CHAPTER-V

CHINESE NATIONALISM RESURGENT: THE CHINESE DIASPORA IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

More than twenty million overseas Chinese reside in Southeast Asia. They represent today a network of economically affluent, highly organized, tightly knit Chinese diasporic communities in Southeast Asia. Because of their experience of migration the Chinese diaspora inevitably appropriates a dual identity: one, it imagines itself as belonging to the Chinese homeland and second, it draws on the identity it has evolved by residing in the host country. Inherent in this dual identity is the notion of dual allegiance, one to the home country and the other to the host country. The status of the Chinese diaspora is thus steeped in continuous ambivalence. This ambiguity is a significant aspect of the way in which the diasporic community constructs its identity in the nation in which it resides. Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity discussed in chapter one explains best the state of the diasporic Chinese in Southeast Asia. The diaspora, with its ambivalent and hybrid identity, reifies the concept of nation and poses a challenge both to the host and the home country’s notion of nation.

This chapter attempts to investigate the aspect of hybridity central to the identity of the Chinese diaspora and its impact on the shaping of Chinese nationalism today. Diasporic hybridity can be understood by analyzing three narratives of nation. One, the narrative of the host country, second, the narrative of the home country, and third, the narrative of the diaspora itself. These narratives

---


169
inform a hybrid culture and a hybrid identity and impart a deepseated ambiguity to the notion of nation. In order to understand each of the three narratives, the chapter will deal with three texts representing the three narratives of nation: Wang Gungwu's writings on the Chinese diaspora reflecting the diaspora's narrative of nation, Tu Wei-ming's writings on the Chinese narrative of nation and Mahathir Mohammad's *Malayan Dilemma*, representing the host country's narrative of nation. By exploring the three perspectives on nation, this chapter seeks to explain how these narratives inform the Chinese diasporic identity and shapes Chinese nationalism.

Diaspora, with its typical characteristics of trans-nationalism and extra-territorialism, not only challenges the idea of the territorially bound modern nation state grounded in sacrosanct concepts of state sovereignty but also reifies the notion of the nation state. In the context of diasporic identity the chapter looks at how the Chinese State defines its notion of nationalism. In order to do so the chapter explores China's policies towards the Chinese diaspora particularly in Southeast Asia. Second, it looks at how the notion of Chineseness evolved among the diaspora and whether Chineseness is a unitary concept. By understanding the Chinese State's policies towards the diaspora and by exploring the diaspora's notion of Chineseness, the chapter establishes the relation between the Chinese diaspora and nationalism in China. The chapter concludes by pointing out that the Chinese diaspora with its modern transformation based on Confucian humanism and democratic liberalism has constructed a new vision of Chineseness. Represented as an economic powerhouse, the diaspora has generated and directed economic transformation in the mainland. This transformative potential of the
diaspora has, thus, complemented the notion of nationalism in contemporary China.

Three narratives of nation

As an instance of the host country’s narrative of nation, Malaysia offers the perfect example. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country where 60% of the residents are Malay and indigenous people, 30% are Chinese and 10% are Indians. In this background Mahathir Mohammad, the longest serving Prime Minister of Malaysia, outlined a peculiarly Malaysia policy for the relation of the different races with each other and the state. The *Malayan Dilemma* (Dilema Melayu) published in 1970, reflects a radical representation of Malayan nationalism. Since the book was written in the aftermath of 13th May 1969 riots in Kuala Lumpur, its central concern revolves around the problem of racial harmony in Malaysia. It seeks to explain why the Malayans in spite of being the majority, are economically backward. It recommends that the way to redress this problem is to give preferential treatment to the Malayans. To justify his stand Mahathir suggests that the Malayans are the “rightful owners” of Malaysia and immigrants are guests until properly absorbed as Donald Moore writes in the preface of the book “Dr. Mahathir’s solution is a sort of “constructive protectionism” worked out after careful study of the effect of heredity and environment ...this book is important because ...it deals with the problem of human beings of different races living together in the same territory”.2

Mahathir Mohammad’s is a classical case of the representation of Malaysian radicalism which upholds the cause of the Bumiputra or sons of the soil. The book Malayan Dilemma raises the question of ‘what went wrong’ during the

