kong Identity

On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong was returned to China after a 150-year interlude as a British colony. This transition is not only political in nature, it is also a cultural transition. At present, two broad constructions of Hong Kong cultural identity vie for the allegiance of Hong Kong's people: "Hong Kong as a part of China" and "Hong Kong as apart from China." These constructions of identity present are reflected in vying constructions of identity past: British-influenced historians and Chinese-influenced historians offer very different interpretations of Hong Kong's precolonial and colonial history in their arguments over whether or not Hong Kong is truly a "Chinese" city. These different interpretations point to a larger fact: between the competing hegemonies of the British and Chinese empires, Hong Kong people have only lately begun to define themselves as having an autonomous cultural identity. "Hongkongese" as a cultural identity involves a "Chineseness plus" that has three clusters of meaning: "Chineseness plus affluence/cosmopolitanism/capitalism," "Chineseness plus English/colonial education/colonialism," and "Chineseness plus democracy/human rights/the rule of law." This article examines the cultural identity of the people of Hong Kong and argues that the survival of Heunggongyahn/Hongkongese as a cultural identity depends on whether or not the voices of democracy will continue to be heard in Hong Kong.

by Gordon Mathews*

On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong was handed over from Great Britain to China, an extraordinary development in the world history of colonialism.¹ Mass media throughout the world have been focusing on the political issues of the handover, the jockeying of Great Britain and China over how Hong Kong is to be ruled. But the issue of Hong Kong's handover is not only political but also cultural: how, in light of their change of rulers, do Hong Kong's people identify themselves? Who do Hong Kong's people think they are? In this paper I examine two dominant conflicting discourses of Hong Kong's cultural identity, Hong Kong as apart from China and Hong Kong as a part of China, and I examine the past, present, and possible futures of Heunggongyahn (Hong Kong people), the identity of being Hongkongese.

"The idea of a man without a nation," writes Ernest Gellner, "seems to impose a strain on the modern imagination. A man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears."² Indeed, almost all people in the world today are socialized and propagated to hold a national identity. Some might contest their "identity," but most take it for granted. This, however, has not been the case for those who live in Hong Kong. "Who are the people of Hong Kong?" has been in recent decades a question with no common, taken-for-granted answers. This is true at the most mundane level; as a young Hong Kong resident told me, "Every time I travel to another country, I have to write down my nationality. Because I have a British National Overseas passport, I guess I'm supposed to write 'British,' even though I have no right to live in Britain.... What should I write: 'British,' 'British Hong Kong,' 'Hong Kong,' or 'Chinese'?" Her difficulties are

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1. The handover of Hong Kong from Great Britain to China may be seen in broad scope as representing one of the final chapters in the worldwide history of colonialism and post-colonialism, as societies throughout the world have divested themselves of their European political masters. But Hong Kong's handover is extraordinary in its particulars in at least two respects: (1) Hong Kong boasts a high degree of affluence, cosmopolitan self-consciousness, and personal freedom, and (2) Hong Kong's decolonization is viewed by many in Hong Kong as recolonization, as control over Hong Kong is passed from one empire to another. In this paper, for reasons of space I do not examine Hong Kong's handover in larger, comparative perspective, important though that is, but focus instead on Hong Kong's particulars at this historical moment.


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Editor's note: In keeping with the practice of the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars diacritics are not used in Asian language terms. An exception is made for the headline only in this article.
of course rooted in politics. With the transition in July 1997, Hong Kong people were granted the national identity—Gellner’s “nose and two ears”—that has so long been denied them. With Chinese Special Administrative Region passports in hand, residents of Hong Kong should have no trouble in years to come specifying the nation to which they belong.

But while China provided Hong Kong’s people with a national identity on 1 July 1997, cultural identity—in simplest terms, who Hong Kong’s people believe themselves to be, rather than who the nation that governs them says they are—is more complex.

For most of Hong Kong’s history, its inhabitants thought of themselves as Chinese; it is only since the 1960s that a sense of autonomous Hong Kong identity has emerged, commentators say. That separate identity, in the shadow of China, has been, of late, a matter of intense contestation. “China wants Hong Kong to be the most prosperous Chinese city,” Martin Lee, the leader of Hong Kong’s most popular political party and vocal critic of China, has emphasized. “They will [only] tolerate Hong Kong as a Chinese city,” eliminating Hong Kong’s own distinct identity. On the other hand, Tsang Yok Sing, the head of a leading pro-China political party in Hong Kong, argues that “most people in Hong Kong know they are Chinese. If you ask me, I say it is my country.”

Surveys reflect this division in senses of identity: one recently showed that 35 percent of Hong Kong residents consider themselves Hong Kong people, 28 percent Hong Kong Chinese, and 30 percent Chinese.

Recent writers on ethnic identity have emphasized its negotiable and situational quality. This may particularly be the case in Hong Kong, given its current precariousness: whether one identifies oneself as “Hongkongese” or “Chinese” may depend upon whether one is talking to a mainland official, to one’s Hong Kong compatriots, to immigration officers, or, perhaps, to an American anthropologist. But I argue that senses of cultural identity in Hong Kong are not only situational. Context is important, but identity is not only a matter of context. Although people in Hong Kong, like people everywhere, are full of inconsistencies and contradictions, they are not chameleons. Hong Kong people’s self-identification as “Hongkongese” or “Chinese” may be linked to their senses of who they most deeply are in their lives and in their community. The mass media in Hong Kong are engaged in a battle to shape the hearts and minds of Hong Kong’s people as “Hongkongese” or as “Chinese.” One side of this media battle emphasizes, in both Chinese and English, affluence, capitalism, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—attributes that Hong Kong now enjoys, they claim, in common with Western nations and in contrast to China. The other side emphasizes nationalism and patriotism: the love of China by Chinese, a love from which other nationalities and ethnicities are excluded. The people of Hong Kong are in the middle: between the exhortations on either side, they wait—often obtaining foreign passports “just in case”—to see what the aftermath of July 1st will be.

The sense of a distinct Hong Kong identity is often said to be particularly the product of Hong Kong’s middle class, those

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who form “the backbone of Hong Kong’s prosperity,” whose “social and emotional ties to China are relatively weak.” 6 In this paper, I focus on members of this class—at present the dominant class in Hong Kong, at least in terms of numbers.7 I have interviewed, primarily in English, thirty-five alumni of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, a key site for the contestation of “Chinese” and “Hongkongese” identities. Now engaged in fields such as business, education, and journalism, these university graduates were asked how they see themselves as “Chinese” and “Hongkongese.” To augment what they have told me, and to better gauge its representativeness, I have also extensively analyzed mass media and scholarly reports in English and Chinese on the issue of Hong Kong identity.

A Brief History of Hong Kong Identity

Two broad discourses of Hong Kong identity compete for the allegiance of Hong Kong’s people: one can be labeled “Hong Kong as apart from China,” the other “Hong Kong as a part of China,” with the center of gravity shifting from the first of these discourses to the second. The shifting nature of Hong Kong identity at present may be seen in terms of the shifting constructions of Hong Kong past.

Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary in 1841, described Hong Kong as “a barren island, which will never be a mart of trade”; as the historian Chan Kai-cheung notes, “every British official and semi-official narration of Hong Kong history in the past century and a half has repeated one or another version of the ‘barren island’ remark.”8 Recent archaeological and historical research, however, has led to the presentation of a very different picture of Hong Kong’s precolonial past. “Hong Kong,” Chan writes, “for most of the past 6,000 years with the exception of recent centuries [has] been a busy crossroads of world trade and cultural intercourse,” taking part in the mainstream of Chinese history.9 Some scholars go further in their conclusions: “The ancient people of Hong Kong already had a strong nationalist consciousness, and a tradition of protecting the family and defending the country,” historian Siu Gwok-gihn claims.10

This reconstruction of history is due to the discovery of new empirical evidence over the past few years, but the politics of contemporary Hong Kong identity are inescapable. “The British pretend they created Hong Kong’s prosperity from scratch. They say it is all their own work…. It is the same in every colony. They want people to forget their history, to forget themselves,” comments archaeologist Au Ka-fat.11 However, what self is to be remembered is disputable. Chan concludes his essay on Hong Kong’s history with the observation that Hong Kong is “a very Chinese city”; but much of the new archaeological evidence predates the era of Chinese imperial control over Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s precolonial history may in this sense support a Hong Kong identity apart from China as much as a Hong Kong identity as a part of China. The difference lies in what “Chinese” is taken to mean: Is it cultural or political, a matter of ethnicity or of empire? But there is also the ambiguity of the archeological evidence itself. I interviewed an archeological curator at one of Hong Kong’s museums, who mulled over the boundaries of fact and interpretation in her work: “I think we should believe in the scientific methods of excavation; but on the other hand, archeologists of Hong Kong each interpret things in their own way; it’s impossible to decide who’s right… . Yes, maybe it is all political. But it’s taboo to think about these things; as a museum, we just try to be neutral. We can’t give a wrong interpretation to the public; we just try to present what’s real.” And, then, with a laugh, she finished her thought: “And what’s real depends on me!”

If Hong Kong’s precolonial history is open to fundamental reinterpretation, so too is its colonial history. The war that led to Hong Kong’s founding is known in some history textbooks still in use in Hong Kong schools today as “the first Anglo-Chinese War.” A number of Western or Western-influenced historians stress that opium was a minor issue: “The war would not be fought over opium; it would be fought over trade, the urgent desire of a capitalist, industrial, progressive country to force a Confucian, agricultural and stagnant one to trade with it.” 12 Mainland Chinese historians, on the other hand, emphasize that the issue was not trade but the British effort to enslave the Chinese people to opium and subjugate them to colonialism. As one historian writes, “The real reason for the Opium War was that Britain had been selling opium to China on a large scale, and this was forbidden by China, setting off the war. During the war, the Chinese government banned all British merchants from trading in China, not just those engaged in the opium trade, and this became the excuse for the British to twist the truth and claim that the war was a “trade war.” However, without a doubt the real nature of the Opium War was the invasion of China by British colonialism. The truth of this part of history should not be changed.”13

7. Hong Kong has a per capita income only slightly lower than that of the United States; the typical Hong Kong worker today is not a street vendor or laborer, as was the case thirty years ago, but a white-collar employee manipulating figures on a computer screen. The views quoted in this paper are those of people within Hong Kong’s middle or upper-middle class, in terms of educational and occupational attainment, but they are not representative of Hong Kong as a whole. See, for example, the polling data of the Hong Kong Transition Project (http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~hktp) for a quantitative portrait of Hong Kong students and I have been interviewing more explicitly working-class Hong Kong people, and have found a range of attitudes not dissimilar to those expressed in this paper.
10. As quoted in Laih Cheu-fan, “Lukhchininhchihn iyiayau tou-jueuk geumahn” (Six thousand years ago, already there were native inhabitants of Hong Kong), *Sing Tao Daily* (Hong Kong newspaper), 2 March 1996. The romanization of books and articles in Chinese published in Hong Kong are given in Cantonese in this paper, using the Yale system, as are their authors’ names. For books and articles published in English by Hong Kong Chinese authors, as well as for the names of Hong Kong’s Chinese newspapers, I use their own romanization of their names.
The people I interviewed, recalling their schooling in Hong Kong, are as divided in their views as the above quotations suggest. Students in Hong Kong secondary schools over the last several decades have studied world history and almost all other subjects using English-language textbooks. Only Chinese history is studied in Chinese; thus the English-language and Chinese-language instruction they receive concerning the Opium War may differ greatly. One man waxed indignant over what he saw as the colonial effort to avoid teaching the truth of Hong Kong’s founding. “When I studied history in middle school, my emotions were aroused. The Opium War—English history textbooks call it a ‘trade war’—that’s not true! At that time, I felt a great resentment at the British for that.” But as another person said, “When I was in secondary school, one time I thought, ‘Was the Opium War really bad?’ In history classes, we were taught that the British were very bad. But then I thought without the Opium War, Hong Kong would not be what it is today!” Others said that the distinction between English- and Chinese-language textbooks was not so clear in their secondary schools; but it does seem that the radically different interpretations of Hong Kong’s founding are to some extent regularly reproduced in the Hong Kong school system at present. The above two statements, beyond particular pedagogical circumstances, seem to reflect two different visions of Hong Kong people’s identity: of Hongkongese as deprived of their Chinese culture by colonialism and of Hongkongese as rescued from Chinese culture by colonialism. It is indicative of the schizophrenia of recent Hong Kong identity that both have been taught, side by side.

British and Chinese views of Hong Kong’s colonial history are, as one would expect, drastically different. Recent histories of Hong Kong by British writers portray the cavalcades of British governors and merchants, with the Chinese relegated to no more than a hazy, all-but-forgettable background. As Jan Morris comments in embarrassment about Hong Kong of the 1920s (as well as, perhaps, about the absence of much Chinese presence in her own book): “For like it or not—ignore it if you could—all around the 4,500 Britons of Hong Kong lived 725,000 Chinese....Very few Chinese names appeared in the history books, because very few Chinese had played public parts in the development of Hong Kong; and the mass of the Chinese population seemed to most observers oblivious to public events, intent only on making a living.” In these books, Chinese appear most often as mute victims: Frank Welsh reports Isabella Bird’s nineteenth-century comment, “you cannot be two minutes in Hong Kong without seeing Europeans striking coolies with their canes or umbrellas.” One professor of Western literature in his forties described to me his first meeting with a white person: “Every one of us, in childhood, was afraid of foreigners: because of their size, because they belonged to the ruling class, and because they spoke a language we didn’t understand. The first time I met a foreigner was in a music lesson in my primary school; he was an inspector, a big man called Parker. He asked me a question, and I answered ‘yes.’ He said ‘yes what?’ and I didn’t know how to answer—he shouted ‘yes what?’ several times and then struck me on my head, very very hard. Do you know what I should have said? ‘Yes sir!’” This man attributes the subsequent direction of his studies to the inferiority complex this meeting seared into him—one he struggled thereafter to overcome.

Recent mainland Chinese and Chinese-influenced histories of Hong Kong have similarly emphasized the brutality of the British treatment of Chinese in Hong Kong’s history; but the large-scale backdrop of these books, missing from their British

13. Louh Faahn-ji, Ngapin jinjiang ysh Heunggong (The Opium War and Hong Kong) Hong Kong: Jaa,hpyihuseh, 1983, p. 42.
15. Welsh, p. 278.
counterparts, is the sense of historical humiliation of China by Britain and other colonial powers, now finally being rectified. These books stress the close relationship between Hong Kong and South China throughout Hong Kong's history. Chapters in one volume, cover such topics as "Hong Kong and the 1911 Revolution" and "The activities of the Chinese Communist Party and other democratic parties in Hong Kong during the Liberation War Era." These minimize all distinctions between Hong Kong and China, thereby shaping a sense of common history and common identity. Great Britain appears in these volumes as no more than a shadowy usurper, robbing China of its territory; British figures and policies, with just a few exceptions, appear in their pages only to be vilified. But, as in their British counterparts, in these books Hong Kong Chinese do not much appear as actors. Hong Kong's people for the most part respond to China, supporting political and social movements on the mainland. This is the primary historical role that they are allowed.

As these Chinese histories of Hong Kong indicate, through most of its colonial past, Hong Kong was indeed closely linked to China. Access to Hong Kong from China was uncontrolled until World War II, and "until recent years, perhaps as late as the 1960s, most Hong Kong Chinese residents considered the mainland to be their motherland. They belonged to it. Hong Kong was only their transitional home." Great Britain was indeed seen as an interloper and usurper by at least some of Hong Kong's people throughout its history, as can be seen in the acts of resistance to British rule that have intermittently taken place, from the poisoned bread case of 1857 (in which a baker spiked his loaves with arsenic for his British customers), to the military struggle of indigenous residents of the New Territories against their British occupiers in 1899, to the General Strike in 1925, to the 1967 riots, which saw "Red Guards in [Hong Kong's]... streets, and the People's Daily exhorting... protesters to 'organize a courageous struggle against the British and be ready to respond to the call of the Motherland for smashing the reactionary rule of the British oppressors.' "

By the late 1960s and 1970s, however, a postwar generation, which had only known Hong Kong as a home, reached adulthood, and a sense of Hongkongese as an autonomous cultural identity began to emerge. For the first time, "Hongkongese" became distinct from "Chinese." The 1967 riots showed the strong ideological influence Communist China held over some of Hong Kong's people; but the Cultural Revolution in all its chaos came to seem for many in Hong Kong less an inspiration than a threat. For the people I interviewed who grew up in the era of the Cultural Revolution, China represented a world that was closed and dark and strange. As one person said, "I remember seeing some of the murdered bodies that floated down from China into Hong Kong waters. I still remember how they stank.... At that time there were so many people risking their lives to escape and come to Hong Kong, so many sad stories. A couple was found tied together, the female was still alive but the male had been eaten by sharks." As another said, "I went to China in 1974, before the Cultural Revolution was over. I still remember the horrifying experience. There were lots of songs everyone had to sing together; everyone was dressed in either gray or blue. I felt I was a Hong Kong Chinese; I had to get out from that place." These words reflect a newly emergent Hong Kong identity of affluent cosmopolitan choice, confronting a communitarian world next door and finding it utterly foreign. And while some critics describe this new sense of Hong Kong identity as one cynically engineered by the colonial government, it seems clear that it was also the fruit of a genuinely new sense of Hong Kong autonomy.

In the decade that followed, Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution gave way to Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms; the strangeness of the Cultural Revolution to Hong Kong's people gave way to familiarity, as China began to open its doors to the capitalist world that Hong Kong represented. In 1982, negotiations began for the return of Hong Kong to China—Great Britain had a 99-year lease on the New Territories, due to expire in 1997, and without the New Territories, Hong Kong was not a viable entity. The Sino-British Agreement of 1984 guaranteed that although Hong Kong would indeed be returned to China, "the economic, legal and social system in Hong Kong and its citizens' way of life will remain in force for fifty years after 1997"—there will be "one country, two systems." The Tiananmen Square incident, on 4 June 1989, dashed Hong Kong's dreams of a benevolent China. A million people in Hong Kong protested (close to 20 percent of Hong Kong's population)—the first time in Hong Kong's history that Hong Kong people had demonstrated en masse against the Chinese government.

Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong, initiated electoral reforms during the last five years of British rule, introducing at least a measure of the democracy that Great Britain had denied to Hong Kong throughout the previous 150 years of its rule and enabling the first direct elections to the Legislative Council. China has insistently denounced all such reforms, heaping obloquy on Patten. Many of Hong Kong's

17. An Australian brought up within the British public school tradition commented to me that the inspector's behavior in this incident does not necessarily reflect a British sense of racial superiority over Chinese, but rather the typical attitude of teachers within this tradition towards their pupils, no matter what their cultural or racial background.

18. Yuh Sihng-mouh and Lauh Suhk-wihng, ed., Yikahp saigei dik Heunggong (Twentieth-Century Hong Kong), (Hong Kong: Keihleuhn syuylip yauhhaahn gungsi, 1995).

19. Where, one might ask, between British-influenced and Chinese-influenced histories of Hong Kong, are Hong Kong people's own versions of their history to be found? "There is not yet a Hong Kong history book which is able to use both Chinese and Western materials in giving a complete history of Hong Kong's political, social, and economic changes from different perspectives," writes Fok Kai-cheung, in his Heung-gongsi: Gaauhohk chaamhaau jiliuh (Hong Kong History: Teaching Reference Materials), Vol. 1. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1995), p. 33—as if Hong Kong has yet to find its own historical identity between the poles of "Chinese" and "Western."

people responded with their feet: half a million of Hong Kong's people have emigrated since the Tiananmen Square crackdown. "We have hard data that a minimum of 2.2 million people will leave or try to leave if something goes wrong" after 1 July 1997, notes the Hong Kong academic Michael DeGolyer. There is a widespread sense among Hong Kong's people over the last several years of having been cast aside to fend for themselves by Great Britain, just as there is the widespread apprehension about China and its intentions. Mark Roberti argues in great detail, neither Great Britain nor China negotiated the handover in good faith, and Hong Kong's people were the losers. Many prominent business people over the past several years have increasingly cooperated with China, seeing their profit as lying with the coming master. Two staunch advocates of Hong Kong's autonomy and democracy, Martin Lee and Emily Lau, contend (in Lau's words) that "China has no respect for freedom, especially freedom of the mind." "Eventually, I expect to be arrested," Lau states.

In late 1996 China appointed an interim provisional legislature to take the place of the elected Legislative Council after July 1; Tung Chee-hwa, a shipping magnate with close links to China, was selected as the future chief executive of Hong Kong by a committee chosen by Beijing. He has advocated the repeal of Hong Kong's Bill of Rights ordinances, and has spoken of the need for a return to "Chinese values" in Hong Kong—"a belief in order and stability; an emphasis on obligations to the community rather than the rights of individuals." He links these values to the Chinese nation: "We have to turn pro-China into a very positive definition. It's a good thing to love our country." Tung's charge that the Democratic Party—the lopsided winner in Hong Kong's 1995 Legislative Council elections—is "anti-Chinese" provoked the party's spokesman, Martin Lee, to reply: "Many polls have found the Democrats to be the most popular party in Hong Kong. Is [Mr. Tung] therefore suggesting all Hong Kong people are anti-Chinese? ... We will support what is good for Hong Kong while opposing what is bad, no matter whether it is [done by] the Chinese, British, or Hong Kong governments." A similar point of view was expressed by Albert Cheng, a popular Hong Kong radio talk show host: "Hong Kong people are very different from mainland Chinese...[Mr. Tung] should stay in China." These two different versions of Hong Kong's cultural identity were reflected in the two largest popular protests in Hong Kong in 1996 (each drawing 20,000 to 40,000 people): the demonstration on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square incident and the candlelight vigil that followed the death of Hong Kong activist David Chan, who drowned while protesting Japan's occupation of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. At the Tiananmen demonstration, the speeches echoed these sentiments: "We will not go away, despite what the Chinese government says. We will remember the atrocities China has committed, and we will continue in future years to gather and speak and mourn, in the fight for freedom and democracy." At the memorial for Chan, speaker after speaker shouted, "As Chinese, we will not tolerate any resurgence of Japanese militarism. The Diaoyu Islands are Chinese, and David Chan died protecting them for China. Let us stand up for our country!" At the Tiananmen demonstration, Hong Kong as apart from China was emphasized: Hong Kong as a free and democratic place that will resist the Chinese government's tyranny. At the tribute to David Chan, Hong Kong as part of China was emphasized: Hong Kong and China unified in their Chineseness against a "militaristic" Japan. The different emphasis at these two demonstrations exemplifies in a nutshell the conflicting currents within contemporary Hong Kong identity at present.

As the foregoing summary indicates, the sense of a separate Hong Kong identity—of hongkongyahn—has existed only in the short period between the late 1960s and today, with tomorrow very much an unknown. It is as if, between the competing hegemonies of the British and Chinese empires and the competing historical meanings of Hong Kong they set forth, a tiny fissure opened up for a few decades, and Hong Kong people began to define themselves. Hong Kong's people took the conception of their British rulers of "Hong Kong as apart from China" and reworked it on their own terms, to define themselves as not British, not Chinese, but Hongkongese. This self-definition is now increasingly in doubt, but before speculating as to the future, let us focus on the present. What is the nature of this Hong Kong identity?

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Hong Kong Identity in the Shadow of 1997

Hong Kong identity, as I have indicated, emerged in the 1970s; by 1986, a major survey on Hong Kong identity found that 59 percent of respondents thought of themselves as “Hongkongese” and 36 percent as “Chinese.”30 Recent survey data show that 49 percent of respondents identify themselves as “Hongkongese,” and 36 percent as “Chinese,”31 a considerable degree of agreement over a ten-year span, although the percentage of “Hongkongese” has dropped, perhaps as a consequence of the approach of 1997. Other surveys show that the percentage of people identifying themselves as “Chinese” has been increasing, at least by a few percentage points, over the past several years.32 Surveys have found that the more educated one is, the more likely one is to claim Hong Kong identity, although at the same time, the more likely one is to seek to emigrate.33 The more educated one is, the more likely one is to be worried about what happens to Hong Kong after 1997.34 This is reflected in the people I interviewed, the majority of whom saw themselves as “Hongkongese,” a minority as “Chinese.” But survey numbers are limited in their meaning, in that they do not tell us what the terms “Hongkongese” and “Chinese” mean to those who identify themselves as such.35

Most of the people I interviewed, as well as scholars of Hong Kong whose works I have read, take pains to distinguish Hong Kong identity from Chinese identity. “Hong Kong is Chinese in many ways.... Yet it is also evident that Hong Kong... has developed its unique identity and culture,” writes Choi Po-king.36 “Hong Kong is not a Chinese city, although more than 97 percent of its population are ethnic Chinese,” writes Kwok Nai Wang.37 One person told me, “It’s ridiculous to say that Hong Kong is not a Chinese city. But from a cultural point of view, we Hong Kong people identify ourselves with a kind of special Hongkongness.” Mass media frequently report on this sense of difference. Describing Hong Kong business people, one newspaper article said: “The more they have contact with China, the more they realize that, although they themselves are Chinese, their ways of thinking, their characters, their styles, are completely different from those of mainland Chinese.”38 The Deputy Director of the New China News Agency in Hong Kong (China’s representative in Hong Kong before 1 July 1997) has commented that “most Hong Kong people do not understand Chinese culture, history, and national events.... They do not have deep feelings toward the country and the race.... They have received a different education from the mainland Chinese, which leads them to biased ideas about things in China.... The Chinese government must undergo great effort to make Hong Kong citizens understand the truth.”39 Despite their coming unity, China and Hong Kong are presented in these accounts—from very different points of the Hong Kong political spectrum—as being fundamentally different.

I asked people who identified themselves as Hongkongese to explain to me at length what they meant by this designation. All seemed to formulate “Hongkongese” as what might be termed “Chineseness plus”: “Chineseness plus affluence/cosmopolitanism/capitalism” or “Chineseness plus English/colonial education/colonialism” or “Chineseness plus democracy/human rights/the rule of law.” Placed geographically, this “plus” was thought of as “Chineseness plus Westernness” or “Chineseness plus internationalization.”

These formulations have a ring of cliché to them (“Hong Kong is the meeting ground of East and West,” as the tourist brochures proclaim), but they were not uttered merely as clichés by the people I interviewed. Rather, they were given a distinct emotional edge. For some, this “plus” was a matter of salvation, of escape from a Chinese cultural identity that they detested. One person I interviewed said, “To speak bluntly, mainland Chinese people aren’t civilized.... Yes, because Hong Kong was colonized it is civilized!” A letter to a local newspaper stated: “All the bad traits in my personality are from my Chinese side, and the better characteristics, if any, are the products of Westernization.”40 For others, this “plus” was experienced as a profound minus: the loss, through colonialism and “the colonization of the mind” they had undergone, of their true Chinese cultural identity. Another letter-writer speaks of “a latent bigotry ... that some in Hong Kong have towards fellow Chinese. Perhaps our colonial heritage has indoctrinated in many of our residents the assumption that what is foreign is superior and what is Chinese is inferior.”41 One person told me, “We Hong Kong Chinese had...

35. This paper deals with “Hongkongese” and “Chinese” as cultural identities, but pays scant attention to the middle category of “Hong Kong Chinese,” an identity adhered to by many respondents in some surveys and by a few in others. Few people I interviewed identified themselves as “Hong Kong Chinese,” although this label may increase in importance in the future, as a neutral identity marker between what some may regard as the more politicized poles of “Hongkongese” and “Chinese.” Another middle category is that of Cantonese, the Guangdong cultural identity shared to a degree by Hong Kong and its hinterland, Guangdong Province. Certainly the economic integration of Hong Kong and Guangdong over the past decades has been extraordinary, as is emphasized in Reginald Yin-wang Kwok and Alvin Y. So, eds., The Hong Kong-Guangdong Link (Hong Kong University Press, 1995). However, few people I have spoken with in Hong Kong seem to feel much shared sense of cultural identity with the people of Guangdong; at present, although perhaps not in future, cultural difference rather than cultural similarity between Hong Kong and Guangdong is what is stressed in Hong Kong.
38. Jeh Wai-jeun, “Dou maht si yalm” (Remembrance from things left behind), Faat Fuh Chihng Column, Ming Pao (Hong Kong newspaper), 6 March 1996.
39. Lauh Bing, “Jeung jeun-sang: Ngoh batnahng chong huhngdang” (Zhang Zhum-shen: I cannot walk when the light is red), Daoithohksin (magazine published at the Chinese University of Hong Kong), Feb. 1996.
colonization. We were brought up in a very strange way. Because of that, we don’t have our original [Chinese] culture; we have no home.”

Indeed, China as a lost home—or, in an even more emotionally loaded metaphor, a lost mother—was an image in the minds of many of those I interviewed. As one woman said, “Even though I’m ignorant about China, I feel like an abandoned child. I don’t know who my mom is, but there’s the longing to return to her. No, my country’s not China, but there is that dream.” Yet for this person the metaphor lost much of its power once she actually beheld that “mother.” “All these years I’ve only visited China once, in 1988. I had this ideal about China, an emotional tie to China, until that visit. I only went to Guangzhou, joined a local tour, but there was a sense of alienation.... One section of the hotel where we stayed had a Chinese restaurant, where the locals, at that time, were allowed to eat. The other parts of the hotel, locals couldn’t go in. I was shocked. The glorious image I had of China was shattered.” As a Hong Kong Chinese, this person had the run of what she called the “Western” section of the hotel, unlike the local Chinese; the rules of segregation, as well as her own sense of difference born of affluence, made her sense that she was not “Chinese” but “Hongkongese.”

Southern China has of course become far more affluent in the past decade: the segregation this Hong Kong resident observed is now no longer practiced; many Chinese now have enough money to enjoy the luxuries once reserved for foreigners. However, some Hong Kong people continue to mock mainland Chinese for their lack of sophistication, as shown by their dress. As some of my students tell me, “visitors from China can afford brand names now, but they still don’t know how to wear them.” “If you see women in the streets wearing Chanel from head to toe, chances are they’re from the mainland,” says the Hong Kong newspaper columnist David Ho. “They know the brands, but do not have real taste or style.”

These comments indicate what is perhaps the dominant discourse of difference among those I interviewed: “Hong Kong is wealthy but China is not?” “Hongkongese are cosmopolitan, Chinese are not.” “Hongkongese have the freedom to consume what they want, Chinese do not”; and underlying these, “Hong Kong is capitalist, China is not.” Hong Kong is popularly thought of as a city of capitalist swagger. A recent popular song—ngoh ji lek [I’m the smartest]—boasts of Hong Kong people’s capitalist prowess: “We are...flexible and adaptable, conscientious, quick and shrewd.... Money-grabbing over the border, knowing at least Chinese and English.... Quick and skilled at constructing buildings and bridges, foreigners look on stunned.... Our horse-racing pools are greatest, enough to buy up an army.”

Hong Kong is also popularly thought of as a city of flashy consumption. (Hong Kong, the guidebooks note, has more Rolls-Royces per capita than any other city on earth; one occasionally sees nouveau-riche businessmen, in their pink Rolls-Royces, flaunting their wealth for all to see.) Many of the people I interviewed showed a high regard for money and the freedom it brings. As a young businesswoman commented: “The best thing about Hong Kong is we can make lots of money here. Money is important in that it gives you choices as to how you want to live, where you want to travel. We have these choices.” Hong Kong people have the means to choose the material bases for their lives and identities, but, she is saying, Chinese do not. Another person described the difference between his mode of life and that of his cousins in a southern Chinese city: “My cousins spend their leisure time mostly at home, just drinking tea and watching television. In Hong Kong we spend and consume most of the time. We go out, to the cinema, to restaurants. Freedom of choice is much less in China than in Hong Kong.” Hongkongese, these people are saying, have maximum freedom to consume; this, they seem to feel, is the essence of Hong Kong identity as opposed to that of China: the ability to consume and become whatever one likes.

The affluence of Hong Kong, and the freedom of consumptive choice it has led to, was taken for granted as a good by most of those I interviewed; but several also emphasized the “greed” and “money-hunger” of Hong Kong people as indicating their lack of higher civic ideals, whether an ideal of “greater China” or an ideal of “Hong Kong democracy.” Newsweek magazine set off a storm in Hong Kong in May 1996 with a cover story on “The Betrayal of Hong Kong.” “The tycoons have gained the most from a freewheeling society. So why are they working with China to impose communist-style control?” the article asks. It quoted the governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, as saying of the tycoons, “they wouldn’t be doing [Beijing’s bidding] if most of them didn’t have foreign passports in their back pockets.”

The affluence and the freedom that money can provide are one perceived mark of difference between Hong Kong and Chinese identities; another key marker is that of language. A scholar has noted that “although Cantonese is the vernacular of Hong Kong... as a communicative medium it is not as socially prestigious as putonghua [Mandarin Chinese].” Still several recent newspapers...
per articles discuss the vitality of Cantonese and impy its superiority to putonghua because of Hong Kong's affluence. Cantonese, the people I interviewed say, marks Hong Kong, and Guangdong Province, as distinct from the rest of China. It also marks, albeit to a lesser degree, the Chinese diaspora as opposed to those who stayed in mainland China: "In Vancouver, you can live your entire life in Cantonese," one person said. Of late, a large demand for putonghua lessons has emerged in Hong Kong, as more and more people begin to feel that they will need putonghua in the future in order to prosper. But a backlash against putonghua is also evident. As one Hong Kong artist says, "Language is one of the prime things to separate yourself from others... In my drawings, I write in Cantonese. I don't care if the [mainland] Chinese don't understand." 49

Even more than Cantonese, English for the people I interviewed serves as the dominant linguistic marker of Hong Kong's difference from China. If affluence points to capitalism as the root of the difference between China and Hong Kong, English points to colonialism, a colonialism directly experienced by Hong Kong people through, among other forms, their schooling. English has served as the primary medium of instruction in most secondary schools, in textbooks, and often in oral instruction. "The fact that students are being forced to learn in a non-native tongue in Hong Kong is an extremely rare practice. I wonder if you could find it anywhere else on earth," the critic of Hong Kong education Tso Kai-lok has said. 50 Some of those I interviewed were outraged at their enforced English training: "My high school... was the essence of colonial education. We had... to forget our past, forget our culture, what actually Chinese or China means to us... For a long time we wrote letters in English, even to loved ones; we said 'I love you' in English." Others were grateful for this training; as one teacher and activist said, "My feminism has a lot to do with my English literature training. In secondary school I read Catherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Before I read them, I had the very traditional idea of 'men should be at work, women at home'... If I hadn't received a Western education, if I couldn't speak English and read English books, I'd be bearing children, working as a secretary or a saleslady selling clothes; I wouldn't be the person I am now." In these divergent views, we see once again that same stark split in Hong Kong identity: Colonial education is seen as either stealing the linguistic heritage of Hong Kong people or saving them from "Chineseness." But whether they resented or appreciated their colonial education, the people I interviewed acknowledged that they were who they were, as "Hongkongese," because of that education, placing them at a remove from "Chineseness." And just as money can make the world beyond China home, so too can the English language: it is English, as well as the presence of a large diaspora community, that makes Canada, Australia, and the United States the leading destinations of Hong Kong emigrants.

A third mark of Hong Kong identity—fundamentally different from the first two, as I will argue—involves political ideals such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. A social worker I interviewed stated: "'Hongkongese' can be used as an identity to distinguish ourselves from the Chinese government. The Chinese government acts as if they are parents, the leaders try to command us as if we are children. To claim one's identity as Hongkongese is a political statement... When I visit my relatives in China, I feel Chinese in day-to-day social life. But when I see the Chinese government spokesman on television, I think 'I am Hongkongese, you are Chinese.'"

This, however, seems a fragile basis for Hong Kong identity. First, Hong Kong's partially democratic elections are of very recent vintage, only existing in the past five years. (Hong Kong's colonial governor was never elected by the people of Hong Kong.) In the decades previous, Hong Kong was ruled by a more or less benignly autocratic British hand, leading to the view, set forth by Hong Kong social scientists in the 1960s and 1970s, that Hong Kong people were apolitical. Great Britain's slowness in allowing for democracy in Hong Kong is the stuff of considerable cynicism in Hong Kong. As one recent writer put it, Hong Kong's present-day democracy advocates "deprecate China... because they say it is totalitarian... They should have stood up long ago to defy colonialism, under which the Hong Kong Chinese have been living as second-class citizens until lately." 51

Second, Hong Kong democracy, and perhaps human rights and rule of law, may shortly be no more. Chinese government officials make claims about the coming of human rights and democracy to Hong Kong; Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Cui Tian-kai has said that "the return of Hong Kong to China
marks the beginning of the time when Hong Kong people enjoy human rights. From July 1st, there will be no more foreign governor or foreign flag raised in Hong Kong.” 55 Beijing’s spokesman on Hong Kong affairs, Lu Ping, claims that “July 1, 1997 will mark the real beginning of democracy [in Hong Kong]. There’s been no democracy in the territory during the more than a century of British rule.” 55 But in fact the Chinese government has, as earlier noted, dissolved the elected Legislative Council in Hong Kong in favor of its own appointed Provisional Legislature (although it claims that democrat elections will be held in 1998). Hong Kong’s chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, has recommended rescinding several laws concerning human rights in Hong Kong. Opinion polls in Hong Kong show that over two-thirds of those polled believe that the method of choosing the Provisional Legislature was “less acceptable” than that of the Legislative Council 54, 55 percent oppose Tung Chee-hwa’s recommendations to scrap human rights legislation, as opposed to only 18 percent who support them. 55

The Chinese government labels electoral democracy and human rights as Western “cultural imperialism” (Western nations are “assuming superiority and imposing their own..., standards on other countries without considering these countries’ different history, cultural background, and social conditions,” claims Xinhua, the New China News Agency). 55 Hong Kong advocates of “Western” democracy and human rights for China are merely suffering from “colonization of the mind”—a Chinese phrase used facetiously by several of those I interviewed. What the Chinese government sees as baneful foreign influence, these people saw as a universal good. As one person said: “Human rights don’t differ in different cultures. The idea may have originated in the West; but human rights are true everywhere, for all people.... The same is true for democracy.” To many of those I interviewed, it appears that democracy in Hong Kong will have a lifespan of some five years; and as goes democracy, they felt, too may go any autonomous Hong Kong identity.

The Fall of Heunggongyahn/The Rise of Jungwokcyahn

What, then, of heunggongyahn? “The naked truth about Hong Kong’s future can be summed up in two words: It’s over,”

52. As quoted in Jasper Becker, “Don’t Pressure Us, Christopher Told,” South China Morning Post, 21 Nov. 1996.
55. Jonathan Braude, “New Breath of Optimism for Hong Kong’s Future, Survey Reveals,” South China Morning Post, 3 Jan. 1997. That these pessimistic numbers were presented beneath a glowing headline I see as indicative of the efforts of Hong Kong newspapers to instill optimism in their readers about the control of China over Hong Kong. In April 1997 the South China Morning Post hired a mainland Chinese “senior consultant”—a founding editor of the China Daily, an official English-language newspaper in China. This move was criticized in Hong Kong as a possible indication of the coming muzzling of Hong Kong’s English-language free press.

56. “Human Rights’ Mask Racism” (Report from Xinhua, The New China News Agency), Eastern Express, 8 Feb. 1995, the business magazine Fortune declared in 1995. 57 At present, anyway, this judgment seems far off the mark: the Hong Kong stock market is close to record highs and the local property market is soaring.

If economic confidence remains high, however, political and cultural confidence seems more fragile. Heunggongyahn, as I have discussed, only emerged over the past few decades, within a small period of cultural autonomy between the overpowering cultural influences of Great Britain and China. There has been a brief period during which, almost despite Great Britain’s political rule, Hong Kong’s people became affluent and cosmopolitan, and a still briefer period during which a departing Great Britain gave Hong Kong a degree of political freedom. China may take away Hong Kong’s nascent democracy, then, inadvertently, its prosperity. If these go, the autonomous identity of Hong Kong’s people will also be lost. As one person told me: “Hong Kong Chinese are unique, but maybe they will become just a name in the history book. At the moment we are still protected; but when the British go, the Chinese influence will come in.... What you see as unique in Hong Kong will not last very long. Hong Kong identity will die out”—not immediately, but gradually and inevitably over the decades to come, he argued.

Apart from the weight of China’s political domination, the Hong Kong identity bears the seeds of its own extinction. Affluence and language, money and English: these markers of Hong Kong identity may mark the tickets out of Hong Kong. Those who adhere to these markers of identity often strongly emphasized that they were “Hongkongese,” but, these very markers of identity may serve to bring about the dissolution of Hong Kong identity in that those who possess them will find it easiest to leave Hong Kong and make their lives and find their identities elsewhere. Democracy, on the other hand, was not seen as portable by its advocates: it was not just anywhere, but Hong Kong that had to be democratic. If two of these “Western” markers of identity enable one more easily to flee China for “the West,” the third may involve a potential and highly threatening penetration of China by “the West.” And indeed, a number of those who adher most strongly to “democracy” and “human rights” as values saw themselves not as Hongkongese but as Chinese.

A majority of the people I interviewed thought of themselves as Hongkongese; a minority thought of themselves as Chinese. No one I interviewed was a direct supporter of the Chinese government, but several expressed optimism toward 1997 and its aftermath, due to the cultural and ethnic background they felt they held in common with the mainland Chinese. In the words of one activist who took part in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands protests, “We love our country and we want our country to be united again: China, Taiwan, Hong Kong—we’re all Chinese—we are all members of the same family, we’re all one race.” The common ethnic and cultural background the speaker attributes to Chinese overrides all political division: China will behave well toward Hong Kong because both are one and the same Chinese people.

Most of those I interviewed made no such claims; but even some of those who were quite pessimistic about the Chinese government and its future actions toward Hong Kong nonetheless called themselves not “Hongkongese” but “Chinese.” The most vociferous advocates of democracy that I interviewed

dreamed of the emergence of a “true China,” as opposed to what they saw as the stilted “Chineseness” of the Chinese state today. Their dreams were not so much of preserving heunggongyahn—Hong Kong identity—but of reshaping junggwokjahn—Chinese identity, in the mold of the intellectuals of China’s 1919 May Fourth Movement and the dissidents imprisoned after the Tiananmen Square incident. One told me of how, when living abroad, she saw on television the events in Tiananmen Square and felt an urge to return to Hong Kong rather than live overseas; her mission, she felt, was to help to create in Hong Kong the “China” that the Tiananmen Square protesters envisioned, a “China” that could perhaps from its base in Hong Kong eventually spread throughout China.