---

13th May 1969 Kuala Lumpur riots. Mahathir argues that real racial harmony never existed between the Malays and non-Malays. During the colonial period there was sporadic Sino-Malay strife but the British prevented major inter-racial strife. Mahathir regarded heredity and environmental reasons as causal factors for the slow development of the Malays and their consequent succumbing to the competition of the non-Malayans. In fact, the British policy of divide and rule further drove a wedge between Malayans and non-Malayans. The dilemma of the Malayans was that on the one hand, they suffered from economic inequality between the Malayan and non-Malayan. On the other hand, since they benefited from the economic stability built by the Chinese business class, they were not averse to the presence of the Chinese in their country. The solution to this dilemma rested upon the upliftment of the Malayans by providing them with "constructive protection". This involved preferential treatment for the Malayans. Mahathir's idea behind this preferential treatment was to bring the Malayans at par with the non-Malayans. He emphasizes that this scheme would effectively create inequality in society. By preferential treatment in jobs, education and the corporate sector, Mahathir intended the Malayanization of Malaya. He writes, "We blatantly declared that there should be job preference on a basis of race. It was racial prejudice which formed the basis of Malayanization."

Mahathir, turned the view that preferential treatment creates racial inequality on its head by arguing instead that "racial equality can only be said to exist when each race not only stands equal before the law, but also when each race is represented in every strata of society in every field of work, in proportion more

---

3 Ibid., p. 6.
4 Ibid., p. 31.
5 Ibid., p. 75.
6 Ibid., p. 77.
or less to their percentage of the population."\textsuperscript{7} It should be noted that Malayans are the majority in Malaysia. Yet at the end of the 1960s the non-Malayan, particularly the Chinese owned 30% of the economy while the Bumiputra owned only 2.4% of the economy. In fact, there existed a wide gap not only at the level of education and job facilities but also at the level of urbanization. At the end of the Second World War, the Chinese community was mostly urban and controlled the modern sectors of the economy, the Indian community was mainly represented in the plantations and liberal professions and the majority Malayans were peasants and lived in the rural areas. Mahathir noted "racial inequality is here an equality of wealth, an inequality of opportunities and an inequality of development"\textsuperscript{8} and called for 'affirmative action' in 1971 aimed at increasing the Malay's share of the wealth of the country from 2.4% to up to 30%. In an interview he justified his policy of the New Economic Policy or NEP on the grounds that, "we did not want what we called the Robin-Hood strategy where you rob the rich in order to help the poor because if you do that, there will be anyway a racial element into it. We had to work it out differently. We took a bigger share for the have-nots out of the economic growth engineered by our politics."\textsuperscript{9} Mahathir clearly emphasized that race was an all pervading reality and suggested accepting racial differences in a society, and in doing so promoted the idea of racial loyalty that involved privileges accorded and denied on the basis of one's race.\textsuperscript{10} He further reiterated that since non-discriminatory polices work against the Malayans, racialism would sustain

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p.79.  
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p.80.  
\textsuperscript{9} Interview with Dr. Mahathir, interviewed by Serge Berthier, Spring 1998, http://www.asian-affairs.com/Malaysia/mahathir.html  
\textsuperscript{10} Mahathir bin Mohamad, \textit{The Malay Dilemma}, p. 175.
them. "If in the process they also block the advance of others, this too is nothing unusual."\textsuperscript{11}

Mahathir's Malayan Dilemma thus clearly determined the nature of Malayan nationalism and aimed at building a predominantly Malayan nation. It privileged the Malayans because they were the majority and were therefore, entitled to enjoy economic benefits. At the level of policy the government introduced the New Economic Policy to reduce the economic gap between Malayans and non-Malayans. In the corporate sector Malay equity participation was raised from 1.9\% in 1970 to 30\% by the end of the plan. A quota system was introduced in the schools. Malay culture was recognized as the national culture.\textsuperscript{12} Mahathir Mohammad's policy aimed at the Malayanization of Malaysia with a dominant Malaya culture and the Malaysian nation began to be defined in these terms. The emergence of a Malay narration of nation effectively marginalized the Chinese and other minorities by introducing the notion of the Bumiputra or the sons of the soil with all its attendant implications for forced quota and fewer opportunities.

The narrative of the overseas Chinese can be best understood from the writings of Wang Gungwu who for the past thirty years has devoted himself to the study of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia. As an overseas Chinese himself, he provides a deep understanding of and insight into the Chinese diasporic communities of Southeast Asia. A survey of his writings on the subject will reflect the nature and position of the diaspora in Southeast Asia. In \textit{China and the Chinese Overseas} Wang Gungwu identified four dominant patterns of Chinese migration:

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 176.

the coolie pattern (Huagong), the trader pattern (Huashang), the sojourner pattern (Huaqiao) and the re-migrant pattern (Huayi). 13 Each pattern represented the development and characteristics of Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia. According to Wang the most common pattern had been the trader pattern that continues till today. The trader pattern refers to merchants and artisans who migrated in large numbers and settled in Southeast Asia. It was among them that Chineseness was most pronounced for they realized the value of Chinese identity as essential to building business networks. The coolie pattern was short lived and this involved migration of mainly poor landless labourers and peasants. Their migration was induced by the abolition of slavery in the West. Thus indentured labourers were shipped to work in plantations, mines, the railroads and farms in Australia, America and Southeast Asia. The third pattern that of the huaqiao became visible between 1900 and the 1950s and mainly emerged as a result of the growth of nationalist ideology in the Chinese Mainland. The Chinese imperial government mainly appealed to these migrants to enlist their financial support to build a strong Chinese State. Therefore, Wang says the term huaqiao connoted a sojourner mentality and they demonstrated their loyalty to China and not to the host country. In fact, they became the backbone for the growth of Chinese nationalism overseas in the late 19th and early 20th century. The re-migrant pattern was represented by the Southeast Asians of Chinese descent or Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan who re-migrated to the West in response to their ill-treatment and exploitation in the host countries. By re-migrating Wang says they sought to preserve their Chineseness. This phenomenon is a relatively a new one. These four patterns essentially signified that migration in different times under different circumstances

created varying degrees of Chinese identity and defined Chineseness in different and variety of ways. Therefore, Chinese identity is not a static phenomenon.

In "The Chinese Minority in Southeast Asia" Wang Gungwu points out that the most important fact about the diasporic Chinese community in Southeast Asia is "their variety, their lack of unity and their tendency to act as fairly discrete groups depending on circumstances and occasions." He identified three types of Diasporic Chinese population: Group A, B, and C. Group A consists of Chinese people who are oriented towards China because of their citizenship rights. The Group B consists of those Chinese who realize the necessity of being loyal to the host country, yet don't display complete loyalty. Instead they maintain their Chinese identity since such identity aids business and other activities. For more than sentimental reasons, practical need drives these Chinese to maintain their Chineseness. Wang Gungwu notes that this group comprises the majority in Southeast Asia. Since this group professes loyalty first to Chinese community and then to the new nation states of Southeast Asia, they remain outside the parameters of the host national community and remain unassimilated. Group C consists of those people who identify politically with the host countries. He says that the Chinese of Group A and Group C comprise a smaller community unlike Group B. Particularly after the Second World War their percentage has further diminished. There is yet another group among the Chinese population who have been thoroughly assimilated in the host country but they are miniscule. Wang Gungwu believed that wherever the Chinese population was dominant in concentration and percentage the problem of inter-communal tension and racial tension prevailed. This is true of Malaysia where the Chinese are 35% of the Malaysian population.

Wang also believes that more than the differences in speech, lifestyle, custom, festivals and even differences in thought patterns, in attitude towards education, material advancement and social mobility, it is the economic difference that caused tension between the non-Chinese and Chinese communities. Therefore, economic reasons rather than cultural and ethnic differences were the primary ones inducing conflict between the two communities.

"Among Non-Chinese", Wang Gungwu writes that being Chinese and maintaining their identity as Chinese did not imply maintaining close relations with the Chinese mainland. In fact, the non-Chinese environment actually defined the Chineseness of the Chinese diaspora. Chineseness was defined around four themes: trading, working, studying and living with the non-Chinese. As traders, most Chinese originally traded and returned home, few settled down and were absorbed into the native society. This scenario changed with the intrusion of European powers that encouraged the Chinese to perform certain trading activities. This led to the evolution of Chinese communities like the Mestizos in the Philippines, and the Baba-peranakans in Malaya. These communities sustained their Chineseness by using of the Chinese language in their day-to-day trading activities, following birth, marriage and death practices, celebrating festivals and professing certain religious practices. With time the Chinese built their own schools for their children and recruited teachers from China. Soon their economic potential came to be recognized by the imperial Chinese government and by the beginning of the twentieth century all Chinese overseas came to be called huaqiao that is sojourners who were encouraged to invest in China, to be patriots and, at a later stage, support the nationalist upsurge against the Manchus. By the 1950s in the new nation states

of Southeast Asia, the Chinese traders sharpened their entrepreneurial skills and emerged as successful merchants. Wang Gungwu notes that identifying with China was not important for these traders. Their Chineseness helped to strengthen business ties among the people of Chinese descent although it did not profit them when they had to deal with the non-Chinese population. However, this trend according to Wang Gungwu is also changing. The economic success of Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China itself in the present decade has given new impetus and inspiration to be phenomena of being Chinese and this has reinforced the sense of Chineseness.