These views parallel those of a number of Hong Kong political figures: “In the long term, China will have to change and be more democratic,” Martin Lee has said. Anson Chan, the Chief Secretary of the last colonial Hong Kong government and of the first post-handover government as well, has stated that “in one hundred years, Hong Kong and China will merge into one system—the Hong Kong system.” Definitions of “China” are, as we saw earlier, hotly disputed in Hong Kong at present. Whereas Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa warns Hong Kong people “to be alert to ‘international forces’ trying to use the territory in a campaign to isolate China,” newspaper columnist Raymond Wong Yuk-man disavows any such narrow political definition of China: “I identify with China culturally and am proud of our national heritage... [But] if you say to be a Chinese I must support either China or Taiwan, I would rather not be a Chinese.”

Cultural China

These people identify themselves not with political China—the present Chinese nation—but with “cultural China”: with Chinese ethnicity, history, and cultural traditions, and including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora. Over and over again, the people I interviewed would make statements criticizing the Chinese government, after which some would say things like, “you’d better not put that in print. That might be dangerous after 1997.” Their loyalty was to a larger China. In one person’s words: “I am a Chinese nationalist... but of the land and the people, not the Chinese constitution. If you respect and obey the constitution of the PRC, does it mean you consent to be a Chinese?... To me the most important factor to be Chinese is Chinese culture, traditional Chinese culture. It is easier to be Chinese in Hong Kong than in China because the traditional values are much more affected by the government in China. In China, they understand and interpret the ancient scholars by one approach, the party’s approach.” Of course, Chinese “traditional culture” is vast and variegated; but for this man, the very multiplicity of readings of “traditional culture” is a mark of authentic “Chineseness,” as opposed to the Chinese government’s inauthentic denial of all multiplicity.

The revulsion that the people I interviewed expressed toward the Chinese government is widespread in Hong Kong. Indeed it seems difficult to justify the likelihood of going from a free press to a muzzled press (even if through self-censorship), it seems difficult to justify the potential erosion of an ideal of human rights (although I wrestle with this: to what extent is my belief in human rights no more than my American ethnocentrism?). Despite Hong Kong’s return to its homeland in 1997, an overwhelming majority of the working class as well as the business people and intellectuals, if offered a choice, would not elect to identify themselves as citizens of the People’s Republic of China. Hong Kong is, at least in spirit, part of the Chinese diaspora,” writes Tu Wei-ming. But at the same time, there is very clearly an increasing acceptance of “Chineseness” in Hong Kong at present. This can be seen in the earlier-discussed revising of Hong Kong’s archeology and history to make it “Chinese”; and this can be seen too in such commercial ventures as Shanghai Tang, a large new store devoted wholly to traditional Chinese clothing that has been attracting considerable attention in Hong Kong and throughout Asia. These trends imply that for all the sense of apprehension felt toward the Chinese government, there is indeed a sense of “returning to ‘Chineseness’” in Hong Kong—a turning away from a separate heunggongyahn, to become junggwokjahn. Cultural identity may in this sense be moving in tandem with national identity. As Hong Kong reverted to China, Hong Kong’s people become once again Chinese, and heunggongyahn fades into history.

And yet it may be that the very spirit of confident independence that led to the emergence of an autonomous Hong Kong identity may lead, with that identity’s gradual dissolution, to the emergence of a new identity: an autonomous, critical, independent Chinese identity, uncontrollable by any government. This is what the current Chinese government most fears from Hong Kong, perhaps with good reason. Heunggongyahn may soon be dead; but from the ashes of that identity, if Martin Lee and his ilk are correct, a resurgent, independent junggwokjahn may emerge. If this comes to pass, the demise of heunggongyahn will have been a worthy cultural sacrifice indeed.

59. As quoted in Cheung (see note 42).
64. Duhng Dak-sahng, ed. “Geuihyauh junggwok dahsikdk seungban-chiuhl” (A new trend of commercial goods with Chinese character), Sing Tao Daily, 22 Feb. 1996.

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The Japanese Organic Farming Movement: Consumers And Farmers United

Organic farmers' groups throughout Japan have formed direct-marketing relations with urban consumers who are interested not only in obtaining "safe" foods but also in helping farmers survive as full-time farmers. This article looks at one such urban-rural coalition, focusing on actions taken by farmers and consumers united in a joint struggle to stop the construction of a golf course resort. Part of that "other Japan" in which people are working together at the grassroots to create an alternative vision of what Japan can become, participants in this movement are fashioning new cultural values and social relations that challenge the dominant culture's hegemony.

by Darrell Gene Moen

The Japanese organic farming movement, which has its roots in the social upheavals of the 1960s against war, pollution, corporatism, and sexism, is today part of a global proliferation of alternative strategies for environmental, social, and personal transformation. Movement participants representing a diverse cross-section of Japanese society are transforming social relations and creating new values, self-identities, definitions of gender, and socio-political assumptions. Earlier village-bounded studies of Japanese rural society emphasized cultural continuity, the masterful blending of modernity and tradition, and the stoic acquiescence of villagers to externally imposed change. My research, by contrast, found organic farmers' groups revitalizing rural economies, forming direct-marketing relations with urban consumers, linking up with farmers in the Third World, opposing Tokyo-directed golf-course and resort development plans, and uniting in a variety of new social movements.

Integral to the success of the Japanese organic farming movement are the networks of grassroots organic foods distributors, retailers, and new consumer food cooperatives, many of which were established in the early 1970s. Japan's largest consumer cooperative, the Japan Consumers' Cooperative Union (Seikyo), was established in 1951. In 1996, the 688 primary Seikyo food cooperatives alone had a national household membership of 14 million. If the family members of each co-op member are counted, more than half of the Japanese population belongs to consumer cooperatives. Many of these have direct-marketing relations with organic farmers. More than 900 grassroots and localized groups of consumers have established co-partnerships, or teikei (see below), with local organic farmer groups; these involve face-to-face contact with farmers, risk-sharing, negotiating prices on amounts and varieties of crops, and numerous opportunities for social interaction between farmers and consumers.

The organic farming movement in Japan is extremely diverse, so I will limit my analysis to one group of organic farmers that united with consumers in a movement against the construction of a golf course. Throughout Japan, farmers and non-farmers alike are being influenced by what these unconventional farmers' groups are saying and doing. Employing innovative non-violent strategies, the participants in this case study were able to gain the respect and support of local residents as well as the public at large, support which was essential to their eventual success.

The Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA), established in 1970, has about 4,000 members. Farmers constitute almost one-quarter of the total. Consumers, including academics, agricultural scientists, medical doctors, journalists, and others involved in various aspects of the organic farming movement in Japan, make up the rest. The organization publishes a monthly newsletter and holds monthly seminars on various aspects of the organic farming movement in Japan. JOAA is critical of Japanese agricultural policies and of U.S. agricultural-surplus export policies.

JOAA actively promotes direct interaction between consumers and farmers and believes that the importance of this concept should be communicated not only to people involved in grassroots movements working for social betterment, but also to national, regional, and local government bodies, and consumer and agricultural cooperatives. JOAA advocates the creation of ties between consumers and farmers through direct-marketing relationships that nurture friendships based on trust and mutual respect, going beyond economic interests or health maintenance concerns.

After studying the efficacy of the co-partnership concept at pioneering organizations such as the Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership (described below), JOAA members formulated "The Ten Principles of Teikei" in November 1978.
In summary form these principles are:
1. Produce crops in accordance with prenegotiated agreements between farmers and consumers.
2. Build a friendly and creative relationship between farmers and consumers, not limited to their relationship as trading partners.
3. Accept all the produce delivered by the farmers.
4. Negotiate prices in a mutually beneficial manner.
5. Build a lasting rapport based on mutual respect and trust.
6. Manage the self-distribution of produce, either by the farmers or by the consumers.
7. Encourage participatory, democratic involvement by all members.
8. Study the various social and political issues related to organic agriculture as these develop.
9. Maintain a balance in numbers of farmers and consumers in the group.
10. Persevere with the ultimate goal of attaining a balance with nature and a relationship of human equality that is based on organic agriculture and the organic link between farmers and consumers.

The organic farming movement in Japan has been deeply influenced by the activities and publications of the Japan Organic Agriculture Association. JOAA has been instrumental in introducing the co-partnership concept to farmers and consumers throughout the country, and through its affiliation with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, it has introduced the co-partnership concept to parties worldwide. One such example is the Consumer Supported Agriculture movement in the United States.

**Alienating Social Relations of Capitalism**

In an interview in the fall of 1991, Ichiraku Teruo—then Senior Director of JOAA—articulated a radical critique of capitalism and the alienating social relations it engenders:

Capitalism fosters the attitude of anything for profit, without regard for the environment or human well-being. If we look around us, we see toxic waste dumps, nuclear power plants, the military-industrial complex and the waste it generates, people working themselves to death. ... 

Teikei is about the process of creating a new culture, a culture not restricted to the profit motive, a culture outside present practice. ... Starting with food and a critique of the present food system—a system that is international in scope because capitalism is international in scope—an awareness of the need to change society in all areas emerges, leading to the realization of the need to build a society based on emerging values.

In co-partnership arrangements, we consumers tell the farmers that they can set their own prices and that we will accept the delivery of all the produce grown. The farmers do not take advantage of our trust, and respecting us, they set a fair price and try to grow only the amount of produce they feel is appropriate for the number of consumer members in the co-partnership. This proves that we humans are not inherently profit-oriented and proves that new human relations based on mutual trust, respect, and understanding can be realized. People tell me, “Look, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestries, and Fisheries (MAFF) has budgeted money to encourage organic farming. They’ve finally come to their senses.” I tell those people to stop dreaming and come to their senses. MAFF has abandoned farmers and farmers still keep looking to MAFF for assistance. It doesn’t make sense. MAFF’s sympathies lie with agribusinesses and major corporations. If they’re calling for more farmers to convert to organic farming, it’s because they smell money to be made, and most of the money will be made by the corporations that control the distribution, processing, and marketing of food. That they are interested only in the economic aspect of organically grown commodities and their potential for generating profits is made obvious by their choice to call organic farming “high value-added farming” (kofuka kachigata no noyo).

Wada Hiroyuki, born in 1934 and a founding member of the Miyoshi Producers’ Group, also makes the point that MAFF has neglected the plight of family farmers such as himself:

The village of Miyoshi, lying in a small, secluded valley, was not conducive to the modern agricultural conversion package promoted by MAFF, which required large-scale paddy-land irrigation projects, consolidation of paddy-fields, and extensive mechanization. MAFF bypassed Miyoshi for agricultural modernization because it considered Miyoshi to be inappropriate for development. We asked for advice, and they told us farmers to grow citrus fruits and ginger as cash crops.

When the price for citrus dropped and repeated mono-plantings of ginger led to soil depletion and falling yields, most of the farmers had to give up trying to make a living from farming and were forced to find some kind of job off the farm. Their children didn’t give farming a second thought as a possible career.

Paradoxically, Miyoshi’s secluded setting was ideal for organic farming. A collectively built and maintained irrigation system, which used clean mountain stream water to flood the rice fields, was already in place. The small-sized plots of upland fields and paddy fields encouraged crop diversity and lent themselves to complex crop rotations. The formation of the co-partnership enabled us to survive as farmers. Thinking back on the situation, I recall vividly the feelings of desperation and depression that accompanied it.

Mr. Wada’s generation of farmers in Miyoshi can “recall vividly” the desperate times when they felt that they had been abandoned by the government. Just when their plight seemed...
irreversible, the co-partnership was formed, and Mr. Wada and his wife became its first producer members. It is little wonder that Mr. Wada believes strongly in the principles espoused by the co-partnership.

Mr. Wada is convinced that by establishing social relationships based on equality and fairness, people can feel fulfilled and connected. This leads to a true sense of community, he believes. He likes the idea of being able to bypass the conventional market and establish direct-marketing relationships based on trust and mutual respect. He stated that he was opposed to the idea of selling surplus produce on the market:

If we started involving ourselves in the conventional market, I'm afraid we'd be drawn back into the game of betting on the market, holding out for the best price. We'd become dependent on forces beyond our control again. Motivated by profit, we'd lose touch with each other and revert to a "dog eat dog" lifestyle. I enjoy the collective spirit of the co-partnership, the sense of working together for a common goal. I don't want everyone to be out for themselves.

**Formation of the Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership**

The thriving Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership came into being when a group of 25 Tokyo-area housewives in their 20s and 30s initiated contact with a group of farmers in Miyoshi Village in October 1973 in an effort to acquire organically grown food for health and ideological reasons. These young, mostly middle-class women had been influenced by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Japanese translation, 1962) and the serialized publication of Ariyoshi Sawako's *Fukugō Osen* (Compound Pollution). The women had been politicized through their involvement in citizens' movements during the 1960s, and had been studying problems associated with chemical farming from both farmers' and consumers' perspectives at monthly study sessions for over a year.

Some of these women had been involved in the women's liberation movement; others had joined the anti-Vietnam War movement as university students; several had participated in the anti-poverty struggles of the late-1960s. One of the women told me that she joined the study group "to have the chance to be with women who'd been active in various social movements and learn from their experiences so I could broaden my own horizons."

In an interview with one of the founding members of the Tokyo-Miyoshi Co-partnership, I was impressed to learn that these women had formed a study group to inform themselves not only about the technical aspects of organic farming, but also about the international political dimensions of food and agriculture.

The more we studied, the more we saw the connections. We saw how Japan's military alliance with the United States was related to importing more American agricultural surpluses. We saw how increasing agricultural imports were forcing Japanese farmers off the land. We saw how migrant workers forced to work for near-starvation wages as construction workers, truck drivers, and factory hands helped Japan achieve its "miracle" economic growth. We saw how the corporations benefited at the expense of the common people. We knew that something had to be done. We realized that we consumers had to form an alliance with farmers to take back the control of agricultural production, distribution, and consumption. We knew that other women were forming consumer cooperatives, but we wanted to work with the farmers directly. That's how we decided to focus our energy into forming a direct-marketing structure between consumers and farmers.

Broad social concerns motivated these women; they were deliberately careful not to limit their interests to what would only benefit them directly. The more they read, studied, and discussed, the more they were able to expand beyond the narrow and exclusionary concerns that many considered the province of the middle classes. As another of the founding members put it, "We wanted to connect 'safe' foods and the support of organic farming with the survival of family farmers, with the preservation of the environment, with opposition to militarism and imperialism, with demands for social justice, and with our need to work collectively to create a better future."

Armed with facts and figures concerning the health hazards associated with the ever-increasing amounts of pesticides in conventional farming, aware of the "politics of food" and the increasing corporate control of the production and distribution of food, and determined to effect the structural changes necessary to counteract the poisoning of the environment, the people, and all living organisms, this group of women looked for a farming village close to Tokyo where farmers might be persuaded to convert to organic farming methods. They wanted to form a direct-marketing structure in which organic farmers would supply them with a variety of agricultural products, from vegetables and fruits to grains and eggs. At the same time, they wanted to form a direct socio-cultural link with farmers in an urban-rural alliance that would work for social change.

Fortuitously, the director of the Chiba Prefectural Training Center for Young Farmers, with whom they had established contact, introduced them to his nephew, Wada Hiroyuki, who was successfully marketing organically grown mandarin oranges at the time and whose farm was located about two hours from Tokyo. As Mr. Wada lived in Miyoshi and had some influence in the village, it was hoped that he could persuade local farmers to convert to organic farming if they were guaranteed a market for their produce.

After six months of negotiations following the initial meeting of about 60 consumers and 40 farmers at Miyoshi Village Hall, the "Group for the Production and Consumption of Safe Foods" (*Anzen-na tabemono o tsukutte taberu ka?*) was established in February 1974 with an initial membership of 19 farm families and 111 consumer families organized into "posts." (A "post" is the place where consumers' group members go to pick up their weekly delivery of produce.)

Both farmers and consumers in the newly established co-partnership anticipated markedly reduced crop yields during the first years following the conversion to organic farming. It was

1. The Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership now consists of 30 farm families (most are extended family households) and more than 1,000 consumer families (as of 1996) residing in the Tokyo metropolitan area.


3. There were a total of 120 posts to which the farmers made their deliveries in 1996. The number of families within a post varies from five to twenty, with the majority having ten families enrolled. Each post is free to decide its own system of sorting the weekly deliveries of produce and exhibits a remarkable amount of flexibility in meeting the needs of post members.
warm enough for a double crop of rice, conventional farmers use

Boso Peninsula near the resort city of Tateyama across the bay

are divided equally among the consumers; and

and various unforeseen problems would appear.

with consumers agreeing to share the risks associated with

and various unforeseen problems would appear.

In order to dispel the farmers' fears and concomitant hesi­
tancy in applying organic farming techniques to all of their fields, the

the consumers' group members agreed to the following three

1. The prices of the produce were to be determined by the

2. The bulk of the harvested produce would be accepted by and
divided equally among the consumers; and

3. A deposit of ¥10,000 by all new consumers' group members
would be available to the farmers as emergency aid, if needed.

With consumers agreeing to share the risks associated with

and guaranteeing the farmers' income in advance of

Miyoshi village (population 4,500), at the southern tip of

farmwoman in her mid-30s reveal:

hardships associated with it. They stay for a day or two; it's kind of

and shopping arcades. I...
ment increased in a variety of endeavors, culminating in their
exposure to new ideas, different ways of looking at things, and
alternative ways of acting out their social
issues ranging from problem children and how to han­
tie, and forging close bonds of friendship. Although class ten­
sions do surface at times, they appear to be less important than
the clearly felt affinity among the fanners and consumers of the
level of empathy requires a long-term relationship.

Although class differences are at times glaringly apparent
(e.g., style of dress, language use, general demeanor), these have
not kept co-partnership members from finding the commonalities
and forging close bonds of friendship. Although class ten­
sions do surface at times, they appear to be less important than
the clearly felt affinity among the farmers and consumers of the
co-partnership. As one 50-year-old farm woman related:

When the consumers' group women are staying at "Everyone's
House" and working in the fields with us or we're discussing life in
general, I really feel close to them and some I consider my true
friends. One day, I saw one of the consumers' group women being
interviewed on television concerning her opposition to sending
Japanese troops to Cambodia and I really felt proud of her. She was
dressed so smartly and talked so intelligently that I almost cried with
the pride in my heart.

Having gotten to know each other over the years, many of
the farmers and consumers in the co-partnership have been able
to get through to real feelings. This became apparent to me over
time as I listened to farmers talking with consumers about
personal issues ranging from problem children and how to han­
dle them to serious illnesses or deaths in the family.

As the years passed, the co-partnership members were
exposed to new ideas, different ways of looking at things, and
alternative ways of acting out their social existence; the influence
of each upon the other was cumulative. Their collective involve­
mence increased in a variety of endeavors, culminating in their

pesticides on his fields and although I closed the windows facing the
wind, the herbicide dust still settled in the house. I had to spend the
whole day cleaning, trying to get rid of the noxious smell and hoping
my children wouldn't get poisoned! You know, we have to get along
with all of our neighbors, so we can't complain about pesticide drift,
we really have no privacy because everyone knows what everyone
else does, and as for the big houses, they're difficult to keep clean
and they're cold in the winter!

The farm women want the urban women to understand the
difficulties associated with living in a rural area. The city women
want the farm women to sympathize with the difficulties of living
in an alienating and stressful urban environment. Reaching this
level of empathy requires a long-term relationship.

The Miyoshi Producers' Group farmers, most of whom had
never participated directly in any type of opposition, were hesi­
tant to ally themselves with the consumers' group women; some of
the farmers saw them as overly confrontational and politically
radical, unwilling to consider compromise. The consumers' group
women were involved from the start in the attempt to form a
national network of anti-golf course groups. By contrast, the farmers
in the Miyoshi Producers' Group had not opposed the idea of
a golf course initially and they were surprised at the vehement
response of some of the consumers' group members. One farmer
stated:

I remember the first time the consumers in our co-partnership
brought up the subject of opposing the proposed golf course in
Miyoshi. We farmers called an informal meeting to talk about the
issue, and most of us agreed that a golf course would be a good thing
for everyone concerned. We half-jokingly said that when the con­
sumers' group women come out to work the fields with us, their
husbands could come out to golf. That way, the family could come
out here together and everyone would be happy. We couldn't under­
stand why the consumers' group members were so upset. To us, it
was just another golf course. After all [laughing], they don't call
Chiba Prefecture "golf course heaven" for nothing!

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in the group told me that they had taken a "wait-and-see" attitude,
hoping to avoid antagonizing their neighbors unnecessarily.

Several of the farmers explained to me that they needed to
maintain friendly ties with neighboring farmers who were not
members of the organic producers' group; they felt that they
could not afford to antagonize them. Often, these relationships
had endured over several generations, and by adopting an ide­
ological stance too much at variance with that of most of their
neighbors, they feared alienating them and causing resentment.

Recalling one of the first meetings in 1988 between co-part­
nership consumers and farmers held at "Everyone's House," one

Miyoshi Golf Course Resort Development Plans

Plans to build a golf course resort in the Momeiri Hills of
Miyoshi had been on the drawing boards since the mid-1960s
when the huge Tokyo-based developer Sobu Development
Corporation started negotiations to purchase land in the area. By
1973, Sobu had obtained from local landowners "notes of agree­
ment to sell" about 40 percent of the 115 hectares (284 acres)
they needed. However, the recession brought on by the oil crisis of
that year forced them to postpone further action. It was in
March 1988 during the "bubble economy" that Sobu Develop­
ment Corporation reinitiated land purchase proposals, and after
obtaining "notes of agreement to sell" about two-thirds of the
land needed for the golf course, the corporation filed for permis­
sion from the Miyoshi Village authorities to start construction.

One of the ten ward heads of Miyoshi at the time happened
be Watanabe Katsuo, a farmer member of the Miyoshi-Tokyo
Co-partnership. At the meeting when the developer's request for
permission to begin construction of the resort complex was
discussed, Mr. Watanabe raised questions about the danger of
chemical use and the advisability of granting immediate ap­
proval.

Mr. Watanabe reported the news of the proposed construc­
tion to the other farmers in the organic producers' group, and the
consumers' group was informed immediately. Most of the farm­
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a golf course initially and they were surprised at the vehement
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Recalling one of the first meetings in 1988 between co-part­
nership consumers and farmers held at "Everyone's House," one

Consumers and farmers with their families at the annual co-partnership harvest festival in Miyoshi. November 1991.
farmer said that when the consumers had called for a joint study session to discuss and evaluate the golf course situation and how best to oppose its construction, most of the farmers in the Miyoshi Producers’ Group had attended, assuming that it would be a mutual learning experience and a chance to discuss ideological differences and available options. He then stated that this initial study meeting seemed to the farmers to be a political lecture by consumers’ group representatives who had been involved in various opposition movements in the city. He remembers that at the end of the meeting many of the farmers left feeling that they would not be able to work together because the ideological differences between the two groups were too great.

One of the consumers’ group women who had attended the meeting in question suspected that some of the men resented the politically provocative language the women used to express their principled determination to fight against the construction of the proposed golf course. One of the farm women told me that some of the older farmers, born and raised with patriarchal beliefs, disliked women who “act as if they know more about politics than men do and try to order men around.” A Miyoshi Producers’ Group farmer told me that her sister, a farm wife like herself, had been involved in a local movement opposing the construction of a golf course resort complex near her village in Shizuoka Prefecture for more than three years. She said that because most of the farmers in the Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership did not have relatives or know of anyone involved in struggles against resort development, their views on golf course development tended to reflect those of the mainstream media, adding:

Sure, they read the articles in the co-partnership journals and newsletters by consumers’ group women involved in anti-golf course activities. Some of the farmers even talked to anti-golf course activists about their experiences when they visited the group and stayed at “Everyone’s House.” But most of the farmers didn’t think much about golf courses, one way or the other, because the issue had never directly affected them. That’s why, when this golf course issue came up here, most of the farmers weren’t too concerned at first. In my case, my sister’s struggle against resort development had influenced me quite a lot. When the consumers’ group formed an anti-golf course action committee and asked us to form a farmers’ golf course opposition committee in March 1988, I was one of the first farmers to volunteer. I knew it was not going to be easy convincing some of the farmers of the need to oppose the golf course project with all our united energy, but I knew that we had to have all the farmers in the group actively involved in the opposition if we were to succeed.

As the farmers’ involvement in the movement progressed, they came to identify the differences between themselves and the urban consumers—even the differences they thought were irreconcilable—as prejudices inculcated from childhood, part of a divide-and-rule strategy of the dominant classes. They came to see the rural-urban dichotomy and class-based divisions as an unnatural and imposed separation of people with common interests and a shared social vision who were attempting to reshape society from the grassroots. Many farmers who had previously harbored resentments against “political women” came to see the male-female split as another aspect of the dominant culture’s divide-and-rule strategy.

One farmer in his mid-50s told me that he had never opposed the authorities in his life and that if someone had told him (before the golf course issue had come up) that he would someday be involved in activities that opposed local political decisions, he would have laughed in their face. He then admitted:

Looking back, I can see how much the consumers’ influence affected my way of looking at things. Before, I thought that protesting environmental pollution was only for people with time on their hands who needed to get involved in some kind of “hobby” (shumi). Now, I see the direct connection between water pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, golf courses, resort development, and farming. I now realize the need for each and every one of us to take a stand and fight to protect not only our livelihoods, but the health and well-being of our children and grandchildren.

The co-partnership consumers and farmers agreed to an initial strategy of obtaining signatures of village residents opposed to the construction of a golf course resort. Within six months, after a house-to-house campaign, more than 1,700 people had signed the petition demanding the cancellation of construction plans. The village assembly voted to reject the development proposal in March 1989.

The victory, however, was short-lived. In April 1990, the then governor of Chiba Prefecture, Numata Takeshi, announced a prohibition against the use of chemicals on golf courses in the prefecture. With this ban, he hoped to mollify opponents and allow development of the golf course to move ahead. Critics pointed out that the bill prohibiting the use of chemicals was a sham since it did not include provisions for inspection or penalties for non-compliance.

Emboldened by the governor’s support, Sobu Development Corporation circulated its own petition supporting the construction of the golf course and obtained 2,100 signatures by January 1991. The earlier decision to reject construction plans was overturned by the village assembly in March 1991. Mizoguchi Hitoshi, an elected JCP (Japan Communist Party) member of the village assembly and one of the Miyoshi Producers’ Group farmers, immediately distributed copies of the official announcement to build the golf course to co-partnership members, thus reactivating the opposition movement.

**Golf Course Rice Paddy Purchase**

In March 1991 co-partnership members formed an ad hoc committee made up of both farmer and consumer members to formulate new strategies to stop the golf course. One effective tactic involved the purchase of 1,500 square meters (about one-third of an acre) of land determined by the committee to be of strategic importance.

One of the Miyoshi Producers’ Group farmers had been contacted by a non-group farmer who informed him that the developers had offered to buy three of his abandoned rice fields located in a narrow valley leading up to the proposed golf course site. This farmer was on good terms with the co-partnership and supported their opposition to the proposed golf course. A thorough examination of the construction plans by committee members revealed that the developers intended to construct a catchment pond at that location. The three rice fields were ideally situated to act as a drainage pond to catch the surface run-off of toxic chemicals. No alternative sites for a catchment pond were available, and if the developers could not acquire this land, the plans for the resort would have to be completely redrawn at an estimated cost of ¥100 million (one million U.S. dollars).
In June 1991, the Miyoshi Producers' Group bought the 1,500 square meters of remote upland rice paddies for ¥6 million ($60,000), twice the going rate for prime lowland rice paddies. The consumers' group agreed to supply the labor needed to prepare the fields, transplant the seedlings, and harvest the rice crop.

The consumers and farmers worked these fields together from 1991 through the harvest of 1993. Participating in the harvest of 1993—in which about twenty consumers' group members and fifteen farmers worked together—I found everyone to be in high spirits as victory was anticipated. Since 1994, the farmers have rented the rice paddies to Kobayashi Noriko, who ran as the opposition candidate in the mayoral election of 1991 (see below). The "rent" amounts to a "taste" of the rice crop and about a case of beer a year.

Meeting with Other Farmers Opposing Golf Courses

A number of consumers' group members had been involved in local struggles against the construction of golf courses in Saitama and Chiba Prefectures, and many of the women who had participated in those struggles felt a need to form a network serving as an umbrella organization to bring together groups opposing specific golf courses. One of the consumers' group women actively involved in the attempt to form a national network explained that she (along with others) felt it important for farmers to have the opportunity to meet and talk with other farmers involved in anti-golf course struggles nationwide. The first national forum on the issue of golf courses was held in November 1988 in Tokyo and the National Liaison Council on the Issue of Golf Course Resorts was formally established. Two nationwide organizations whose coordinating roles were pivotal in organizing the national network were the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) and Seikyo, the Japan Consumers' Cooperatives Union (JCCU).

More than 200 participants from nineteen prefectures attended the inaugural meeting of the national network. By the time of the third meeting, held in Kobe in 1990, the number of participants had risen to more than 700 representatives from 43 prefectures. Miyoshi Consumers' Group members involved in local struggles attended all of the meetings. Local campaigns against golf course development were no longer isolated, and activists nationwide were now able to meet in order to discuss strategies and to encourage each other in their struggles.

The Miyoshi Producers' Group farmers sent a delegation of four farmers to the national meeting in Kobe in 1990. One of the Miyoshi farmers offered the following comments:

The farmers we met at those meetings sounded a lot like some of the consumers in our co-partnership. They were talking about social justice, and farmers' rights to farm, and everyone's right to clean water, and political corruption, and the rich getting richer, and the evils of uncontrolled capitalism. At first, it was shocking for us to hear other farmers talking like that. After the study sessions, we would drink [sake and beer] with the other farmers and that's when we knew that they were farmers, just like us. They were just trying to survive as farmers and were at the same time concerned for the health of their families. They said that they couldn't fight alone and that they needed to build coalitions with as many different groups of people opposed to golf course construction as possible in order to win.

Another point that impressed me was made by one of the farmers from Nara Prefecture. He said that the farmers there weren't really concerned with the proposed construction of a golf course at first. None of them gored so they figured it had nothing to do with them. It wasn't until they started receiving leaflets stuffed into their mailboxes at home, and handouts passed out at train and bus stations by a local citizen's group opposed to the golf course construction that they began to become interested. And it took a lot of time before the farmers became actively involved and actually formed a farmers' opposition group. He said that if they hadn't joined forces with the local citizens' group, they wouldn't have known where to begin, and that only by working together with as many different groups of people as possible can we hope to stop further golf course construction in Japan.

After viewing an NHK (national public television network) documentary program that described the golf course opposition activities of local farmers in Yamazoe Village in Nara Prefecture in the spring of 1991, the Miyoshi Producers' Group decided to send a delegation of four farmers to meet with the farmers there. One of the farmers who visited the opposition farmers in Yamazoe Village stated:

When they [the farmers of Yamazoe Village involved in the opposition movement] took us to the site of the golf course, I was shocked. They [the developers] were almost finished with the construction of the course, and the tops of the hills had been leveled and all the trees were gone. I could see with my own eyes what was in store for the Momenti Hills of Miyoshi if a golf course were built there. The farmers showed us the water in their rice paddies and it was red from the chemical runoff! I recorded it all on video and showed it to everyone when we returned.

I was told by an organic farmer from Ogawa-machi in Saitama Prefecture, who had just written a book about opposition to golf courses in Japan, that within four or five years after the construction of a golf course so-called "red water" is invariably detected flowing out of surface-water drainage works. This is because during golf course construction in Japan, felled trees are buried intact, and mountain soils with a high iron and manganese content are dug to depths of up to 50 meters and used as soil fill to create level playing terrain. This procedure results in extraordinarily high levels of humic acid which, when mixed with the chloride disinfectant used on golf courses, changes into trihal-methane, a known carcinogen.

Signs declaring opposition to the proposed golf course construction are displayed boldly outside "Everyone's House." July 1991.
By the summer of 1991, the consumers and farmers of the co-partnership had put up billboards opposing the construction of the golf course in front of “Everyone’s House” and in the fields of Yamana Hamlet and the neighboring hamlets of Ebishi, Yamashita, and Masuma—all within Miyoshi Village boundaries. They also put up billboards in Zushigaya Hamlet, Town of Maruyama, where one of the farmers’ group members lived. With volunteer labor, the co-partnership decided to publish a weekly four-page opposition movement newsletter to be inserted in the local newspaper and delivered to the 1,200 households in the village of Miyoshi. A consumers’ group contingency fund of ¥300,000 (US$3,000) was drawn from to pay for the cost of paper, printing, and delivery of the newsletters. A total of 64 issues of news updates on the anti-golf course struggle were delivered to village residents before the developers finally gave up and closed down their office in Tateyama, returning to their main office in Tokyo in March 1993.

The Miyoshi Producers’ Group farmers had met with farmers in other areas of Japan fighting against the construction of golf course resorts and had fully committed themselves to defeating the proposal to build one in Miyoshi. Their enthusiastic commitment convinced many Miyoshi residents to support the farmers in their opposition.

Miyoshi Village Mayoral Election

Since the incumbent mayor supported the plans to build a golf course, the co-partnership members decided to run their own candidate against him. However, they could not find a local resident willing to run for the office of mayor. Wada Hiroyuki, founding member of the producers’ group and respected leader of the community, feared conflict with some of his relatives living in the village if he ran as an opposition candidate and was forced (through familial pressure) to turn down the nomination. Mizoguchi Hitoshi, a member of the producers’ group, also turned down the offer of nomination as he felt that it was important for him to continue as an elected representative on the Miyoshi Village Assembly. He was elected to his fourth four-year term as a Japanese Communist Party village assembly representative in the fall of 1993.

It was not until two days before the official deadline to submit the necessary paperwork that the opposition group found a person willing to enter the contest for mayor. Her name was Kobayashi Noriko, a relative newcomer to the village who had moved to Miyoshi from Yokohama with her husband in order to pursue their interest in organic farming. Most of the farmers in the opposition group felt that her status as a “newcomer” would be an asset since, as one farmer put it, “No local toes would be stepped on.”

The farmers and consumers actively involved in the golf course opposition hastily set up election headquarters at “Everyone’s House” and called a press conference at Tateyama City Hall to announce the candidacy. They prepared a careful statement stating the reasons behind their decision to oppose the incumbent mayor. All the prefectural newspapers carried the story of the “anti-golf course mayoral candidate.”

The farmers and consumers of the co-partnership put up election posters, distributed campaign leaflets door-to-door, and drove vehicles with loudspeakers throughout the village announcing the candidacy of Kobayashi Noriko for the upcoming election. The village held the election in September 1991. Ms. Kobayashi received 812 votes against the incumbent’s 2,090. This was an amazing accomplishment, since it usually takes a year (and a prodigious amount of money) to prepare for and run an election campaign.

Both farmers’ group and consumers’ group members expressed satisfaction with the results. They felt that with so many village residents opposed, it would be difficult for the developers to go ahead with construction plans. One farmer told me how gratified she felt when she heard the election results:

I was really nervous going door-to-door talking with people I didn’t even know. But I knew it was for the good of the whole village. That’s what kept me going. I feel good having stood up for my beliefs. I think a lot of people around here feel closer to each other because we ended up taking a stand together.

Despite the local opposition, approval at the prefectural level to begin construction of the golf course in Miyoshi was announced formally by the village assembly on December 15, 1991. Within two months of the announcement, the anti-golf course activists initiated a course of action that turned out to be one of their most effective opposition strategies: symbolically selling trees on privately held forested land within the proposed golf course boundaries to supporters of the opposition movement. Since the trees held in the legally bound trust could not be cut down for a period of seven years, this tactic proved to be the developer’s nightmare come true.

Standing Tree (Tachiki) Trust

Suzuki Akira and his wife Fumiko were former consumer members of the Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership who moved to Miyoshi in 1983. Mr. Suzuki explained:

We joined the co-partnership in 1981 and started to come to the village on weekends to help with the farmwork. At first, we both
experienced culture shock. The lifestyle was so different from what we were used to in the city. After about two years of spending our weekends at “Everyone’s House,” we decided that we wanted to try farming ourselves and we moved out here. We rented a house in Tateyama from one of the Miyoshi Producer Group farmer’s older brothers for ¥6,000 (US$60) a month and started growing our own food, getting advice from the farmers. We built our log house here in Miyoshi in 1988 on land we rent from Sugita Shoji [a Miyoshi Producers’ Group farmer] for ¥10,000 (US$100) a year. He’s been very generous to us. I think [laughing] it has to do with the fact that we introduced him to the woman he married, a friend of ours from Tokyo. We’re very happy out here. The stress of life in the city was getting to us, and it’s a wonderful place for our son to grow up. That’s why when we heard of the proposal to build a golf course here, we knew we had to get involved in the opposition. We were part of the opposition right from the start [in 1988] and we started looking into tactics used by other groups opposing golf courses in Japan.

On February 6, 1992, Mr. and Mrs. Suzuki held a meeting at their house in Yamana Hamlet to discuss the adoption and implementation of the Tachiki Trust tactic with other key participants in the opposition. Wada Hiroyuki, Mizoguchi Hitoshi, and Ishihata Noriko of the Miyoshi Producers’ Group; Kobayashi Noriko, the mayoral candidate; and several consumer members of the co-partnership, along with several local residents were present. Mr. Suzuki had visited the Tokyo office of the National Liaison Council on the Issue of Golf Course Resorts and had obtained literature explaining how the Tachiki Trust works and saw examples of its use in other parts of Japan. After perusing the literature together, everyone at the meeting agreed that implementing the Tachiki Trust as an opposition tactic was an excellent idea. The Miyoshi Village Mountain Trust Committee was established at the meeting with Wada Hiroyuki as chair and Suzuki Akira as secretary/treasurer.

Unlike previous trusts in which the land itself was parceled and sold to supporters opposing development schemes, with the Tachiki Trust the trees on the land were to be held in trust. The trust prohibits the cutting down of any trees held in trust for a period of seven years, renewable for another period of seven years. Putting the trees in trust, rather than the land itself, was much less expensive and required much less paperwork. Minami Shuji, a farmer/musician living in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture, is given the credit for introducing the idea of the Tachiki Trust in 1989. The Miyoshi Tachiki Trust (the first in Chiba Prefecture) was modeled on the 1990 Tachiki Trust movement in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture.

Mr. and Mrs. Suzuki started going door-to-door with hanko (signature seal), contracts, and cash in hand. In the first week following the meeting, they managed to convince four landowners to support the golf course opposition movement by putting the trees on their land in trust. There was a frenzy of activity at “Everyone’s House” as consumer and farmer members of the co-partnership made wooden signs the size of road signs to post at the four trust sites, made wooden labels about six inches by twelve inches in size, wrote messages on them, and attached them to the trees. The farmers took time from their farmwork in turns to clear a path to the four sites located in the remote mountain forest. Mr. Suzuki contacted the members of the press in Tateyama and called the major television studios in Tokyo inviting them to attend and record the first Tachiki Trust labeling event in the Momeiri Hills of Miyoshi. Children as well as adults took part in the first demonstration of “labeling” trees. By the end of the day, 123 trees at four sites had wooden signs attached to them with the names and addresses of purchasers written on them. Many had messages written on them as well, such as one by a seven-year-old boy that simply stated, “Let’s grow together!” NHK broadcast the news tape twice that day during prime viewing time, at 6:15 PM and again at 9:00 PM. Within a week, the Miyoshi Village Mountain Trust Committee had received telephone calls from 373 people nationwide who had seen the televised broadcast; these viewers purchased 1,078 trees at ¥1,500 (US$15) a tree.

Within six months, a total of 17 landowners with 7.53 hectares (18.6 acres) of land located at 33 sites scattered about the proposed golf course had agreed to join the Miyoshi Tachiki Trust movement. Sobu Development Corporation officials found themselves in a quandary; they could not continue negotiations with other landowners because of the pockets of resistance by the landowners associated with the Tachiki Trust movement within the proposed golf course site. The developers vacated their office in Tateyama in March 1993, and the Miyoshi Village Mountain Trust Committee stopped accepting offers to buy trees at that time. The golf course proposal was officially defeated in March 1994 when the contract to begin construction expired. Co-partnership members had bought more than 1,000 trees, and a total of 3,330 trees had been placed in trust by more than 2,000 individuals representing 1,451 families nationwide.

By 1996, the Tachiki Trust oppositional tactic was being used at more than 100 locations throughout Japan. It is now being employed to stop the construction not only of golf course resorts but also of winter ski resorts, oceanside resorts, nuclear power plants, expressways, and garbage dump sites, as well as to stop the expansion of military facilities.

Conclusion

The example of the Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership demonstrates the efficacy of consumers from urban areas uniting with organic farmers in a long-term relationship based on equality and trust. Farmers are able to survive as full-time farmers and consumers are given a direct connection to the land that produces the food they consume. Both farmers and consumers are able to expand their horizons and engage in a variety of activities that they would not have the opportunity (or, in some cases, inclination) to participate in otherwise. Working together toward an alternative vision of what Japan can become, participants are engaged in concrete actions that create new cultural values and new social relationships and challenge the dominant culture’s socio-political assumptions.

The Miyoshi-Tokyo Co-partnership members entered the political arena and raised the consciousnesses of other residents beyond short-term economic self-interests to encompass long-term environmental and social concerns. Farmers and consumers in the group influenced each other, and after ironing out their differences, were able to act collectively. The organizational strength and effective use of the mass media in turn encouraged others, in the city and in the country, to become involved, directly or indirectly. The experience strengthened the bonds between the farmers and the consumers. They fought collectively and were able to realize their collective goal: to halt the proposed golf course.
The Adventures of an Ideology: 
Western Marxism in Post-Mao China

This article intends to bring to light the adventures of Western Marxism in China in the 1980s. It focuses on the philosophical ideas raised and illuminates the views of reformist and orthodox Marxists in the polemic about Western Marxism. I argue that in early 1989 the debate about Western Marxism had escalated into a fundamental challenge to the official ideology—a challenge that came to a sudden halt with the Tiananmen crackdown on 4 June 1989 and the chilling effect this event had on ideological discussion in China.

by So Wai-chor

The Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1978 ushered in a decade of ideological fermentation in China that lasted until the Tiananmen crackdown on 4 June 1989. During this period, despite official campaigns against "bourgeois liberalization" and "spiritual pollution," orthodox Marxism, understood by the CCP as Marxism-Leninism, became less sacrosanct. Discussions on various aspects of Marxism, in particular on "humanism" and "alienation," captured the limelight in Chinese intellectual circles throughout much of the 1980s. Adhering to (jianchi) and developing (fazhan) Marxism in a new direction became leading themes among Chinese intellectuals.

During this period of ideological fermentation, Western Marxism, a European non-Leninist Marxism that included thinkers like Georg Lukacs and Karl Korsch, captured the attention of Chinese Marxists. In the Maoist era, this type of Marxism was simply condemned as revisionism, but a new evaluation emerged after the death of Mao. Like the discussions on humanism and alienation, much heat was generated by the polemic about Western Marxism.

This article will shed light on the adventures of Western Marxism in China in the 1980s. It will focus on the philosophical ideas raised during that period and consider the views of reformist and orthodox Marxists. By early 1989 the debate on Western Marxism had escalated into a fundamental challenge to the official ideology. Reformist intellectuals envisaged nothing less than a paradigmatic shift in orthodoxy Marxism. The challenge ceased to exist when the crackdown in Tiananmen Square cast a chill over all ideological discussion. Nevertheless, interest in


3. In the 1980s, the themes of "adhering to" and "developing" Marxism frequently appeared in the writings of Chinese Marxists. See, for example, Su Shaozhi, "Makesi zhuyi: Jianchi yu fazhan" [Marxism: What to adhere to, what to develop], in Makesi zhuyi yanchiu [Studies on Marxism], no. 1 (1986): 115-126; Li Zehou, "Jianchi yu fazhan" [Adhere to and develop] in Xinhua wenzhai [New China Literature Selections], no. 9 (1986): 10. In June 1985, the journal Shehui kexue (Social Sciences), Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, invited articles on "adhering to" and "developing" Marxism. See Shehui kexue, no. 6 (15 June 1985): 2.

Western Marxism among Chinese intellectuals survives and the intensity of the debate about Western Marxism is a trustworthy barometer of the ideological atmosphere in China.9

The State of Chinese Marxism after the Third Plenum

In the 1980s, discussions on Marxism among Chinese intellectuals were more intense than at any time since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Three stages of development may be discerned. The first stage was the liberation of thought after the Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party in December 1978. This was the time when Deng Xiaoping exploited the liberation of thought to fight against Hua Guofeng and to justify his economic reforms. The second stage began in 1983 when the limitations of Marxism were fearlessly broached by reformist intellectuals. Pluralistic tendencies in Marxism, the early ideas of Karl Marx, and differences in ideas among the founders of Marxism were no longer forbidden topics of debate in intellectual circles. A third stage started in 1988 when the discussion on Marxism finally culminated in a challenge to the basic philosophical premises of Marxism. The discussions on Western Marxism that flourished in this stage ended with the Tiananmen crackdown in June 1989.

A decade earlier, after the Third Plenum in December 1978, “seeking truth from facts” had become the official party line. Subsequently the trial of the Gang of Four and the process of “de-Maoization” helped to dismantle the dogmatic ideological substructure. China’s intellectuals began to re-examine Mao Zedong’s version of Marxism.8 Like the renaissance of Marxism in Eastern Europe in the 1960s, Chinese intellectuals at the early stage of the liberation of thought were attracted to elements of humanism and alienation in Marx’s thought, two elements that had long been ignored by orthodox Marxists. This neglect, in the opinion of reformist intellectuals, partly explained the disasters brought about in the Maoist era. Wang Ruoshui, deputy editor of the People’s Daily, was thinking like this when he initiated the discussion on alienation and humanism in Marxism.7 By 1983 debates on these two concepts became intense. Zhou Yang, a high ranking official before the Cultural Revolution and deputy director of the Propaganda Department in the early 1980s, came to the fore affirming the importance of humanism in Marxism. He minced no words, arguing that various kinds of alienation in fact existed in socialist China.8 Faced with growing challenges to official Marxism, party conservatives succeeded in persuading Deng Xiaoping to launch an anti-spiritual corruption campaign in October 1983. Dissenting views were drowned out.9

When Deng sensed that the anti-spiritual corruption campaign might stifle his reform effort, it was soon brought to an end.10 Critical attitudes towards Marxism among Chinese intellectuals emerged once again after the campaign. By 1983-84, the second stage of discussion on Marxism began. The revival coincided with another round of reform efforts in 1984 when a “planned commodity economy” was introduced.11 Reformist intellectuals began to focus on the limitations of Marxism in dealing with contemporary problems. Su Shaozhi, a world-renowned Chinese Marxist of the 1980s, epitomized the critical trend towards Marxism among Chinese intellectuals. Su was the first deputy director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (IMLMT) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), founded in July 1979. In 1982 he was elected director of the institute and served in that post until his ouster after the Tiananmen crackdown in June 1989. He has led a life of exile in the United States ever since.12 Su clearly is a Marxist with a liberal bent. As early as 1983, in an article commemorating the centenary of the death of Marx, Su took the view that true adherence to Marxism meant developing Marxism creatively. But how was this to be done? The answer, to Su, lay in the interaction between Marxism and concrete reality. He appealed to Marxists to link Marxist thinking with contemporary situations, for “Marxism has vitality precisely because it continuously draws its life-force from the steadily developing reality.” “New developments in China,” Su noted, “required Chinese intellectuals to distinguish the fundamental and universal aspects of Marxism-Leninism from its transitory and specific features.”13 Marxism, to Su, was no longer immune to change.

5. Bill Brugger and David Kelly suggest that “Attitudes towards Western Marxism are a key indicator of intellectual change in China, precisely because many of the implications of Marxism without Lenin were first worked out by Western Marxists such as George Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, and their successors.” See Bill Brugger and David Kelly, Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era, p. 15. David Kelly briefly mentions the polemic about Western Marxism among Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s in his article “Representative Culture: Official and Unofficial Values in Tension,” in Kuan Hsin-chi et al., eds., China Review 1991, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), pp. 16.14-16.15.


7. For a selection of Wang Ruoshui’s articles on humanism and alienation, see Wang Ruoshui, Wei ren dao zhiu bianhu [In Defence of Humanism] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986). Bill Brugger argues that there were many similarities between Wang Ruoshui’s ideas and those of radicals of the 1960s. See Bill Brugger, “From ‘Revisionism’ to ‘Alienation’.” Wang certainly would not like to be identified as a Maoist in his struggle for a tolerant ideological atmosphere in China.

8. Zhou Yang, “Guanyu makesi zhiyi jige Wun wenti de tantao” [A discussion on several theoretical questions in Marxism], Renmin ribao [People’s Daily], 16 March 1983: 4-5.


11. Ibid., pp. 170-172.

12. For Su Shaozhi’s account of his years at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, see Su Shaozhi, “A Decade of Crises,” pp. 335-351.

The limitations of Marxism were even recognized in the official press. On 7 December 1984, the People’s Daily carried commentary stating that Marxism-Leninism, a product of earlier years, could not solve all contemporary problems. It emphasized that theory should link up with reality, calling for the abandonment of a dogmatic attitude towards Marxism. The article, which prompted foreign journalists to speculate that China might abandon Marxism altogether, did usher in a period of journalistic criticism concerning the relevance of Marxist ideas to the contemporary world. One such piece was penned by Deng Weizhi, an editor in the Shanghai branch of the Chinese Encyclopaedia Publishing House, and later an active participant in the democracy movement. In an article published in the People’s Daily on 14 March 1986, Deng stated that to develop Marxism, “breakthroughs” (tupo) were essential. Marxism could never be developed, he contended, if the old ways held force. Some basic principles in Marxism might not always be “essential” and outdated principles should be discarded, he argued. Deng acknowledged that many basic principles of Marxism were still full of vitality, but he maintained that they should all be tested in practice.

Other aspects of orthodox Marxism were also questioned in this critical atmosphere. Reformist intellectuals eagerly argued that different types of Marxism should be tolerated. Deng Weizhi and Wang Ruoshui stated that as Marxist ideas interacted with concrete situations in different countries, different schools of Marxism would emerge. Leninism, in this sense, was merely one school of Marxism. Furthermore, Deng Weizhi broke official taboos by mentioning in passing that not all of the ideas of “Young Marx” were un-Marxist and that differences in ideas and political climate, a wide-ranging review of Marxism, socialism, and capitalism was undertaken by Su Shaozhi’s Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Sensitive topics concerning Marxism were discussed in the Institute: the crisis and pluralization of Marxism in China. The critical review of Marxist theories by practice, the question of the privileged position of Marxism in China, and the importance of humanism and alienation in Marxism.

The essence of this critical review was fully reflected in Su Shaozhi’s article “Re-understanding Socialism” published in Shijie jingji daobao (World Economic Herald) on 24 November 1986. Su’s chief contention was that Marxism had a limited sphere of applicability:

Marxism, being a science, not a religion, cannot be treated dogmatically. Marxism is only a science, not an all-inclusive “Science of Sciences.” As one of the sciences, it must follow the rules and characteristics of science in general. Any science, confined by its own special conditions and limitations, can be applicable only over a certain range. So, a particular science can be imperfect, surpassed, and falsified. Marxism cannot become a science while these basic characteristics and rules are neglected and despised.

True to his critical spirit, Su called into question some of the statements of Lenin and Stalin. Lenin’s emphasis on a unitary perspective of Marxism as a science and a product in the context of certain historical conditions and practice. As such it might change and develop with experience today’s reality and their works could not solve all contemporary problems. For the article, see pp. 58-63.

Shaken by student unrest, the party had tightened its control over ideology by late 1986. Hu Yaobang was ousted as the party’s general secretary in January 1987 and a second round of anti-bourgeois liberalization campaigns was organized. Su Shaozhi and other party intellectuals were lambasted by party conservatives led by Wang Zhen. Protected by Zhao Ziyang, Su survived the attack and retained his party membership. Yet his colleague at the IMI, MT, Zhang Xianyang, and prominent intellectuals like Wang Ruoshui, were either forced to retire or expelled from the party.

But the reformist intellectuals were not silenced. Protected by Zhao Ziyang, they continued their quest for a new understanding of Marxism. The year 1988 witnessed a new stage of development of Marxism in China. The critical review of Marxist philosophy culminated in an attempt to change the basic
premises of Marxism. Again, Su Shaozhi took the lead in attacking orthodox Marxism. In January 1988, in a response to comments made by U.S. scholars about his Marxist views, he spelled out the position he had come to after years of re-asserting Marxism. Marxism in China, Su felt, had strayed from original Marxism. He argued that the Marxism China had learned from the Soviet Union was Stalinism, not true Marxism. Understandings of Marxism in China had suffered further when Mao Zedong made mistakes in both theory and practice in his later years. Furthermore, as a product of nineteenth-century capitalism, Marxism had its limitations; it contained certain utopian elements, for example, that did not conform to contemporary reality. Su reiterated that Marxism was a science and as such it should, like science, not recognize eternity or absolute authority. It needed to develop in line with practice in order to remain fresh.27

By this time, the debates had broadened into a wide-ranging reassessment of Marxism's basic philosophical premises. Foremost in these debates were the role and importance of the concepts of subject and practice in Marxism, the re-evaluation of the traditional philosophical categories such as thinking and being (subject and object), and the transcendence of the philosophical division between materialism and idealism.28

The concept of subject had assumed a pivotal position in Marxism ever since Wang Ruoshui asserted that "[M]an is the starting point for Marxism." Its importance was further highlighted when Li Zehou, another prominent Marxist intellectual, dealt at length with the concept of subject in his works.29 At the same time discussions about the concept of practice gradually grew beyond the boundary of "practice as the sole criterion for testing truth." Many Chinese intellectuals began to describe Marxist philosophy as "practical materialism" (shijian weiwu zhuyi).30 Practice, in their view, took on an ontological meaning in Marxism. Dialectical materialism and historical materialism, long revered in orthodox Marxist textbooks, were relegated to a secondary position or dismissed altogether as not reflecting the essence of Marx's philosophy.31 Even Engels's insistence that the basic problem in philosophy lay between thinking and being was challenged. Engels's premise was said not to have taken into account the role of human beings and the importance of a concept of practice in history; and his assertion had confused rather than enlightened the basic problems in philosophy.32 The emphasis on practical materialism, with practice as unifying both the subject and the object, led to the conclusion that philosophy in the contemporary era should transcend the traditional—and outmoded—philosophical division between materialism and idealism.33

In the same vein, Lenin's philosophical view was also disputed. Wang Ruoshui argued that Lenin's theory of reflection, as elaborated in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, was different from Marx's viewpoint. Like other critics of the theory, Wang traced the sources for their differences to the fact that Lenin only recognized the importance of the object in the cognition process while Marx also emphasized the role of the subject. Wang cited the First Thesis in "Theses on Feuerbach" in support of his argument. He chided Lenin for according practice a lesser role in Marxist philosophy. Lenin, Wang noted, took practice as the basic criterion in the cognition process, whereas Marx took practice as having an ontological meaning. In sum, Marx and Lenin had different philosophical premises.34

All these debates and symposia epitomized the tolerant ideological climate of the time. This atmosphere gave rise to a surge of interest in Western Marxism among China's intellectuals. The unprecedented interest shown by intellectuals towards this current of thought was closely related to other critical attitudes towards Chinese Marxism at the time. As we shall see, discussions about Western Marxism reinforced and deepened the debates on orthodox Marxism, strengthening challenges posed to the official Chinese version of Marxism.

The Introduction of Western Marxism into China

In the Maoist era, Western Marxism had been criticized as revisionism and bourgeois thought masking itself as Marxism. Georg Lukacs, widely regarded as one of the leading Western Marxists, was condemned by the CCP as a through and through revisionist. Lukacs had long been a suspect figure in the international Communist movement. In 1924 he was denounced at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International for deviating from Marxism. On various occasions from 1949 to 1962 he was criticized severely in his native country of Hungary as a revisionist.35 When Mao Zedong launched a nationwide political cam-


28. For a review of the debates about the various philosophical premises of Marxism, see, for example, Yang Zhengjiang, Zhexue tixi zhongyao wenxi yanjiu [A Study of Important Issues in the Philosophical System] (Shanghai: Yuandong chubanshe, 1993); Yu Hongwei et al., Shijian weiwu zhuyi yanjiu gaishu [A Brief Account of the Study on Practical Materialism] (Dongying: Shiyu daxue chubanshe, 1990).


32. For a review of the debates regarding basic problems in philosophy among Chinese intellectuals, see Yang Zhengjiang, Zhexue tixi zhongyao wenxi yanjiu, pp. 139-162 and Zhonggao zhexue nianjian 1989, p. 95.

33. Yang Zhengjiang, pp. 162-175.

34. Wang Ruoshui, "Xiangzi zhuyi he fanyingli wenxi" [Realism and problems of reflection theory], Wenhui bao (12 July 1988): 3.
The ideas of Western Marxists. But he never intended to question
41. A list of recent publications and translated works in the series is
included in Chen Xueming,

Western Marxism made its debut in the Chinese academic
world in the early 1980s. The first systematic scholarly work
was written by Xu Chongwen, whose 648-page book Xifang makesi
zhuyi (Western Marxism) was published in 1982. 37 Xu has been
a research fellow at the Institute of Philosophy, CASS, and
vice-president of the Study Society on Contemporary Foreign
Philosophy. In his 1980 publication Baowei weiwu bianzheng fa
(In Defence of Materialist Dialectic), he echoed the party line
and dismissed Western Marxists as bourgeois thinkers. 38 After
the publication of Western Marxism, Xu began to think more
independently and to argue that there were fruitful elements
in the ideas of Western Marxists. But he never intended to question
the official premises of Marxism. Western Marxism had the
modest aim of providing a basic textbook on the subject for
higher institutes and learned societies. It tried to be as compre­
hensive in its coverage as possible—the ideas of all major
Western Marxists were set out and briefly examined. 39 The
publication of this book made Xu the acknowledged pioneer in
this field. 40 He later became the editor-in-chief of the series
Guowai makesi zhuyi he shehui zhuyi yanjiu congshu (Studies
on Overseas Marxism and Socialism), and under his editorship
numerous works of Western Marxists have been translated into
Chinese. 41 A substantial number of publications appeared in the

35. See Istvan Meszaros, Lukacs' Concept of Dialectic (London: The
37. Xu Chongwen, Xifang makesi zhuyi [Western Marxism] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1982).
38. See Xu Chongwen, Baowei weiwu bianzheng fa [In Defense of Materialist Dialectic] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980).
39. The leading thinkers of Western Marxism treated in Xu Chongwen’s book include Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Wilhelm Reich, thinkers of the Frankfurt School, Henri Le–
féuvre, Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Galvano Della–Valpe, Lucio Colletti, Louis Althusser, Serge Mallet, and Andre Gorz.
40. Chinese scholars have often acknowledged the pioneer position of
Xu Chongwen in the study of Western Marxism. See, for example, Zhang Yibing, Zheduan de lixing chibang: Xifang makesi zhuyi xueshu quanjie [The Broken Rational Wing: A Critique of the Philosophy of Western Marxism] (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1990), p. 2; Chen Xueming, Xifang makesi zhuyi lun [An Analysis of Western Marxism] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), p. 626.
41. A list of recent publications and translated works in the series is
included in Chen Xueming, Habeimai de “wangzi zhe xuehui” lun [Analysis of Habermas’s Theory of “Late Capitalism”] (Zhonggang: Zhonggang chubanshe, 1993), after page 444. For a brief
summary of Xu Chongwen’s research activities on Western Marxism, see Zhongguo xueshu nianjian 1989, pp. 365-366.

43. For a summary of the discussions at the Changchun symposium, see Zhexue yanjiu, no. 10 (1986): 79-80; Zhongguo xueshu nianjian 1987, pp. 101-102.
44. See Shenji and Qixun, “Yao bawo lunzhan de shizhi: Ping Hong Liane danu ‘xifang makesi zhuyi’ lun zhan de shuping” [We must grasp the essence of the polemics: A critique of Hong Liane’s ‘Comments on Polemics on ‘Western Marxism’ in Mainland China’], Zhongguo lunan [China Tribune], no. 356 (July 1990): 71; Xu Chongwen, “Jian–
chi shishi qujian, luishi yang xiangxiang jiaocai xianshi” [Insist on seeking truth from facts, or use imagination to alter the reality], Zhong–
quo lunan, no. 319 (September 1990): 73. One of the important translated
works by Du Zhangzhi was Lukacs’s Record of a Life: An Autobiogra­
phy, published in 1986. Since 1989 Du has been engaged in a
more ambitious project. He intends to translate the classical
works of Marxists and publish six series of books on “New Marxism.” See
45. For a selection of articles written by Xu Chongwen and Du Zhang–
zhi, see Xu Chongwen, “Guanyu ‘xifang makesi zhuyi’ yanjiu zhong
de ruogan wenti” [On several questions relating to the study of “Western
Marxism”], in Hong Liane, ed., Xifang makesi zhuyi lunzhan ji [An
Anthology of Polemics on Western Marxism] (Taibei: Senda tushu yoyou gongsi, 1990), pp. 41-62. The article was originally published in Makesi zhuyi yanjiu, vol. 1 (1987): 134-152; Xu Chongwen, “Ji
‘xifang makesi zhuyi’ wenti de Du Zhangzhi tongzhi” [A reply to
Comrade Du Zhangzhi about the questions on “Western Marxism”] in
Xu Chongwen, “Xifang makesi zhuyi” luncong [An Anthology of

37. In his book Lukacs’ Concept of Dialectic, Lukacs describes dialectic
as a method of overcoming alienation, but he also argues that
the dialectical method is itself a form of socialization.
38. The title of Lukacs’s book refers to the idea that the dialectical
method is a means of social construction.
39. The article was originally published in Zhexue yanjiu, no. 3 (1985): 33-39.

40. Chinese scholars often acknowledged the pioneer position of
Xu Chongwen in the study of Western Marxism. See, for example, Zhang Yibing, Zheduan de lixing chibang: Xifang makesi zhuyi xueshu quanjie [The Broken Rational Wing: A Critique of the Philosophy of Western Marxism] (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1990), p. 2; Chen Xueming, Xifang makesi zhuyi lun [An Analysis of Western Marxism] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), p. 626.
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summary of Xu Chongwen’s research activities on Western Marxism, see Zhongguo xueshu nianjian 1989, pp. 365-366.
defender of the orthodox Marxist position and Du was hailed as a reformist intellectual who dared to take a critical look at Marxism.

In the polemics on Western Marxism, it is interesting to note that the journal *Makensi zuyi yan'chuan* (Studies on Marxism) and the CBT both played a conspicuous role. Under the editorship of Su Shaozhi and his independent minded colleagues, *Studies on Marxism* served as a major forum for discussion of Western Marxism. And Du Zhangzhi was not the only one in the CBT to hold unorthodox views on Western Marxism. Other intellectuals at the CBT like Mao Yunze, Tong Guomu, Wang Jisheng, and Li Huibin supported Du’s views and questioned the philosophical premises of orthodox Marxism. The CBT had a close working relationship with Su Shaozhi’s Institute, as reflected in their collaboration in the translation of Bukharin’s work into Chinese. They were both behind the movement to reevaluate the official ideology through Western Marxism.

### The Xu-Du Polemic

The Xu-Du polemic in 1988 revolved around two main issues: whether Western Marxism is a Marxist current of thought and how “Marxist” the ideas of Georg Lukacs are, especially those expressed in his book *History and Class Consciousness*. Judging whether a current of thought was Marxist, Xu believed, depended on whether it had a “Marxist philosophical world view” (makensi zuyi shijie guan). What then, is a “Marxist philosophical world view”? Xu’s concept did not just parrot the orthodox view. In an innovative way he termed Marx’s philosophy “practical materialism.” To him, the concept denoted the following:

On the one hand practical materialism puts heavy emphasis on the role of practice, [it] maintains that the thing, reality and sensuousness, should be conceived not only through objective and subjective forms but also through sensuous human activity, through practice, and from the point of view of the subject. Also [it] insists on materialism and the primary position of nature.

Practical materialism, unlike the traditional orthodox interpretation of Marx’s philosophy, distinguishes itself by laying heavy emphasis on “practice” and “subject.” To Xu, this restores an aspect of Marxism that had long been neglected by Chinese Marxists. But Xu had no intention of deviating from orthodox Marxism. He contended that practical materialism was identical with dialectical materialism in that both emphasized the primary position of nature and materialism. Yet he preferred to call Marx philosophy “practical materialism” because he believed that the term truly reflected the importance of practice and subject in Marx’s philosophy. In Xu’s view, Western Marxism is not Marxist because it deviates from these ideas. Xu’s analysis of the ideas of two distinguished Western Marxists, Lukacs and Gramsci, further illuminates his point of view.

Analyzing Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness*, Xu Chongwen determined that Lukacs deviated from orthodox Marxism in three areas: the dialectic of nature, the theory of reflection, and the concept of practice. To Lukacs, the essence of Marx’s dialectic consisted in the interaction between subject and object; hence it existed only in history and in the social realm but not in nature. Yet Engels applied dialectic to nature, and this, in the opinion of Lukacs, showed vestiges of Hegel’s influence. Xu quoted various statements from Marx’s works such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *Capital*, and argued that Marx, like Engels, insisted on the objective reality of the dialectic of nature. Engels’s understanding of the “dialectic of nature” merely followed Marx.

Lenin’s theory of reflection, hailed by orthodox Marxists as the cornerstone of Marxist epistemology, was criticized by Lukacs for being nondialectical because it presumed a separation between “thinking” (subject) and “existence” (object). Xu contended that Lukacs did not grasp the true meaning of the theory of reflection. He reiterated the orthodox Marxist position that the theory of reflection, contrary to Lukacs’s position, is not a “simple,” “direct,” “passive,” and “total” reflection. The theory of reflection involves an active cognitive process and the revolutionary participation of human beings.

On the question of practice, Xu Chongwen picked on a remote point raised by Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukacs was opposed to Engels’s position that “scientific experiment” and “industry” are component elements in practice. Both scientific experiment carried out in an artificial and “ideal” environment, and industry operated in a bourgeois system, do not take man as an active agent in practice. Human beings in this case are still “objects” of history. Thus, this kind of practice, to Lukacs, is not really practice in the dialectical sense. Xu of course disputed this conclusion. He did not make an elaborate defense of Engels’s position but simply reaffirmed that both scientific experiment and industry have objective laws and serve human purposes; they constitute an important element of practice.

Xu concluded that Lukacs’s *History and Class Consciousness* was a typical work of “Hegelian Marxism” and that it rightly restored the activist side of the subject. But the work undeniably was not Marxist: “Hegelian Marxism” has interpreted the Marxist philosophical world view as practical ontology and reduced...
the essence of the world to mankind-in-practice. It has put matter and spirit together as the unity of opposites through the practice of mankind. It has rejected Marx’s insistence on the primary position of nature. In this way, it has deviated from Marxism.” 52

“Foremost in [the] debates on Marxism were the role and importance of the concepts of subject and practice in Marxism, the re-evaluation of the traditional philosophical categories such as thinking and being (subject and object), and the transcendence of the philosophical division between materialism and idealism.”

Like Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci was not entirely a Marxist according to Xu. Gramsci, Xu said, described Marx’s philosophy as “practical philosophy,” but Gramsci gave practical philosophy a new twist of interpretation. Xu claimed that Gramsci intended his practical philosophy to transcend and replace the traditional philosophy of both materialism and idealism, and Gramsci wrongly defined materialism as meaning only mechanical and vulgar materialism. Gramsci thus claimed that Marx never described his philosophy as materialism or as “dialectical materialism.” 53

Xu Chongwen found Gramsci’s philosophical stance disagreeable. Gramsci’s problem was that he wrongly took practice as the ontological basis of Marxism, of which both “matter” and “nature” on the one hand, and “spirit” and “consciousness” on the other, are unified through human practice. There is no need to treat matter or nature as primary and existing independently outside of human consciousness. There is simply no distinction between idealism and materialism, which, to Xu, clearly is contrary to the ideas of Engels and Lenin. 54 In sum, Xu held that Gramsci’s philosophy was totally different from that of Marx. 55

At the inception of his debate with Xu Chongwen in 1988, Du Zhangzhi took the position that Western Marxism, as it encompassed very different Western thinkers like Georg Lukacs, Jean Paul Sartre, and thinkers of the Frankfurt School, was a muddled concept. He accused Xu of following the lines of Perry Anderson’s delineation of the shape of Western Marxism. He agreed with the view of a U.S scholar, Stanley Aronowitz, that the concept of Western Marxism was riddled with problems of definition. 56 Du tried to argue that Western Marxism was a dubious concept in order to rescue some of the Western Marxists like Lukacs from being grouped with “bourgeois” thinkers like Sartre. His conclusion was that before we judge whether a theory is Marxist or not, we should understand more about the theory itself. He preferred treating different versions of Marxism as inquiries into Marxism and did not condemn them as anti-Marxist. 57

Du Zhangzhi’s philosophical position was given definite shape when he and two other intellectuals, Zhou Suiming and Weng Hansong, published the article “How to evaluate Lukacs” in the People’s Daily on 27 January 1989. 58 Lukacs’s History and Class Consciousness and Towards an Ontology of Social Being were the focus of the analysis. The authors of the article acknowledged that the first work did have a “complicated influence” in the West; some Western thinkers borrowed Lukacs’s ideas to serve their own purposes. Moreover, there were clear inadequacies in this work: the emphasis on totality as a methodology was carried too far (resulting in an ill fit with the concept of economic infrastructure); an inordinate amount of attention was put on social practice (losing sight of the fact that Marxism had a theory of nature); and the work was stamped with the metaphysical construct and methodology of Hegel’s logic. Despite all these weaknesses, they maintained that in essence History and Class Consciousness was an important Marxist work. 59

In their view, Lukacs’s work succeeded in criticizing the “naturalistic tendency” (ziran zhuyi qingxiang) of the theorists of the Second International. It reinstated the methodological basis of Marxism by explaining both nature and history from the angle of “practice in history” (lishi shijian). 60 Lukacs’s notion of totality railed at the vulgar economism of the Second International and propounded to take “total social activities of the subject and the object” as the basis of history. It brought to the fore the concept of practice and the social side of human material activities and existence. These were in tune with Marx’s concept of practice. 61 Marx, they said, recognized the independent existence of nature, but he also emphasized that in practice nature in its objective form acquired a subjective side as well. Hence, in Marx’s doctrine, “social being” as an ontology should supersede “nature” as an ontology. Lukacs’s work, Towards an Ontology of Social Being, encapsulated this idea. By postulating labor as the central category in social practice, the mutual interpenetration of humankind and nature as well as person-to-person relations were brought into focus. The work highlighted human subjectivity as well as the objectivity of practice in the process of history. Lukacs, like Marx, not only underlined the element of material means of production in society (shehui cunzai), he also recognized the vital importance of practice. This is a return to the concept of practical materialism as advocated by Marx in the Theses on Feuerbach. The three authors concluded that Lukacs corrected the erroneous tendencies in the study of Marxism and contributed to a restoration of an ontology of social being and

53. Xu Chongwen, trans., Shiyan zhexue [Practical Philosophy] (Zhongqing: Zhongqing chubanshe, 1990), pp. 9-15. This work is a translation of Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971). In this translated work Xu wrote a long preface commenting upon Gramsci’s philosophical ideas.
the repudiation of a theory of "naturalist ontology" (ziran benti lun). 62

Herein lies the basic philosophical difference between Xu Chongwen and Du Zhangzhi. Although both employed the term "practical materialism" to describe Marx's philosophy, Xu emphasized the primary position of nature and materialism, while Du took practice as the mediating link between nature, society, and thinking. The issue of the primary position of nature and materialism—two sacred components in orthodox Marxist philosophy—was blurred. For Xu, nature is the ontological basis of Marx's philosophy; for Du, practice takes on an ontological meaning.

Xu Chongwen and Du Zhangzhi were aware of the political implications of their polemics. In the heat of the debate, Du made a barbed remark that Xu Chongwen's views would have been understandable when "leftist" ideas were still prevalent, but in the current situation in China these views were clearly out of date. 63 In response, Xu Chongwen accused Du of not thinking in terms of an "ideological line." Western Marxism, Xu pointed out, was an umbrella term covering Hegelian Marxism, Freudian Marxism, Phenomenological Marxism, Existential Marxism, Positivist Marxism, and Structural Marxism. In Xu's opinion, Du tried to synthesize all these Marxisms, but not in a synthesis typical of Mao Zedong thought. In the latter case, Xu stated, the general truths of Marxism and Chinese revolutionary conditions were synthesized. Western Marxism, on the other hand, was a synthesis of the Marxist world view and the world view of other Western philosophical currents. Such a synthesis, Xu thought, would only create confusion within Marxism. 64

The Xu-Du debate broke new ground in the study of Western Marxism in China. 65 Since then a spate of articles and works on various leading thinkers of Western Marxism and their ideas have been published. 66 Eventually the discussions on Western Marxism culminated in an attempt in 1989 to change the basic premises of official Chinese Marxism.

Critiques of Orthodox Marxism

The ideological challenge posed by reformist intellectuals in 1989 had everything to do with the political climate of the time. In early 1989, reformists led by Zhao Ziyang were besieged by conservatives in the Party. At that time the reforms of prices and state enterprises were stalled and social discontent brought on by inflation and corruption was on the increase. It was rumored that the conservatives had pressed Deng Xiaoping to remove Zhao. 67 The tension between reformists and conservatives in the Party reached a high pitch. Coincidently, reformist intellectuals made use of the debates on Western Marxism to launch a challenge against official ideology. It appears that reformist intellectuals, sensing that their patron Zhao Ziyang was under pressure from Party conservatives, made a concerted effort to strengthen the hands of the reformists by intensifying the debates on Western Marxism.

The challenge came from the journal Studies on Marxism. In its first three issues of 1989, several Chinese intellectuals were courageous enough to put forward ideas diametrically opposed to the official positions of Chinese Marxism. The dissent was first sounded by Weng Hansong in an article on Western Marxism. 68 His views were elaborated on by Gong Jingcai, Wang Jisheng, Li Huibin, and Li Huaijun. 69 Xu Chongwen lost no time in taking issue with them, defending the orthodox Marxist positions. 70

This time the polemic between the two camps went beyond the boundary of discussions on Western Marxism shaped by the Xu-Du debate, raising issues central to orthodox Marxism. A paradigmatic shift in orthodox Marxism was envisaged.

The focal point of the new polemic on Western Marxism was ontology. The discussions were closely linked to the understanding of the essence of Marx's philosophical world view and to the relative importance of the notion of practice in Marx's doctrine. A correct understanding of Marx's philosophy was, to the participants in the polemic, a prerequisite for any judgment on Western Marxism.

The philosophical position of the reformist intellectuals was expounded in the most systematic way by Wang Jisheng and Li Huibin. Wang and Li came from the CTB and were colleagues of Du Zhangzhi. In an article in Studies on Marxism, they explained the basic tenets of practical materialism and cited its

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62. Ibid.
63. Du Zhangzhi, "Xifang makesi zhuyi shi yige hanhu de keyi de gaijia, " p. 97.
65. For a discussion on the Xu-Du polemic and its political and ideological implications, see Hong Liande, ed., Xifang makesi zhuyi luntan ji, pp. 3-26; Shengji and Qiuzhen, "Yao bawo luntan de shizi," pp. 70-80.
66. For a selected list of publications discussing Western Marxism, see ibid., pp. 78-80. See also, Chen Xueming, Xifang makesi zhuyi lun; and Ou Litong and Zhang Wei, Falankefu xuepai yanjiu [A Study of the Frankfurt School] (Zhongqing: Zhongqing chubanshe, 1990).
68. Weng Hansong, "Dangqian 'xifang makesi zhuyi' wenti xin xinglin zhi wojian" [My opinion on the new controversy on the present issues of "Western Marxism"], Makesi zhuyi yanjiu, no. 1 (1989): 189-201.
69. See Gong Jingcai, "Wo bei Xu Chongwen tongzhi xifang makesi zhuyi guan de jidian kan" [My opinion on Xu Chongwen's view of Western Marxism], Makesi zhuyi yanjiu, no. 2 (1989): 256-267; Wang Jisheng and Li Huibin, "Shijian weiwu zhuyi haishi jiu weiwu zhuyi?" pp. 181-192; Li Huaijun, "Tan tan dangqian 'xifang makesi zhuyi' zhenglin de shizi" [Talking about the nature of the present polemic on "Western Marxism"], pp. 262-269.
70. For Xu Chongwen's defense, see Xu Chongwen, "Buyao ba weixin shijian guan shuocheng shijian weiwu zhuyi. Ping Du Zhangzhi, Weng Hansong eng tongzhi de qingnian Lukaqi guan" [We must not take the realist concept of practice as practical materialism. A comment on Comrades Du Zhangzhi and Weng Hansong's view on Young Lukacs], Makesi zhuyi yanjiu, no. 3 (1989): 163-180; "Yao huxiao shijian weiwu zhuyi ju shijian zhexue de yuanze jixieen. Da Li Huibing Wang Jisheng tongzhi" [We must clarify the line of demarcation between practical materialism and practical philosophy. A reply to Comrades Li Huibin and Wang Jisheng], in Xu Chongwen, Yong makesi zhuyi pingxi xifang sico [Using Marxism to Evaluate Western Currents of Thought] (Zhongqing: Zhongqing chubanshe, 1990), pp. 362-380.
differences from traditional materialism. The first basic principle of practical materialism, they said, is that it takes the subject as the medium for understanding reality. Citing Marx's statements in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*, Wang and Li pointed out the main weakness of traditional materialism: it attempts to apprehend phenomena, reality, and sensation through the object or through contemplation, not through the sensuous activities of human beings, nor through practice and subject. Feuerbach makes a similar error. Thus, history and materialism were separated. (In the opinion of Wang and Li, Xu's standpoint was similar to Feuerbach's.) The philosophy of orthodox Marxism suffered from the same mistake. Both dialectical materialism and historical materialism treated the spiritual entity and material entity as two separate categories with no mediating links. Practical materialism aims at correcting these defects. It posits a "historical nature" (*lishi ziran*) or "natural history" (*ziran de lish'i*) and unifies humankind and nature through real, sensuous activities. Apprehension of nature and human beings is through practice. Thus, practice is the ontological basis of practical materialism. This position echoes the ideas expressed in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Indeed, both Wang and Li quoted approvingly Gramsci's notion of the historical nature of matter. 72

Wang and Li proceeded to give a new reading of materialism. They declared that materialism does not necessarily have material entity as its ontological basis. "Material activities" (*wuzhi de huodong*), "material relationships" (*wuzhi de guanxi*), or—put simply—practice, can be the ontological basis for this world. They cited Marx's writings to support their views. According to their reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*, Marx sums up the basis of the real world as "continuous sensuous activities," "industrial development," "productive activities." Marx never attempts to determine whether matter (being) or spirit (consciousness) is primary. Human beings, to him, do not exist in the abstract; Marx always situates them in real life and activities. Thus, Xu Chongwen's emphasis on the primary position of nature is not really Marx's position but a derivation from traditional materialism. 74

Lukacs's ideas were now interpreted in the light of the new reading on the ontology issue. Gong Jincai, a student of Du Zhongzhi and a scholar of the philosophy department of Hebei University, published an article commenting on Lukacs's article "What is orthodox Marxism?" Among other things, Gong stated that Engels, followed by many Marxist thinkers, maintained that nature (matter) was prior to society and was the ontological entity for philosophical systems. But in Lukacs's thought, nature was subordinate to society, human beings, and human practice. To Gong, it was Lukacs who correctly captured Marx's idea. Gong admitted that Marx once maintained that "the priority of external nature remains." But Marx also noted that "a being which is not the object of another being therefore presupposes that no objective being exists." Based on this statement, Gong took that part of nature that was still untouched by human beings as "nonexistent" and lacking "any practical value and meaning." He argued that Marx's dialectical system did not take nature but instead history and total practice, as the primary entity. The argument that Lukacs's ideas were basically in line with Marx's world view would shock orthodox Marxists.

In the same vein, the ideas of another leading Western Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, were evaluated in a new light. Li Huibin, a colleague of Du Zhongzhi, made the startling assertion in the *Guangming Ribao* on 17 July 1989 that Gramsci had a profound understanding of Marx's philosophy. 76 To Li, Gramsci did not take materialism or idealism seriously, for he worked to transcend their division and unify the two through the concept of practice. Such a reading of Marx's philosophy, stated Li, indicated that Gramsci took a great interest in the First Thesis of the "Theses on Feuerbach." Li agreed that practice should take priority over matter, as a result a new understanding of matter was required. He adduced passages in *The German Ideology* to show that without human practice, all existence could not be talked about: "[T]his activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the basis of the whole sensuous world as it now exists, that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon, find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing." 78 Gramsci's understanding of matter in the context of human practice, Li concluded, conformed to Marx's ideas.

The new reading of Marx's philosophy also led to a preliminary probe into the intellectual affinity between Marx, on the one hand, and Engels and Lenin, on the other. Assertions were made that the philosophies of Engels and Lenin were in some respects at variance with that of Marx. Weng Hansong pronounced that Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* had a deeper intellectual affinity with Engels's *Anti-Dühring*. For one thing, Lenin's theory of reflection was closely related to Engels's idea of a dialectic of nature. And they both failed to understand the essence of Marx's materialism. Reading between the lines, Weng gives the reader the impression that Marx's philosophy was different from the philosophies of Engels and Lenin. But he refrained from a detailed discussion. The only major point made

72. Ibid., pp. 186-187.
73. Ibid., pp. 183-185.
74. Ibid., pp. 187-189.
77. For Gong Jingcai's arguments, see Gong Jingcai, "Zhengtong makesi zuhui de zhengxin," pp. 50-51. Gong's view was supported by Li Huijuan. See Li Huijuan, "[T]an dangqian 'xifang makesi zuhui' zhengxin de zhengshi," pp. 263-265.
80. Li Huibin, "Gelanxi dui makesi zhuxue sихiang de lijie," p. 3. Li Huibin's radical interpretation of Gramsci's ideas was criticized by Chen Zhishang, a Chinese intellectual, for distorting Marxism. See Chen Zhishang, "Buyao yong Gelanxi qujie makesi zuhui" [Do not use Gramsci to distort Marxism], *Guangming ribao* (19 October 1989): p. 3.
by Weng was that Lenin offered a wrong interpretation of Marx’s philosophy by saying that Marx took “nature” and “matter” as the ontological basis of the world. The truth, contended Weng, was that Marx regarded nature, society, and thinking as the constituent elements of the world, with practice as the mediating link. This line of reasoning led Weng to assert that even though Western Marxists differed from Engels and Lenin in their rejection of a dialectic of nature, their position corresponded with Marx’s practical materialism.81

Having depicted such a division among Marxism’s founders, reformist intellectuals tended to view Western Marxism as part of Marxism. Gong Jingcai did not think that ideas that are different from those of Engels and Lenin should automatically be regarded as beyond the pale of Marxism. Marxism, according to Gong, is not merely a theory or the interpretations of Engels and Lenin; it is also a practice, a “cultural phenomenon existing in totality.” Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism-Maoism is not the only model of Marxism; true Marxism is actually based on the fundamental ideas of Marx and Engels as well as on ideas generated by Marxist inquiries into new conditions and new problems. Hence, variants of Marxism may arise in different countries following a synthesis between the general principles of Marxism and actual revolutionary conditions in those countries. These variants are both similar to and different from Leninism, Gong contended.82

These ideological challenges to official doctrine in 1989 indicated that reformist intellectuals did attempt to dismantle several central tenets of orthodox Marxism. Their reevaluation of Lukács’s ideas was a step towards a reexamination of the philosophical presuppositions of orthodox Marxism. Gramsci’s philosophy also shaped their thinking on the concept of practice and the ontology issue. The notion of practice was brought in to replace nature as the ontological basis of Marxism and Marx’s materialism was interpreted in such a way as to accord a central place to practice. Differences of views in epistemology and ontology were even suggested between Marx, on the one hand, and Engels and Lenin, on the other, as the debates raged on. In this process, the ideas in Marx’s early works, “Theses on Feuerbach,” The German Ideology, and the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts were cited to justify their critical reevaluation.


In effect, the reformist intellectuals restored a Marx who saw “nature” and “history” as closely interpenetrated, with practice as a mediating element between them. This Marx is alien to official ideology. Had it not been for the Tiananmen crackdown on 4 June 1989, the debates on Western Marxism would have continued and orthodox Marxism would have had to face serious challenges.