For workers like coolie or indentured labourers, Chineseness came to be defined in response to the exploitation and discrimination inflicted upon them by the colonial masters in Southeast Asia. In fact, under the colonial masters the Chinese lived and worked in isolation from the non-Chinese population. Wang says this Chinese working class abroad became the backbone of Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialist movements in China. The end of the Second World War and the departure of the colonial powers from Southeast Asia, however, brought about changes to work relationships. Many Chinese workers began to work together with indigenous workers. In countries where Chinese workers were less numerous, the pressure on them to integrate with the local environment was stronger than in societies like Singapore and Malaysia where their numerical strength helped them to sustain their Chineseness. For Chinese students in non-Chinese environments, Chinese nationalism led to the growth of Chinese primary and secondary schools in the host countries and Chinese students increasingly studied in Chinese schools in order to reiterate their ancestral identity. But with the emergence of new nation states in Southeast Asia, the new states
promoted a unified education system and demanded the closure of Chinese schools. As Chinese children went increasingly to non-Chinese schools most Chinese began to conform to the national system of education. But the strains of forcible assimilation are visible in Malaysian politics even today.

Wang Gungwu writes that trading, studying and working with the nonChinese brought differing experiences for Chinese settled in different countries. The degree of assimilation of the Chinese in the non-Chinese environment depended upon the number of Chinese in each country and the attitude of the local government towards the Chinese minorities. In fact the pressure to assimilate was greater in countries where the Chinese diaspora was small in number. In such countries the Chinese minority tried to downplay their Chineseness. Apart from the numerical factor that determined assimilation, religion also had varied impact. In countries where Buddhism existed, the Chinese population found it easy to mingle since the ideas of charity and compassion found in Buddhism resonated in Chinese Confucian values. But in countries, which were predominantly Islamic, Chinese attitudes, customs and norms conflicted and there was resistance to assimilation. This promoted Chineseness, sustained Chinese heritage and deepened a sense of identity.

Hence, as Wang Gungwu explains, Chineseness is not a unitary concept. The diasporic Chinese defined their Chineseness in negotiation with their immediate non-Chinese environment. Factors like the numerical strength of the population, religion, and the politics of the host government all contributed in a variety of ways to building “how to be Chinese, how to remain Chinese, how to

---

16 Wang Gungwu, *Among Non-Chinese*, p. 143
become Chinese or how to lose one’s Chineseness.” The second inference that Wang arrives at is that in defining their Chineseness, the diaspora was able to distinguish between the Chinese culture and the Chinese state and therefore, their Chineseness did not carry any political identity. The Chineseness of the diaspora in Southeast Asia is defined today basically by two characteristics: education and an interdependent world economy. Wang believes that so long as the Chinese in the host country have guarantees to education, legal rights and rights protecting their minority status, they have no reason to fear the non-Chinese. Secondly, economic globalization has enabled the Chinese to trade with other Chinese – both in China and around the world. This economic interaction at the global level has promoted a ‘cosmopolitan culture’ which has in turn made Chinese adaptable to the non-Chinese environment. Both these characteristics enable the Chinese diaspora to survive and flourish and, in turn, this perpetuates the Chineseness of the Chinese diaspora. This Chineseness of Chinese diaspora does not, however, connote a political identity. Wang’s view is that Asia the concept of a political identity and cultural identity has to be understood as being two different things. The Chinese diaspora carry their cultural identity into the new nation state. But this does not contradict their sense of being a nation in the new environment. This is because “in east Asia the idea of the nation state, with its national boundaries, one country, one culture, one religion and so on is very alien.” So the Chinese diaspora appropriates itself the hyphenated terms Chinese- Malaysia, Chinese-Singapore, Chinese- Thailand to describe themselves. There is no contradiction between ethnic identity and their national identity. This is in contrast to Europe where there

17 Ibid., p. 145
19 Ibid.
is only one dominant identity. Wang says this kind of singular identity explains why a Christian can only be a Christian but a Chinese can be both a Buddhist and a Daoist at the same time. Therefore, the kind of exclusive vision that prevails in European culture is alien to the Asian context. This explains why the Chinese diaspora remains Chinese in essence while displaying its political allegiance to the new nation state. It also explains why Chineseness prevails in Malaysia where the government realizes the ethnic differences between the Malayan and non-Malayan yet respect that difference without employing forcible assimilation.