Western Marxism after Tiananmen

The Tiananmen crackdown in June 1989 shattered the reformist faction in the Communist Party. Zhao Ziyang was stripped of all his official positions; the conservatives in the Party tightened their grip on ideology; and reformist intellectuals were silenced, with some forced to go into exile overseas.83 The editorial board of Studies on Marxism was immediately reshuffled after the crackdown, and Su Shaozhi and his colleague Zhang Xiangyang were expelled from the board.84 The polemic over Western Marxism gradually fizzled out; but research and the publication of academic studies on Western Marxism have continued in the years since 1989. Introducing the ideas of leading Western Marxists to Chinese audiences continues to be a task for Chinese intellectuals. Two outstanding examples of introductory texts are Chen Xueming’s book Xifang makesi zhuyi lun (An Analysis of Western Marxism) and his collaborative work with Yu Wujin, Guowai makesi zhuyi zhexue liupai (Marxist Philosophical Currents in Overseas Countries).85 Specific studies on various aspects of Western Marxism are also popular. Among these are the study of the Frankfurt School by Ou Litong and Zhang Wei and the study of Western Marxist theories of contemporary capitalism by Li Qingyi.86 Added to this body of literature are an increasing number of translations of works by Western Marxists. The Series of Studies on Overseas Marxism and Socialism, under the editorship of Xu Chongwen, is but one remarkable example.87
Nevertheless, the ideological atmosphere has changed. Re­formist intellectuals dare not challenge orthodox Marxism. Most of the reformist intellectuals who participated in the polemic over Western Marxism have become more circumspect in their evaluations of Lukacs’s work and Marx’s philosophy. Although Du Zhangzhi recognizes Lukacs as an important Marxist thinker, he admits that *History and Class Consciousness* is “not a totally mature Marxist work” and has “numerous vestiges of Hegelian influence.”

Li Huaijun also has a different evaluation of Marx’s philosophy. Though Marx employed the concept of practice as a mediating element between subject and object, human beings and nature, as well as spirit and matter, Li states, he ultimately accorded a primary position to nature. Nature remains the ontological basis for Marx’s philosophy. The assertion that practical materialism can transcend the traditional division between materialism and idealism is, to Li, too subjective. Li is now uncon­vinced that Marx’s philosophy should be termed practical materialism. On the whole, orthodox views are more conspicuous in recently published works on Western Marxism. A new batch of scholars, Cao Yuwen, Li Qingyi and Zhang Yibing, all lay stress on the non-Marxist nature of Western Marxism.

In the field of Marxist philosophy the orthodox view also predominates. Debates on practical materialism, the ontological issue in Marx’s philosophy, the nature of Engels’s and Lenin’s philosophy—debates that have been generated and reinforced by the polemic over Western Marxism—have continued to this day. But now the debates are clearly dominated by orthodox views.

In the post-June 1989 period, Western Marxism no longer plays a facilitating role in the re-thinking of Chinese Marxism. To be sure, there have been a few bold exceptions. In *The Philosophical Ideas of Lukacs*, a book published in the New Marxism series in Taiwan in 1993, Gong Jingcai analyzes various works produced by Lukacs in different periods of his life.

He mentions in passing that Lukacs’s *History and Class Con­sciousness* indeed reveals the true Marx. Though different from Engels and from official Marxism in the idea of the dialectic of nature, Lukacs follows Marx’s philosophy, Gong maintains. Another reformist intellectual, Weng Hansong, still disagrees with the orthodox portrayal of Marx’s philosophy. He insists that Marx takes practice as the mediating element linking nature, society, and thinking. Thus, he contends, practice should be taken as the ontological entity in Marx’s philosophy. These are the lone voices, however, in post-June 1989 China and their expressed viewpoints no longer give rise to debates about Marxism.

### Conclusion

Compared with its fate in the Maoist era, Western Marxism has made significant strides in China in the post-Mao period. Heated debates over Western Marxism were common in the latter half of the 1980s. Before the Tiananmen crackdown, the reformist intellectuals boldly used the ideas of Western Marxists to challenge Chinese Marxism. Inspired by Lukacs’s work, *History and Class Consciousness*, and by Gramsci’s practical philosophy, they put forth a new interpretation of Marx’s philosophy, differentiating his philosophy from that of Engels and Lenin. They also used the “philosophical” part of Western Marxism to challenge the official ideology. This is not surprising given that Western Marxism is basically anti-Leninist. Reformists first attempted to recognize Western Marxism as a variant of Marxism; then to use it as an effective weapon to question the central tenets of orthodox Marxism.

This questioning of orthodox Marxism has been blocked since 4 June 1989. Chinese intellectuals now approach Western Marxism in a solely academic way and within an orthodox Marxist framework. The “political” element has been conspicuously absent from the studies of Western Marxism; only the “academic” element remains. The continuing interest of Chinese intellectuals in this area makes it possible for Western Marxism to flourish as an “academic” subject, but its capacity to influence the “ideological world” has been diminished. In the face of these difficulties it must be concluded that the introduction of Western Marxism into China over the last ten years has broadened the horizons of Chinese intellectuals. The number of works published in this field in China is evidence that Western Marxism has been given a place of importance among Chinese intellectuals. After all the years of lively debates on Western Marxism, Chinese intellectuals will never again look at orthodox Chinese Marxism with the same eyes.

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87. See footnote 41.
90. See, for example, Xu Chongwen, *Yong makesi zuhui pingu huiyang xifang shico* [Using Marxism to Evaluate Western Currents of Thought] (Zhongqing: Zhongqing chubanshe, 1990), pp. 42-58; Cao Yuwen, “Makesi zuhui yu xifang makesi zuhui zai zhuanhuang de duali” [The philosophical antagonism between Marxism and Western Marxism], *Xinhua wenhai*, no. 4 (April 1990): 30-35; Li Qingyi, “Xifang makesi zuhui de dandai ziben zuhui biliu” [The two current views of Western Marxism], *Zhongguo zhexue nianjian* (1991), pp. 297-303; Zhang Yibing, *Zhexue de lingxi changbian*, pp. 317-321.
From Anti-Feudalism to Sustainable Development: The Kerala Peoples Science Movement

People's science movements (PSMs) have become an important but little studied recent phenomenon in India. Originating in anticaste thinking of the 1950s, PSMs attempt to popularize nonmystical, scientific thinking, especially among India's rural poor. Many PSMs have evolved into significant centers of activism against social inequality and for environmental protection. The original and largest PSM in India is Kerala's KSSP, with more than 50,000 members. KSSP's history illustrates the changing focus of PSMs and shows that the organization has been able to influence many developments in Kerala over the past 30 years, including protection of the species-rich Silent Valley, improving the schools, promoting discussion of alternative plans for agriculture, industry, and electrical power; campaigning against unsafe drugs, fostering total literacy, installing high-efficiency cooking stoves, and conducting an innovative people's resource mapping campaign. When the 1996 Left Democratic Front Ministry decided to launch a people's campaign for local-level development planning, KSSP became a major mobilizing force for the campaign.

by T. M. Thomas Isaac, Richard W. Franke, M. P. Parameswaran

In recent years, India has witnessed the rise of a number of people's science movements. These movements attempt to popularize science among ordinary people, especially in India's thousands of villages, through lectures, street drama, children's science magazines, and other mechanisms. People's science activists attempt to spread secular attitudes that undermine religious and communal passions such as those that erupted in 1992 with the right-wing Hindu destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque. Toward that end they encourage the adoption of Gandhian-based ideas of Indian self-reliance, independence from major power blocks, and local development initiatives.

India's people's science movements represent an important experiment in participatory development initiatives at the village level. One of the most influential and substantial of these movements is the Kerala People's Science Movement (KSSP).

With more than 50,000 members, the Kerala People's Science Movement is one of the largest active voluntary organizations in Kerala. Its monthly magazines, Sastragathy (Progress of Science) and Sastra Keralam (Scientific Kerala), reach tens of thousands of readers; its children's science magazine Eureka has 80,000 subscribers; its health camps inform people about disease prevention; its science jathas, or processions, raise science awareness; its books such as Why Are Things the Way They Are? and How Do Things Work? are read by school children across the state; its campaigns for environmental protection have made it Kerala's most important ecology group. The KSSP has made itself a dynamic force in Kerala's radical, educated, activist culture.

How did a popular movement organized around scientific knowledge become so influential in Kerala's public life? In this essay, we attempt to answer this question by surveying the history of the KSSP, examining its scientific and political ideas, and briefly considering its accomplishments and shortcomings. We believe that the experiences of the KSSP may provide ideas...
and inspiration both for science-minded activists and activist-minded scientists in other parts of the third world.

**Antifeudalism and the Formation of KSSP: 1957-1967**

The Kerala People’s Science Movement traces its origins to 1957 when a group of concerned science writers gathered in connection with a literary conference at Ottappalam. The group managed to produce a book on science and laid plans for a translation of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and two other similar books into Malayalam, the language of Kerala.

In 1962, a group of thirty science writers in Calicut independently organized a forum of science writers. Their actions led to the formation of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), or “Science Writers Forum of Kerala.” This group linked up in 1965 with Kerala scientists from Bombay who had independently begun working on the idea of rendering scientific literature in Malayalam. In one of their earliest statements, a scientist-founder of KSSP justified the group’s formation: “We are living in an age of science... The general laws of science and the discoveries of science that exert such great influence on the development of mankind, should not remain as the family property of certain experts. Either these experts themselves or some other people have to shoulder the responsibility of explaining them to the common man in a language he can understand.”

This expression of democracy in the practice of science was rooted in these expressed beliefs of early KSSP activists: (1) that scientific knowledge and scientific thinking would help to undermine what they saw as the mystical basis of the feudal structure of Kerala—a structure that embodied the belief that high-caste Brahmans were “clean,” “pure,” and “high,” while those who produced most of the wealth were “dirty,” “untouchable,” and “low”; (2) that science involved both technical and social progress (“It is not enough that the people study science; they must live accordingly,” one scientist-activist argued); and (3) that a people’s movement should fight knowledge inequality alongside other forms of discrimination because there are divisions between “haves” and “have-nots” in scientific knowledge just as there are in land ownership, income, and political power.

KSSP held its fourth annual conference in the central Kerala city of Trichur in 1967. Here the various original groups came together, wrote a constitution, and, in July 1968, registered the organization in Kerala under the Charitable Societies Act.

**KSSP Becomes a Mass Movement**

In 1967 KSSP emerged as a mass movement, organizing demonstrations and meetings around the demand for greater scientific education in Malayalam and the preparation of a Malayalam scientific dictionary. At this time, Dr. Triguna Sen, the first non-Hindi Education Minister in Delhi, allocated financial resources for the development of regional languages. The state government in Kerala, under left leadership, used the allocation to set up a State Institute of Languages in Trivandrum to develop scientific literature in Malayalam. Most of the scientists and science writers recruited for this work were or quickly became supporters of KSSP. They organized seminars, workshops, and symposia, leading to publication of several scientific and technical books and articles.

The work of the socially committed scientists at the Institute spurred further activities by KSSP members around Kerala including the launching of a quarterly science journal *Sastra Gathy*, which became a monthly in 1974. By 1970 KSSP was publishing two more journals: *Eureka*, aimed at the age group 8 to 12, and *Sastra Keralam* for those 16 and older. In 1977, the organization made available a gift box of ten children’s books on science. The initial press run of 8,000 copies sold out almost immediately and a second edition was printed in the same year.

KSSP’s numerous publications brought science into Kerala’s extensive school network. As one KSSP leader described the process: “[O]ccasionally one boy or girl browsing through [*Eureka*] gets some doubt which they try to clear with their teacher. It was an unusual thing, a student asking doubts, especially from outside the text book. Most teachers brush them aside, but occasionally one teacher gets excited, and soon [the student] finds [his or her] way to the KSSP.”

In 1969 KSSP launched “A Pretaste Course,” a course designed to give tenth-grade students an introduction to college courses and to explain the nature and importance of various scientific subjects and how these subjects are interconnected and related to people’s daily lives.

In 1973 KSSP began forming science clubs in the schools; by 1975 more than 1,500 such clubs had been formed.

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Another school-related activity was science talent tests such as the “Sastra Keralam Quiz,” started in 1972 for high school students. Two years later, activists in Trichur organized a science talent test for primary school children. At both high school and primary school levels, scholarships were given to top ranking scorers, with some of the questions drawn from materials that had appeared in Eureka and Sastra Keralam.

Beyond the Schools

Beyond the schools, KSSP activists sought to bring scientific knowledge and thinking to the broader public. A 1973 mass education campaign developed around the idea of beginning the school year with “Science Week.” Over 1,000 lectures were given on topics such as “evolution of the universe” and “man and society.” In 1976 a second science campaign on “nature, science, and society” involved more than one million people in 12,000 classes. Lecture campaigns in the years after 1976 dealt with topics such as “Kerala’s resources,” “public health,” and “agriculture in Kerala.” The success of these campaigns derived in part from KSSP’s policy of recruiting new personnel from outside the organization.

KSSP invented new forms of science education such as the science jatha, or procession. This creative form of education reached a high point in the Science Cultural Jatha of 1977 when a group of science activists toured the length of Kerala for thirty-seven days giving lectures at twenty to thirty places a day and reaching more than half a million people. Local KSSP activists organized street theater, folk dance, exhibitions, book stalls, lectures, and science competitions at each of the stopping points during the jatha. Jathas are now a regular feature of town and village life in Kerala.

Rural science forums were another activity developed in the mid-1970s by KSSP. Established in every village administrative unit in Kerala, the rural science forums were self-reliant, independent entities organized for purposes of local-level development planning. By 1978, 600 such forums had come into being. Unfortunately the lack of sufficient local technical skills meant that the rural science forums were not able to tackle village-level problems by themselves. The forums ended up becoming units of KSSP.

One reason for KSSP’s growth and popularity was its unique style of work. Known in Kerala as parishattikata, the KSSP style is characterized by informality, simplicity, frankness, friendship, and the absence of rigid hierarchical structures. Generally no one person continues in an official position for more than two years; many leading activists do not even participate in the executive committee.

The most important meeting of KSSP during the year is the Annual Camp. One participant described a typical annual meeting in words that summarize KSSP’s general ambience: “It was a commune of the best eighty Parishat [KSSP] activists rather than the office bearers. It is still an experience that the activists recall with fond affection. Frank discussion forgetting everything else. Discussions through day and night. Really a Parishat family was evolving and it was there that the mutual friendship, faith and respect that were to be central for all the later Parishat activities were developed.”


Another element of parishattikata is personal responsibility. KSSP workers’ education documents emphasize the need to reply to letters, keep proper accounts, volunteer for tasks, and avoid gossiping and grumbling in favor of open and constructive criticism.12

Consistent with its emphasis on democracy and participation, KSSP does not receive regular grants from anyone and accepts no monetary help from any foreign funding agency. Instead, KSSP depends primarily on the personal contributions of its members and on profits from the sale of KSSP books and pamphlets.

KSSP maintains a nonconfrontational approach vis-à-vis competing organizations, although it has been the victim of direct and indirect attacks by conservative and religious forces in the state. Arguing that God is outside the realm of science, KSSP has refused to be drawn into a debate on God and religion. Nonetheless, right-wing Hindu fundamentalists attacked KSSP activists physically in Quilon in 1988 for allegedly undermining the glorious traditions of ancient Hindu science. Similarly, a Muslim League newspaper criticized KSSP for offering village classes on the theme “nature, science, and society.” The Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference charged KSSP with propagating atheism and threatened teachers in Catholic schools who were supporting KSSP activities.13 Progressive members of all the religious communities have worked to overcome conservative opposition to KSSP’s science teachings.

Despite the fact that the KSSP is clearly more comfortable associating with generally left-wing forces, its ideas and activities have earned it respect—sometimes grudging—from conservative political parties. The major political parties have come to consider the Parishat [KSSP] an “all-party organization similar to the Library Movement in Kerala.”14

Science for Social Revolution

In 1974, KSSP adopted “science for social revolution” as its leading slogan. At first, the slogan only meant that science should become a weapon in the hands of the poor and the oppressed in their struggles against the rich minority who exploit them. Later, the slogan acquired sharper features, distinguishing KSSP from all other mass movements in Kerala—a creative synthesis between Marxist and Gandhian concepts.

KSSP perceives Indian society as divided into broad antagonistic camps—a majority, which is constantly impoverished or faces the threat of impoverishment, and a minority, which is constantly enriched at the expense of the majority. Revolution for KSSP means a discontinuity, a reversal of this process. KSSP evolved a strategy to achieve the empowerment of people at the grass roots, strengthening local self-government, and creating democracy by making small not only beautiful but also powerful.15 KSSP believes that ordinary people learn skills and acquire self-confidence by becoming involved in a variety of struggles.

the length of the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border. After a year-long discussion, KSSP adopted a resolution opposing the project at its annual conference in 1978. An interdisciplinary team of KSSP questions for the Western Ghats mountain range that runs most of the project in a report entitled “The Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project: A Techno-Economic and Socio-Political Assessment.”

This report relied on data gathered from field trips to Silent Valley by KSSP members as well as research findings from the Kerala Forest Research Institute and studies by scientists in the Botanical Survey of India, the Zoological Survey of India, and the Geological Survey of India.

The KSSP’s experts arrived at six major ecological arguments against the project: (1) the dam would submerge 830 hectares of reserve (protected) forest, including the invaluable riparian ecosystem; (2) the Silent Valley—one of the biologically richest, oldest, least disturbed, and largest continuous stretches of forest in the Western Ghats—is capable of being protected since it includes reserve forest area and is somewhat isolated; (3) the Valley’s flora are complex and not yet studied; (4) it contains a gene pool of unknown but probably immense diversity; (5) it is the habitat of at least three endangered species of animals, including the Lion-tailed Macaque, one of the most threatened primates in the world; (6) because of the integrated nature of ecological systems, hydroelectric power projects might have serious consequences for nearby environmental zones that could not be adequately outlined in advance.

KSSP members concluded that the power generated by the project either in relation to the overall energy position of Kerala or the southern Indian grid, was only of marginal benefit when weighed against these ecological factors. In addition, they argued, sole reliance on hydroelectric sources for power was risky in the event that a weak monsoon would leave too little water to turn the generators.

KSSP activists argued their case against the project not solely on a “purist” basis—protecting the environment at any cost—but also on a cost/benefit basis. They added that alternative energy sources such as thermal plants or other hydroelectric projects might prove more valuable to Kerala and do less ecological harm in the long run. Only one-third of Kerala’s hydroelectric potential was being tapped, the activists noted, and they argued that the immediate needs of the local people could be met by strengthening the distribution network for electric power.

KSSP activists understood that the people of Malabar had long yearned for a better electrical supply. A KSSP report noted: “It is true that the Silent Valley is one of the richest biospheres in the whole world, but it is also true that for the people of Malabar, the question of energy, of irrigation, of employment and of development is more real, immediate, and obvious than the necessity of protecting the unique biosphere of Silent Valley. Without winning over the confidence and co-operation of the people of the locality in particular, and of Kerala in general, the Silent Valley cannot be saved.”

KSSP’s largest and most significant environmental struggle was its campaign to halt the construction of a dam below the Silent Valley of the northern Kerala region of Malabar. This project, which was to generate 522 million units of electrical energy, was sanctioned in 1973; preparations for the work started in 1976.

Controversy initially arose when scientists associated with the Indian central government questioned the ecological consequences for the Western Ghats mountain range that runs most of the length of the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border. After a year-long discussion, KSSP adopted a resolution opposing the project at its annual conference in 1978. An interdisciplinary team of KSSP experts and activists then enumerated the arguments against the project in a report entitled “The Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project: A Techno-Economic and Socio-Political Assessment.”

From Mass Science Education to Political Action

In the years from 1977 to 1987 KSSP launched campaigns against abuses of science and technology. These included exposure of the ill effects of the Kuttanad Development Project, which involved the construction of dikes, dams, causeways, and spillways in a vast area that is generally one to two meters below sea level at the southern end of Lake Vembanad. KSSP research documented adverse ecological effects from the project such as an increase in water weeds, concentration of fertilizer and pesticides in the lake, a decline in the fish population, a drop in the water table (leading to problems with drinking water and water for coconut trees), and an increase in rodents and other pests. Release of the project report in 1978 was an eye-opener even for KSSP activists, forcing them to adopt a more critical attitude toward development projects.

KSSP’s campaign for “social revolution” first by opposing the use of science and technology by the haves against the have-nots, then by proposing alternatives to involve people in mass actions for alternative uses of science and technology. Another phase started in 1988 with the mass literacy campaign, continued through participatory resource mapping and micro-level planning from 1988 to 1991, and then through the people’s campaign for the formulation of Kerala’s ninth five-year plan for economic development.

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16. The tragedy that befell the Kuttanad region—a result in part of the Kuttanad Development Project—has beenmovingly documented in a video, The Weeping Rice Bowl, produced by Kerala’s Centre for Development Communications. The video traces the processes leading to the lake’s decline, asking whether water diversions, the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and other elements of the Green Revolution program did long-term harm in return for very short-term good. See note 49.

With this philosophy, KSSP began a prolonged and intense mass campaign that involved thousands of meetings and hundreds of lectures and seminars, exhibitions, and theatrical performances. Activists lobbied political leaders and bureaucrats, wrote articles in newspapers and journals, and instigated court actions. Eminent scientists and scientific organizations both in India and abroad came forward in defense of Silent Valley.

Convinced that the Silent Valley Project was pivotal to development in Kerala the project’s supporters vehemently attacked KSSP and challenged the validity of its arguments. Critics charged that KSSP opposed all dams and claimed that it was playing into the hands of forces in the imperialist West who opposed all forms of development by Third World peoples.

KSSP prevailed, however, and won an important political victory when, in 1983, the Indian central government withdrew its sanction for the project. But the Silent Valley campaign had changed KSSP in significant ways. From an organization established to translate and popularize science, KSSP now became involved in debates about how best to use science in the development of Kerala.

Theoretical Beginnings of Sustainable Development

Publication of The Wealth of Kerala in 1976 had put KSSP in the forefront of Kerala’s development thinking. The Silent Valley campaign brought KSSP into the new arena of sustainable development, a movement that was just then becoming popular in development circles in the West. But KSSP thinking has shown itself to be more elaborate and overarching than development theory in the West. KSSP environmentalists see Western ecologists as fixated on the environment as nature only. By contrast, KSSP activists see ecology as including economic and cultural elements. Human-nature interaction is a social activity and as a consequence the natural and social sciences must be seen as integrated systems.18

KSSP accepts the need for rapid increases in productivity and production—traditional development goals—but it also emphasizes equitable distribution of wealth, creation of jobs, and sustainability. In the 1985 lecture campaign centered around its book The World We Live In, KSSP organizers argued that ecological struggles are part of the general social struggles going on in the world. Ecological struggles can play an important role in social mobilization and consciousness-raising for social transformation, they maintained.

In 1987 KSSP published Kerala: Land and Man, a book that attempted to apply the lessons of its earlier book, The Wealth of Kerala, to the problems of development in the areas of agriculture, industry, energy, forestry, education, and health.

Agriculture: KSSP developed a four-point critique of Kerala’s agricultural development:

1. Prices of farm products have not increased as rapidly as those of both wage and non-wage inputs. Little attention has been paid to the organization of marketing agricultural products in Kerala.
2. Insufficient attention has been paid to ecological factors in maintaining the agricultural resource base. The recurrent droughts during the long dry season (January to May) in the late 1980s and the consequent lowering of the water table in many areas have played havoc with crops like coconut, on which Kerala depends as much as rice for income and subsistence.
3. Technical inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, and irrigation works have not been carefully studied for maximum benefit. Irrigation in particular has been left almost entirely to large-scale projects of dubious worth. No attention has been paid to local-level water management. The irrigation of garden lands—extremely important in Kerala along with the paddy fields to which they are often attached—has been neglected. Because of the undulating terrain of much of Kerala, large-scale irrigation may actually be less cost-efficient than smaller development schemes.
4. Land-holding patterns may not be conducive to the best utilization of resources. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of land holders in Kerala, for instance, do not depend upon cultivation as their main source of income. Landholders of this type are not inclined to invest in intensive cultivation.

Industry: KSSP supports the industrial development of Kerala, but with some safeguards, including ecological impact assessments. It rejects the proposition that people must accept pollution for the sake of industrialization just as it opposes the argument that workers should accept a reduction in wages in order to attract industries. The organization also opposes unplanned industrial development. KSSP fought the construction of a new aluminum plant, for example, because it was determined that the high demand for electric power in aluminum processing would accentuate electrical power problems in Kerala.

18. A capitalist society requires constant vigilance on the part of the people because the profit calculus of capitalists does not take into consideration the short- or long-run social and environmental costs of their investments. This and related ideas were discussed at the Parishat’s 14th annual conference in 1977 under the theme Man and Environment. See V. K. Damodaran et al., eds., Manushyanum Chutupadum [Man and His Surroundings] (Trivandrum: KSSP, 1977).

A scene from “Kothamuri,” a folk art form of Northern Kerala in which the downtrodden and oppressed make their criticisms known about the landlord in veiled language. Courtesy KSSP 1985.
In place of "industrialize-at-any-cost" approaches, the KSSP favors an industrial policy that encourages the development of industries that use raw materials that are already abundant in Kerala like rubber; that utilize scarce resources like electrical energy cautiously; that have the greatest employment potential; have linkage effects to small-scale sectors within Kerala; and that exploit the consumer markets within Kerala.

To deal with Kerala's severe problem of more than 25 percent unemployment, KSSP has proposed the introduction of intermediate technologies in the coir, handloom, and cashew-processing industries—technologies that would raise productivity and improve the quality of the products without causing large-scale displacement of workers.

Energy: KSSP blames unscientific planning and inefficient management by the Kerala State Electricity Board for the severe power crisis in the state. In 1990 only about one-half of the state's domestic consumers received enough power to run electrical appliances. Projections for adequate power generation for the remaining years of the 1990s are not hopeful given the systems currently in operation. KSSP has proposed an alternative power-generation program that includes completion of present hydroelectric projects (not including Silent Valley of course) on a priority basis; construction of a Salem-Trichur 400-kilovolt connection to achieve a better allocation from the central electrical grid; the reduction of line losses by 10 percent from their current 27 percent; upgrading of the older hydroelectric stations; and construction of new hydroelectric stations with adequate ecological safeguards.

KSSP activists also call for higher rates above a certain minimum usage. Despite the power shortage, KSSP has not endorsed the construction of nuclear power plants in Kerala. Given the high population density of the state a major nuclear accident would be disastrous. Even a low-level leak would have serious consequences given the interconnected system of waterways in Kerala. KSSP does not oppose the development of India's nuclear energy capability generally, however. Nor does the organization appear to consider the health and safety dangers of coal-burning plants to outweigh their benefits.

Forestry: Deforestation is one of Kerala's most formidable problems. The Western Ghats Mountains make up 56 percent of the total geographical area of Kerala State, and include its entire forest area. Satellite photos, evidence from historical records, and on-site verification all show that Kerala's forest cover declined from about 44 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century to only 17 percent in 1973. Of 17 million square kilometers of forest in 1905, only 6.6 million remained in 1973.

KSSP organized a state-level jatha in 1983-84 in order to raise public awareness about the depletion of Kerala's forests.

20. Ibid., p. 2091.
21. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 223.
KSSP activists travelled through the forest belts collecting signatures for a petition to be submitted to the state legislative assembly. The campaign included padayatras (foot marches), dharnas (sit-ins) at forestry offices, seminars, and lectures. (The campaigns were not without personal risk, as KSSP volunteers found out during the “Munderi March” in 1985 when they risked their personal safety by marching into a forest area where trees were being felled illegally.)

Along with such high-profile actions, KSSP also engaged in serious analysis and reconsideration of state-sponsored social forestry schemes. In 1986 the KSSP decided to dissociate itself from Kerala’s social forestry program because the program had changed to a World Bank-sponsored effort. KSSP questioned the project’s introduction of alien varieties of trees, pointing out that—contrary to the claims of the World Bank agents—local people preferred to plant native fruit tree saplings.

Education: All KSSP activities contain an educational component: the jathas, the lectures and seminars, the publications, the petition drives. But the KSSP also engages in formal school-related programs that aim to make learning and teaching interesting and useful, to formulate improved educational and curricular policies, and to agitate against corruption, privatization, and commercialization of education.

KSSP is so well recognized for its expertise—and its popularity—that the Education Department of the state government cooperates with it in organizing science clubs, science fairs, and science talent tests. The prestige that has come to be associated with KSSP tests has produced some undesirable effects, however. Institutions began coaching students for the tests and commercial publishers started producing guides for test preparation. In response, KSSP has attempted to play down the competitive aspect of the tests, to decentralize the program, and to inject a more festive spirit into the examination process.

Teacher training—another KSSP program—includes the preparation of notes by KSSP experts and activists for use in science courses and workshops for teachers.

Although it is constantly evolving, KSSP’s philosophy of education retains much of the framework set forth in the Document on Education prepared at its eleventh annual conference at Mancheri in 1982. This document presents a detailed discussion of education as a tool for social change, along with a critical analysis of the present school system in Kerala: its elite bias, the alienation from productive labor that it engenders, the irrelevance of much of the curriculum, unscientific teaching methods that destroy the inquisitiveness of the students, the lack of adequate facilities, the outmoded examination system, the pernicious continuing influence of caste and religious interests, and educational policies that are generally anti-people.

Health: Along with many other health activists in India, KSSP voices strong criticisms of the health care delivery system—a system that favors the building of sophisticated hospitals while rampant “poverty diseases” go untreated. KSSP has been able to bring into its fold a number of doctors, medical students, and paramedical staff from modern medical institutions and from traditional Indian medical arenas such as Ayurvedic medicine and homeopathy.

KSSP is also critical of India’s pharmaceuticals industry, which is largely controlled by foreign corporations. These multinationals produce about 60,000 drugs, but KSSP doctors estimate that only 250 of these medications would be sufficient to take care of most of the health needs of the country. In 1986 KSSP published a best-selling (35,000 copies) exposé of unethical marketing practices in India’s pharmaceuticals industry: Banned, Bannable, and Essential Drugs.

KSSP’s approach to people’s health led to the organizing of health education classes in rural areas. Subjects taught included disease prevention, nutrition, immunization, first aid, and oral rehydration therapy. KSSP also organized people’s vigilance committees—Hospital Protection Samitis—to improve the health care facilities of government hospitals in many parts of Kerala.

Kerala’s specific health problems differ somewhat from the rest of India. With low infant mortality, low birth rates, and long life expectancy, many of the disease syndromes typical in third world areas does not exist in Kerala. Even so, high morbidity (illness) remains a serious problem. Indeed, Kerala suffers to some extent both from diseases of underdevelopment such as intestinal infections and parasites and from diseases of affluence such as cancer and heart disease.

To develop a deeper understanding of Kerala’s health problems, KSSP conducted a large-scale health survey in Kerala in 1987. The survey offered an opportunity to educate the organization’s activists on specific health problems of Kerala and to intensify the public campaign on general health issues. Month-long health camps were held in all panchayats (village units) of Kerala. These consisted of a minimum of six classes on nutrition, immunization, oral rehydration therapy, first aid, health habits, and blood donation, along with special immunization camps for children under five and pregnant women. Film shows, slide programs, poster exhibitions, health jathas, and medical “parliaments” were also conducted.

The combination of data-gathering, education, and activism encompassed in the people’s health survey illustrates KSSP’s philosophy and approach to science and people’s welfare. It also serves as a take-off point for the organization’s work in supporting the activist programs of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) ministry that came to power in the elections of 1987.

KSSP and the New Democratic Initiatives

The Kerala Left Democratic Front ministry, which lasted from March 1987 to June 1991, launched several programs as part of its New Democratic Initiatives campaign. The most important and successful of these involved three mass actions of the KSSP: (1) the campaign for total literacy, (2) the installation of high-efficiency wood-burning stoves, and (3) the People’s Resource Mapping Programme. Each of these programs illustrates the working style and effectiveness of KSSP and highlights some of its shortcomings and limitations.


In December of 1988, KSSP organized a campaign to establish full literacy throughout Kerala. Thousands of volunteers organized jathas, meetings, drama presentations, and literacy classes in neighborhoods where illiterates were concentrated. In keeping with the KSSP style, high energy, excitement, commitment, and fun were emphasized. With great fanfare, activists opened a project office in the Ernakulam District on 15 December 1988, and kept it open twenty-four hours daily until 4 February 1990 when the district was declared 100 percent literate.

High energy and involvement also marked the creation of popular committees in all 860 panchayat wards and municipal wards of the Ernakulam District. The inauguration of the campaign was festive, with five literacy jathas beginning from five edges of the district on 21 January 1989. Led by major political leaders, literary figures, religious scholars, artists, and academics, participants traveled for six days on foot giving street plays, folk performances, group songs, and speeches at various stopping points. The jathas and artistic performances helped create an atmosphere in which people felt they could come forward and admit their illiteracy and join in the classes. After the classes began, literacy walls were set up in each panchayat ward to give news of the campaign and literacy banners sprouted throughout the district. Ernakulam town put up huge signboards bearing the slogan “Sakshara Nagaram-Sundara Nagaram,” meaning “Literate City-Beautiful City.”

At some events, illiterates were encouraged to come forward and display their talents in song, dance, and recitations. The campaign—in true KSSP style—encouraged such activities as ways to enhance the self-esteem and self-awareness of the learners. Thousands of prizes and certificates were awarded.

KSSP had several goals for the campaign, including the achievement of specific reading and writing skills in Malayalam. KSSP also provided information on basic human needs, the equality of the sexes, the need for clean drinking water, India’s freedom struggle, the nature of local government, and many other topics.

During the campaign, teachers discovered that the lack of eyeglasses prevented many of the learners from reading no matter what efforts were put into the program. In one Muslim region, organizers received donations of more than 50,000 pairs of eyeglasses in just two months in fall 1989. These were matched to those who needed them by volunteers who were given one-day training courses to work with doctors, medical students, and traditional Indian Ayurvedic physicians.

By February 1990, 135,000 persons had learned to read and to write out of an estimated total of 174,000 illiterates in the Ernakulam district. The 135,000 neo-literates had scored over 80 percent on a test given as part of the program; the other 39,000 had failed the test, but gained some literacy skills they could build on in the follow-up programs. An independent observer calculated that each student became literate at a cost of between 205 and 333 rupees. The 333-rupee figure equals less than US$26 per literate person. More than 80 percent of this came in the form of cash and materials or labor contributions from the community. In recognition of KSSP’s work, UNESCO bestowed its 1990 literacy award on the organization.

KSSP saw the literacy campaign as a means to teach literacy, impart scientific knowledge, and instill an awareness of scientific thinking. As such, it fits objectively with both the starting point and the most recent orientation of KSSP: it undermines feudal thinking and it lays a basis for further campaigns for sustainable development.

The campaign went beyond these goals, however. Another achievement was the pride of accomplishment of the mostly low-caste learners. Many of the older learners had fought in earlier years in the land reform struggles or had other long-term experiences with trying to change their lives. Learning to read

29. Ibid., p. 74.
30. Another 60,000 illiterates above the age of 60 were counted in the district. Although some of these people learned through the program, the official success count appears to have involved only those aged 5 through 60 (ibid., p. 50).
31. Ibid., pp. 45 and 81-82.
32. In Report of the Evaluation, P. K. Michael Tharakan included the estimated value of non-monetary inputs to produce a high figure. Dr. K. Ekbal of KSSP estimated the direct money outlay at “Rs 50 per head” (India Today, 31 August 1991:80).
and do arithmetic gave them the confidence to challenge government officials above them. As one journalist reported: "Collectors [high government officials] in Kerala say neo-literates are writing letters to demand better roads and health facilities." 34 Those who are literate and who have felt the power of learning know they have rights. They are willing to struggle for them. Such people constitute a democratic force to which, even a government ostensibly committed to their welfare, must pay attention or face their direct action. As reported by an evaluator of the Ernakulam District Total Literacy Programme (EDTLP), [T]he immediate benefit of the EDTLP was in helping the neo-literates and instructors to become better equipped as participatory citizens. Probably the most astounding example of such a development is from the Pongumchuvadu Tribal Colony where the learners with the help of instructors cleared two kilometers of road through the forest, organized a cooperative society, and organized a fair-price bazaar for Onam.35

The literacy campaign also furthered the breakdown of caste barriers. Teachers from higher castes learned to value their close contact with adult students and their children from the lowest castes.36

Finally, the program seems to have awakened women to continue both their education and their meetings together. At first they were meeting to learn the alphabet; later they came to talk about their problems and their feelings. Their discovery of their abilities and of their solidarity with each other became a force in itself, motivating them to organize and work for cleaner water, better transportation, and more responsible government officials, including members of the Left Democratic Front who supported the program.

A follow-up of the program included publication of a special newspaper, Aksharam, for the neo-literates, and expansion to all districts of Kerala. The all-Kerala expansion resulted in Kerala’s becoming officially 100 percent literate in 1991.

**High-Efficiency Stoves**

Lacking substantial known oil or gas reserves, India depends on wood-burning for 69 percent of its rural energy needs.37 This long-standing practice has resulted in dramatic forest loss, long hours searching for and hauling wood, and considerable air pollution. Research in 1981 indicated that Gujarati household cooks inhale 21,000 milligrams of suspended particulates annually per individual. Non-cooks inhale 3,700 and Ahmedabad city traffic police 2,600. The level recommended by the World Health Organization is 210.38 Cooking for three hours in a Gujarati kitchen has been found equivalent to smoking twenty packs of cigarettes per day in exposure to benzoapyrene, a likely carcinogen.39

KSSP has joined an all-India effort to install high-efficiency stoves (chulhas) to reduce fuel use and improve home air quality. KSSP’s approach has been to carry out user-oriented research and action to popularize and improve the stoves. (High-efficiency stoves were developed in India in the 1940s, but few have been adopted.)

KSSP has established the Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC), where scientists and engineers work on projects including improved stove design. KSSP’s special contribution to stove design and popularization lies in its respectful attitude towards the end users. Household cooks and their family members, for example, are encouraged to participate in the installation of their new stoves.

In 1992 KSSP figured that a high-efficiency stove could be installed for 190 rupees, using household labor and household-provided materials such as tiles, bricks, clay, rice husks (for temper for the clay platform), lime, and sand. KSSP calculates that the original investment of 190 rupees (equal to about five days wages for an agricultural laborer) will save households 600 rupees in fuel costs per year.

Despite these impressive achievements, KSSP is concerned that the acceptance rate of the stoves is still low. Among the reasons given for the continued reluctance to use the smokeless chulhas is the fact that in some areas, kitchen smoke is used to dry copra (coconut) and fish during the rainy season. Moreover, for the poorest 10 percent of rural Kerala households, the one-meter square platform surface required for the chulha is more space than is available. Smaller platform design is thus required for these potential users.40

**From Word Literacy to Land Literacy**

KSSP’s most advanced work towards sustainable development is the People’s Resource Mapping Programme. This program, invented by KSSP activists in collaboration with several Kerala-based geographers and geologists, mobilizes villagers to make maps of their resources. These maps are combined with scientific maps to create a basis for local-level planning with environmental considerations and discussions of the long-term consequences of resource use as well as short-term gains. KSSP activists saw the project as a logical extension of their work in the total literacy campaign: the People’s Resource Mapping Programme is an attempt to create land literacy among the direct owners and users of the land.41

In their initial overview of the program, advocates outlined their view of the interconnection between natural and social processes—a longstanding KSSP position:

34. Ibid., pp. 77 and 80.
36. This aspect of the program is illustrated dramatically in the video The Quiet Revolution in which a college-educated Ezhava teacher comes to value her friendships with former untouchable Parayas.
39. Ibid., pp. 125-126.
The concept of sustainable development has gained significant importance in recent years due to (1) inadequacy of existing development processes to wipe out socio-economic inequality and (2) well-evidenced nexus among environmental degradation, resource depletion, economic disparity and poverty. Many environmental problems like deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, salinisation, water logging, drying up of water courses, etc. are directly or indirectly linked to poverty and consequent stress on the local bio-physical system.\(^{42}\)

Addressing problems such as these, KSSP activists and their scientist allies do not place much trust in large-scale central planning from the national capital (New Delhi) or the state capital (Thiruvananthapuram).\(^{43}\) Who knows better, they ask, than the local landowner, what his or her land and water resources are? KSSP believes that collective action by villagers, together with some input from professionally trained scientists, will create an awareness “of the land as a unit to be understood for proper use.... For this, the involvement of local land owners and users in evaluation, planning, and development can make land use rationalised.”\(^{44}\) Furthermore, they emphasize that

A proper intervention strategy can only be worked out if the status of natural resources along with their spatial distribution is understood fully by the planners, the land owners, and the users. Involvement of local people in this process brings out relevant, at the same time genuine, problems that affect productivity. In addition, it would generate not only a sense of participation among the local people but also a desire to improve their land use.\(^{45}\)

KSSP selected twenty-five panchayats across Kerala for a pilot run of its ambitious mapping program. Relying on their traditional mechanisms—jathas, artistic performances, lectures, seminars, puppet plays, and the like—organizers identified and enlisted the help of “development volunteers” in each ward (all with a 10th grade education) to be the local mapping activists.\(^{46}\)

After a brief period of training, these village mappers collected data on land use, local assets, water resources, and other elements not requiring specialized scientific knowledge. Scientists at Kerala’s Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) took the maps developed by the development volunteers and created a map of their own—an environmental appraisal map. This map was taken back to the village, where it became the focus of deliberations involving villagers, map volunteers, and the scientists. The final step in the mapping campaign was the creation of an “action plan” map that identified development and environmental-protection projects that the villagers would elect to engage in.

How well has the mapping program worked? An example from one village—Kallisseri in northern Kerala—illustrates both the strengths and the deficiencies of the KSSP-sponsored mapping program. Using maps developed in the campaign, village leaders and a KSSP activist had drafted plans for an improved water drainage scheme, a small village forest reserve to protect slopes, and some other projects. They realized, however, that the maps they developed were not giving them all the information they needed and that additional socio-economic data would be helpful in areas for interventions not immediately suggested by the maps.\(^{47}\)

Their socio-economic research showed, for example, that late in the dry season, villagers were purchasing significant amounts of vegetables imported at great cost from other parts of India. At the same time, many fields planted in rice during the rainy season lay fallow in the dry season for lack of water. Unemployment of youth was also a serious problem in the village. After lengthy discussions, the People’s Resource Mapping group and the panchayat committee decided to sponsor a small experimental program in which landowners would grant free use of their fallow rice fields during the dry season to groups of unemployed youth who would cultivate the most popular dry season vegetables on the land and sell these in the local market at lower prices than the imported foods.

The committee turned to the “depth to water table” maps that they had produced during the KSSP campaign in order to select the best sites for the project. They then consulted the “overall environmental appraisal map” to determine whether

43. During the Left Democratic Front ministry (1987-1991), geographic place names in Kerala were recast into their Malayalam forms, replacing the colonial era British mispronunciations. The British name of the capital city of Trivandrum once again became Thiruvananthapuram, its proper spelling in Malayalam. Other place names in this paper use the renewed Malayalam with the recent English in brackets the first time they appear.
46. The 10th grade educational level refers to the Kerala SSLC or Secondary School Leaving Certificate, which requires completion of ten years of schooling and the passing of the SSLC exam.
they would be harming the environment by using those lands and the water at that time.

In the dry season of 1993 all 21 groups raised medium-sized harvests and broke even on their investments. A total of 2,500 unemployed youth got work experience and pay. More than six acres became productive in a new way. In 1994 organizers were able to time the planting and harvest so that market prices were higher and a profit was made. By 1997, the vegetable gardens had spread to additional work groups and were becoming popular with individual households as well.48

Disappointingly, the Kalliasseri action plan was one of only two such plans that had been developed by April 1992, in spite of the fact that the voluntary mapping had been completed in 20 of the 25 pilot villages and "scientific mapping" had also been done in twenty of the villages.49

**People's Plan: From Micro to Macro**

In April 1996 the Left Democratic Front won a majority in the Kerala State Assembly and formed a new ministry that moved quickly to launch a three-step program to empower people for self-governance through information and training, to increase substantially the resources available for development projects (boosting the percentage of locally available development funds in the ninth national 5-year plan from 5 percent to 40 percent, for example), and to provide necessary administrative and human resources for carrying out the new responsibilities for decentralized administration.

During the first six months of their campaign—known as "Ninth Plan, People's Plan"—numerous training manuals and videos were produced. These educational materials have influenced about 700 state-level resource persons, 10,000 district-level resource persons, and 100,000 village and urban neighborhood resource persons. More than 3 million people participated in 14,000 gatherings to express their local grievances, identify priorities, and suggest solutions. About 600 to 700 pages of training materials have been published and 1,000 village development reports have been drafted—these reports mostly written by ordinary people with help from the resources persons mentioned above. The "Ninth Plan, People's Plan" campaign is the largest experiment in participatory democracy undertaken in India. KSSP activists are playing major roles in every aspect of this unique and unprecedented experiment to bring about a new development culture in Kerala.

The Kerala People's Science Movement represents an unusual and instructive experiment in third world development. Its three decades of activity have produced several achievements in the areas of education, political mobilization, scientific research, and creative project development. From its beginning as an organization created to overcome feudal anti-scientific attitudes among ordinary people, KSSP has evolved into a promising movement for mobilizing Kerala's relatively literate, healthy, and politically sophisticated population for the daunting task of generating wealth through environmentally sound sustainable development projects.

Despite their organization's impressive achievements, KSSP activists acknowledge important weaknesses and failures in their programs. They have failed, for instance, to develop programs for fishing and livestock—two key economic sectors that involve thousands of Kerala's state workers and small resource owners. They have also failed to involve women to anywhere near the extent required to make good the KSSP's commitment to social justice and equality. KSSP activists attribute the low participation of women in their programs to the general social oppression of women in Kerala and to male dominance in the state's culture.

In 1987 women activists in KSSP drew up a detailed document that urged KSSP activists to develop slogans and outreach actions that would bring more women into the organization by specifically trying to meet women's needs. The new emphasis resulted in rural health classes becoming more focused on the needs of women and on gender bias in the health system. For the most part, however, KSSP has limited itself to self-study among mostly male activists who agree in principle on the desirability of overcoming male dominance in their movement but who have taken few actions yet towards that goal.

Among KSSP's aims for the future are (1) the popularization of science and the creation of a scientific ethos among the people; (2) sustained struggle against abuses of science and anti-people ideology and for the development of self-reliant scientific and technological capabilities for India; (3) the provision of technical and scientific aid to other people's movements; and (4) the creation and implementation of programs that offer the potential for sustainable development.

The "Ninth Plan, People's Plan" campaign of 1996-97 offers KSSP a new platform on which to continue to move from anti-feudalism to sustainable development and to make small powerful. With all their shortcomings and failures, and despite the difficult problems Kerala faces, KSSP activists and their allies look to the future with optimism and a commitment to make Kerala a better place for all its people to live.

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49. T. Gangadharan, *Report on Kalliasseri People's Mapping Project at the National Level Orientation Course on Drinking Water and Sanitation Programme with People's Participation* (Mundur: IRTC, 1 October 1993). The 1997 update is based on interviews and observations made during a visit to Kalliasseri on 8 January 1997. Kerala video-makers have produced a 28-minute videocassette, with English-language sound track, on the People's Resource Mapping Programme: Titled *Plotting the Riches*, the video includes some footage of the mapping process and meetings in Kalliasseri Panchayat. For more information, or to order, contact Centre for Development of Imaging Technology, Chitranjali Studio Complex, Thiruvallom, Thiruvananthapuram 695027, Kerala, India. Fax: (91-471) 644-569, code 17. Tel: (91-471) 714-54 or 76646. E-mail: cdit@glasmdol.usnet.in.

**KSSP Wins 1996 Right Livelihood Award**

KSSP was one of four recipients of the Swedish Right Livelihood Award for 1996. Known as "the alternative Nobel prize," this award was introduced in 1980 "to honor and support those offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today." The text of the complete Right Livelihood Foundation press statement of 2 October 1996 is posted on the Internet at [http://www.chss.montclair.edu/anthro/kerala.html](http://www.chss.montclair.edu/anthro/kerala.html).
Transnational Networks and Hindu Nationalism

Contemporary Hindu nationalism articulates a genteel multiculturalist presence in the United States that is at odds with militant Hindu supremacism in India. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) of America trumpets Hindu culture as both a contribution to America’s multiculturalism experiment and as an example of successful multiculturalism in itself. Indian immigrants who support VHP in the United States think of the largely urban lower-class membership of the VHP in India as a reservoir of Hindu nationalist sentiment—one that legitimizes their identities. But the differences between the members of the two branches of VHP can be enormous. Indian immigrants’ assertions of Indian/Hindu identity cannot be dissociated from their negotiation of the experience of racial marginalization in the United States. They may substitute religion for race, but regional and national loyalties are still salient. The politics they espouse centers on concerns that are U.S.-focused even when they look approvingly on Hindu militant activities in their homeland. Second-generation Indian immigrants may assume the political attitudes of the first generation, but they also seek a culturally congenial way of asserting their identities without reference to race. Finally, this article shows that there is a much wider spectrum of people in India, who in spite of their nationalist, anti-U.S. political beliefs, are likely to sense affirmation of their politics in the international support and financial assistance they receive from the members of VHP of America and from other Indians living abroad.

by Arvind Rajagopal*

Nine months after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, in December 1992, a conference was held in Washington, D.C., sponsored by VHP of America, the U.S. branch of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Assembly). Despite the fact that VHP (India) had been banned by the Indian government for its role in the destruction of Babri Masjid and in the riots that followed, several VHP leaders were allowed to attend the 1993 conference under the pretext that “Global Vision 2000” was purely a cultural event, marking the centenary anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s 1893 address to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Once at the conference, the VHP leaders quickly made their true intentions clear. Member of Parliament and noted demagogue Uma Bharati, for instance, made it a point to denounce liberal Hindus who disagreed with the Hindu right’s militancy: “To those of you who say you are ashamed to be Hindus, we want to tell you: We are ashamed of you. After December 6th [the day of the demolition of Babri Masjid], the tiger has been let out of the cage.” Murli Manohar Joshi, then president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), declared to a cheering audience of mostly Indian-American immigrants to the United States that December 6th was “the most memorable day” of his life, and that it inaugurated a new phase of Indian history. When Uma Bharati chanted, “Kaho gav se, hum Hindu hain [Say it with pride, we are Hindu],” the crowd of more than 5,000 shouted, “Hum Hindu hain, hum Hindu hain.”

Writing in the Washington Post soon after the 1993 conference, novelist Shashi Tharoor condemned “Global Vision 2000” as an example of “the peculiarly vicious fanaticism of expatriates.” Like many other observers, Tharoor saw the VHP’s endorsement of Hindu fanaticism as a mark of Indian political culture in the United States. He went on explain that the connection between extremism and expatriates is the result of a compound of frustration (as minorities in the United States) and guilt (at having “deserted the motherland”). The “American ethnic mosaic” is “full of imported bigotry,” Tharoor wrote, and Indian Americans are now in competition with the “Fidelios of the foreign fringe”—such as the “Muslim fundamentalists” who tried to blow up New York. Tharoor sees himself as a “liberal Indian,” but this does not render him immune to the xenophobia he generously invokes in behalf of “America.”

Tharoor’s critique registers an interesting problem in contemporary analyses of identity politics. Academics tend to agree that identities are fluid, mobile, and multiple, but that realization often seems distant from popular perceptions, as both Tharoor’s essay and the policies and practices of the VHP of America suggest. If identity-formation is an open-ended process, the result of that process is precisely to deny such contingency, as

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distinction is asserted against rather than with others. On the other hand, an essentialist view such as Tharoor's argues for an organic connection between expatriates and their roots. Once these ties are severed, he implies, all expression goes awry and all inner harmonies are disrupted. The neutralized location of Tharoor's perspective suggests a temperate zone outside the hot-house of natural politics, where more detached and enlightened expression prevails. Instead, we can more usefully consider identity as constituted of diverse layers of historically sedimented practices, differentially mobilized according to context. If we stress only the multiplicity of possibilities for identity, and the fluidity of its assertion, we risk an ahistorical voluntarism, in the familiar American trope of unbridled self-fashioning.

Relocation in a different context leads to a reformulation of old identities in ways that cannot be predicted. We see examples of this in three sets of practices in Indian immigrant communities in the United States: those relating to class and caste identity, to religious observations and rituals, and to "self-making," that is, formation of individual identity in relation to family and to the larger society. I draw from available literature, from conversations with other Indians resident in the United States (including several VHP members), and with VHP members in India, to argue that the VHP of America for the most part responds to the particular concerns of its North American members in its organizing activities. What needs specifying is how "Hinduism," defined variously in religious or cultural terms, has been chosen to be the means of forging identity, and by what means it articulates with a religious nationalist politics back in India. Indians in the United States arrive at support for nationalist extremism abroad through a series of disjunctive discourses rather than through any unshakeable tendencies to bigotry that the civilizing influence of America cannot dislodge, as Tharoor seems to imply.

Founded in 1969, the VHP of America is one branch of a global network established by India's Hindu right over the years. The VHP network provides its thousands of members across Europe and North America with a syncretist identity that "represents" all Hindus—indeed all Indians—despite the many variations in belief and practice that divide them. The organization represents one embodiment of historical developments in Indian nationalism; however as a transnational body, VHP has drawn on and expressed experiences of Indian expatriate communities interacting with activities in India. It is not clear why affluent, educated immigrants identify with communalists in India and support their militancy. Migrancy and the savoir faire it bestows have often been understood in terms of cosmopolitanism, which may be described as a culture of urbanity (or trans-urbanity), contrasted against parochial or merely national attitudes. The expatriates one reads about are often intellectuals, who if they write on such matters tend to examine their own situations.

"Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles," writes Salman Rushdie in one meditation on belonging. "Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places." But in an age of globalization, roots have become portable accessories,  

4. "Expatriates are no longer an organic part of the culture, but severed digits that, in their yearning for the hand, can only twist themselves into a clenched fist." Tharoor, "Growing Up Extreme."
5. Names of several informants have been changed in the interests of confidentiality.
profusely re-imagined and remade, fulfilling a range of political purposes. No ready formula will suffice to explain these uses. Rather, the manner and content of their reproduction, and the uses to which they are put must be tracked down and detailed before their aggregate effects can be described.

As relatively affluent immigrants from an obstinately poor nation, Indians in the United States are often ambivalent about espousing either an unabashed American identity or a received version of Indian identity. An unmodified American identity typically sits more comfortably with second and later generations of Indians, leaving unresolved the question of racial marginality. Meanwhile the immigrants are unable to wrap themselves in an Indian national identity, as that would appear to make a virtue out of political weakness. A redefined cultural nationalism is the answer for most expatriates as they distance themselves from the political problems of their homeland, and selectively embrace aspects of the U.S. environment. Rightwing Hindu nationalism, as embodied in the VHP, has capitalized on this tendency to its immeasurable advantage, defining its work in the United States largely in terms of religion and culture, offering ways of belonging and means of acculturation for later generations of Indian immigrants. The focus on religious identity serves to deflect the awkward question of race and provides the VHP with a genteel multicultural presence. At the same time, VHP's vision of a strong Hindu state offers compensatory gratification for the experience of exile and marginality and promises redemption. Finally the VHP's carefully groomed presence in the United States helps it raise money and acquire the prestige the fluidity of the processes involved, pictures a series of symbolic translations across diverse locations rather than mechanistic movement along inert channels of passage. The "awareness" of those in some segments may express locally rooted understandings whose "translation" into other segments preserves a certain incompleteness. Links of opaqueness as well as of transparency articulate disparate contexts in a global network of exchange. When people's movements are restricted, however, cultures will always remain more local than global. Those favorably positioned in transnational networks may utilize the disjunctures represented in such circuits, reinforcing structures of uneven economic and social development. Elucidating these new modes of mobilization is preliminary to developing creative political responses to them.

Crafting Identity across Diversity

The Hindu right coalition in India is comprised of a range of elements, from industrialists seeking a supportive business environment and urban middle classes willing to embrace an ideology consonant with their own swelling fortunes, to its traditional base of small traders and business people. Since the mid-1980s the increase in Hindu communal assertion in India has received widespread support from urban middle and professional classes, as well as from the ruling Congress Party. Like the economic liberalization that closely paralleled it, this new pattern of support seemed to announce a liberation of long-dormant powers that had been stifled by a moribund Nehruvianism. Diverse ideological currents joined together to restructure the economic liberalization that closely paralleled it, this new pattern of support seemed to announce a liberation of long-dormant powers that had been stifled by a moribund Nehruvianism. Diverse ideological currents joined together to restructure the basis of the social compact in a manner akin to Thatcherism.

Religious identity had hitherto been championed in a relatively austere Brahminical form. This was due partly to its reformist, Arya Samaj roots as well as to the modernist conviction that nationalism was itself a new form of religion. V.D. Savarka, the author of the Hindu right manifesto, and M.S. Golwalkar, leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps, or RSS), both hold up the nation as the supreme object of worship over idol-worship and the invocation of specific deities. Downplaying idol-worship had the political benefit of avoiding a sectarian emphasis on one rather than another of Hinduism's many deities.

In the late 1980s, however, the Hindu right departed from its previous practice and began to use popular religious ritual and symbolism in a systematic fashion. At the same time, they indicated a willingness to entertain partial forms of support, as opposed to the rigorous commitment hitherto required of recruits, especially in the RSS (see below). These two changes broadened the appeal of the Hindu right. Militant Hindu rhetoric sounded attractive to small town youth for whom the abstractions of nationalism held little meaning. The skillful use of advertising techniques gave the traditionally somber propaganda of the RSS all the appeal of a crusade.

The explicit appeal to popular religious expression signaled an important change in the tactics of the Hindu right. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had long been the grey eminence behind a "family of organizations" or sangh parivar. Martial discipline and a strict regimen of daily drill accompanied membership. Although the RSS continues to provide guidance and organizational cadre, it is the VHP that now claims to be "the representative organization of Hindu society." Correspondingly, there is a move away from the monolithic organization of the RSS towards a decentralization of strategy and tactics, with many more initiatives coming from the grassroots level.

In contrast to those of the RSS, the VHP's strategies are flamboyant and spectacular, drawing on local idioms and regional dialect rather than on austere, high-caste forms. Today, the VHP is publicity-sensitive and media-oriented where innovation and symbolic appeal are concerned, and organizational tactics tend to be adjusted according to the situation. Indeed, the media is crucial to the carefully orchestrated range of identities the VHP offers—from a pietist, devotional identity to a politicalized Hindu identity to a militant supremacist position. By presenting a new range of political "identity" options to the "non-committed voter," the Hindu right has wedged its way close to the center of the electoral arena.

A more inclusive religious identity exists mainly at the level of political ideology. As lived practice, it does not emerge all at once. Here the international reach of the VHP is influential. Relatively open-ended practices of religious identification have developed among immigrant communities over time, in what Raymond Brady Williams has described as “ecumenical Hinduism.” These practices were developed by relatively small numbers of people who faced a new environment and longed to reproduce some form of community identity.  

There is thus a discrepancy between the pluralist professions of an “ecumenical Hindu” identity and the sectarian politics into which the VHP translates. Other organizations prevent the fragmentation of their communities abroad by creating a syncretized culture; most have no serious political ambitions and so their hegemonic effect is limited. The VHP, however, coordinates disparate styles of operation in the United States and in India, combining cultural and social activities in the States with supremacist politics in India. It acts as an umbrella organization that attempts to represent or influence most other major Indian organizations, by direct participation of its members in bodies such as the Federation of Indian Associations of North America, and by indirect means such as electronic mail networks (e.g., alt.hinduism) and submissions to World Wide Web sites related to Hinduism. By various means, the VHP’s reach extends well beyond its relatively small membership. For example, VHP successfully mobilized Indians in more than thirty U.S. cities to perform the shila puja, a ritual to consecrate bricks for the rebuilding of the Ayodhya temple.

The most spectacular result of the VHP's syncretist efforts, however, can be found in the Ram temple movement. The VHP’s plan for rebuilding the Ram temple in Ayodhya symbolizes a restored national honor and the greatness of Hindu civilization. The proposed design for the temple incorporates a shikhara, a dome in the North Indian style; there are also two gopurams, domes in the South Indian style (although these are only a quarter of the shikhara’s height). This syncretist design, which is without precedent in Indian temple architecture, is an explicitly political gesture made by a largely North Indian-led Hindu right to their South Indian constituents.  

On the face of it, the support of far right Hindu nationalist politics at home by prosperous and highly placed Indians in the United States is anomalous. In the early part of this century, Indian immigrants to the States—Punjabi farm workers for the most part—were fiercely nationalist. Discriminated against and subjected to racial attacks, they felt that their subordinate status in the United States was a result of India’s subjugation by the British. The Ghadar Party they formed—with partial funding from Germany—sent a band of armed revolutionaries to India to foment a war of liberation. Party members who demonstrated in the United States frequently shouted “firangi maro” (strike down foreigners). Indian immigrants in the United States today possess the archetypal immigrant virtues of hard work, thrift, and material success. They have one of the highest incomes of any ethnic group in the United States, and are the best educated. Yet numbers of these Indian immigrants align themselves with extremist politics in India. Notions of guilt, frustration, and political irresponsibility are inadequate to explain this troublesome juxtaposition. More careful attention to the specific contradictions they bring to and mobilize in their new location is required.

### The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America

The VHP of America has been registered in thirteen states since 1974, although regular meetings of the organization began as early as 1969, just five years after VHP’s founding in India. U.S. membership is around 2,000, but the organization claims to have “contacts” with 10,000 families in the United States. VHP works in youth camps and in Bal Vihars or Children’s Education Programs, conducts celebrations of Hindu festivals, sponsors lecture tours and workshops (usually with religious figures associated with the VHP in India), provides family counseling “with a Hindu outlook on life,” and operates social service projects (though the latter appear to be mostly in India). In addition to these activities, which tend to be episodic in nature, VHP forms a network of contacts and affiliations with other Indian religious and social organizations in the United States, extending its influence well beyond its immediate membership.

The U.S. organization channels funds to VHP organizations in India. The funds are collected under the guise of charitable donations in the United States The United Way, until recently, had a donor choice agency code for tax-deductible contributions for VHP of America. The VHP was also a beneficiary of the AT&T Rewards Program through which customers direct a portion of their monthly long-distance telephone bill payment to an approved charitable organization. Lobbying by


12. A similar syncretism is evident in the design of the Shiva-Vishnu temple that was built in Livermore, California, before the recent Ram temple movement became significant. The temple has both a shikhara and a gopuram; it is the only temple I am aware of with such a design. The substantial precedence of the design over the VHP’s efforts in India, the prominence of the temple in South Asian itineraries in the East Bay, and the volume of traffic between the West Coast and India suggest that syncretist efforts by immigrants abroad may offer models for nationalist efforts at crafting homogeneous “syndicated” identities at home that materialize the unity of a diverse community.  

13. According to the 1990 Census, there were 890,000 Asian Indians in the United States, of whom two-thirds were foreign-born. 63.7 percent of the males and 48.7 percent of the females had a bachelor’s degree or higher. This compares with 43.2 percent for all Asian males and 32.7 percent for all Asian females, and 23.3 percent for all males and 17.6 percent for all females in the total population. The per capita income of Asian Indians in 1989 was $17,777 per annum, as against the national per capita income of $14,143 per annum and the per capita income for whites of $15,687 per annum. Asian Indians were below only the Japanese (American) per capita income of $19,373 per annum. The poverty rate for Asian Indians in 1989 was 9.7 percent, below the 13 percent for the entire nation and the 14 percent for all Asians (Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian accounting for a disproportionate percentage of the Asian poor). See We the American...Asians (U.S. Department of Commerce: Economics and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, September 1993). For the most recent study of South Asians in the United States, see Karen Leonard, South Asian Americans (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1997). For discussion of the South Asian diaspora, see Peter van der Veer, ed. Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).
secular activist groups has succeeded in ending both of these efforts. Unofficial sources in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the VHP in India indicate that the funds they receive from the United States are substantial but the actual amounts are difficult to estimate.

Among the parties contesting the 1996 general elections in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was the only one that found Non-Resident Indians (see below) deserving of mention in its manifesto. The party is sensitive to the advantages of having allies abroad, such as the VHP and the Overseas Friends of the BJP, a New York-based organization formed at BJP leader L. K. Advani's suggestion. The President of the VHP of America, Dr. Yashpal Lakra, estimated that there were 16 million Indians living outside India, earning between $24 and $46 billion annually. Even if a small percentage of this amount was sent back "and was utilized properly" it would be of benefit, he observed. The VHP's own literature claims that between 1977 and 1993 more than $1.25 million was donated to various social service organizations, over half of them in India. Although the recipients are always said to be performing social services, e.g., educational or medical services, Hindutva propaganda efforts are considered a "service" too, as the VHP "saves" converts from Islam and Christianity by reconverting them to Hinduism. Foreign missionaries and the insidious activities allegedly carried out by them in converting poor, low-caste Hindus, help legitimize aggressive proselytizing campaigns, while underlining the VHP's identification of religion with nation.

Non-Resident Indians

In the early 1970s, the Indian government acknowledged the existence of an Indian diaspora and, at the same time, declared a claim on Indians living abroad by using the term Non-Resident Indian, or NRI. The NRI, a kind of hybrid Third World power in the age of globalization, is defined, characteristically, in the negative, moving from non-aligned to non-resident, as it were. The strangeness of the term—simultaneously signifying origin but denying location—symbolizes the disjuncted power of its referent. The education and affluence of the NRIs, coupled with their (alleged) sense of identity as Indians, makes them the apotheosis of the Indian middle class. They exemplify what "Indians" could achieve if they were not hobbled by an underdeveloped society and an inefficient government. "Indianness" finally came into its own, but its significant achievement was its being elsewhere.

The NRI has never been an unambiguous role model, however. If nothing else, middle class resentment of the privileges and differential rights of the NRIs assured this. NRIs enjoy representation without taxation (neatly inverting the problem behind India's first national uprising); they are seen to corner markets, raise prices, fix elections, and even instigate riots. Ubiquitous and yet difficult to spot, dispersed in their presence and yet concentrated in their power, NRIs are the postmodern version of that old deus ex machina of desi politics, the foreign hand.

The Foreign Exchange Regulations Act of 1973 defines the term Non-Resident Indian. If a citizen of India lives abroad for the purpose of carrying on a business or career, but declares his intention to stay in India for an indefinite period, then that person would be considered a Non-Resident Indian. According to the 1973 act persons are held to be of Indian origin if they had at any time held an Indian passport, or if either of their parents or grandparents was Indian or was a permanent resident in undivided India at any time. The wife of a person of Indian origin would be considered to be of Indian origin too, although a husband would not receive this privilege if his wife were of foreign origin. A person of Indian origin holding the passport of another country would thus be entitled to all the rights available to non-resident Indian citizens. "NRI" is used as the designation for both these categories.

NRIs are allowed to deposit money in special accounts in Indian banks with competitive, guaranteed rates of interest. This arrangement puts scarce foreign exchange into Indian government coffers. The activities of NRIs are sanctified under the guise of a shared origin, imputing a sense of cultural belonging to newly formed partnerships in transnational investment. Such claims, however contestable, developed their own momentum once they became institutionalized. Thus the author of one guide to financial planning for NRIs writes:

Our civilization going back to 5000 years and more has received many philosophies, cultures and religions, and has also given out many to others... Overseas Indians today are a broad class devoted and owing their heritage to the mother country. They have made good fortunes and also have acquired high technological capabilities. Even as they are eager to contribute to the development of the mother country, the country also wants to and can utilise their vast resources, finance and technology and experience. We are proud of them and they should be proud of us as well. 10

The tacit negotiation is clear: India offers cultural capital and a genuine sense of mutual belonging in exchange for financial capital from the NRIs. This presumed commonality is at the heart of "expatriate nationalism" such as the VHP's.17

Indian emigrants are tiny in number relative to the population at home. They number around fifteen million, or about one and one-half percent of the over nine hundred and fifty million Indians in India. Until recently, Indian emigrants have had little visible social influence at home. Lately, however, overseas indi-

14. In 1986, the amount of money sent by Christian and Muslim religious organizations, according to Reserve Bank of India estimates cited in a VHP publication, was 4.38 billion rupees (then about $365 million), representing a dramatic increase from the 1977 figures of 735.9 million rupees (then about US$98m). Jaswant Rai Gupta, Hindutva ka Dhamantaran Evam Videshi Dhan [Role of foreign money in conversion of Hindus], (New Delhi, n.d.), pp. 9-10.

17. In the Guide to NRI Investment, V. Balasubramanian points out that residence is normally crucial for a number of reasons—to establish legal standing and to substantiate claims to citizenship, for example. So the concept of a non-resident Indian is in a sense contradictory. If the definition of Indian is independent of residency and even of citizenship, there remains the quite old-fashioned test of blood and race—in this case, descent from Indian citizens. But even this could be waived in the case of non-Indian wives (but not husbands). This implies a notion of an Indian essence, albeit a gendered essence, that is indifferent to the vicissitudes of time and place.
ans have loomed large in Indian public life. India does not forget her sons and daughters even when they live abroad for generations. 18

There is certainly an element of prosaic interest in the Indian government’s concern for overseas Indians. The Organiser, a conservative Hindu weekly, had this caustic observation to make:

Pandit Nehru told Indians in Burma to merge among the Burmese and forget about retaining Indian citizenship or heritage. At that time the Indian treasury was full. Today borrowing has gone on for a long time, so they are discovering Indians everywhere. Who is an NRI? It is being said that anyone, but anyone, who had at one time or another held an Indian passport...is entitled to all the “benefits” accorded by the State Bank of India with the patronage of the Government of India. 19

The Organiser’s reference to Nehru is characteristically unfair; Nehru was far from indifferent about how Indians were treated abroad, even if he did not advocate their involvement in politics back home. 20 But the link the paper makes between NRIs and India’s financial situation is on the mark. Indeed, the Hindu right itself had been exploiting this link for some time in support of its own activities.

Noteworthy characteristics of this financial link become clear when NRI deposits are contrasted with those of migrant Indian workers who have gone abroad to sell their labor, principally in the Gulf countries. With the oil boom of the 1970s and the movement of Indian workers to the Gulf countries, substantial amounts of foreign exchange began to flow into India. Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, the amount repatriated by semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the Gulf countries surpassed the foreign exchange deposited in bank accounts by NRIs (mostly from the United Kingdom and the United States) by about 50 percent: Rs 14,000 crore versus Rs 9,000 crore. 21 The money from the Gulf came without strings, and there was no question of the money returning abroad: it came to stay, regardless of interest rates or other inducements. In contrast, NRI money from the West was deposited into external accounts, and the government announced that the accounts, as well as the interest earned, would be fully repatriable. Deposits are exempt from wealth tax, and the interest earnings are exempt from income tax. Deposits of one year or more earn interest at rates at least two percent higher than domestic deposits and as much as five or six percent higher than the interest accrued by rupee accounts in international markets.

Several analysts have pointed out that NRI money was “hot money” and thus an unstable basis for borrowing by the Indian government. In 1986, for instance, total foreign exchange holdings totaled around Rs 7,000 crore, worth less than four months imports, and NRI deposits totaled Rs 9,000 crore. If NRIs had to choose between their money and the needs of their country, there was little doubt how they would act. The danger was real. In fact, India’s foreign exchange balance did drop into the negative in June 1991 and again in September 1991.

Economist Ashok Mitra estimates that Gulf remittances could increase substantially, perhaps by as much as 50 percent, if the Indian government provided NRI-type incentives to Indian migrant workers. But the class bias of Indian bureaucrats and politicians prevented such a policy from being formulated. 22 The NRIs received special incentives because they lived in the West and because they were the friends and relatives of India’s governing classes.

Hyphenated Immigrants: Imagining Whose Community?

If national identity offers what is now the ubiquitous form of “living the modern,” how do Asian Indians conjugate their nationality as members of multiple “imagined communities”? The emergence of “hyphenated nationalities” signals an attempt to expand the scope of national identity, qualifying its claim to universalism, but retaining it by imputing an affixability to it, as in Indian-American, Chinese-American, and so on. 23 Practices of splitting and mending national identity according to the needs of “other” national-cultural groups present contemporary, pragmatic solutions to the problems of marginality. As it is reproduced across generations, the stratagem of multi-national identification is inflected in ways that spotlight the hyphenated American self’s negotiations of the contradictions of marginality, assertion, and denial.

The characteristic contradiction of the nation, according to Benedict Anderson, is to contain both a liberal gesellschaft as well as more hoary notions of tradition. 24 Anderson imputes an unspecified but appealing, voluntarist synthesis to the “imagined community,” presenting, in fact, a description of the culture of the liberal state, idealized and sanctified by the omission of state coercion. The challenge to the nation has come from a series of inter-related sources, including the erosion of state authority due to the transnationalization of capital, the international division of labor, the accompanying settlement of diasporic populations, and—partly owing to the growing mediatory role of the state—claims of rights by women, minorities, and sub-nationalities. Against this unravelling of state authority and old national cultures, Anderson’s argument is reassuring: he joins the cultures of citizenship and community in an ingenious synthesis. In fact,

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18. Amitav Ghosh has observed that the link between emigrants and their homeland is in the realm of the imagination rather than through any direct physical contact or through national affiliation such as citizenship. Ghosh cited the case of Indians who fled from East Africa in the late 1970s. Some of the exiles received government help in getting resettled in India, even though they had given up their Indian passports and in many cases had ceased speaking any Indian language. Ghosh suggests that the link was indeed not a material one, but existed in the imagination—Indianness as a felt and dreamed-of connection that survived mere worldly change. Amitav Ghosh, in Public Culture 1, no. 3 (1988).


22. Ibid.


community practices refractory to those comprising the national "common sense" may provoke a distinctly coercive response from the state. Debates over the Rushdie affair in Britain and over the wearing of head scarves by young Muslim women in French schools highlight the disparity between majority and minority community rights in liberal society. 25 Although liberal rights are procedural rather than substantive, when conflicts arise between majority and minority community norms, the majority invariably wins. 26 In practice, minority rights are individual rights, which deprive them of the "sources of self" nourishing their distinctness. Distinct community ways of life are eroding, reinforcing the sense of "not belonging" symptomatic of modernity. However, non-whites' experience has historical roots in the polarity of "blackness" and "whiteness" left over from slavery. 27 Thus the erosion of community rights also affects minorities' means to understand the distinctiveness of their experience. 28 Between the abstraction of universalist claims and particularist demands based on difference, languages of mediation are required for the mutual accommodation of minorities and the majority in society. The experience of the Rushdie affair in Britain, in which the entire response from minorities was characterized as "fundamentalist," serves as a warning in this regard.

Classifying Indians in the United States

Although Asians in the United States have been dubbed the "model minority," often earning degrees and dollars at rates greater than those of the Caucasian majority, the price of their success has been a tacit agreement not to rock the boat and to accept the existing racial hierarchy. As writer Shawn Wong has said, for minorities in America, silence wins love. 29 "Model minority" may ostensibly refer to Asian-Americans, but the unspoken reference is to African-Americans, who are the "model" and archetype of the "minority": dark, unassimilated, and unassimilable. Referring in 1835 to "southern Americans" (today classified as "Hispanics") Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that they had two active passions that made them isolate themselves: the fear of resembling the Negro, and the fear of falling below the level of whites. 30 Today, for many minorities, the "melting pot" means living in a liminal condition, ever striving towards an unattainable "whiteness" and fleeing an ever-threatening "blackness." Other racial minorities are not potential allies so much as threats, bearing the taint of blackness they desire to escape.

Different politics are shaped by different histories: if Indians abroad experience racism, the kinds of racism they are exposed to and the ways in which they reflect them, vary considerably. The experience of Indian immigrants in Britain sheds light on the situation of Indians in the United States in some important respects. Indians came to Britain in the shadow of empire, with a culture of white colonial supremacy lingering. Like African-Caribbean immigrants they worked at low-paying, semi-skilled jobs. In spite of different experiences of racism, there were enough similarities in class and status that linkages could be formed in political coalitions, with "black" being used as a label of collective empowerment in the wake of the Black Power movement in the United States. 31 An explicitly political relationship to the majority community could emerge. Immigrant communities were much more cohesive and durable in the United Kingdom, since social and geographic mobility were relatively limited. The arrival from East Africa in the 1970s of Indians who aspired to be upwardly mobile changed the profile of the community and demonstrated that immigrants could succeed. Strong community relationships endured, however, because of the need for group protection in a racial environment that was more hostile than that in the United States. 32

In the United States, by contrast, most immigration has been relatively recent. The 1965 U.S. Immigration Act, which made historic expansions in quotas and abolished all explicit national discrimination, marked the beginning of sizeable immigration from India. 33 Most Indians now in the United States arrived after the civil rights movements of the 1960s had won their victories. Although it could be argued that Indian immigrants have profited substantially from the civil rights movement, they did not necessarily identify with the participants in those struggles. 34 Entering the United States for the most part as "highly skilled professionals," their class and caste backgrounds usually predisposed them to view their privileges as a matter of right and an indication of personal merit. A variety of factors...

32. For a useful discussion of political consciousness among Asian Indian youth in Britain, see KumKum Bhavnani's Talking Politics: A Psychological Framing for Views from Youth in Britain (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991).
33. To quote S. Chandrasekhar, "It is clear that this 1965 Immigration Law still discriminates against persons from India since the quota for India is only 20,000 out of 390,000 (5.1 percent of the total) whereas the population of India constitutes 15.3 percent of the world's population. It is obvious that in fairness to India her quota should have been considerably higher." Setting a flat rate quota system discriminates against the more populous countries, which are, by and large, non-white countries. S. Chandrasekhar, ed., From India to America: A Brief History of Immigration: Problems of Discrimination, Admission and Assimilation (La Jolla, Calif.: Population Review Publications, 1982), p. 19.
34. 453,000 of the 890,000 Asian Indians in the United States in 1990, or over 50 percent of their population, arrived after 1980. (Statistical Abstract of the United States 1993, Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, table 18.) For an essay that suggests that in the United States...
combined to bleed Indian immigrants of most ethnically distinctive traits, especially from the second generation onwards. These included their middle- to upper-middle-class status and strong pressures on their school-aged children to assimilate with their schoolmates. (Few children speak an Indian language at home, for instance.) These and other factors have led Indian immigrants to identify with whites in U.S. society rather than work out their own distinct identities. Dark-skinned themselves, most Indian immigrants brought with them prejudices against black skin.

First generation Indians frequently employ metaphors of caste as a convenient way of referring to the interwoven manifestations of race and class in the United States. Thus the United States is often described as a caste society, with African-Americans at the bottom and Indians above them. Determining just how far above African-Americans they stand is a constant source of anxiety for Indians in U.S. society. Anecdotes about Indians' racial prejudices abound. I have one of my own. I was once accosted at a bar, late at night, by two quite tidy African-Americans. One of them said to me, "Hey, you there!" I returned his greeting. He got straight to the point. "You're black, aren't you? Just like us?" I said that I was. His friend intervened, "They're black, just like us, but they act like they're better."

"How do whites perceive Indians?" a visitor from India asked a group of Indians at a party. "Better than blacks" was the answer. By using blacks as the constant point of reference, proximity is reinforced even while distance is desired. Difference is bought with effort, by earning enough money, for instance, to live in white neighborhoods and to send their kids to white-dominated schools. With job security in industry a thing of the past, and even senior employees liable to be laid off, Indians are acutely sensitive to their vulnerability. One VHP member in Los Angeles, trying to express what a catastrophe had befallen a pregnant teen who was turned out of home by her Indian parents, said, "This society will place them in the same status as blacks in the blink of an eye." Rather than allow the young woman to go into a state- or church-subsidized center, which would presumably have had a large percentage of blacks, the VHP came to her rescue.

Most Indian immigrants have cultural identities whose contradictions, if latent at home, become more prominent in the United States. Issues of class and caste identity come to the fore. Mostly of upper-caste and of middle- or upper-class origins, Indian immigrants are little prepared to be positioned as the Other. The assertion of caste hierarchy usually imputes racial superiority, as with savarn, caste Hindus versus untouchables referring to "Aryan" versus "Dravidian," for example; essential differences are believed to underlie caste divisions. With centuries of inter-mixture, however, the resulting physical similarity of castes at opposite ends of the hierarchy is extremely threatening to notions of caste purity, especially in the relative anonymity of urban environments. "Black brahmins." For instance, of whom there are many, always run the risk of being thought of as low caste; as such, few are immune to the stigma of untouchability. The anxiety that accompanies the assertion of caste identity is, then, often considerable. Yet cultural defenses available seem limited and do little to address the underlying problem of arbitrarily asserted superiority; they range mainly from stoicism to an aggressive assertion of that superiority itself. There have been few moves to re-infect the notion of "blackness" in more positive, inclusive ways.

Coming to the United States, Indians are confronted with the return of the repressed: the blackness they deny at home now threatens to encircle them. Even as they insist on being called "brown," the plea of Indian immigrants not to be called "black" is what is most audible. They aspire towards whiteness; in fact several early Indian immigrants to America argued that they were actually Caucasian and succeeded in obtaining citizenship, until a Supreme Court judge ruled that Indians were not "white." Denied full acceptance into white society, they assume a deliberately blurred perception of their relationship to the majority society.

Fear, inhibition, and a sense of their political weakness have combined to prevent any substantive political expression on the part of the Indian community in the United States; perhaps their material success is reward enough. But success pursued in individual rather than collective terms has made it harder for Indian immigrants to address issues they face as minorities. Yet the majority of Indians would have difficulty in admitting this except in privacy. On the one hand, they may have experienced little explicit discrimination themselves in India; on the other hand, such experience as they may have had of racial discrimination summons the specter of their repressed caste impurity, and as such would lead to anxiety rather than anger. For a variety of reasons they are often reluctant to identify discrimination as such when they encounter it. The competitiveness between individuals discourages any discussion of racism: to raise the issue of discrimination may be interpreted to be an excuse for failure.

37. One instance of positive assertions of "blackness" I am aware of is in Tamil cinema, the actor Rajinikanth started a trend of dark-complexioned heroes who spurn the use of makeup; Vijayakanth and Bhagiyaraj are two other instances of successful heroes whose dark color is explicit. However, most heroes continue to be regarded as "fair." With heroines, the code is much more stringent, and there are only scattered instances of actresses who have broken the color bar.

38. Several Japanese and Chinese applicants were denied citizenship on the basis of the 1790 Naturalization Law, which limited the privilege to "free white persons"; after 1870, citizenship was extended to "aliens of African nativity or persons of African descent" as well. However, Indians were the only ones among Asians to be judged as members of the "European" race, being believed part of "the Mediterranean branch of the Caucasian family, and many courts granted Indians American citizenship on that basis. Observations by Justice George Sutherland in the judgment of the Supreme Court, in denying citizenship to Takao Ozawa (Ozawa v. U.S.) in 1922, illustrate the culmination of this trend. However, in the very next year, the same judge, in U.S. v. Bhogat Singh Thind, ruled that Indian nationals were ineligible for citizenship. Thereafter this avenue was closed to Indian nationals (S. Chandrasekhar, pp. 19-21).
rather than a description of a real social problem. India’s independence struggle is a dim memory and there is little experience of collective oppression they can draw on to understand what they face in the United States. Indeed, when racial violence targets Indians, the response of other Indians is often to deny any common identity with the victims, in a typical variant of minority pathology. The much-publicised case of the “Dotbusters” illustrates this tendency.

The beating of several Indians and the killing of one man in the vicinity of Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1987, were events not sufficiently newsworthy to capture the attention of the major media. It was only when “hate literature” in letters and pamphlets, circulated by a group calling itself the Dotbusters, filtered through, that the media found a symbol arresting enough to report on. (The “group” was later discovered to have all of two members, white men in their early twenties.) What is significant is that the wider Indian community never drew attention to these incidents of racial violence as indicative of their minority status in the United States. The local Indian community staged rallies to demand protection, while other residents of Jersey City complained about being ignored by more affluent Indians.39

Jersey City, which is “the home of the Statue of Liberty” (the “Mother of Exiles,” in Emma Lazarus’s words), has the largest concentration of Indians in the United States. Described in India Today as “perhaps the closest thing to an Indian ghetto in the United States,” the city is spoken of with delicate disapproval by most professional Indians, as the overtones of the term “ghetto” suggest. Gujaratis—many of them from East Africa—dominate Jersey City’s Indian population of 13,000. Most are employed in the service sector, including shop-keeping and real estate; others commute to jobs in New York City.40 More prominent members of the Indian community live in south New Jersey, as one of them pointed out to me.41 They saw the visitations of violence in Jersey City as part of a karma that they clearly did not share.