In “The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy” Wang Gungwu regarded the Chinese act of sojourning a typical Chinese experience of migration. In the imperial times those Chinese who migrated for trading activities were expected to return and those who settled down in the foreign lands were branded as treacherous and outcasts. With the lifting of the ban on migration in 1893, the imperial court legitimized migration of the Chinese overseas and a new term, huaqiao, was used for the Chinese migrants. However, lifting the ban did not redefine the overseas Chinese as modern migrants since the imperial Chinese court not only encouraged the overseas Chinese to identify with their homes in the coastal provinces but also with China and Chinese civilization. The use of the new term, while it legitimized Chinese migration, also implied that they should be politically loyal to China. This idea of garnering political support was a product of modern nationalism. However, with the establishment of the Communist government in China and the emergence of non-

---

21 Ibid., p. 46-47
22 Ibid., p. 47
23 Ibid., p. 76
Communist nation states in Southeast Asia, the Chinese migrants were suspected of being communists whose loyalty could never be trusted. In this new situation, some Chinese migrants returned to China and others remained behind and were either assimilated or integrated or acculturated with the local community. In fact, the local born Chinese in the foreign lands felt the need to adapt to the "local modernizing environments in which they had grown up and hoped to go on living." Many of these local born could not read or speak Chinese. Wang argued that these local born Chinese who grew up in the multicultural societies of Southeast Asia and the West "challenged the idea that there was only one kind of patriotic Chinese." In countries where circumstances made assimilation difficult, the Chinese came to recognize that "wealth was the most important factor in securing their community's autonomy." When China after three decades of isolation, opened up for reform and modernization, a new phase of interaction began between China and the overseas Chinese. In this the role of Hong Kong was crucial, Wang argued. Its proximity and familiarity with the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, where most overseas Chinese had come from, made the territory a vital link. From there, ties were restored and investments to business came. Eventually, careful understandings were reached between the governments of China and Southeast Asia regarding the ways in which the Chinese of foreign descent might help to deepen the commercial links between themselves and China. Wang argued that a new "seaward looking China" had emerged and this would impact on the Chinese of foreign descent.

24 Ibid., p. 75
25 Ibid., p. 76
26 Ibid., p. 81
27 Ibid., p. 115
Wang argued that “the evidence of history is that overseas Chinese communities have always sought as much cultural autonomy as they could wherever they have gone.” In the multicultural societies, the Chinese immigrants got much cultural space and this allowed them to be more loyal to the host countries. Wang concluded that given the willingness of more countries to be more multicultural, given the Chinese tradition of sojourning, and given the massive presence of a China that is finally turning seaward, there will always be some ethnic Chinese who will press for the autonomy they need in order to remain culturally Chinese as long as possible.28

Wang Gungwu thus argues that wherever they resided the Chinese maintained their Chineseness. This is typical of the Chinese characteristic of sojourning. However, they tried to build their own autonomous space independent of the host country and mother country’s influence. In fact, today while the Chinese living abroad have greatly aided in China’s modernization, they have successfully insulated themselves from identifying politically with China, yet maintained their cultural identity which is Chinese.

In the narration of the nation that emerges from the Chinese Mainland, Tu Wei-ming in “The Living Tree” argues that the meaning of being Chinese is intertwined with China as a geopolitical concept and Chinese culture as a lived reality.29 Tu divides cultural China into three symbolic universes: the first consists of the PRC and other societies populated predominantly by ethnic Chinese, the second consists of the Chinese diaspora and the third consists of the non-Chinese individuals who try to understand China intellectually. He says the meaning of