The events in Jersey City occurred at a time when black-versus-white tensions were unusually high. In the fall of 1987, four white teenagers were on trial for clubbing a black youth to death in Howard Beach, Long Island (New York), in the previous year. In the racially charged atmosphere that year, affluent Indians no doubt had little desire to draw attention to themselves. One second-generation Indian student—a member of the Hindu Students’ Council (whose parent organization is the VHP of America)—told me that he had taken a course with an Indian professor who explained that the victims of the Jersey City violence were different from the skilled professional “first generation” immigrants. They were less skilled “second generation” immigrants—poor relatives and country cousins of the first generation—and so endowed with different attitudes toward work and achievement. For a meritocratic audience of aspiring professionals raised in America, this explanation appeared to be enough to provide closure to that story.42 It would apparently make little difference to point out that the murdered man was a manager for Citicorp in New York City, that two of the people most badly beaten were medical doctors, and that they were not “sponsored immigrants.” Nor would it pay to argue that it was the prosperity and industry of Jersey City Indians that brought them such unwelcome attention, not their “failure” to adhere to a suitably American regimen.

Rituals as Re-membering

Religion is the way that Indians in the United States express their distinctiveness, while evading issues of race and ethnicity. Syncretic Hindu practices, the favored means of expressing cultural difference, are defined in spiritual rather than racial terms, thus enabling Indians to consolidate their identity while underplaying anomaly. It is in rituals that syncretism is most clearly seen.

The liminal status of first-generation Indian immigrants inflects their expatriate nostalgia with a peculiar poignancy, as “home” gains in brilliance as a constellation of memories drawing closer emotionally as it recedes in time. “India” becomes a touchstone of their identity, assuring them of a place where they truly belong (or once did belong). As a repository of recollections and longings rather than a region in historical time, “India” becomes fixed and motionless, “motionless the way all immemorial things are... and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.”43 Ritual best fills the need here, with its deliberate enactment of repetitive, sanctified tasks whose monotony in performance belies the fullness of their evocations. The content of rituals and the ways in which they are enacted are the means by which people’s cultural, religious, and national identities are renewed and adjusted to their changed circumstances in foreign lands. The sense of affiliation with home tends to be deeply gendered, with women often having a much sharper sense of family restrictions and social obligations in India as opposed to their relative freedom in the United States. At the same time, a good deal of the work of nurturing community relationships is done by women, in terms of maintaining ties in India as well as in the United States.

Timings of sacred rituals and festivals are adjusted for the convenience of working people, so that major events are inserted into the American secular calendar rather than following the Hindu calendar. With daily observance of ritual seldom possible, festival days acquire a disproportionate importance, and relatively minor festivals may be elevated to a new significance. The distinctiveness of sacred locations in India is recreated in the United States, reading new meanings into topographical formations. The location of the Venkateswara temple in Pittsburgh, for instance, is described in a statement issued by the temple committee as standing at the confluence of three rivers, the Allegh-
Ritual practices transplanted to the West exhibit a new self-consciousness. Idol worship and other practices are re-described as symbolic enactments of more abstract and, not accidentally, more respectable ideas, placating temple-goers as to the compatibility of pagan rituals with Christian beliefs dominant in the United States. Thus, although diverse interpretations may exist with respect to particular traditions, one set of meanings is put forward, rewriting aberration and heresy as new forms of already known principles. Thus idol worship is described as secretly having more abstract forms of contemplation as its aim; burning camphor represents a symbolic cleansing of the self before listening to the guru; cow dung is said to have antiseptic properties, and so on. Substantial infusions of scientific management and of therapeutic, self-help culture abound as well. A workshop demonstrating “Vedantic principles of self-enquiry” is described as “a supreme stress management program spiritual workshop” and a vratam, a ritual pledge generally performed by women, becomes “human resource management.”

Spiritualism in the United States is eminently pragmatic. Every effort is therefore made to justify Indian (here exclusively “Hindu”) practices in terms of science, and indeed of modern management—and therapeutic culture—as well. “Hindu” spiritualism provides a necessary counterweight to the ills of a representative culture of acculturation and of therapeutic, self-help culture abound as well. "Vedantic principles of self-enquiry" is described as a supreme stress management program spiritual workshop and a vratam, a ritual pledge generally performed by women, becomes human resource management.

The acculturation process for immigrants has always been rapid and severe, with “individualism” serving as the shorthand description for the many forces involved as well as for their outcome. Ronald Takaki argues, for instance, that the “iron cage” of individualism has been one of the crucial cultural constructs used to break down immigrant community relationships, by celebrating the rational, autonomous individual as sovereign.

Sacvan Bercovitch offers an analysis that captures the characteristic contradictions of this process. He describes the ways in which the Puritan project of self-fashioning, deeply identified with the larger project of empire-building, can be understood to have been influential, in one form or another, since the seventeenth century. Self-making was seen as heroism, requiring individual will and imagination, a civic virtue and a national mission. The allegory of America as the promised land and means of acculturation for later generations of Indian immigrants. The focus on religious identity serves to deflect the awkward question of race and provides the VHP with a genteel multicultural presence. At the same time, VHP’s vision of a strong Hindu state offers compensatory gratification for the experience of exile and marginality...."

45. Ibid., pp. 172-174.
47. Suprabatham, literally “good morning,” is the name given to morning songs in Carnatic music, sung to awake the deity. Recorded music, of course, allows a variety of listening contexts.
wilderness for Cotton Mather became for Emerson the redemptive frontier of the West. Bercovitch sees a persistent tendency in the culture to link self- and social-assertion with the moral assurance of a "self-proclaimed people of God." This has combined claims of fostering individual freedom with the paradoxical ability to direct that freedom into the reproduction of a relatively homogeneous culture—one that is capable of mobilizing unanimity of will in a short period of time. Rather than crystallize the Puritan ideology into a singular set of values, then, we can better understand it through its ability to enclose antithetical terms in a dynamic tension. It exerts its power by narrativizing contradictory forces into one form of fabulation, in characteristic mythic fashion.50

The issue of race becomes immediately obvious as an underlying theme in the enactment of the Puritan will. Both the takeover of what was declared to be "empty land" from the native Americans and the establishment of an institution whose effects permeate society to this day, namely slavery, were of fundamental importance in the birth of "America" and testify to a deep belief in racial superiority as part of the project of American self-making. How then do non-whites inhabit such a self? Ruth Frankenberg, in her interviews with white women in Northern California, found persistent denials of any substance in their own culture; they often referred to it as "no culture." It was "others" who had "culture," who had "color" and "diversity" in their lives. Respondents spoke of "the formlessness of being white," and of the unmarked nature of "whiteness" leading to anonymity.51 The distinction of being unmarked, however, represents the privilege of a dominant culture that names Others without having to identify itself, as Frankenberg points out. Whiteness appears then as the underlying basis on which all are evaluated and graded, and as the highest point of assimilation in a melting pot society. In a culture whose normative core is blanked out, white immigrants are always more easily assimilated; it is the non-white "hyphenated Americans" who are asked—into the second generation and beyond—which country they are "from."

Hindu vs. American Identity

As actors in a narrative of modernity that is not "theirs," what choices might non-white non-Westerners make beyond marginality and imposture? The question emerges more sharply in the West, but it is an issue to be grappled with in any attempt at "modernization." One variant of Hindu nationalism inverts difference, and presents progress instead as originating from itself: "Hindu science" emerges as the visionary manifesto of modernity, even if it fell into disuse and disrepair thanks to alien invaders, primarily Muslims. Identity formation in the United States, however, is indelibly marked by race. This is clearest, of course, in those whose formative years were spent in this country. I will quote a series of excerpts from an interview with a second-generation Indian, Shyam Mudgal, born and raised in the United States and an active member of the VHP of America's student wing, the Hindu Students' Council. The ideological conflation of "Hindu" with "Indian" has little political salience in the context of the United States; if in India "Muslim" is the Other, here Indians are themselves the marginal ones. To assert "Hinduness" is to attempt to declare difference without confrontation, diverting the issue of race into one of congenial cultural variation. This does not succeed in evading either marginality or imposture, it involves both.

I think deep inside I believe I'm strongly Hindu. That doesn't inhibit me from doing most things I want...What's important is understanding what an atman is, what moksha is, what the law of karma is...Hinduism is very consistent with science, so there's less of a dichotomy.

The multiple hesitations in making the assertion of identity culminate in Mudgal's defiant flourish: "I'm strongly Hindu." We can observe the splitting of the self, performed to acknowledge the otherness of a heathen culture in the authorized vision of modernity. Here the division between inner and outer creates no friction, however, because their respective bases in Hinduism and science are "very consistent" with each other. This absence of a dichotomy cannot be spoken in the same language; a sacred, and secret, tongue is invoked, asserting rather than denying otherness.

I identify with being an American completely...I don't think there is any conflict if you understand what the actual philosophical process of being a Hindu is...Sometimes there are traditions which it seems like you have to follow. Like going to the temple for instance. You have to understand why this is only a tradition and doesn't have a deeper significance.

The vigor of the assertion "American completely" suggests the force of will required to be "American," just as the more hesitant invocation of Hinduness indicates the refractoriness of an insufficiency of nature. Again the implication of conflict and again the swift denial. Although Hinduness is "deep inside," its resolution is referred to an abstract level, as a philosophy to be understood, rather than as a history, for instance, much less as something that needs to be worked out emotionally or in practice. Thus traditions are described as "only" traditions, with no commitments of belief or action entailed by them. What then does Hinduness mean?

We've even tackled social issues. We explain how all of mankind is one family. You can find reasons in Hinduism to get involved in social work. We're just using Hinduism as a driver force to get involved in daily life. Not in a fundamentalist way. But just to be proud of being Hindu. Subconsciously it gets instilled in us too, because of the media, that Hinduism is very primitive.52

Mudgal finally refers to marginality, although he exonerates the larger culture at the same time by concentrating bias in the media, the familiar villain in a blameless society. The refer-
erence is still not directly to race, but religion is fungible with it here. Addressing the problem of identity is key to the Hindu Students' Council's method. The cultural work Mudgal describes is not the task of oppositional signifying practice, however. There is little acknowledgment of the prolonged and extensive labor required to engage with, shift, and transform existing deep-rooted identities. Nor is such transformation intended. Initially, Hinduness was something deep inside, now it appears outside as a propulsive force compelling an already constituted self. “We’re just using Hinduisms” comes as an admission of strategic appropriation that begins from and returns to the field of dominant American culture, not “in a fundamentalist way” but “just to be proud.” The contradiction remains between being American and asserting Hindu identity. The “primitivism” of the latter sits ill with the modernity of quotidian life, leading to a splitting of the self and to denial, to a heuristic crossing back between invoking a secret identity and domesticating it as already known, as merely a useful tool. The contradiction is “resolved” in the mode of American self-fashioning, as an ongoing effort of individual will and imagination.

For first generation immigrants, home is the place that bears all the burden of differences that are unresolvable in the new environment. It offers an identity that is crucial to recovering a sense of self that has been challenged by experiences of racial exclusion. Inhibitions in the expression of marginality in the United States tend to solidify the immigrant’s sense of their identity being repressed, making it less fuzzy and plural, more unitary, heavy, and substantial. For these immigrants, forming links with political parties at home is a natural outcome of these dynamics. The next generation, however, faces a somewhat different set of problems. Without their own memories of home, they turn to first generation immigrants as their means of “remembering,” as their experiential link with the homeland. Racial marginalization is experienced, and often denied, by both groups. Nevertheless a disjuncture exists between them, because the crucial loci of their early, formative years are different.

Disjuncture and Difference at Work

Specific forms of association determine the kind of nationalism that immigrants express. While expatriate nostalgia and yearning for an idealized community at home may grow in response to alienation and frustration abroad, the specific ways in which these become manifest are not predetermined. They are dependent on meanings that are selectively mobilized and articulated to reproduce the relationship between disparate locations. It is crucial that the branches maintain their institutional differences, so as to retain their affiliations and their recruiting ability in each location.

The constituents of the VHP of America are mostly English-educated professionals and managers. Their counterparts in India, by contrast, have a far more diverse class spread, with a much higher percentage of lower-middle-class members, who use vernacular languages for the most part. The differences between the two branches can be understood in the light of these fundamental divergences. The former are relatively well-settled and shun any association with oppositional politics in the United States; the descriptions of VHP work that circulate in their literature emphasize values and education and highlight the contributions that Indian immigrants make to social work. The VHP of India offers a stark contrast: it has a far more embattled middle-class membership prepared for militancy. Alone of the organizations banned for their role in the demolition of Babri Masjid, the VHP was banned for nearly three years; the ban on the others was lifted soon after the incident.

For Mudgal and most other U.S.-born Indians, the Hindu nationalist politics of the VHP seem distant and more a concern for first-generation immigrants than for themselves. For Mudgal, VHP politics do inform commonsense understanding of Indian society. He has tried to interest second-generation youth in the “one or two issues” he has been involved in, like Kashmir and Ayodhya, but he finds that they are “overwhelmed” by the alienness of the subject. His real involvement, he expects, will be in fortifying Hindu identity in the United States through extending the reach and developing the character of organizations like the Hindu Students’ Council.

In Mudgal’s grappling with the problem of his difference, even as a relatively “well-integrated” person, we get some sense not only of the identity problems of the second generation, but also of difficulties that might arise between immigrant parents and children. Few parents are equipped to deal with the qualitatively different problems involved in raising children in the United States, as compared to India, for example. The problems manifest themselves in various forms: uncommunicative, rebellious children, declining performance in school, lack of ambition, and dating. The determination of symptoms is gendered, as are the means of their redress: it is a problem when boys are not ambitious, and when girls want to date. In any case, the children’s rejection of patriarchal authority is often the moment of the most profound cultural crisis for first-generation immigrants; their relationships with their own parents, and their culture, become more idealized the more they contemplate their alienation from their children.

Here the VHP made its grand entrance, as members tell the story, with its unique emphasis on the irreplaceability of Hindu cultural identity, understood as a national identity. Numerous VHP members asserted that the moment of recognition for parents who feel alienated from their children was the moment when their “Indianness” finally struck them as an inescapable reality—one they had to acknowledge and work with. The accumulated problems that had their origins in repressed contradictions could no longer be ignored. Recognition of this reality gave the VHP a prime U.S.-specific mobilizational opportunity. The VHP launched youth camps and Sunday school programs in an effort to provide “community support” for parents' acculturation efforts. The most important task, as the president of VHP saw it, was to give the children an experience of selfless love from outside their own families. He implied, of course, that additional benefits would flow from there on. Even if the children did not become as vociferously “Hindu” as their counterparts in India, the VHP refrained from making this an issue. The emphasis was on helping members blend into U.S. society. “We don’t want to create any tension in their minds,” the VHP president pointed out. What the VHP gained was not only the participation of the parents, but a larger overall membership to parade before the public. More than half of the 5,000 who attended the “Global Vision 2000” conference in 1993, for instance, were U.S.-born. 53.

The sweeping claims, expressed in short, repetitive, ringing phrases, summon the image of drum rolls accompanying a tremendous, ongoing march of people; they have all the rhetorical force of a manifesto or a declaration of war. Pingale goes on to expound the familiar theme of a divided Hindu society, weakened by centuries of Muslim rule and by discriminatory quotas and legislation instituted by vote-hungry politicians, but hopeful at the prospect of realizing its unity and strength. The militancy and the Hindu supremacist of Pingale's rhetoric are unmistakable; the boldness of the claims, breathtaking.

The VHP of America... prefers to select and emphasize issues that resonate in the U.S. context. If those in the subcontinent are compelled to live in India as it is, Indians abroad are free to imagine India as it might be instead.

Parishad is the International organization of Hindus, which has branches in many countries. All these sister organizations cherish the same Hindu ideal of Unity and exhibit the same Concern for the Welfare of the Humanity [sic]. Dedicated Parishad members practice the highest Hindu ideal of World is a one Family [sic]—Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.... Parishad promotes sincere practice of the time tested Hindu cultural and spiritual values, so we can enrich the American society. They drive [sic] an emotional inspiration through a live Contact with Mother Bharat.... Platform of the Parishad provides expression to concerns like preserving rich, spiritual, cultural Hindu heritage and creating positive identity and confidence in the Children.... Parishad invites the serious minded leaders of American society to join hands in enhancing a better understanding.

The VHP's goal of social and political organization in India is replaced here by goals more specific to the United States. The emphasis on creating confidence in children suggests that invoking India's "rich cultural heritage" alone is not enough; it also hints at their minority status. The familiar declaration that the world is one family takes a different meaning in this context, asking for inclusion rather than promising it. Dr. Yashpal Lakra, president of the VHP for America, explained the organization's orientation to U.S. values as natural and expressive of a deep affinity: "American justice and equality is almost identical with the way we think. If you think of the Bill of Rights, or of Jefferson's thinking, it is so akin to the Vedantic way of thinking." Whereas Islamic countries united legal and religious authority, the U.S. Constitution was not a Christian one, and Hindu thought had anticipated such forms of tolerance, he said.

In this understanding, typical of Hindu rightist arguments, Hindu thought had the power to be religious and secular at once. The abstract character of these assertions suits the VHP's U.S.-based constituents, for whom India is more palatable as idea than as reality: "Every time they go to India," Dr. Lakra said, "they feel disgusted. They see the dirty streets and the dirty bathrooms. They don't want to identify with India. But they can take pride in Hinduva."

Hindutva may be offered as a substitute for India, but VHP of America screens out other issues that are deemed inappropriate for their U.S. constituents. Thus, while support for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya was sought, no mention is made of the campaign by VHP (India) in favor of Indian-owned companies over multinational corporations. The swadeshi agitation to protest the presence of foreign companies in non-essential areas, popular among VHP constituents in India, represents a powerful current of economic nationalism, but one that finds little favour with Indians in the United States, who tend to support liberalization.

55. Ibid., pp. 9-11.
57. Dr. Yashpal Lakra, interview with the author, 4 May 1996.
another man’s woman. Wall-hangings listed brand names of consumer goods made by foreign companies, with indigenous equivalents named for each. A consistent Hindu nationalist position would imply support for such politics; the VHP of America, however, prefers to select and emphasize issues that resonate in the U.S. context. If those in the subcontinent are compelled to live in India as it is, Indians abroad are free to imagine India as it might be instead.

Indian participants in VHP-staged protests against GATT and the activities of multinational companies might be surprised to know, for instance, that the VHP of America sees no contradiction in emphasizing its loyalty to the United States (and to U.S.-based corporations), and that its members tend to view GATT as part of a welcome process of liberalization. In addition, the VHP of America’s professions of women’s equality contrast strikingly with the VHP of India’s denunciations of abortion and birth control as “insults to motherhood.” Whereas family-based programs are central to the VHP of America, literature produced by the VHP in India makes little mention of any “social problems” related to the family in India. (The All India Women’s Conference held by the VHP in New Delhi in 1994 represented a belated attempt to address “women’s issues.”) Celibate men and women occupy most of the important positions in the VHP in India, harking back to the Hindu right’s notion of an ascetic (then exclusively male) priesthood of nationalist fighters. For those in India, the VHP of America operates rather as a sign of the VHP’s far-flung reach, of the durability of “Hinduness” (even amidst the seductions of the West), and—not least of all—as a welcome source of a strong currency.

Conclusions

In conclusion, expatriate nationalism may manifest a whole chain of differences constitutive of its collective organization. Indian immigrants’ assertion of Indian/Hindu identity cannot be dissociated from their negotiation of the experience of racial marginalization in the United States. They may make a substitution of religion for race, but regional and national loyalties are usually still salient. In any case, they tend to form syncretist organizations to enable both therapeutic enactments of belonging and sites for the acculturation of their children as well. The politics they espouse centers on concerns in their new location even when looking homewards with an aggressive Hindu nationalism. Second-generation Indians in the United States for their part may seek ways of “integrating” into white-dominant society that are answered by the VHP’s Hindu emphasis. They may assume the first generation’s political attitudes; at the same time, and perhaps more importantly, they seek a culturally congenial way of asserting identity while avoiding the issue of race. Finally there is a much wider spectrum of people in India, who despite their militant, nationalist, and anti-U.S. politics, are likely to sense an affirmation of their politics from international support and certainly from international financial assistance.

Review Essay

Screening China: Recent Studies of Chinese Cinema in English


by Zhang Yingjin*

Prior to the early 1980s, the study of Chinese cinema in academia was a rarity in the West. This situation changed in the mid-1980s in the wake of a number of events that generated new interest in Chinese cinema.

Chinese films began to be shown and greeted with critical acclaim at international film festivals. In 1985, Yellow Earth (Huangtu di, directed by Chen Kaige, 1984) was shown at international film festivals in Hong Kong and Hawaii, becoming the first of a series of success stories from China’s so-called Fifth Generation filmmakers (Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and others). Ground-breaking retrospectives of Chinese films had screened earlier: in Turin, Italy (Feb. 25-Mar. 8, 1982, more than 140 films), in Beijing (Sept. 1983, more than 40 pre-1949 films), and in Hong Kong (Jan. 1984, mostly films from the 1930s). Other Chinese film weeks and film seasons stimulated public interest in Chinese cinema in the West.

In the fall of 1984 and the spring of 1986, Chinese film scholars Cheng Jihua and Chen Mei came to the United States to team-teach their “legendary” film seminars at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Their seminars marked

*My gratitude to the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan for granting me a postdoctoral research fellowship in 1995-96, and to its faculty and staff for making that academic year my most productive one. This essay was first completed and presented at Michigan in December 1995; a Chinese version was presented at Beijing University, Nankai University, and Xiamen University in July 1996.

Editor’s note: Titles of films are given first in English and then in Chinese following the style used by the author.

1. The pre-1980 publications, usually of informational rather than academic nature, supplied basic but much-needed materials on the cultural and political history of modern China, or on significant film events, figures, and studios; some of them also came with biographical entries on major directors and plot summaries of selected films. For samples, see Jay Leyda, Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972); Régis Bergeron, Le cinéma chinois, 1905-1949 (Lausanne: Alfred Eibel, 1977); Cinema e spettacolo in Cina oggi, XIV Mostra internazionale del nuovo cinema quaderno informativo, n. 73 (a cura dell’ufficio documentazione della Mostra, 1978).

Souls) ever duplicated, at least not within the last two or three decades.” See Film Festival, made this observation in 1993: “New Chinese cinema has surprising and admirable series of successes, which no other cinema has

6. Klaus Eder, a principal program organizer of the Munich International

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Contemporary China

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Kaplan, Bill Nichols, Robert Rosen, Robert Sklar, Vivian Sobchack,

nality, musical, narration, psychoanalysis, woman and film, and so on.

practice, ideology, interpretation, melodrama, modernism and moder­

"China Is Near: A Visit to the People’s Republic,” E. Ann Kaplan challenges cross-cultural

and Modern Chinese Literature (1993).

3. Rothman’s phrase, in Wimal Dissanayake, ed., Melodrama and Asian Cinema (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 258. In the subsequent years, Cheng and Chen team-taught at other institutions, including the University of Southern California, the University of Iowa, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook. For a sample list of institutions that have offered Chinese film courses recently, see Yingjin Zhang, “Rethinking Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Questions of Authority, Power, and Difference in Western Studies of Chinese Films,” Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 26, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1994): 44, n. 1. 4. The visiting U.S. film scholars included Dudley Andrew, Nick Browne, David Bordwell, Brian Henderson, Beverle Houston, E. Ann Kaplan, Bill Nichols, Robert Rosen, Robert Sklar, Vivian Sobchack, and Janet Staiger, some of them making more than one trip. The topics of their lectures ranged from film historiography, film theory and practice, ideology, interpretation, melodrama, modernism and modernity, musical, narration, psychoanalysis, woman and film, and so on. For more details, see Nick Browne, Beverle Houston, and Robert Rosen, “China Is Near: A Visit to the People’s Republic,” On Film 14 (1985): 11-17; George S. Sensel, Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong, ed., Film in Contemporary China (New York: Praeger, 1993), pp. xxii-xxiii. 5. In Dissanayake, Melodrama, p. 259. Ni Zhen supplies an example of the dramatic impact of Western critical acclaim on the fate of Yellow Earth: when first released in 1984, the film attracted only a small audience at home, and a Beijing theater had to refund tickets and replace the film with another program; after the 1985 Hong Kong Film Festival, “when an attempt was made in Shanghai to devote two or three movie houses exclusively to experimental narratives, Yellow Earth ran to capacity audiences for a week and had a nationwide impact” (Sensel et al., Film in Contemporary China, p. 31). 6. Klaus Eder, a principal program organizer of the Munich International Film Festival, made this observation in 1993: “New Chinese cinema has dominated many international festivals, most recently Venice in 1992 (The Story of Qiu Ju), Berlin in 1993 (Women from the Lake of Scented Souls) and Cannes in 1993 (Farewell to My Concubine). That is a surprising and admirable series of successes, which no other cinema has ever duplicated, at least not within the last two or three decades.” See Chinese cinema is now firmly established as a blooming field of academic study, as evidenced by the number and quality of the books under review here. This new field of study deserves a systematic examination of its accomplishments to date and an assessment of the needs for further research.

Chinese Cinema and Melodrama

Melodrama and Asian Cinema (Wimal Dissanayake, ed.) is based on a film symposium held at the East-West Center in Hawaii in 1989 and includes four chapters on Chinese cinema.

In the first of the four, “Melodrama / Subjectivity / Ideology: Western Melodrama Theories and Their Relevance to Recent Chinese Cinema,” E. Ann Kaplan challenges cross-cultural film studies to avoid taking an essentialist position that China is China and has nothing to do with the West. Her essay demonstrates that a reading based on Western melodrama theory can actually illuminate our understanding of Chinese films. She believes, for example, that Xie Fei’s A Girl from Hunan shares a “classically patriarchal ideology of a young women’s sexual arousal dependent on male initiation” (p. 21), an ideological position commonly found in classic Hollywood films. Citing a distinction that feminists have observed between “women’s melo-

dramas" (i.e., stories of how “man comes to be man”) and “women's films” (those that resist the dominant patriarchal ideology by raising “the question of what it means to be female” [p. 13]), Kaplan discusses various instances of female subjectivity, sexuality, desire, and transgression in *The Legend of Tianyuan Mountain* (Tianyunsan chuanqi, directed by Xie Jin, 1980), *A Girl from Hunan* (Xiangnan Xiaoxiao, directed by Xie Fei, 1985), *A Good Woman* (Liangjia funi, directed by Huang Jianzhong, 1985), and *Army Nurse* (Nuer lou, directed by Hu Mei, 1985).

Ma Ning’s article “Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s” begins with conceptions of the Chinese family in the popular mind and then focuses on the issues of family conflict, power-pleasure nexus, and sexual politics in *The In-Laws* (Xi yingmen, directed by Zhao Huanzhang, 1981), *In the Wild Mountains* (Yeshan, directed by Yan Xueshu, 1987), and *Country Couple* (Xiangyin, directed by Hu Bingliu, 1983). Ma Ning asserts that “family melodrama” of the early 1980s constitutes a site where symbolic violence is staged and where a “habitual mode of perception of the Chinese peasantry” persists (p. 34).

In “The Goddess: Reflections on Melodrama East and West,” William Rothman analyzes an early Chinese masterpiece, *Goddess* (Shengn, directed by Wu Yonggang, 1934), from a comparative, humanistic perspective and considers the ways in which virtue and purity are embodied in the actress Ruan Lingyu and are captured—rather than violated—by the camera.

Yuejin Wang presents a creative piece, “Melodrama as Historical Understanding: The Making and Unmaking of Communist History,” in which he argues that melodrama is itself a mode of historical understanding because, as in 1989, “History presents itself as cinema” that commands our melodramatic “gaze” (p. 73); he supports his argument with a review of significant historical events in China and in Eastern Europe. The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, he points out, were melodramatic spectacles watched by the rest of the world.

The essays in Wimal Dissanayake’s volume illustrate the importance of melodrama to Chinese film studies. Informed by multiple theoretical models, they offer many interesting—at times insightful—readings of Chinese films. At the same time the essays show the contributors’ struggles to navigate through what Douglas Wilkerson calls, in a rather negative review, “the turbid theoretical verbiage.” An advocate of broad-based area studies, Wilkerson favors research that demonstrates thorough knowledge of other disciplines as opposed to research that is confined to one academic discipline.

**Chinese Cinema and Traditional Arts or Aesthetics**

A good example of the area studies model that Douglas Wilkerson prefers is found in *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan*, edited by Linda Ehrlich and David Desser. (Wilkerson translated the first two essays in the China section on *Cinematic Landscapes*; he provides introductions to each of the essays as well.) The five essays on film and visual arts in China cover a wide range of topics, including traditional aesthetics based on Taoist and Zen Buddhist principles, and the influence of traditional Chinese painting, especially the Southern School of landscape (nanzong), “with its multiple perspectives, relative flatness, use of blank space, elastic framing, lack of chiaroscuro and sculptural shading, and emphasis on expressive, calligraphic contour lines” (Wilkerson, p. 41).

Hao Dazheng’s “Chinese Visual Representation: Painting and Cinema” is a systematic study of outstanding features of Chinese visual representation, such as dominance of horizontal expanse over depth (hence the use of flat mise-en-scène), interest in communality and totality rather than individuality (hence no need for close-ups), or preference of imaginative over realistic portrayal (hence the use of flat lighting). Ni Zhen’s “Classical Chinese Painting and Cinematographic Signification” discusses other features such as the ambulatory, panoramic point of view and freely expandable frame in Oriental painting, the manipulation of temporal “blanks” and “empty space” in Chen Kaige’s and Hou Hsiao-hsien’s (Hou Xiaoxian) films, and the link between the “lyrical” film and the Chinese literati tradition.

*Chinese film scholars in the West are now confronted with two choices: one is to follow the orientalist trend and perpetuate a myth that reduces China to rural China, to barren landscapes, to exotic rituals, to male impotence or castration, to repressed female sexuality—in brief, to all that may be termed ‘primitive passions’; the other is to demythologize Western fantasies and redirect critical attention to other aspects of Chinese cinema.*

Whereas Hao and Ni are thoroughly immersed in Chinese aesthetics, Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar are more concerned with recent developments in the West and thus propose, at the beginning of their essay, “Post-Socialist Strategies: An Analysis of *Yellow Earth* and *Black Cannon Incident*,” to conceptualize “the style and strategies of Fifth Generation films” as “post-socialist”—a concept awaiting further elaboration (p. 84). They then proceed to study Chen Kaige’s *Yellow Earth* in terms of brushwork, ink, composition (drawing on the Chang’an school of painting in the mid-twentieth century, as well as on the concept of yin/yang permutation). They then analyze *Black Cannon Incident* (Heipao shijian, directed by Huang Jianxin, 1983) in terms of alienation, expressionism/abstractionism, and distanciation. They conclude that the departure of these two films from the “socialist-realist tradition” in the 1950s and 1960s points to “the opening up of a post-socialist space” in which tradition may be revived for contemporary intervention and Western modern art invoked for “very Chinese purposes” (p. 110).

As if to illustrate Berry and Farquhar’s conclusion on the usefulness of tradition, An Jingfu’s “‘The Pain of a Half Taoist: Taoist Principles, Chinese Landscape Painting, and *King of the Children*” argues that Chen Kaige’s recourse to Taoist aesthetic is not completely successful and the main character in his *King of the Children* (Haizi wang, 1987) is at best a “half Taoist”—the other half being “Confucian” (p. 121).

Finally, Jenny Kwok Wah Lau’s “Judou: An Experiment in Color and Portraiture in Chinese Cinema” takes note of a switch of artists’ preoccupation from portraiture to landscape during the Tang dynasty (618-904) and redirects our attention to a neglected...
genre, the “rich color painting” (nongcai hua). In terms of the four basic elements in classical Chinese portraiture, namely posture, facial expression, spacing, and environment (p. 134), she discusses the characterization and the manipulation of color in Ju Dou (Ju Dou, directed by Zhang Yimou, 1990). She concludes that the film creates meanings “new to traditional Chinese cinema” (p. 133), but falls short of specifying exactly what the new meanings are or why they are new in contemporary China.

Technically, Cinematic Landscapes is an impressive book, handsomely designed—with many colorplates and stills to illustrate the affinities between painting and cinema. It is also easy to use—with a filmography and a list of selected works (but regretfully without a character list). As an attempt to “identify some of the bridges that link both worlds” of film studies and art history and to investigate “how some films cite the visual arts as a reference point” (Erlich and Desser, pp. 3-4), the anthology is a great success. It not only helps fill a gap in Western scholarship but it also links Chinese and Western types of film studies. However, due to its preoccupation with aesthetic, philosophical, and formal or compositional elements, the Chinese section in this anthology (except for Berry and Farquhar’s essay) does not adequately explain how innovative film styles function in the cultural and political context of contemporary China. For such explanations, we turn to the next book.

**Film Studies in Contemporary China**

In his Foreword to Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989 (George Semsel, Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong, eds.)—a book that covers the most exciting decade of Chinese film studies, 1979-1989—John Lent insists that the collection is “important primarily because it allows Chinese film personnel to speak for themselves in their own language, using their own cultural and scholarly traditions” (p. x). Introductory and concluding remarks from the three editors frame a collection of Chinese articles in English translation that are arranged under five major headings: “The Call for New Social Concepts,” “The Issue of Culture,” “Yingxi” (shadowplay theory), “The Entertainment Film,” and “The Debate on New Chinese Film Theory.” According to the editors, works advocating technological development prevailed in the early 1980s, as evident in the pursuits of film language, of the ontology of film, and of other new concepts of film, whereas from the mid-1980s on “Chinese film studies shifted from technological to ideological concerns” (p. xx) in an attempt to rethink issues of social function, ideological construction, and political implication of filmmaking and film criticism.

In an unambiguous manner, the editors attribute the achievements of Chinese film studies in the “New Era” to the “influence of the West,” for Western film theories, made available for the first time by visiting American scholars and through Chinese translations published by China Film Press (Zhongguo dianying chubanshe) and in journals such as Contemporary Cinema (Dangdai dianying), Film Art (Dianying yishu), and World Cinema (Shijie dianying), provided the necessary discursive means by which Chinese film scholars departed from the official paradigm of monolithic political criticism and ventured into a new intellectual space.

Presented in a variety of forms—essay, commentary, critique, and roundtable discussion, the articles in Film in Contemporary China exemplify a type of scholarship that is markedly different from that practiced in the West. Whereas film studies, as Rothman laments, had become all but completely “academized” in the United States by the mid-1980s and had lost its valuable “human” dimension, in Chinese film criticism we still see a close human tie between filmmakers and critics, and the latter’s genuine engagement in—rather than a presumably “disinterested” detachment from—ongoing film production in China. It is in this sense, to say the least, that the collection will prove useful to anyone who cares about what film studies meant to Chinese scholars in the 1980s, especially when the collection is paired with its earlier, companion volume, Chinese Film Theory (Praeger, 1990), which deals with a number of important debates in the 1980s: the theatricality of film, the literary quality of film, the new concept of film, the nationalization of film, and tradition and innovation in film (e.g., the Xie Jin model). The weaknesses of the 1993 collection are its inconsistencies and its presentation of bibliographic data that is frustratingly incomplete or even incorrect.

Judged by the standards of quality research, comprehensive coverage, and rich supplementary materials (e.g., illustrations, chronologies, glossary, and bibliography), New Chinese Cinemas (Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, and Esther Yau, eds.) is undoubtedly the best single-volume publication on contemporary Chinese cinema in English to date. Based on a conference held at UCLA in January 1990, this collection represents the maturation of Chinese film studies in the United States—a remarkable achievement given that the field was barely ten years old at the time of the conference.

In a succinct introduction, Nick Browne, who was among the first to introduce Chinese film studies in the United States, places this anthology in a “demanding cross-cultural frame,”...
characterizing it as an interdisciplinary venture "between film studies and Chinese studies" (p. 11). "The challenge," Brown states, "is to map the changes of aesthetic form and sensibility upon the resistances and incursions, displacements, and reinscriptions of political power as it seeks to shape the social body" (p. 2). To that end, he reminds the reader, "Western interpretations of these changes . . . must first be historical and cultural" (p. 11).

"For film study in America to accept Asian cinema only as an object to be studied in accordance with already established procedures and doctrines is for the field to deny to Asian films, and to Asians, the status of subjects, subjects capable of thinking for themselves."

The first two essays in the anthology deal with melodrama. In "Spatiality and Subjectivity in Xie Jin’s Film Melodrama of the New Period," Ma Ning maps the manifestation of spirituality and subjectivity in Chinese film melodrama. Beginning with an examination of film director Xie Jin’s narrative mode as a blending of "history with fiction or legend, the personal with political, in a narrative pattern characterized by a bipolar structure that is typically Chinese" (p. 15), Ma discusses spatial dislocation and female subjectivity in The Legend of Tianyun Mountain and the construction, in Xie Jin’s other films, of a "coherent" social subject at a time of ideological crises. In the course of his explanation, Ma Ning makes observations such as these: the subject position of the Chinese narrative discourse is group-oriented (p. 19); the yin-yang cosmology has left its mark on the screen layout, so that the right-hand side is usually associated with yang/positive whereas the left-hand side with yin/negative (p. 20). Clearly influenced by structuralist poetics, several of Ma Ning’s observations appear to be too neatly charted. They require further evidence to substantiate their validity.

In "Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Melodrama," Nick Browne summarizes Western theories of melodrama and, in a cautious way, suggests that Chinese “family melodrama” (as conceived by Ma Ning) is not truly analogous with its Western counterpart. Browne proposes instead a concept of “political melodrama” that he defines as “an expression of a mode of injustice whose mise-en-scène is precisely the nexus between public and private life, a mode in which gender as a mark of difference is a limited, mobile term activated by distinctive social powers and historical circumstances” (p. 43). Interestingly, he selects the same Xie Jin films that Ma analyzed, but he offers his own interpretations of the intricate link between political positions and sexual relations, the tension generated by the expectations of an ethical system (Confucianism) and those of a political system (socialism), a mode of subjectivity at the margin of official discourse, and a concept of the “person” apart from gender per se.

In comparison, Paul Pickowicz’s “Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism” is theoretically more daring in that it recommends the notion of “postsocialism” as a way to comprehend contemporary Chinese culture and society. He judges modernism to be an abused term and postmodernism to be largely irrelevant to Chinese film studies. Postsocialism, he argues, exists in “the domain of popular perception” (p. 61), if not on an explicit ideological level. Pickowicz claims that “an alienated postsocialist mode of thought and behavior began midway through the Cultural Revolution” and that this “negative, dystopian cultural condition” is not restricted to the city alone (pp. 62-63). He views Black Cannon Incident as a postsocialist critique of the Leninist political system, Dislocation (Cuoweil, directed Huang Jianxin, 1986) as a parody that links postsocialism to theater of the absurd, and Transmigration (Lunhui, directed Huang Jianxin, 1989) as a story of individual resignation and anomic in the postsocialist society.

In “Neither One Thing Nor Another: Toward a Study of the Viewing Subject and Chinese Cinema of the 1980s,” Chris Berry continues a study he began in 1985, substantially modifying his earlier judgment that a “nonindividualized, communal subject” is typical of post-1949 “classical mainland Chinese cinema.” For films in the 1980s, Berry proposes “a series of more localized models” of the viewing subject—models that take into account “a matrix of distinguishing factors, among them gender, distanciation, identification, subjectivity, emulation, and rejection” (p. 109).

The second part of New Chinese Cinemas focuses on films from Taiwan and Hong Kong. It opens with Fredric Jameson’s “Remapping Taipei,” an essay on Terrorizer (Kongbu fenzi, directed by Edward Yang [Yang Dechang], 1986) and on the film’s themes of urban alienation and disillusionment. In its characteristically imaginative fashion, Jameson refers to a range of European modernist works and non-Western texts as he argues that Terrorizer attributes modernization more generally to urbanization than to Westernization as such (p. 120), that it explores three now-archaic modernist themes—“art versus life, the novel and reality, mimesis and irony” (p. 123)— and that it defines the situation of women as “fundamentally spatial” while developing the male figures in “their temporal destinies” (p. 146).

In “The Ideology of Initiation: The Films of Hou Hsiao-hsien,” William Tay employs the notion of “initiation” in his study of the world-renowned director from Taiwan, Hou Hsiao-hsien. Tay regards Hou’s A Time to Live and a Time to Die (Tongnian wangshi, 1985) and Dust in the Wind (Lianlian fengchen, 1987) "as cinematic analogues of the Bildungsroman," which concentrates on the maturing process of the film’s protagonist (p. 152). “But besides the usual psychological inclination to romanticize childhood and to embellish the past,” Tay writes, “Hou Hsiao-hsien’s unstained and innocent countryside always remains in idealistic opposition to . . . the city, which is usually portrayed as the embodiment of deception, corruption, and exploitation” (p. 155).

Li Cheuk-to’s (Li Zhuotao) essay, “The Return of the Father: Hong Kong New Wave and Its Chinese Context in the 1980s,” is very informative. Conceding that Hong Kong has not produced directors of the caliber of Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Chen Kaige, or Tian Zhuangzhuang, he argues nevertheless that Hong Kong cinema is important in many ways (p. 160). First, all new wave directors have received formal training in film schools in the West, and their works are marked by technical sophistication, aesthetic stylization, and modern sensibility. Second, since they were born and grew up in the territory, they exhibit a new Hong Kong consciousness—one that was absent from earlier generations of Hong Kong filmmakers who were more concerned with nationalism and their Chinese identity. The reintegration of Hong Kong into China in 1997 was a shadow

that loomed large in the minds of the new generation of Hong Kong directors, who sought to articulate a collective anxiety by probing into the China-Hong Kong relationship. According to Li, *Homecoming* (Shuishu liumian, directed by Yim Ho [Yan Hao], 1984) and *Long Arm of the Law* (Shenggang qibing, directed by Johnny Mak [Mai Dangxiong], 1984) constitute “the positive and negative poles of people’s perceptions of the mainland in Hong Kong” (p. 169).

Survival, self-interest, and a new heroism based on brotherhood are the themes developed in the gangster films that have long been popular in Hong Kong. By contrast, Hong Kong’s new breed of directors (those who began filmmaking in the late 1980s) reject the myths of brotherhood and heroism and—in films like *Gangs* (Tongdang, directed by Lawrence Ah Mon [Liu Guochang], 1988)—refuse to acknowledge the return of the father (the symbol of Chinese tradition).

In “Border Crossing: Mainland China’s Presence in Hong Kong Cinema,” Esther Yau distinguishes five perspectives of “China”—imperial China, Republican China, socialist China, Taiwan after 1949, and Hong Kong ruled by the British since 1842 (p. 182). She sees Hong Kong as a place where Chinese and Western cultural values co-exist and, like Li Cheuk-to, treats *Homecoming and Long Arm of the Law* as polar expressions vis-à-vis the mainland, although both films are equally ambivalent “toward [Hong Kong’s] postcolonial future” (p. 197).

The final essay in the anthology, Leo Ou-fan Lee’s “Two Films from Hong Kong: Parody and Allegory,” analyzes the larger issues of urban culture and postmodern sensibility through the study of two films that represent two popular Hong Kong subgenres—the “hardcore” *gongfu* movie and the “softcore” romantic comedy. Lee starts with actor/director Jackie Chan (Cheng Long), whose serious and comic sides in *gongfu* action films such as *Project A* (A jihua, 1983) exhibit elements of parody and allegory. Lee then studies *Rouge* (Yanzhi kou, directed by Stanley Kwan [Guan Jinpeng], 1987) and *Peking Opera Blues* (Daoma dan, directed by Tsui Hark, 1987). Taking his interest in parody one step further—linking parody and “pastiche”—Lee points to “the inevitable theoretical query: can we regard Hong Kong films as in some way products of a Chinese postmodern culture?” (p. 212). For him, “postmodernity” is indeed already present in Hong Kong cinema and its presence may “have something to do with the infrastructure of Hong Kong’s urban culture” (p. 212). Refraining from a thorough investigation of the question of postmodernity, Lee nonetheless urges the reader to think about how to situate Chinese cinema in the contemporary postcolonial, if not entirely postmodern, world system, an issue that is examined at great length in Rey Chow’s most recent book.

### Chinese Cinema and Postcoloniality

The only single-authored book under review here, Rey Chow’s *Primitive Passions* is the most impassioned study of Chinese cinema and modern Chinese culture. Rereading Lu Xun’s well-known story of how he came to write fiction after watching a newsreel about the execution of a Chinese spy by the Japanese, Chow detects a sign of the beginning of a new kind of discourse—that of “technologized visuality”—in the “third world” (p. 5). What she sees as “paradoxical” in Lu Xun’s case is that, while fully aware of the direct and crude power of the new visuality, he nonetheless returned to the “ancient, word-centered culture” (p. 10) in his enlightenment project.17 Drawing on postcolonial discourse, Chow further asserts that, though visuality has been largely marginalized, if not altogether repressed, by modern Chinese intellectuals, “the entry of film represents a moment of an epochal dislocation of the linguistic and literary sign” (p. 18). In her elaborate formulation of “primitive passivity,” she points to the fantasies of a lost origin and to the strategies of invention and exoticization that structure a way of seeing “China as simultaneously victim and empire” (pp. 22-23).

After a discussion of “Mao-worship” during the Cultural Revolution as “the most enchanting film of the time” (p. 31), Chow studies China’s Fifth Generation directors as “anthropologists and ethnographers” who create a “space where ‘China’ is exhibited in front of audiences overseas” (pp. 37-38). Their cinematic reinventions of “China,” Chow insists, must be “seen ultimately as rejoinders to the aspirations of the communist state” (p. 43); to move beyond such “cultural centricism,” she calls for decentering the sign of “China” (p. 48).

Part 2 of Chow’s book consists of four chapters devoted to specific Chinese films. According to Chow, a film like *Old Well* (Laoping, directed by Wu Tianming, 1987) “demonstrates the fundamental nothingness of the labor of social fantasy” (p. 77); moreover, she claims, “A careful allegorical reading of *Old Well* would demonstrate that the allegory of the ‘nation’ is, paradoxically, the nation’s otherness and nonpresence”—a nonpresence “signified by the barrenness of romantic love” (p. 72). In her reading of *Yellow Earth*, she critiques two positions in current critical thinking about “third world” cinema—one “leftist masculinist” (i.e., Jameson’s “national allegory”) and the other “liberal feminist” (i.e., E. Ann Kaplan’s “heterosexual erotics”)—and argues that, in Chen’s film, “the image becomes a kind of alibi, with its full signifying power giving way to a significance that is musical in effect” (pp. 89-90). In a radical move, she locates in *King of the Children* a “conception of culture as violence and excrement” (p. 129) and a creation, in the elusive figure of a “mute” cowherd, of “a discourse which counters the institution of education” (p. 124). As a product of narcissistic male culture, she concludes, “Chen’s film offers a fantastic kind of hope—the hope to rewrite culture without woman and all the limitations she embodies” (p. 141).

Finally, turning to Zhang Yimou’s *Red Sorghum* (Hong gao liang, 1988), *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern* (Dahong denglong gaogao gua, 1991), she judges these films to be “inheritors of the popular Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fictional modes” (p. 146), a term used by critics to refer to a type of popular fiction in early twentieth-century China that dwells excessively on the emotional lives of young lovers. She admits, however, that Zhang betters his precursors in the “art of seduction,” which involves a “self-subaltermination” and a “fetishization of women” (p. 148). She then reviews recent studies of Zhang and objects to the interpretations based on the *wu/shi* (emptiness/fullness) conceptualization and on the “repressive hypothesis” (p. 158). For Rey Chow, “filmic images operate as images, as surfaces whose significance lies in their manner of
undoing depth itself" (p. 159). The power of surfaces in Zhang’s films, she contends, comes from their confrontation, from their tactics of returning “the double gaze of the Chinese security state and the world’s, especially the West’s, orientalism” (p. 170, emphasis in the original).

In the final part of her book, Chow considers China’s status as object of gaze and claims that “being-looked-at-ness, rather than the act of looking, constitutes the primary event in cross-cultural representation” (p. 180). Through the twist of looking at oneself being looked at by others (the West), she suggests, contemporary Chinese cinema seeks to ethnographize China (the self) and becomes, in the end, an “autoethnography” (p. 181). After a survey of Western translation theories, she reconstructs Chinese cinema as “cultural translation” (p. 182), or translation between cultures, and concludes: “If translation is a form of betrayal, then the translators pay their debt by bringing fame to the ethnic culture.... It is in translation’s faithlessness that ‘China’ survives and thrives” (p. 202).

As “a rejoinder to some of the most urgent debates about cross-cultural studies, sexuality, ethnicity, identity, authenticity, and commodity fetishism” (a description that appears on the book’s back-cover), Primitive Passions is a timely contribution to a new interdisciplinary study of anthropology, film, and literature. As “an attempt to produce a cultural history and anthropology of modern China through the technologized visual image” (p. x), however, Chow’s book is far from satisfactory. For one thing, the project as she envisions it would not be complete without consideration of other genres and forms of visual representation, such as book illustrations, pictorial magazines, and comic strips, as well as photography, television, advertising, and architecture. Her restricted use of Chinese sources, which stands in striking contrast to her impressive command of Western architecture. Her restricted use of Chinese sources, which stands in striking contrast to her impressive command of Western critical literature, will inevitably reduce the persuasiveness of her major arguments. For instance, the concept of film as (auto)ethnography is illuminating in regard to Tian Zhuangzhuang’s Horse Thief (Daoma zei, 1985) but inadequate to his Rock ‘n’ Roll Kids (Yaogun qingnian, 1988); similarly, “primitive passions” are fully present in Zhang Nuanxin’s Sacrificed Youth (Qingchun ji, 1985) but noticeably absent from her Good Morning, Beijing! (Beijing nizao, 1990), or from other contemporary urban films, such as The Trouble Shooters (Wanzhu, directed by Mi Jiashan, 1988) and After Separation (Da saba, directed by Xia Gang, 1992). These remarks, nevertheless, are not meant to diminish the value of Primitive Passions, which lies in the provocative questions it poses, if not in the radical answers it proposes.

Unresolved Issues

In conclusion, I will comment on a set of interrelated issues that are raised but not fully resolved in the books under review and that are likely to generate further debates. The first issue concerns the politics of cross-cultural studies, or more precisely, the question of Western theory and Chinese texts. Presumably writing against the text-centered approach in the West, Li Tuo recommends that “attention should be paid not only to the [Chinese] film texts themselves, but also to the ways in which Chinese critics interpret these texts and how and in what context their theoretical discourse is produced.” 20 Yet, throughout the 1980s, the Chinese theoretical discourse was heavily influenced by Western theory. “Translations of Bazin’s What Is Cinema? and Kracauer’s Theory of Film... were quickly followed by studies in semiotics, structuralism, formalism, psychoanalysis, ideological and feminist criticism.... The works... by Mitry, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacobson, Metz, Foucault, Benjamin, Althusser, Fredric Jameson, Andrew, Bordwell, Nichols, Nick Browne, Mulvey, and Ann Kaplan, brought numerous new approaches into the field and, in contrast to the past, heavily influenced Chinese film studies.” 21 In fact, gleaned from recent studies, many names can be added to this spectacular “hit parade”—Adorno, Bakhtin, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Derrida, Freud, Heidegger, Lacan, Nietzsche, and Said. The list goes on and on.

We may take the presence of these Western theorists in Chinese film studies as a sign of the significance accorded to the field and of the level of sophistication the field has attained; but, from another point of view, it may be said that this Western presence is problematic—even to some Western film scholars. In his passionate overview at the end of Melodrama and Asian Cinema, Rothman questions the condition in which Asian cinema becomes accepted as an integral part of academic film study: “For film study in America to accept Asian cinema only as an object to be studied in accordance with already established procedures and doctrines is for the field to deny to Asian films, and to Asians, the status of subjects, subjects capable of thinking for themselves. It is to silence Asian voices,... to suppress conversation between and among Americans and Asians.” 22 The silencing and suppression of Asian films in Western studies have been criticized, 23 but more is at stake in cross-cultural studies, including such a practical thing as how to designate the term “contemporary Chinese cinema” for Western audiences.

This raises another issue, the notion of contemporary Chinese cinema as “ethnography and autoethnography.” 24 As is clear from the review above, Rey Chow bases her analysis on a small number of recent films, most of them set in rural China or in a mythical or cyclical time frame. 25 It is true that—with the success of films of Zhang Yimou’s such as Red Sorghum and Ju Dou—Western audiences will have no difficulty recognizing “oppos-
sive feudal practices, ethnic details, myth making, magnificent cinematography, [and] female sexuality" as Zhang’s trademarks (p. 150). However, from a critical point of view, to theorize that these trademarks of one individual somehow constitute the essential features of contemporary Chinese cinema is, intentionally or not, to disregard its diversity and complexity, to deny its achievements in other categories (e.g., urban cinema), and ultimately to participate in a new kind of orientalism. Indeed, Zhang Yimou’s "exhibitionism"—which Chow calls "the Oriental’s orientalism" (p. 171)—is very much a product of orientalist surveillance exercised by the international film festivals in the West as an immediate result, his model of "visual ethnography" (p. 149) may have become "infinitely reproducible" (p. 48). It is not an exaggeration to state that Chinese film scholars in the West are now confronted with two choices: one is to follow the orientalist trend and perpetuate a myth that reduces China to rural China, to barren landscape, to exotic rituals, to male impotence or castration, to repressed female sexuality—in brief, to all that may be termed "primitive passions", the other is to demythologize Western fantasies and redirect critical attention to other aspects of Chinese cinema.

This task of re-envisioning the directions of critical practice is the third issue I would like to address. As Chris Berry rightly observed in 1990, "we still lack reliable English-language histories of the Chinese cinema before 1949, the Taiwan cinema and the Hong Kong cinema... [And] individual genres of feature film, documentaries and newsreels remain largely uncharted." Seven years have passed since Berry made this observation in Melbourne, Australia, but the situation remains basically unchanged as far as film history is concerned. What is encouraging in the field, nevertheless, is an increasing number of critical studies of individual texts of early Chinese cinema, Taiwan cinema, and Hong Kong cinema in the early 1990s, although we still need more studies of auteurs, genres, and themes.

25. Among the eighteen films she lists in the index, more than half are merely mentioned in the book, and only one (Goddess, 1934) falls in the category of urban cinema.

26. Three recent films conform to Zhang Yimou’s paradigm of repressed female sexuality in rural China: The Woodenman’s Bride (Yanshen, directed by Huang Jianxin, 1993), a film that looks like a remake of Red Sorghum; Red Firecrackers, Green Firecrackers (Paoda shuangdeng, directed by He Ping, 1994), a winner at the 1994 Hawaii Film Festival and a crowd-pleaser at art theaters in the West; and Ermo (Ermo, directed by Zhou Xiaowen, 1994), an artistic, at times comic variation on the theme of repressed female sexuality set in contemporary China.


29. In addition to the writings by Chow and Yau reviewed here, see Chris Berry, "A Nation (T)wo: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)," in Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema, ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 42-64. This collection is not reviewed here because it contains only two essays on Chinese cinema, both published previously in East-West Film Journals.

30. For a full-length discussion of these questions, see Yingjin Zhang, "From ‘Minority Film’ to ‘Minority Discourse’: Questions of Nationhood and Ethnicity in Chinese Film Studies," Cinema Journal 36, no. 3 (spring 1997): 73-90.

31. In Browne et al., New Chinese Cinemas, p. 120.
Report from the Field

Not Quite Han: The Ethnic Minorities of China’s Southwest

by Jonathan Unger*

In centuries to come, when historians look back at the history of southwest China, they will see the last half of the twentieth century not so much as the time of “socialist construction,” but rather as the age in which the various peoples of that vast region increasingly adapted to Han Chinese lifestyles. For this is the real—the lasting—story of the past five decades in this part of China. The tidal surges of collectivization and Maoist political campaigns in the region will be perceived largely as events that quickened the process of cultural assimilation. With astonishing rapidity, peoples in the southwest who had once been quite different from China’s majority Han population have largely abandoned their ways of life and beliefs, even their sexual mores and family structures, and increasingly taken on the ways of the local Han. Yet at the very same time, ironically, Chinese government policy dissuades most of them from completely abandoning their ethnic status.

These are the distinct impressions gained during three research trips into the hill country of China’s three southwestern provinces and Hainan Island in 1988, 1991, and 1994-95. Each of the research trips was made on behalf of international anti-poverty agencies. During these travels, households and village officials in several dozens of ethnic-minority villages were interviewed on questions of rural development and social change.

In 1988, I had an opportunity to visit villages in the mountain country of northern Yunnan Province for two months, conducting fieldwork on poverty alleviation. In 1991, villages in southern Yunnan, western Guangxi Province, and Guizhou Province were visited during a similar two-month trip. And in 1993-94, I conducted a month’s fieldwork investigation in the southern Hainan countryside. These travels provided an opportunity to interview farm households of Bai, Buyi (Bouyei), Hui, Li, Miao, Yao, Yi, and Zhuang extraction in counties scattered across the back country of the southwest. At all times, I was able to designate which villages and which households I wanted to visit, often on the spur of the moment.

This report does not present the results of in-depth anthropological fieldwork nor does it plumb in detail the socio-cultural changes under way among a single people. Rather, it is an attempt to convey my sense of the overarching circumstances and predicaments of a broad range of peoples whom I had an opportunity to visit in parts of southwestern China that are normally off-limits to foreigners. To be sure, no generalizations will comfortably cover all of them. China’s southwest is home to a sizeable number of different peoples—a majority of the fifty-five “ethnic minority nationalities” officially recognized by the Chinese government. Some were patrilineal like the Han, some were bilateral, and some matrilineal. Some engaged in irrigated wet-rice agriculture and were commercially sophisticated, while other peoples lived by slash-and-burn agriculture and hunting. Political structures varied as well. The Bai, for instance, once controlled an extensive independent kingdom with standing armies, while the Zhuang (whose population today includes millions of farmers) were traditionally organized in far smaller local groups. Other peoples such as some of those designated today as Miao and Yao, who depended upon slash-and-burn agriculture, lived in small independent bands that shifted encampments whenever soil fertility and wild game became depleted.

Table 1 (p. 68 below) shows the population size of the dozen different ethnic minorities that will be discussed in this article. The map on page 70 shows roughly where they live and what language families they belong to. But as shall be seen later in the essay, the table and map, while useful in distinguishing between these different groups, should be taken with more than a pinch of salt. For one thing, the official population figures in the table are based upon the Chinese government’s own peculiar way of categorizing the various ethnic groups. For another, the map cannot show that sometimes a single small county may contain the villages of four or five different interspersed peoples, including Han settlements and villages inhabited by more than one ethnic group. The map gives a false impression of the southwest region as composed of a patchwork of large single-ethnicity blocks.

The Historical Legacy

Living so near to one another, the indigenous peoples of the southwest have long influenced each other, and thus the “traditional” societies of these peoples were constantly changing. Han immigrants who moved into this environment were influenced in turn by the local mores of their new neighbors. When I conducted interviews in Han villages throughout this region, it was obvious that customs differed from district to district. But it was also apparent in my travels to villages, both Han and non-Han, that interactions among the local ethnic groups were weighted in favor of the absorption of Han traits—either directly through the Han settlers or through the influence of other ethnic minorities who had already been acculturated to Han ways.

* Thanks are due to David Bradley, Uradyn Erden Bulag, Anita Chan, Sarah Dunlop, Stavan Harrell, Raphael Israeli, Peter Van Neww, and the editor and anonymous referees of the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars for comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.
Among some of the peoples I visited, such as the Bai or the Zhuang, the adoption of local Han lifestyles had long preceded the Communist government’s ascension to power in 1949-50. A slow process of assimilation had been under way for many centuries. Indeed, throughout Chinese history the assimilation of other peoples has been one of the principal means by which the Chinese empire and Han Chinese culture have expanded outward, intermingling with and eventually absorbing one people after another on the periphery of the empire. The wealthy Yunnan merchant village that Francis Hsu examined in his 1948 classic, *Under the Ancestor’s Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in Village China*—the community that, for generations of Western university students, has epitomized upper-class rural Chinese life—was in fact entirely inhabited by Bai people who, while retaining their own language at home, had long ago absorbed Chinese mores and practiced them to a tee.1

Unlike the Bai, who were wet-rice agriculturalists and adept at commerce, not all of the indigenous populations of the southwest were in a position to keep their territories intact in the face of the Han advance. Over the centuries, Han migration into the region was accompanied by the gradual retreat of most of the indigenous peoples southward and upward into the mountains.2 Consequently, in Yunnan, where a bit over a third of the population is listed as belonging to ethnic minorities, 70 percent of these peoples today live in mountainous districts.3 In Hainan, the progressive penetration of Han settlers pushed almost all of the indigenous Li people into the southern half of the island province.

1. Although Hsu treats the community as quintessentially Chinese, he notes that “In West Town both sexes dress like other Chinese and all women past thirty have bound feet, but everybody speaks Min Chia as the mother tongue. In addition, most men and fewer women speak the Yunnanese dialect with a local accent” (*Under the Ancestor's Shadow* [New York: Anchor Books, 1967], p. 18). The Bai people of today used to refer to themselves and their language simply as the Min Chia (minjia), a Chinese term meaning ‘commoner’ or ‘civilian’ (perhaps initially used by the Bai in counter-distinction to Chinese military colonies, where *hanyu* was spoken). That is, the Min Chia thought of themselves not as a separate people but as a local variety of civilian Chinese. An interesting book on the Min Chia/Bai is C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Tower of Five Glories: A Study of the Min Chia of Ta Li, Yunnan* (London: Cresset Press, 1941). Two recent articles on this subject are Colin Mackerras, “Aspects of Bai Culture: Change and Continuity in a Yunnan Nationality,” *Modern China* 14, no. 1 (January 1988): 51-84, and David Y.H. Wu, “Culture Change and Ethnic Identity among Minorities in China,” in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups in China*, Chien Chiao and Nicholas Tapp, eds. (Hong Kong: New Asia College, 1989), pp. 15-18 especially.

2. On the historical process of Han immigration and the consequences for China’s indigenous populations, see C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972), chapter 4. Fitzgerald writes that in previous historical eras the peoples who occupied Yunnan’s mountain areas, “the ‘raw’ or ‘uncivilized’ in Chinese terms, were largely left to themselves. Very little conscious and planned effort was made to bring them under Chinese influence, so long as they kept the peace...Chinese policy, on the other hand, lethargic although it seemed to be, was based on the conviction that time would bring all the peoples of Yunnan within the full pale of Chinese civilization; a century this way or that did not matter” (pp. 74-75). The ascension of the Communist Party altered official perceptions and accelerated this process dramatically.


5. This “commercial” conquest of land is apparent, for example, in the life stories related in Hsiao-T’ung Fei and Chih-I Chang, *Earthbound China: A Study of Rural Economy in Yunnan* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948).

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official category</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Normal geographic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>1,595,000</td>
<td>Valleys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyi</td>
<td>2,545,000</td>
<td>Hill country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai</td>
<td>1,025,000</td>
<td>Valleys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>1,254,000</td>
<td>Hill country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu (for Yunnan only)</td>
<td>440,000*</td>
<td>Valleys/hill country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingpo</td>
<td>119,000</td>
<td>Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li</td>
<td>1,111,000</td>
<td>Hill country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisu</td>
<td>575,000</td>
<td>Hill country/mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naxi</td>
<td>278,000</td>
<td>Valleys/hill country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>7,398,000</td>
<td>Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao</td>
<td>2,134,000</td>
<td>Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>6,572,000</td>
<td>Hill country/mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuang</td>
<td>15,490,000</td>
<td>Valleys/hill country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1982 census figure (Minzuxue yu xiandaihua [Ethnic studies and modernization]), 1985: 2, p. 11).*

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which were organized at times under the auspices of the People’s Liberation Army, recruited demobilized soldiers and peasants from over-crowded provinces to the north, and later in the late 1960s and 1970s absorbed large numbers of young people dispatched from China’s cities.

Sometimes the indigenous peoples were forced out by the new plantations, especially where they had been engaging in slash-and-burn agriculture and hunting, and they were obliged to settle in higher, poorer mountain areas. Elsewhere, such as in the Red River valley in southern Yunnan or in Hainan Province (where I conducted research at four state farms in late 1993), the state farms incorporated the village sites of the indigenous people, who were employed to help staff them. Normally outnumbered by Han, they were expected to live a Han-style life under a Han-style work regimen.6

Even for the great majority of the ethnic minorities who lived beyond the reach of state farms, the advent of socialism and of grassroots Party organization became a dramatically effective means of penetration. The political conformity demanded in Maoist times meant conformity to Han ways; education generally meant education in hanyu (Mandarin Chinese); new farming practices meant adoption of Han techniques and of the crops favored by the Han. During the most oppressive phases of the Maoist period, for instance during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69, non-conformity to Han ways was interpreted by many local Han officials and farmers as deviations from Chairman Mao’s teachings, and sometimes officials and mobs alike destroyed these people’s religious sites and forcefully imposed Han social practices.7 In other periods, though, it appears that the authorities’ efforts to enforce assimilation were not specifically intended to denigrate and discriminate the local peoples; rather, they were unconscious reflections of the Han populace’s assumptions of superiority. Within a few years of the end of the Cultural Revolution, the extremist acts of the period were repudiated as counter-productive, and during the Deng era the government was careful to adopt non-coercive policies in the southwest.

Government efforts have not been similarly effective in the regions to the west and north—regions occupied by peoples such as the Uighurs of Xinjiang Province, the Tibetans, and the Mongol herders of Inner Mongolia. These peoples’ sense of self-identity has been bolstered by belief in a major world religion—Islam or Buddhism—which they can counterpoise to Han claims of superiority, and also by a large concentration of fellow Turkic peoples and Mongols on the other side of China’s border. Fueled by government suspicions, Chinese officials have lashed out periodically with campaigns of repression. Han dominance is explicitly backed up in these regions by standing armies.

The southwest is quite different. The only people there who have cross-border affiliations of any political significance are the Dai of Xishuangbanna Prefecture in southern Yunnan, who can look across to the up-country Dai in Thailand and Thailand’s Theravada Buddhist tradition.8 They have been disinclined to assimilate to Han ways.9 But Beijing does not have concerns about the Dai the way they have about the Tibetans and Uighurs. The Dai themselves exhibit no inclination to separate from China and Chinese authorities evidently believe that they pose no danger of doing so.

Few of the other minority peoples of the southwest have strong reference points external to China, be these ethnic or religious or territorial. Nor do most of these groups occupy any well-defined territories of any size that they can unambiguously call their own. Their communities, whether White Yi or Miao or Yao or Hani, generally are scattered across the terrain in relatively small pockets surrounded by other peoples. Each people usually inhabits its own specific niche—one ethnic group a

6. In Hainan, the region in China with the largest concentration of state farms, I was able to conduct interviews at four rubber plantations. While the most northern of these state farms contains practically no Li at all, each farm that lies farther south contains progressively higher numbers. At the most southern of the four plantations, situated in territory that was inhabited almost entirely by Li until the 1950s, a bit more than half of the farm’s 23,000 residents are Li. Many of them rub shoulders daily with Han co-workers and supervisors. They tend to occupy the lower manual labor positions, and according to the statistics that I gathered, Han families in these four state farms enjoy incomes 43 percent higher than those of the Li households.


9. In a different respect, the Lisu, Jingpo, and Wa peoples who practice a slash-and-burn agriculture in the dense mountain country along China’s frontier with Burma have also been in a position to use their access to the border to resist assimilation. “Whenever the situation in China worsened,” a resident of the border area told me, “they’d shift over to Burma; and when it became peaceful in China again, they’d shift back. They remain outside the system.”
valley bottom, another the hills, yet another group the eroded upper reaches of mountains. In one Guangxi county that I visited in 1991, for instance, the lowlands around the county capital are occupied largely by Han farmers while, farther out, Zhuang communities and their hillside rice paddies occupy the small twisting valleys that comprise much of the county’s arable land area. Narrow trails thread steeply upward from the Zhuang hamlets toward tiny Yao settlements in karst hollows in the hills high above. During the dry seasons, Yao women descend along these trails on long daily trips to fetch drinking water for their families and their scrawny livestock. In another mountainous district not far from the capital of Yunnan Province, intermixed Bai and Han farmers occupy the best mountain valleys, while Yi villages lie in smaller valleys at higher elevations, and an impoverished Miao hamlet sits alone close to the crest of a mountain. A young man from Dehong Prefecture in the far west of Yunnan explains that there, in a similar fashion, “The Dai occupy the valleys, the Lisu occupy the foot of the mountains, and the Jingpo are higher up. It’s said that all three groups used to battle fiercely till it was settled where each lived, at what height.” In this tiered pattern of settlement, all groups recognize that they have only very local territorial claims and that, whether they wish it or not, they are irrevocably bound to the larger Chinese whole.

With the coming of collectives and strong local government administration, the peoples who moved about the highest hill country practicing slash-and-burn agriculture were required instead to settle down in permanent hamlets and to adopt agricultural practices much closer to those of the Han. The Miao who live near the crest of a mountain not far from Yunnan’s capital had been relatively late in becoming permanently settled in this fashion, only in the 1960s. Since that time, the local commune/township leadership, made up entirely of officials of Bai and Yi extraction, has been energetically organizing their assimilation in the direction of Han ways. When I visited in 1988, a one-room school had recently been erected in the Miao hamlet, and a teacher of Miao origin was instructing his pupils in hanyu. Having given up their mobile existence only in recent decades, the Miao have customs that are noticeably different from the Yi, Bai, and Han communities that lie farther down the mountains. The Miao villagers told me through an interpreter that, among other things, they retain more of a collective sense of sharing within the hamlet than do the non-Miao peoples of the district, and that the Miao respected and listened to village elders more than did nearby peoples. In fact, more than in any other

10. The Han usually, but not always, occupy the richer lowlands. In the mountains of north-east Yunnan, where Han immigrants poured through in waves over the centuries, few minority communities remain in place. High eroded mountain territory as poor as any occupied by Miao or Yao elsewhere in the southwest is home here to desperately impoverished Han. One such village of miserable poor mountain Han is described in Jonathan Unger and Jean Xiong, “Life in the Chinese Hinterlands under the Rural Economic Reforms,” Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 22, no. 2 (1990): 9-10.
village that I visited, I saw that the Miao ironically had a certain nostalgia for the period of agricultural collectives, when they had worked together as a tight-knit community and shared their crops under the strong leadership of Miao cadres who played the role of village elders. Yet even here mores have been changing fast; and it was all too obvious as I moved about the hamlet that the newest Han ways of doing things were being adopted, including a recent shift among the younger generation toward a stronger and more competitive sense of private property. Township officials spoke approvingly of this shift, and of the plans that they had in the works to assimilate the Miao more thoroughly into the local commercial economy.

This Miao community is illustrative of a pattern I encountered repeatedly in the southwest. In sum, the pace of acculturation and assimilation among the hill peoples had accelerated sharply following the establishment of the PRC in 1949, with the organization of collectives and then with the subsequent rise of a post-Mao "commodity economy." Through the mid-1950s many of the hill peoples such as the Miao, Yi, Yao, and Li still reportedly had held to their own distinctive mores; but over the past four decades, dramatic cultural changes have taken place.

**Acculturation and Lower-class Status**

In village after village, among the Yi, Zhuang, Yao, Buyi, Li, and other ethnic groups, people answered questions about their social mores in ways that were quite similar to the way local Han farmers answered. In the case of marriage customs, the peoples I contacted today patrilineal very much in the fashion of the Han, whereas some of the ethnic minorities had possessed bilateral or matrilineal descent systems in earlier times. In many of the homes I visited, the main room holds a religious or ancestral altar similar to those in Han households. In almost every place that I visited, I found that the Qing Ming festival honoring the deceased is celebrated in Han fashion, with pork having the same significance in the rituals.

When pressed to identify the ways in which they differ from the Han, villagers would often note that the language they speak at home is non-Han, that in some cases their women still wear distinctive clothing, that they attend festivities that are specific to their own ethnic tradition, that unlike the Han they enjoy singing and dancing at festivities, and that in some cases their wedding and burial rites differ somewhat from those of the Han. But in all other ways, they would assert to me, they were similar to the Han. So, too, in the Minority Affairs Commission office in every county I visited, local commission heads—themselves from ethnic-minority backgrounds—would relate how similar or identical to the local Han the local minorities have become in a range of essential respects.

The head of one county office in Yunnan, himself of Yi background, declared that "with progress, the ethnic groups will be assimilated, and our job is to maintain the existing cultural traditions, to prevent these from eventually becoming extinct." Not surprisingly, the differences that could most readily be discerned in visits to communities appear to be those that are positively encouraged nowadays by the authorities (festivals, special ethnic songs, dances, native costumes, and the like) or are traditions that persist unconsciously. The latter phenomenon involves local ethnic mores that are partially concealed within an outer shell of the newer Han-style forms of kinship and religion, and are not particularly noticeable to the local ethnic people. For instance, my questioning revealed that when ethnic peoples have taken on Han-style kinship structures, the kin on the mother's side of the family often retain an importance on social occasions that is uncommon among the Han.

In a great many cases, the younger members of the minority populations are not aware that their own mores had once differed sharply from those of the local Han. Their knowledge of the past is limited to oral transmission, and collective memories do not go back very far. Again and again I would hear it asserted that the new beliefs and ways of doing things "have always been the customs of us Yi" or "us Zhuang."

This is not to imply that they necessarily put much of a premium on their ethnic identity. As just one example, in the high country of Pingtang County, Guizhou Province, in a small rural township (formerly a commune) of 1,300 households that is 35 percent Han and 65 percent ethnic minority, largely Buyi,11 a 30-year-old Buyi related that he and others of his generation do not speak or understand any Buyi. Nor could he pinpoint any differences between the local Han and Buyi of his own age group.12 He felt no loss whatsoever, he suggested, in becoming assimilated. Similar sentiments were echoed in interviews with members of ethnic minority groups throughout the southwest.

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11. The Chinese government, going against the grain of its official pinyin spelling system, transliterates Buyi as Bouyei for some unknown reason.

12. He appears to be bending the truth here, in that some of the Buyi of Pingtang County still follow a different marriage pattern from the Han. Rural Buyi brides today often return home to their parents' house three days after the wedding and remain there, with visits to their husbands, until the birth of their first child. This custom is on the wane, however, and has already all but disappeared among the Buyi of neighboring Dushan County, where I also spent a number of days going into villages.
As part of my research into poverty alleviation, I went in search of minority communities that had been the least assimilated. In Bama County, Guangxi, where the Zhuang who inhabit the flat arable lands very largely follow Han customs, local officials informed me that, in contrast, the Yao of the high karst East Mountain district had not been much affected by modern Chinese ways because their territory is so isolated. Yet when I scrambled down narrow paths to visit several of these hamlets in hollows among the mountains, I discovered quite a different picture. In one Yao home I sat on a tiny stool talking to a man in his 30s and two younger neighbors who had drifted in. All three of them could speak an understandable Mandarin, as they had gone to the local primary school for several years. Our conversation revealed that their religious practices are largely the same as those of the Han, except that they did not maintain ancestor altars at home; they all wore the same style of clothing as the local Han and Zhuang; and they cooked the same cuisine. When asked about the differences between the Yao and the Han, they stressed that the Yao are scarred by impoverishment. To them, that is the essential “ethnic” distinction, other than the fact that they speak a different language at home. The differences between them and the local Han, they said, are that the Han know how to plan out agriculture better and that during the slack season some of the Han can go off to be carpenters and blacksmiths. “We can’t because we don’t have the know-how. Our homes differ from the Han, too, in that they use tile roofing while we can only afford thatch. If we could afford to, we’d live in Han homes. No, no, there’s no conflict between Yao and Han culture. None. No, we wouldn’t mind, if we lived where the Han are the majority, if we were to speak Han at home—and wouldn’t mind if our grandchildren couldn’t speak Yao.” They smiled at the silliness of my question and at my naiveté in thinking that they should mind.

Many of those I interviewed from other impoverished minority groups in the southwest similarly regard themselves as poor second-class Chinese—a situation they would like to escape. Even officials who are responsible for projecting a contrary image often confessed as much. After regaling me with a rosy official picture about the preservation of Li culture, the Li-origin head of the Minority Affairs Office in a south Hainan county where 45 percent of the rural populace are Li, confided: “Actually, most Li feel their own customs are symbolic of being backward and poor, and so they welcome more ‘modern’ practices.” During interviews in the hill country, farmers of diverse ethnic-minority backgrounds repeatedly expressed that same sentiment.

This perception of their ethnicity as a mark of low status and of poverty can be seen in marriage patterns. Although the majority of individuals in each ethnic minority marry within their own communities, some of the young women, especially in mixed communities, marry into Han households. That is, these women have opportunities to practice hypergamy: upward mobility through marriage into a higher social status grouping. A young Han woman, on the other hand, would rarely marry a Li or Zhuang or Yao or Miao man and take on the status of his family.

Pride in ethnicity usually appeared to belong most to those who can afford it. The Bai, who have a reputation for being better farmers than the Han of Yunnan, for enjoying higher living standards than most of the province’s rural Han, and for achieving higher rates of literacy in the Han Chinese language than the Han themselves, can feel superior to the Han on the Hans’ own terms. It is easy for them to assert pride in being Bai, especially since, as noted earlier, they had become “Chinese” over the centuries on their own terms. At the insistence of the Party secretary of a very prosperous Bai community, I climbed a nearby hill to view the elaborate tomb of a local son who had passed the highest imperial exams during the Qing dynasty and had risen to the office of governor-general of two provinces. The message that the Party secretary and other villagers obviously wished to convey was that we local Bai have long been able to hold our own as Chinese.

It became equally evident, when interviewing in a couple of rural Hui (Muslim) communities in Yunnan, that the Hui also feel no sense of inferiority regarding their Hui identity. They are known to be more commercially astute than most of their rural Han neighbors and they are better in animal husbandry; they also enjoy a higher literacy rate than the Yunnanese Han. Historically they were of Han origin and were speakers of Chinese from their beginnings. Separated from the local Han only by religious tradition and government labeling, they have never had to endure a “Sinifying” process nor had to compromise their customs.

13. In the early 1980s, the Bai recorded a literacy rate of 59 percent, compared to a Yunnanese Han rate of 55 percent. (Minzuxue yu xian­daihua, no. 4 [1986]: 32-33.) These statistics include Yunnan’s urban population, which is overwhelmingly Han, so it can be presumed that the rural Han population had a rather lower rate of literacy than 55 percent.

14. The Hui population of Yunnan had a literacy rate of 58 percent in the early 1980s (ibid). Interestingly, the rate of literacy of Hui women was identical to that of Yunnanese Han women. The Naxi are the only other minority people in Yunnan besides the Bai and Hui with a higher literacy rate than the Han.
Prejudices

So far as I could tell, the Han in Yunnan refer to the Bai with respect; there is little reason not to, as the Bai reflect back to the Han a cultural and economic image that is similar to that of the Han. The Hui of Yunnan are the objects of disparaging Han remarks about their being “too sharp” commercially and too clannish, but whatever biases the Han may hold against them are mixed with sour respect, as they are as good or better than the rural Han in many of the things that the Han themselves value.

But the predominant Han image of other ethnicities in the hill country of the southwest is quite different. In one respect, it is the image that these people have learned to hold of themselves: embarrassingly poor and backwater, and socially and materially so disadvantaged as to seem manifestly inferior to the Han.

This image is exemplified by an anti-poverty project that was initiated among the Li in 1993 using Hainan provincial government funds. This project provided grants of 1,000 yuan to a number of Li households to help finance the erection of Han-style brick homes. Although the thatched houses normally built by the Li are better suited to the local climate, Han-style houses are perceived to be superior precisely because they are associated with Han-ness. Notably, the project specified that these house-building grants were only to be made available to Li who live in thatched housing within sight of asphalt roads. The Hainan countryside contains few such roads; and those that do exist tend to be frequented by tourists from other parts of China and from overseas. What it came down to was that thatched housing was regarded by the officials as embarrassing evidence of a primitive poverty that is unbecoming to Hainan’s self-image. Among the Li themselves, it was noticeable in the villages that I visited that the most prosperous Li tend to build brick and tile-roofed homes similar to the Han, despite the fact that these are stifling in the sultry tropical climate.

House styles are not the only aspect of minority material culture that Han officialdom holds in low regard. A Western agronomist with whom I traveled in Guizhou Province in 1991 was perturbed to find that the government agricultural extension service was trying to persuade ethnic-minority highland farmers to give up the cultivation of varieties of buckwheat and rye that were well-suited to the local climate and to grow instead varieties of dry rice that are vulnerable to damage by the highlands’ climatic extremes. The local Han agricultural officials were puzzled by the agronomist’s concerns, as a shift to rice seemed to them an undeniable mark of the populace’s “progress.”

During my travels rural Han cadres repeatedly made off-the cuff disparaging comments about the rural minorities as being “slow” and “backward” and “childlike.” There exists among the Han an open prejudice that even university-educated Han are willing naively to reveal to a foreigner. The Li, for instance, were portrayed to me repeatedly in a Stepin Fetchit stereotype of happy-go-lucky, lazy, watermelon-eating natives of dubious moral stature.

This bigoted image is reinforced by the Han view of minority hill groups as being sexually loose. Smutty locker-room jokes about the Li and other groups were bandied about on a daily basis among the Han colleagues who accompanied me during my research trips. The soft-core pornography industry in China is practically built around this image. Minority peoples of the southwest are the stage setting for the exhibition of bare breasts and for story lines about sexual free abandon. This technique circumvents censorship by projecting eroticism as exoticism, a trick that, at its most subtle, National Geographic magazine made famous many decades ago in the West.

In recent times the Han have tended to be somewhat puritanical when it comes to matters sexual, at least in terms of its public acknowledgement, and this stereotyping of the minority peoples portrays them as not just “different,” but as lasciviously less moral. It became evident to me from the back seat of our 4-wheel-drive vehicle that my Han colleagues had a split image of the southwestern minorities: their jokes and anecdotes about a lack of sexual control were not just exotic voyeuristic fantasies, they also cast the minorities as truly lower class.

At a state-farm rubber plantation in Hainan, the Han head of a production team, a majority of whose team members are from Li families, quite forthrightly told me with some disdain that “the Li in our team have poorer educational backgrounds and are lower in culture. They like to drink too much. They’re uncouth in their eating, dressing, and living conditions. Their young men are more willing than the Han young men to make sexual innuendos in mixed company.... Their Han neighbors don’t think their minds are quick enough, nor that their characters are good.” In short, they are pictured as possessing all of the

stereotypically negative attributes that are associated around the world with being lower class.

**Official Dogma and Manufactured Ethnicity**

The view held by most Han about the inferiority of most of the southwestern minority peoples is reinforced by official teachings on ethnicity. Party dogma has focused on the writings of the nineteenth-century anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, whose ideas Friedrich Engels adopted, rendering them sacrosanct. The Morgan/Engels scenario propounds a hierarchy of peoples who occupy higher or lower places on a tree of human social evolution. Near the bottom sit "matriarchal" and slaveholding societies, which Morgan depicted as living fossils of earlier primitive stages out of which modern societies supposedly have grown. Some of the southwestern hill peoples were matrilineal until they came under the influence of the Han; some among those who are now called the Yi were slaveholders as recently as the mid 1950s.

I interviewed three anthropologists at Yunnan's Institute of Ethnology and at the University of Kunming in 1988. Each was patronizing and condescending about the peoples they studied. Their prejudices about the minority peoples fell back regularly upon the official verbiage of these being "matriarchal" or slaveholding societies, remnants from a primitive "stage." Essentially, they used this rhetoric to explain what a great many Han people viscerally seem to believe: that the more a people differs from the Han in any of its recent or remaining customs, the less civilized it is and the more "backward" it is in all dimensions, not just economic; and conversely, the more like the Han a particular group is—in having a firmly patrilineal kinship system or any other Han custom—the higher on the human tree they are.

This Party-endorsed credo reinforces a Han belief that they are "raising the minority peoples to a higher level" through efforts to assimilate them to Han culture. At the same time, however, the official tagging of ethnic groups by a different set of so-called Marxist criteria freezes them in a framework that strengthens and sometimes invents ethnic identities.

China's minority peoples were labeled by the government based upon a Stalin-era Russian characterization of ethnic nationalities as possessing four characteristics: a distinct territory, a common language, a common type of economy, and a distinct common culture. Investigative teams were dispatched by Beijing in the 1950s to categorize the various minority populations along these lines. Even though few of the investigated peoples strictly fit every one of the four criteria, this was ignored in the end as a technicality, and in due course 55 minority ethnicities in China were formally "identified" and recognized officially by the state. This number was conveniently small enough to be handled administratively by the national government.