28 Ibid., p.117
being Chinese differs in each of these symbolic universes. Tu further argues that in the coming century it will be the periphery of cultural China that will set the economic and cultural agenda for the next century. Tu Wei-ming argues that China faced a cultural crisis with the intrusion of the West. Its civilization based on Confucian culturalism failed to meet the challenge of the West. This plunged China into collective amnesia and its intellectuals questioned the efficacy of China's tradition, Confucian values and Chinese culture. In effect, they questioned the meaning of being Chinese or Chineseness. Finding that China as a civilizational state was no longer tenable, they felt the need to reject tradition and imbibe the values of the modern West to construct a modern Chinese state. But the quest for modernization created a dilemma for the Chinese intellectuals about whether modernization meant Westernization. If so then what would it mean to be Chinese? A radical iconoclasm and quest for modernity came to dominate Chinese intellectual thinking from the May Fourth onwards. Its present manifestation can be found in the much acclaimed *River Elegy*. While the intellectuals of the mainland groped for solutions on how to marry modernity to tradition and retain Chinese identity, the Chinese overseas achieved dynamic economic growth based on the principle of humanistic Confucianism and thereby, proved that Chineseness is not incongruous with modernity. In fact, the participation of the Chinese diaspora in the booming East Asian economies demonstrated that the same Chinese people could achieve modernity by retaining Chineseness and that Confucian philosophy as embodied in the principles of industry and discipline and familial / clan networks determined their modern transformation. As Tu Wei-ming writes, "to Chinese intellectuals in industrial East Asia, the awareness that active participation in the economic, political social and cultural life of a thoroughly
modernized community does not necessarily conflict with being authentically Chinese implies the possibility that modernization may enhance rather than weaken Chineseness." The success of East Asian industrial capitalism, thus, had an impact on Chinese on the mainland in reviving the concept of Chineseness. Thus, Tu Wei-ming believes that the periphery presents powerful and persistent economic and cultural challenges and will come to set the economic and cultural agenda for the center. The Pudong project in Shanghai, which is the planned development of a Special Economic Zone, comparable to the size of Singapore demonstrates the impact of the periphery on the Chinese Mainland.

Tu Wei-ming also argues that if cultural China is viewed as the psychological, economic and political interaction between the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan and Singapore, then the notion of China as a civilizational state reemerges. The idea of belonging to a Confucian civilization also pervades the Chinese diasporic identity in that the diaspora never lost their sense of the homeland even by staying outside of the mainland. In fact, China with its long history, mammoth size and huge population left an impression on “the psychocultural constructs” of diasporic Chinese. The diaspora always yearns to get back to homeland and seeks, above all, recognition in homeland. Therefore, the Chinese diaspora essentially possesses a “sojourner mentality” and lacks a sense of permanence in adopted country. From Tu Wei-ming’s conceptualization of the three universes, cultural China reemerges as a civilizational state and the diaspora draws its identity from this cultural notion of China.

From the three narratives of nationhood, some characteristics of diasporic identity can be identified. First, incipient in the bumiputra concept in Malaysia, is
the notion of the antagonism of the host nation state towards the Chinese community. This antagonism instigates the diaspora to "construct an alternative and more satisfying identity- one of belonging with Chinese in China."\textsuperscript{32} Second, following from the first, the diaspora displays civilizational identity.\textsuperscript{33} Since the diaspora identifies with the Chinese civilization, Chinese worldwide can be said to have a civilizational identity.\textsuperscript{34} This civilizational identity does not imply identification with the Chinese state but to the Chinese people and Chinese culture. Third, while the Chinese diasporic identity represents common civilizational identity, it also possesses a heterogeneous identity born out of local conditions or as a reaction to the host country. Therefore, diasporic identity is ambiguous and the meaning of Chinese is contestable and ever changing, varying from place to place. These characteristics of the Chinese diaspora have a definitive impact on the meaning of the Chinese nation and consequently determine the Chinese notion of nationalism.

**Shaping of the Chinese policy towards the diaspora**

The modern Chinese policy towards the diaspora is traceable to the nineteenth century when the late Qing imperial government of China in its efforts to initiate economic modernization was trying to break free from the growing foreign control and search for alternative sources of foreign capital.\textsuperscript{35} The alternative was sought in overseas Chinese capital. Until there was pressure from the West the Qing government had discouraged emigration and had adopted

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p.225
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
stringent measures to restrict movement overseas. The Unequal Treaties carried a clause allowing Chinese emigration facilitating the Western powers exploitation of Chinese labour as the era of slave trading came to an end. The imperial law preventing emigration was repealed in 1893. Prasenjit Duara has observed that there emerged three narratives on modernity in China on soliciting the diaspora’s help to serve the national interest: the narratives of the Qing imperial state, the Constitutional monarchists and reformers led by Kang Youwei and the republican revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen.

Wang Gungwu points out it was the huaqiao pattern of the four dominant patterns of Chinese migration owed its origin to the Qing government’s policies and this migrant group became visible between 1900 and the 1950s. In fact, the Chinese imperial government consciously used the term- huaqiao- signifying allegiance to China and the Qing state, and entailing certain legal rights and responsibilities toward the Chinese state. Thus, the Qing government’s deliberate encouragement to sojourners to identify with China and Chinese civilization transformed the overseas Chinese in the 19th century “from outlaws into honored mandarins as part of an imperial nationalism.” The Qing state realized the need to strengthen national defenses and undertook a comprehensive programme in education, commerce, law and local self-government. Since most of its own revenues went in paying off the foreign debt it turned to the overseas Chinese for investment. Therefore, the Qing government gave up the ban on emigration in

---

37 Ibid., p.42.
1893 and set up Consulates in Southeast Asia to address the needs of its “nationals” abroad. From 1902 onwards the Qing government involved the overseas in commercial projects. As incentives for investment in mining and railroads, the Qing government even adopted measures like the sale of brevet ranks and titles. In fact, those Chinese overseas who invested more than two thousand Yuan in a modern enterprise were given the first rank. Six special missions of imperial envoys and many other delegations were sent to Southeast Asia to whip up investments from the overseas Chinese. Duara suggests that with the sale of ranks and imperial symbols the message was also to instill Confucian virtues among the diaspora and create a Confucian nationalism. The Qing State thus attempted to build the modern nation on the old civilizational concepts. This contact with the overseas Chinese received a legal dimension with the Nationality Law of 1909 which adopted the principle of jus sanguinis, the doctrine that claimed that nationality goes by the ethnic descent through the patrilineal line.

In contrast to the Qing strategy, reformists like Kang Youwei combined the framework of both Confucian civilization and Constitutional monarchy to usher in reforms. This synthesis of both old and new attracted the huaqiao for while the reforming policies did not discard the imperial state and instead retained the imperial prestige, it also brought in new reforms needed to rejuvenate the state. Kang’s vision was embodied in the Baohuanghui (Society to protect the Emperor)

---


Ibid., P.44.

Ibid.

Ibid., p.45.


Prasenjit Duara, Nationalist Among Transnationalists, p.48.
in Southeast Asia. This narrative fed into establishment of schools in Southeast Asia which fostered Confucian values as well as modern scientific values as well as political issues like mobilizing the support of overseas Chinese in boycotting Japanese goods. At the same time the reformers also addressed the local problems of the huaqiao.

The revolutionary narrative of modernity was based on the global discourse of Social Darwinism, central to which were notions of racial purity and superiority and the Enlightenment values of enterprise, adventurism and expansionism. The revolutionaries built up the discourse of Han racialism that was opposed to the rule of the Manchus who had persecuted the overseas Chinese. The revolutionaries glorified the contributions of the earlier Ming rule which promoted maritime expeditions and whose effort led to the colonization of the Nanyang (the southern states across the seas). In doing so the revolutionaries called for huaqiao support for restoration of Han rule by overthrowing the Manchus. Sun Yat-sen and his activities largely depended on the aid provided by the overseas Chinese. The communities of Hong Kong, Yokohama and Singapore were among the first to finance the activities of Sun Yat-sen. It was, however, under the Guomindang that a more active policy was pursued towards the overseas Chinese. Since the Guomindang had begun virtually as an overseas Chinese party and it also looked to overseas Chinese for funding. Between 1912 and 1919, the KMT attempted to promote and supervise overseas Chinese education and from 1918 until 1922 there was a department of Overseas Chinese Affairs within the ministry of Commerce.

---

46 Ibid., p. 49.
47 See Ibid.
The Guomindang subsequently established an Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau, which in 1926 became the first Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission.\textsuperscript{50} The overseas Chinese were encouraged to retain Chinese culture by attending local Chinese schools, learning the Chinese language and adhering to Chinese customs and traditions.\textsuperscript{51} Thus, the overseas Chinese were encouraged to identify with Chinese rather than local politics and this, in turn, fostered Chinese nationalism among them but became a cause for concern for the Southeast Asian countries.\textsuperscript{52} This legacy continued under the Communists.