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were just an ordinary local version of Chinese. Had the government’s policy taken a different road, their language today could have been deemed to be simply another Chinese dialect. After all, a fair part of the Zhuang vocabulary derives from Cantonese, and in important respects the grammar of Cantonese, in turn, appears closer to Zhuang (and Miao/Yao) than it does to Mandarin or other Chinese dialects. The Zhuang tongue could have been seen in the same way that Cantonese is today—quite unlike the Mandarin of north China, but undeniably Chinese in the eyes of other Chinese. Instead, today’s Zhuang were rigidly defined in the 1950s as non-Han, as “Zhuang.” By definition they spoke an entirely separate language and were defined as a distinct and immutably separate people. They are taught this and they believe it themselves.

A second pertinent example relates to the Bai of Yunnan, who, as we observed earlier, had very largely been assimilated into the Han over the centuries. Over the past four decades, however, they too have been taught by the state to perceive themselves as “Bai,” as somehow non-Han. They too have been taught that they speak a non-Chinese tongue, and festivals that have been promoted by the state have been played up as “markers”—trappings—of their traditions and ethnic identity. Half a century ago, if we can go by the accounts of researchers who lived among them such as Francis Hsu and C. P. Fitzgerald, the Bai did not perceive themselves as particularly distinct from the rest of the Chinese. Today they do.

In some cases in the 1950s, groups that spoke mutually unintelligible dialects and followed dissimilar customs were simply merged together by the state under a single umbrella heading. The Yi are a case in point. They comprised a whole range of disparate groups that spoke related languages, according to Chinese linguists. In one county that I visited in Yunnan in 1991, four different “branches” of the Yi live in adjoining districts. It was clear from interviews in the homes of Yi farmers that the Bai Yi (the White Yi) do not perceive any similarities between the Gan Yi and themselves, and vice versa, but each acknowledges that they themselves are “Yi” and that the others, bewilderingly, must somehow be Yi too.

In such circumstances, an ethnic group may adamantly reject the notion that another group shares the same ethnic label as themselves. The Naxi and the Mosuo, which the government has decreed to be a branch of the Naxi, are cases in point. A colleague on my travels, who is a Naxi, born and brought up in the city of Kunming, relates that when he visits his rural Naxi grandparents in Lijiang County, Yunnan, he is struck by the fact that “the Naxi are the same as the Han other than in language and women’s dress. They today feel they must be different from the Han, but being from Kunming I can see they’re entirely the same.” Having adopted a large number of Yunnanese Han social attributes over the centuries, and being firmly patrilineal and sharing Han prejudices against “loose sex,” the Naxi are, he says, “ashamed” to be pigeon-holed together with the Mosuo, who famously are the last remaining matrilineal society in the southwest and do not adhere to steady married sexual relationships. Chinese books and videos almost invariably refer to the Mosuo as “Naxi,” and the Naxi have been frustrated in their attempts to get the government to exclude the Mosuo from the Naxi fold. (Indeed, over the past four decades the government has acceded to only a single request [in 1979] to recognize a new ethnic grouping.)

“...at the same time that cultural assimilation progresses among the hill-country ethnic groups of the southwest, some of them—like the Li of Hainan—are becoming marginalized and impoverished bystanders to China’s development.”

Among the Zhuang (population 15.5 million as of the 1990 census) and the Buyi (population 2.5 million), which are the largest ethnic-minority populations in Guangxi and Guizhou Provinces respectively, the confusion of labeling was the reverse. I stayed for a week in Guizhou Province in a largely Buyi county in the mountains near the border with Guizhongki. The people there still speak Buyi. They related that their language was practically identical to that of the Zhuang people who lived in the neighboring county in Guangxi Province. Several older Buyi told me at dinner one evening that the customs of the peoples in the two counties traditionally had been very much alike. They insisted, however, that they were two separate peoples. I was left with a bemused suspicion that, whatever their protestsations, the Buyi and their Zhuang neighbors might actually be one and the same people.

A Zhuang scholar who specializes in “ethnicity” later explained to me that when an investigative team headed by Fei Xiaotong came to Guizhou in the 1950s to demarcate the ethnic peoples of the province, the team had hit upon one of the names by which the people locally had designated themselves, Buyi, and had declared them to be a distinct ethnic “nationality.” This designation

20. It appears that through a process similar to what has been occurring in the southwest but far earlier in Chinese history, the Cantonese population of Guangdong Province is a product of penetration and absorption: biologically partly descended from Han immigrants from the north and partly descended from indigenous Yao and Vietnamese and Zhuang peoples who did not flee but rather adopted Han ways, intermarried with Han pioneers, and invented Han-style lineage records.
21. Anthropologist Steven Harrell has written several excellent papers on the Yi and the artificial common identity with which they have been labeled. See Steven Harrell, “The History of the History of the Yi,” in Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers, Harrell, ed., pp. 63-91; “Ethnicity, Local Interests, and the State: Yi Communities in Southwest China,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 32, no. 3 (1990): 515-48; and “Ethnicity and Kin Terms among Two Kinds of Yi,” in Ethnicity and Ethnic Change in China, Chien Chao and Nicholas Tapp, eds., pp. 179-98. Harrell notes, in a letter to me, that “Yi intellectuals really do see themselves as Yi, even though for many peasants it doesn’t matter—an artificial identity, yes, but not less real than an artificial lake.”
was duly recognized by Beijing. Years later, Fei reportedly confided that when he subsequently went on a research trip to Guangxi he discovered that the Buyi and Zhuang were in fact the same ethnic people. But it was too late. The administrative die had been cast. According to the Zhuang scholar, the government reasoned that the mistake was all for the good: it was preferable to deal with two smaller groups of people, each enclosed within a different province, than one large multi-provincial Zhuang population who might prove to be politically troublesome.

Two quite different writing systems were approved by the government for what are now declared to be two different languages (though I am told that if written in international phonetics, the languages of the Buyi and Zhuang come out almost entirely the same). Different dances and other cultural markers were attributed separately to the Buyi and Zhuang and were highlighted in government-sponsored festivals. Two different ethnic affairs bureaucracies were established, staffed separately by Zhuang and Buyi officials. Each of these groups of ethnic officials claimed its own set of seats at national assemblies. Through these separate bureaucratic structures—with their attendant perks—vested interests soon developed within each group to actively support distinct identities. Simultaneously, the local schools, the mass media, indeed all channels of information reinforced the conviction that they were different peoples. Having been identified as “Zhuang” or “Buyi,” they have become separate peoples, because they believe today they are separate.

Pride in Ethnic Labels

In some respects the various recognized ethnic groups appear to take a certain pride in their ethnic labels, a pride reinforced by government policies that play up the picturesque aspects of ethnicity. For their own traditionally honed reasons, too, some of the groups among the so-called Yao, Miao, Zhuang, Yi, Buyi, and others still wish to affirm their place in the micro-environment in which they live by wearing their ethnic identities in public. A great many minority women, at considerable expense and effort, continue to wear beautifully distinctive clothing that deliberately sets them apart both from the Han and from neighboring ethnic minorities. The distinctive garb sets them off, too, from groups whom they have always considered to be different from themselves but whom the government has officially designated as belonging to the same ethnicity as themselves. 23

Many among the ethnic minorities are aware today, also, that ethnic identification can bring its own rewards. For instance, the government pursues an affirmative action program that makes it easier for ethnic minorities to get through admissions exams and reach the higher levels of the education system. Much more significantly, in some districts and provinces the ethnic minorities can have one more child than the Han under the government’s birth-control program. 24

Thus, two factors have combined to produce a new willingness to identify oneself more strongly as being of non-Han birth: (1) pressures to conform to Han ways, lessening with the break-up of the socialist collectives, and (2) an affirmative action program is being pushed today by the government. In the 1982 census, a great many minority households that had been largely assimilated to Han ways declared themselves to be Han. In the 1990 census, however, many of those same households claimed an ethnic-minority identity. In many cases, the children of mixed Han/non-Han homes, even in urban China, are declaring themselves of minority status in order to take advantage of educational and child-bearing opportunities. The census statistics for the ethnic peoples from the southwest show that in 1982, 5 million people identified themselves as Miao; in the 1990 census, 7.4 million declared themselves as such, a 47 percent leap. In 1982, 1.4 million people declared themselves to be Yao; in 1990, 2.1 million identified themselves as Yao, an astonishing climb of 52 percent. The numbers of those who identified themselves as Yi climbed by 21 percent; the numbers for the Li jumped by 36 percent; and those for the Bai leaped by 41 percent. 25

Natural increases in population cannot account for such steep increases. In most cases, the minority peoples have been restricted to one more child per family than the Han; in rural areas three children rather than two. Nationally, the Han population grew by 10.8 percent from 1982 to 1990, and so it can be estimated that the natural rate of increase among the ethnic populations probably did not exceed 15 percent.

In some cases, the new surge in ethnic self-identity has led to a cultural revival and a reaffirmation of ethnic roots. I did not find this to be true of the peoples I interviewed. But Stevan Harrell, who has studied the Nuosu, has informed me that among the 2 million Nuosu of the Liangshan region of Sichuan, not far from the border with Yunnan, a grassroots cultural revival is under way now that the fetters of the Maoist era have been removed. Among the Nuosu people of Liangshan (who are designated by the government as part of the Yi) not just the women but also many of the men dress conspicuously different from the Han (something I did not observe among any other people in the southwest). They continue to practice their native religion and they have devised a school curriculum using the Nuosu written language. One distinguishing feature of the Nuosu is that they largely live as a contiguous block of people, not intermingled with villages of other ethnic groups. This may explain why they have been able to retain and rejuvenate their culture in these varied ways.

23. A distinction in gender comes into play here. The men, who almost invariably dress in the same attire as the Han and who can normally speak some kanya, stand at the cutting edge of the shift toward acculturation. The women not only continue to wear distinctive ethnic attire, but they also are less often educated than the men and thus more often entirely dependent on the indigenous language. During this period of transition the women seem to occupy a position that represents to the peoples themselves the symbolic pull of tradition and of ethnicity.

24. The numbers of children that ethnic minorities are permitted to have seems to depend upon how anxious a provincial government is to keep population growth under control. In Yunnan Province, the minority communities that I visited are only allowed to have two children without suffering a fine, the same number of children as are allowed to rural Han families in Yunnan. In Hainan Province, in contrast, the indigenous Li are normally allowed one more child than the Han; a Li farmer is allowed three children, one more than a Han farmer; a Li state-farm worker or city dweller is allowed two children, again one more than his or her Han workmate. (In practice, the poorest Li farmers in the villages I visited tend to have 4-5 children. They are too impoverished to be vulnerable to fines or other sanctions.)

25. For a table showing the minority-population figures from the two censuses, see Beijing Review, 24 December 1990, p. 30.
A Li family compound in the mountainous Jiangangshan district of Hainan Island, three minutes' walk from the forestry station where the author lodged for a week. The small minority of Li families who become sufficiently prosperous are inclined to tear down such homes in favor of Han-style tile-roofed brick houses that are stifling in the tropical heat. Photograph by Jonathan Unger, 1993.

During my travels, I did encounter a cultural revival of a very different sort. During the past century, missionaries had converted large numbers of Miao to Christianity, and in Guizhou Province I witnessed a vast outpouring of Miao for Sunday worship. To be sure, a purist would not consider this expression of Christian religiosity to be evidence of an indigenous Miao cultural revival, but it is clearly a reaffirmation of Miao distinctiveness in that region of Guizhou—and by way of a world religion that, akin to Tibetan Buddhism and Hui Islamic beliefs, can be counterpoised to Han claims of superiority. Questions of "cultural revival" can be complicated indeed.

In a great many other cases, however, the "cultural revival" that has surfaced in China's southwest appears largely to be an artifice supported by the political and intellectual elites of the ethnic minorities for their own strategic purposes. The anthropologist Emily Chao has studied the effort by state-financed Naxi intellectuals to transcribe and glorify the indigenous dongba religious culture, and she has discovered that the promotion of dongba culture is not a grassroots phenomenon today the dongba culture is safely dead for the vast majority of the Naxi population and is even declining in the remote mountain villages on the periphery of Naxi territory. It is something to be exhibited at the institute's museum, a prestigious item to be stored and interpreted. The representation of a distinctively Naxi identity, as separate from a shared Chinese identity, placed [state-financed] Naxi nationalists at odds with the broader Naxi public, who had come to see themselves as indistinguishable from the Chinese. With the revival of popular Chinese religious observances among town and lowland Naxi, popular culture is again being aligned with a broader Chinese cultural identity.27

Louisa Schein has discovered from her work in a largely Miao county in Guizhou that the much-vaunted reinvigoration of costumed Miao women's song and dance programs similarly reflects the ethnic elite's projection of Miao culture for its own strategic and emotional uses. It is not so much a grassroots movement by ordinary Miao people.27

It is evident that two cross-cutting trends have been at work. On the one side, people from the southwestern ethnic groups have a reason—an increasingly strong reason—to identify themselves as distinctive, even when their particular ethnic designation has been invented, unwittingly or unwittingly, by the state. This is particularly true among the political and educated elites of these minority groups. Yet at the same time, most of the ethnic-minority populace have increasingly taken on the attributes of local Han culture. In doing so, many of those who are from poorer groups are seen by others, and by themselves, as a type of lower-class Chinese, with Han-like, but lower-class Han-like ways.

Notwithstanding the prejudices of many Han officials and the arbitrary manner in which minorities have been categorized, it should not be concluded that the Chinese government is guilty of discriminating against or knowingly harming the interests of these peoples. In fact, in contrast to Beijing's record in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, the Chinese authorities deserve credit for handling relations with the ethnic groups of China's southwest more humanely than most of the nations of Southeast Asia have treated their minority populations. Whatever the flaws, the Chinese government has generally followed a program in the southwest that respects ethnic traditions, or more specifically ethnic folkways, and has even provided funding to promote dance, language, and other cultural markers. Perhaps more importantly, the government has provided the minorities with state-sponsored advantages through affirmative action programs. Simultaneously, through the school system and a variety of other means, efforts have been directed toward the de facto cultural assimilation of all of these groups, at a pace far outstripping any previous period of Chinese history. But even this can be considered a well-meaning effort, one that, in many cases, enjoys the cooperation of the local minorities.

Significantly, too, the very shape of local administration and of land ownership helps to protect the minorities from being.

27. Schein writes, for example, "It must be stressed that Miao elites not only facilitated Han consumption of their culture as embodied by their women, but also engaged in a kind of ritualized objectification in which they themselves partook of reified representations of their own 'traditions'. This was especially common among those who had left the countryside and, living among the majority, separated in space from their home villages, had begun to cultivate a kind of romantic nostalgia for essentialized versions of their forgotten culture. The chief symbol of this still-recoverable past was the richly adorned Miao girl, usually in song." ("Gender and Internal Orientalism in China," p. 86).
dispossessed of their lands by commercially astute Han, as had occurred so often previously in history. The system of state farms no longer is expanding (and indeed some in the southwest have all but collapsed and the land there returned to villages and families for their own use). At the same time, in all of the villages that lie outside the boundaries of state farms, the administrative shell of the previous collective era has been retained. This means that while farmers today cultivate their land privately, the land continues to "belong" to the hamlet or village, and cannot readily be sold to Han immigrants and entrepreneurs.

In the Tuanjie [Unity] Yi-Bai Autonomous Township, a former commune in Yunnan that I visited for several days, non-Han people comprise more than two-thirds of the population; and the word "Autonomous" in the title provides an assurance that some of the leading posts are reserved for people of non-Han origin. The township Party Secretary is a Bai, and the township administrative head is an Yi. Since land ownership ultimately rests with the township and its constituent villages, it would require the collusion of such local leaders to remove fields and pasturelands from local use and transfer them to Han outsiders. This serves as a brake on land dispossession in cases where, say, destitute households among the local Yi individually might otherwise be vulnerable.

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In the present economic climate, however, even this local administrative and land ownership structure does not always suffice to protect a local ethnic population from dispossession. In late 1993 I spent a week in the countryside of Ledong County, Hainan Province, a ruggedly beautiful landscape of rolling hills that would be a perfect setting for large-scale tropical fruit production. But the local Li populace, who inhabit all of the hill acreage, are starved of capital and in no position to develop and irrigate large-scale commercial fruit orchards.

Li officials in one entirely Li township told me that they had no way of making use of the township’s 20,000 mu of hill land (6.5 thousand acres), and so were in the midst of negotiating a long-term lease of 15,000 mu of the land—at a surprisingly low annual rent—to the Chinese Mango Co., Inc. The company, a semi-private enterprise, was reportedly also looking to take over an additional 30,000 mu elsewhere in the county.

In another Li township, which was desperate to find a way to pay the salaries of its local cadres and teachers, an entrepreneurial state-owned company had recently leased for 30 years—a again at a dirt-cheap price—a block of hill land that local Li farmers had been planting with crops. In keeping with Han prejudices, the company had brought in a group of Han farmers from Manchuria (presumably with no knowledge about tropical fruit production) to develop the orchards. The local Li were left under-employed and without access to needed land.

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At yet another site in the county, a county-government enterprise had contracted out a swath of Li hill country and had hired unemployed Han from the county capital (rather than the local Li) to plant the new orchards. Whatever the safeguards of central government policy and local administrative structures, the pull of historical trends and Han prejudice is once again at work. This time it is in the shape of agribusiness, gradually dispossessioning minority hill farmers in favor of Han commercial interests.

At the same time that cultural assimilation progresses among the hill-country ethnic groups of the southwest, many of them—like the Li of Hainan—remain marginalized and impoverished bystanders to China’s development.

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Symposium Response
The Cold War and Me*
by Andre Gunder Frank

For social scientists it is a sobering and useful exercise in self-understanding to attempt to see clearly how the direction of our scientific exertions, particularly in economics, is conditioned by the society in which we live, and most directly by the political climate (which, in turn, is related to all other changes in society).... Responding to that cue [from the sphere of politics], students turn to research on issues that have attained political importance.... So it has always been. The major recastings of economic thought... were all responses to changing political conditions and opportunities.

—Gunnar Myrdal in *Asian Drama*

Are we then to conclude that Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Gunnar Myrdal and Peter Bauer must be regarded as "Right" and A. G. Frank, Dudley Seers, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Pope as "Left"? Or is it the other way around?

—H. W. Arndt in *Economic Development: The History of an Idea*

My "contribution" to the BCAS area studies symposium is inspired by Chalmers Johnson's "The CIA and Me," but since I never attained—or aspired to—his lofty heights, I can only offer my lowly worm's eye view of political conditions, opportunities, and responses from the ground up à la Myrdal. My sympathies do lie with Bruce Cumings. However my own experience—and apparently also that of Arndt—reveals that the political "science" issues in "Area Studies and International Studies during the Cold War" did not appear with quite as much "virtue of clarity" (Barlow) as Cumings now sees them. Alas, my experience echoes some of the confusion in Stanley Heginbotham's and Arndt's renditions, both during the cold war and since.

My personal life and experience have been intimately shaped by the cold war and its relation to "area studies" especially in relation to the Soviet Union, Latin America, and "Third World development" policy and studies. My experience is an ineluctable prism (prison?) for me, but it may also contribute something to the general political sociology of knowledge of this period, much of which still remains to be analyzed and written.

My pacifist father, a novelist, took me out of Nazi Germany when I was four years old in 1933. We emigrated first to Switzerland (1933-41) and then to the United States. After high school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I went on to Swarthmore College (Pennsylvania), where I studied economics and became a Keynesian. Many years later I asked my ex-fellow student (now the publisher) Myron Sharpe why he did not save me years of wandering through the woods by telling me about Marxism and communism four decades ago. "You would not have listened," he responded.

1950: Not knowing what I was letting myself in for, I started a Ph.D. in economics at the University of Chicago, which has since become the oracle of the right (that is wrong!) and the ideological wellspring of Reaganomics. I studied economic theory with Milton Friedman, who at that time did not have an audience for his monetarist gospel preachings much larger than his captive students. I passed my comprehensive exams in economic theory and public finance after less than a year at the PhD. level. Despite that, I received a letter from the Chicago Economics Department advising me to leave, because of my unsuitability or our incompatibility. So much for political conditions, opportunities, and responses.

1951: I went on to the University of Michigan and studied for a semester with Kenneth Boulding and Richard Musgrave. I wrote a paper on welfare economics for Boulding, which proved that it is impossible to separate efficiency in resource allocation from equity in income distribution. I took the paper, for which Boulding had given me an A+, back to Chicago to get at least an M.A. out of them. Since my thesis violated the political economic gospel of the Chicago school, they made me cut the heart of the argument out of my paper and then gave me a C- for my efforts.

I became active in the U.S. National Student Association. Though I was isolated at the extreme left wing among the delegates at USNSA's 1951 congress, I tried my hand as "kingmaker" for the most liberal of the candidates running for president in the association. But McCarthyism was at its height and

*Editor's Note: Andre Gunder Frank's "The Cold War and Me" is a response to the symposium on "Asia, Asian Studies, and the National Security State," that appeared in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29, nos. 1 and 2 (1997). Frank describes a personal trajectory that took him from Nazi Germany as a child to dependency theory and global historical studies under the tutelage of Milton Friedman and his Chicago colleagues, W. W. Rostow and the M.I.T. Center for International Studies among others in a life that has also led him at various times to Castro's Cuba, Allende's Chile and Brezhnev's Russia. His contribution reflects on intellectual and political trajectories that cut across the cold war divide in the last half of the twentieth century. The entire symposium, including an extended version of Frank's essay is available on the BCAS web page: <http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas>.

—Mark Selden, Guest Editor

Vol. 29, No. 3 (1997)
we lost the election to my right-wing roommate Bill (whose last name I don’t recall). As president, he put USNSA to work for the CIA, as was revealed much later.

1954: The University of Chicago received a sub-contract from George Murdock’s Human Relations Area Files project at Yale University to prepare handbooks on five “Slavic Peoples.” I was hired to help prepare the ones on Ukraine and Belorussia. Down the hall, Fred Eggan ran the “Philippines Project.” One of his project members was Jesuit Father Frank Lynch, who later became “our man in Manila” when he promoted U.S. ideological and political interests at the Jesuit-run Ateneo University in the Philippines. The sugar daddy and beneficiary of all these projects was the Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. Army. I still remember a visit from a colonel who came to explain the rules of the game to us and to assure himself that what we produced would serve as a suitable basis for the Army’s own classified additions to our reports. Nonetheless, part of my work was a friendly (anti-cold war) interpretation of “The Organization of Economic Activity in the Soviet Union.” Another part of my work involved empirical research on the Ukraine. This later became the topic of my Ph.D. dissertation. In the course of my research, I found that I was unable to get some of the material I wanted at the Library of Congress because it had been checked out by the CIA, which was no doubt duplicating—and with more “political opportunity and response” perhaps improving on—my modest efforts.

1957: When I was Assistant Professor of Economics at Michigan State University (MSU), Professor Brandstetter was head of the campus police and Chair of the Department of Police Administration. (He and I had disputes both about parking tickets and politics.) As department chair, Brandstetter administered the “police training” program that Eisenhower-friend and MSU President Mark Hannah was running for the CIA in Vietnam in the time of Ngo Dinh Diem (until the U.S. dumped him). Several of my friends had taken the opportunity to go to Vietnam on this program to do “research.” One of them, Stanley Scheinbaum, exposed and denounced the program some years later in Ramparts.

1958: MIT’s Center for International Studies (CENIS) gave me an office for three months. What an opportunity that was. There I met, among others, Walt Whitman Rostow, who had just written his Process of Development, and was working on his celebrated Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto, along with a book he was doing for the CIA together with CENIS Director Max Millikan: A Proposal. Key to an Effective Foreign Policy. Although Rostow and Co. dealt with Keynesian-type macro economic and even social problems, they did so to pursue the neo-classical, explicitly counter-revolutionary, and even counter-reformist cold war ends that were newly in vogue. The quintessential modernization book, Passing of Traditional Society: The Modernization of the Middle East, was done while author Daniel Lerner was at CENIS. This book, along with Everett Hagen’s On the Theory of Social Change and David McClelland’s Achieving Society, translated the “conditions” of naked cold war ideological orthodoxy into euphemistically saleable social “scientific responses.”

Another CENIS study—on Indonesia—resulted in Clifford Geertz’s Agricultural Involution. The foreword was written by his CENIS supervisor Ben Higgins, with whom I have been friends ever since. Three decades later, Ben White (Institute for Social Studies, The Hague) would ask with indignation how Gunder Frank and Higgins could both like Geertz’s book, which he among others had lambasted. Both of us answered in print. Higgins asked “so why all this Geertz-bashing?” He responded in part, “Perhaps Geertz was not quite harsh enough on Dutch colonialism.” For me, however, Geertz sufficiently demonstrated to me how Dutch colonialism had generated Indonesia’s development of underdevelopment.

While at CENIS, Rostow “confided” to me that since the age of 18 he made it his life’s mission to offer the world a better alternative to Karl Marx. I did not understand then what that was supposed to mean. After reflecting on the fate of Marxism and “really existing socialism” I now wonder why Rostow wanted to dedicate his life to offering an alternative to them. I would later write “Walt Whitman Rostow: An Ode to Underdevelopment” and “Rostow’s Stages of Economic Growth through Escalation to Nuclear Destruction.” Some, like Aidan Foster-Carter, claimed that development theory underwent a paradigm shift “from Rostow to Gunder Frank.” However, as we will note below, this was only a limited change, confined to limited circles, due far more to the opportunity provided by the reality of the U.S. war against Vietnam than to any theory of mine.

1960: The International Institute of Education (IIE) gave me a grant to travel to the Soviet Union to continue work for my Ph.D. Despite—or, as it turned out, because of—my official sponsor—almost all official doors in Moscow and Kiev were closed to me. Only later did I learn that I had become an “innocent” subject of a tit-for-tat “international incident” between the U.S. and Soviet governments after the Soviet military had shot down Francis Gary Powers in his U-2 spy plane.

Nonetheless, a seminar at the Economics Institute of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences discussed the findings of my Ph.D. thesis, among which was my judgment that collectivization had reduced productivity in Ukrainian agriculture. “You don’t know what you are talking about,” I was told in my first run-in with the political conditions and ideological orthodoxy on the other side of the cold war. After my conclusions ceased to be controversial, and Ukraine became independent, News from Ukraine (Kiev) published my account of this experience: “I Was Never Invited Back.” In the meantime, it was also revealed that, unbeknownst to me, the IIE was a CIA front organization, which asked many of its fellowship recipients to report back to them on their findings. If that was what was asked or expected of me, I was too “innocent” to understand it.

1961: I resigned from Michigan State University stating that I could not in good conscience continue to work on “development” there or anywhere in the United States because our work was “part of the problem, and none of the solution.” The tie-ins between “area” and “development studies” and the cold war have been closely and intricately “conditioned.” They clearly have their origins in the political conditions set by U.S. “national” and western “imperialist” interests, on one side, and by the “evil empire,” on the other. But, alas the tie-ins have yet to be fully explored. Much of the testimony and documentation is only just beginning to be published, e.g., in the BCAS symposium, in the book The Cold War and the University, by Noam Chomsky et al. (The New Press, 1996), and in Schneider on Schneider (Duke University Press 1995), in which anthropologist David Schneider testifies to the role he, George Murdock, Clyde Kluckholm, and others played with various U.S. government agencies. David
Price is producing a detailed study entitled "Cold War Anthropology: Collaborators and Victims of the National Security State" (forthcoming in Identities).

The fact that some work—like ours on the "Slavic Peoples" and that done by CENIS and Rostow—was specifically commissioned and financed by U.S. government agencies as part of their foreign policy was the least of the problems. Still more consequential was the fact that the entire "development" field and much of related social "science" was less visibly but no less widely and deeply ideologically conditioned and marked by cold war and "national/imperialist" interests—and their mutual relations. Of course, the same dynamics were at work in the Soviet Union.

The entire "modernization" theory and the Weberian social science on which it was based were reflections of the American "Sinatra Doctrine": Do It My Way. What is good for General Motors is good for the country, and what is good for the United States is good for the world, especially for those who wish to "develop like we did." I was less and less persuaded by this "theory" and especially by its application in praxis, as when the CIA engineered the 1953 coup against Mossadeq in Iran and the military coup against the progressive social democratic and nationalist government of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954. In these and other cases, the Soviet "cold war threat" was invoked to mask naked "imperialist interests," which visibly prevented rather than promoted any Third World "development."

I decided to look for better answers in the Third World itself, first in Africa and then in Latin America, especially in Cuba. On the way, and on the strength of my father's good reputation in East Germany, I was offered a job researching Latin American history at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig. I told them I didn't know anything about history, Marxism, or Latin America, but that I would gladly come back after I went to Latin America to learn about these realities—on the spot. Armed with my new-found knowledge, I later applied and was rejected by the "Karl Marx" University as unsuitable. In this, my second run-in with the other side of cold war ideological orthodoxy, I learned that I was only suitable when I knew nothing about the topics at hand.

1962: After traveling through Latin America, I set off for Leipzig by way of Cuba. I never got to either, to Leipzig for the above-mentioned reason and to Cuba apparently for the same reason—despite repeated attempts and even a personal invitation from Che Guevara to do research with him in Cuba. That fell through when Che set off for the Congo to help train the guerillas of Laurent Kabila (who finally managed to oust Mobutu Sese Seko and take over the presidency of the former Zaire in 1997).

1965: The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) denied my application "to return to unrelinquished domicile" in the United States for the following reasons: "Your attitudes [are] contrary to the best interests of this country as evidenced by your writings published in the Monthly Review, Vol. 5, (9-1964) and [in a] mimeographed letter dated July 1, 1964, containing ideologies foreign to this country and identifying yourself as a Marxist and your further identification with the Communist Chinese position of world revolution and the destruction of the capitalist system."

"Marxism?" That I never knew much about. I denied that I was either a Marxist or a non-Marxist, any more than I was a Newtonian. (Though I must say that in the 1963 Sino-Soviet ideological and "social scientific" debates, the Chinese did seem to have a better position on Third World development.)

When the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City came to my house with a gift of quality diapers for my newborn son, I asked him why the Soviet Union's relations with Brazil had increased following the U.S.-sponsored military coup in 1964. I have never forgotten the answer he gave (in English rather than Spanish): "Business is business." Political conditions may bear on economic "theory," as Myrdal observes, but rather less so on economic praxis. It did not take long for the Chinese to demonstrate their primary interests as well.

The Government of Canada also barred me as "a threat to national security," a claim that the Minister of Immigration made to the Canadian Parliament and that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau confirmed to me in a private letter. I disingenuously wrote to Trudeau to ask why he did not make common cause with me, since both of us had been barred from entering the United States because of our alleged sympathies for China. The only possible threat to Canadian national security, I suggested, was that the proposed Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the reasons for my exclusion might find and reveal that it was the United States that put his government up to denying me entry. "How could you even suggest such a thing about sovereign Canada?" he asked. In the end, Trudeau refused to form a Commission of Inquiry into my case—on grounds of "national security."

1967: I traveled to Cuba as a journalist representing the Marxist journal Monthly Review to cover the first (and last) Latin American Solidarity Congress. There, I talked with President Dorticos about staying in Cuba to work. Instead of an invitation, my family and I were unceremoniously put on a small Cuban plane to Nassau. Arriving from Cuba without a visa, the Bahamians detained us at the airport until the Governor General acquiesced and permitted us an overnight stay in a hotel (where the police checked on us at 3 A.M.).

1968: Another trip to Cuba, this time to the International Congress of 500 "Intellectuals" from sixty-seven countries. I helped draft the Appeal of Havana that said: "It is the fundamental interest and duty of intellectuals to support the struggles of national liberation, social emancipation, and cultural de-colonization of all people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and... the struggle against imperialism."

The same theme dominated the 300th anniversary celebration of the University of Lund in Sweden in 1968, at which the Yugoslav exile Stefan Dedijer, Amitai Etzioni, and I debated about "Scientific Research and Politics." In one intervention I stated my belief that "all of North American and nearly all of Western European social science is one huge Camelot project" (the reference was to the clandestine U.S. Department of Defense project to engage Chileans to spy on themselves).

Issues surrounding the role of social science came particularly alive among American anthropologists, some of whom (including some colleagues) were engaged in "counter-insurgency" projects in Vietnam and elsewhere. Some of us wanted anthropology to support rather than be used against the guerrillas in Indochina. The most prominent anthropologist opposing our view was Margaret Mead, who put the full weight of her prestige squarely behind the establishment. As part of these debates, I was invited to a special panel at the Sixth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Chicago in 1973, but the U.S. government refused entry to me and another would-
be participant from Cuba. My paper, which pleaded for "libera-
tion anthropology," was entitled "Anthropology = Ideology, 
Applied Anthropology = Politics."

In 1968, the United Nations International Labour Organi-
sation (ILO) hired me for a Latin American regional research
program in Chile. Arriving in Santiago with my UN passport, I
was detained at the airport, then taken into town to see the head
of the Chilean political police (who had a foot-high file about me
on his desk), and finally dispatched back to the airport to wait
for the first plane out in the morning. Salvador Allende, who was
then president of the Senate, came to the airport during the night
and vouched for me to remain in the country under his responsi-

bility. He also went three times to the Minister of the Interior
to get me a temporary residence permit and to have the "file" on
me destroyed. Residence was granted, but the file remained intact.
The ILO proceeded to fire me as politically unsuitable and we
each accused the other of breach of contract. Despite the inter-
vention of the UN Secretary General's office, I lost. In fact, I later
learned that the decision was already printed before the oral
argument was even presented at the ILO Tribunal. So much for
political conditions and justice as well.

1970-73: With Salvador Allende as president of Chile, depend-
ence theory became a practical matter. My house in Santiago
became a place of refuge and of discussion for compañeros from
near and far. My sociology student at the University of Chile,
Dagoberto Perez, stayed there after he emerged from jail for a
political crime he did not commit. After his death in a shoot-out
with the military regime in 1974, I would dedicate two books to
his memory. I wrote numerous articles for the local press on
timely issues of the day, such as the terms for the nationalization
of copper.

Returning to Chile from a conference on "Imperialism,
Independence and Social Transformation" in New Delhi, I found
that Jose Rodriguez Elizondo, a delegate from the Communist
Party of Chile, had used the Party's daily newspaper to launch a
political and personal attack against me for what I had allegedly
said about Chile in India. He falsely claimed that I had criticized
his party and disparaged the political process in Chile by saying
that it had not gone as fast or as far as it could and should have.
His newspaper denied me the right of reply to set the record
straight. As a United Nations official in the 1980s, Rodriguez
Elizondo wrote a book on the "infantile left" in Latin America
in which he misrepresented my position and vilified me person-
ally once again.

1972: At the third UNCTAD congress in Santiago, Chile, deleg-
ates from African governments talked about "development of
underdevelopment." I decided that, if this idea of mine had
become so institutionalized, it was time for me to move on. At
the Seventh Congress of Latin American Sociology—held in the
same building as the UNCTAD congress—I delivered a paper
entitled "Dependence [Theory] is Dead, Long Live Depend-
ence." My argument was that what was now demanded was the
study of and resistance to the worldwide economic crisis of
capital accumulation that I said had begun around 1970. (Actu-
ally, as I wrote later, it started in 1967.) I answered critics who
labeled me variously as a functionalist, dependenta, marxist,
neo-marxist, pseudo-marxist, communist, maoist, Trotskyist, petit-
bourgeois, principal ideological terrorista in Latin Amer-
ica, cat's paw of the CIA (Rodriguez Elizondo's words), and—as
the Italian Communist Ruggiero Romano charged in a public
lecture in Warsaw—a former guard in a Nazi concentration camp
in Poland (when I was in high school in Ann Arbor).

Why all this hoopla? Well, one reason was that cold war
ideological opposition to dependence theory ranged across the
entire political spectrum from right to left, including especially
Moscow and its orthodox Communist allies. Issues of the ubiqui-
tuous Manual of Political Economy, published and disseminated
by the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, routinely dismissed
dependence theory and denounced me personally. That was
another example of the run-ins I had with the "other" ideological
side of cold war theoretical orthodoxy—particularly in the po-
itical climate of Brezhnev's détente with Nixon and Kissinger.

The other reason for this attention was that despite so much
resistance and opposition from all sides, dependence theory and
praxis had made significant inroads, first in Latin America, then
in the United States and Europe, and finally in other parts of the
Third World. Why? Simple! The one-word answer was "Viet-
nam." For dependence seemed to offer an alternative response to
the orthodoxy received—wisdom of "modernizers" like Rostow,
who wanted to bomb Vietnam back into the Stone Age, and
others, who argued that "we have to destroy it to save it."

After the mid-1970s, with the military coups in Latin
America and the end of the war in Vietnam, the political climate
changed again and the resulting conditions undermined popular
support for dependence theory and praxis. But the same also
happened to modernization theory, which Henry Kissinger—
ever the "realist"—pronounced dead in 1979, at the hands of the
Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. Elsewhere, the world economic
crisis would bring military coups and martial law to the fore,
along with opportunities for the worldwide appeal of Milton
Friedman's monetarism, Reagonomics, and Thatcherism. I de-
voted twenty years to the study of that economic crisis and its
political and policy repercussions worldwide, publishing studies
with titles such as "The Crisis of Ideology and the Ideology of
Crisis."

11 September 1973: The military coup in Chile. The monetarist
economic "theory" of my ex-professor Milton Friedman was
carried to Chile by himself, Arnold Harberger, and the so-called
Chicago Boys. The new policies were imposed by General
Pinochet as "equilibrium on the point of a bayonet" (the subtitle
of my Economic Genocide in Chile). In his militarized Chile,
General Pinochet gave the Chicago Boys free reign over eco-


nomical policy and Friedman and Harberger jumped at the chance
to recommend their shock treatment therapy. In Free to Choose,
Friedman argued that the magic of the market (efficiency?)
comes first and freedom (equity?) later. He was awarded the
Nobel Prize for economics, not for peace, thank God. The World
Bank still hails Chile for its economic model, never mind that it
has cost the lives of countless friends and comrades.

1973-78: Because I was still a citizen of Germany and because
I had a one semester visiting professorship at the University of
Berlin, I returned to Germany after the coup in Chile. In five
years of trying I was never able to get a university job in
Germany, despite being short-listed several times. Once the state
Minister of Culture and Education, who has to approve all
professorial appointments, simply eliminated the position for
which I was first in line. The last time I reached the top of the
short list, the same minister told a university president who
wanted to hire me that "this Frank will never get a job here." I
left Germany in 1978, moved to England, and then to Holland.
Announcements

Announcement of Search in Chinese and Japanese History

The History Department and East Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are conducting a joint search for a full-time, tenure-track assistant professor in Chinese or Japanese history. Tenure base is in the History Department. This position is open to candidates specializing in any period, and the Ph.D. is preferred. The teaching duties of the position include an introductory survey course, advanced undergraduate courses and graduate training in the area of specialization. The appointment will begin at the start of the 1998-1999 academic year.

Candidates should send a letter of application, a curriculum vitae or dossier, and three letters of recommendation to Professor Thomas J. McCormick, Chair, Search Committee in Chinese and Japanese History, Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 5114 Humanities Bldg., 455 North Park Street, Madison, WI 53706. The deadline for application is November 15, 1997. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is an equal-opportunity employer. Women and minorities are encouraged to apply. Unless confidentiality is requested in writing, information regarding the applicants must be released upon request. Finalists for the position cannot be guaranteed confidentiality.

Announcement of Search in International Women’s Issues

California State University, Long Beach, announces that there is a great likelihood that a joint tenure track appointment will be available in International Women’s Issues. The position would be shared between the International Studies Program and the Women’s Studies Program in an ethnically and culturally diverse campus and wider community.

Experience with interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches in teaching, including relations among gender, class, race/ethnicity may be important, as also evidence of activism in international women’s issues and relevant community involvement, especially with Southeast Asian women abroad and in the diaspora.

For further information contact:
Dr. Patricia Rozee, Director, Women’s Studies Program, California State University, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840 (Phone: 562-985-5650; Email: prozee@csulb.edu)
or Dr. Ben Wisner, Director, International Studies Program (c/o Geography Department, same address, Phone: 562-985-5859; Email: bwisner@ige.apc.org).

Announcing a new journal from SAGE in 1997

Gender, Technology and Development

Editor: Govind Kelkar,
Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok

An international, refereed journal designed to serve as a forum for exploring the linkages between changing gender relations and technological development. The diverse perspectives of the Asian region will provide the main focus, but dialogues along East-West and North-South lines will also be an important aspect of the journal. The objective is to facilitate the recognition, promotion, and co-ordination of opinions concerning the extended and shifting boundaries of meaning in gender, feminism, equality, technology, and science for non-Western societies and cultures.

The multidisciplinary journal will be published three times each year, in March, July, and November. Inquire for rates.

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NANKING

1937

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the massive Japanese military attack on the Chinese capital city of Nanking. For many historians the atrocities, known as the Nanking Massacre, remain the symbol of Japanese militarism in World War II.

Princeton University will host an academic conference on 21-22 November 1997 that aims to facilitate the long-delayed healing process by exploring the event and its aftermath in many layers and from many angles. The list of participants includes Richard Falk, Ikuhito Hata, Vera Schwartz, Ian Buruma, Arthur Kleinman, Yu Ying-shih, Norman Iizkowitz, and U.S. Congressman Lipinski of Illinois.

For information contact David Liu, Publicity Committee, 250 East 54th St., #23A, New York, NY 10022. E-mail: davidliu@princeton.edu. Web site: http://www.princeton.edu/~nanking

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Yes,  
I am a rabid optimist  
For me  
Every tree that continues to stand  
Every stream that continues to flow  
Every child that runs away from home  
is an indication  
that the battle is not only on  
it is being won.

Lives a young man  
who calls the earth  
his mother.

You will give me the boring details  
of the rise of state power  
after every revolution  
And all I can tell you  
is that in our tribe  
we still share our bread

You may tell me about  
the nuclear arms race  
And all I can tell you is that an unknown child held my hand  
with love.

You will reason with me  
And I will talk nonsense like this  
And because the difference  
between breathing  
and living life  
is the difference between  
reason and poetry  
I will read poems to you  
Poems full of optimism  
Poems full of dreams  
And maybe a poem better than this.

A poem by Satinath Sasamgi (Sathyu)
Sanabhauna (Possibility) Medical Clinic  
teaching ayurvedic remedies and yoga to the survivors  
of the Bhola catastrophe

Note address change for the  
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