**Overseas Chinese Policy in the Maoist era**

Stephen Fitzgerald opined that immediately after the Communist takeover of China, there was little evidence in the CCP about its policies towards the overseas Chinese. During this period overseas Chinese policy was, in fact, determined by the Taiwan question. The policies, thus, were limited in nature for the main thrust of the CCP was to ensure that overseas Chinese did not adopt a pro-KMT stance\textsuperscript{53}. The introduction of the phrase, *great patriotic unity (aiguo da tuanjie)*, in the earliest statements on overseas Chinese policy indicates the CPC’s stand on the overseas Chinese. The phrase essentially meant that the overseas Chinese were expected to profess their loyalty only to China and not to the KMT government across the Straits. Also the use of the term ‘Chinese resident abroad’ (Guowai Huaqiao) indicates the conception of the overseas Chinese in China.\textsuperscript{54} In the Common Programme, the ‘Chinese resident abroad’ was viewed as one of the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p., 80.
\textsuperscript{54} See Ibid., pp. 78-80.
components of the people’s democratic united front with the right to representation in the CPPCC. Stephen Fitzgerald argued that the use of the term ‘Chinese resident abroad’ while it indicated that the overseas Chinese were all Chinese nationals did not have any legal connotations.\textsuperscript{55} Despite a clear position on overseas Chinese the CCP, however, recognized the right of the overseas Chinese to Chinese government protection. Thus in the Common Programme it was promised that ‘The Central Government of People’s Republic of China shall make every effort to protect the proper rights and interests of Chinese residents abroad’. Thus in 1949 the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission replaced the KMT’s Chinese Affairs Commission.

From 1954 onwards China shifted to a more pragmatic relation with the overseas Chinese. In its zeal to play a more international role and portray itself as a peaceful power and a champion of de-colonization, China had to rethink its polices towards its overseas population. As Stephen Fitzgerald puts it, ‘cultural separateness, economic domination, racial arrogance, and political attachment to China made the overseas Chinese a suspect minority in Southeast Asia and an unlikely channel for effective influence for the CCP.\textsuperscript{56} This was true to some extent as for example in Malaya where the Communist insurgency played havoc for almost ten years. The insurgents were largely recruited from the overseas Chinese.\textsuperscript{57}

Zhou Enlai’s statement at the First National People’s Congress on September 23, 1954 signalled the change in Chinese policy towards the overseas Chinese. The statement spelt out:

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 79.
For our part, we are willing to urge overseas Chinese to respect the laws of the governments and the social customs of the countries in which they live. It is worth pointing out that the question of the nationality of overseas Chinese is one which the reactionary governments of China in the past never tried to solve. This placed overseas Chinese in a difficult situation and often led to discord between China and the countries concerned. To improve this situation, we are prepared to settle this question, and are ready to settle it first with the Southeast Asian countries which have established diplomatic relations with us.  

At the Bandung Conference in 1955 the changed policies towards the overseas Chinese were implemented. The decision to eliminate dual citizenship was formalized with the signing of a treaty between Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mr. Sunario and Mr. Zhou Enlai on 22 April 1955. Under such an agreement, an ethnic Chinese was required to chose only one citizenship. In fact, there were three features outlining one citizenship: a) a minor would acquire the citizenship of his/her father; b) when the father's citizenship was unclear, he/she would adopt his/her mother's citizenship; c) A minor who had his/her father’s citizenship would be allowed to choose either Chinese or Indonesian citizenship and become integrated into the local society. Only Indonesia signed such a treaty. The outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, however, disrupted the overseas Chinese policies to the extent that the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC) was dismantled in 1967. The relatives of the overseas Chinese in China who enjoyed privileges of the extra income from overseas such as ‘private homes’ and ‘special shops’ lost their privileges during the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution when the ultra leftists regarded relatives of the overseas Chinese as ‘parasites’ and

---

59 Ibid., p. 482.
'capitalists'. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission also disappeared and an atmosphere of general neglect prevailed in overseas Chinese policy. Also the dual-citizenship treaty signed between China and Indonesia was unilaterally abrogated by Indonesia in the aftermath of the 1965 coup in Jakarta.

**Overseas Chinese policy in the Deng era**

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, normalcy returned to the political and social life of China. Deng Xiaoping's Four Modernizations also drove the contemporary migration of the Chinese population. Chin Ko-lin, author of the forthcoming *Smuggled Chinese: Clandestine Immigration to the United States*, says the exodus stems from policy changes in China after 1978, when Washington and Beijing established diplomatic relations. To qualify for most-favoured-nation status in the U.S., China relaxed emigration regulations in 1979 and the flow westwards began. Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up thus paved the way for Chinese to go in search of business opportunities abroad. The shift from people's communes to private agriculture, massive lay-offs at state-owned enterprises, rapid industrialization in coastal provinces--all led to dislocation and more migration. "Beginning in the late 1980s, some of those who did not have legitimate channels to emigrate began turning to human smugglers for help," says Chin. The favourite destination of Chinese migrants, smuggled or otherwise, was New York.

With these changes in the post-Mao era the office of the overseas Chinese was restored as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. Rehabilitation of the domestic overseas Chinese was undertaken. In 1980 the PRC passed the first Nationality Law which abandoned dual nationality. Zhou Enlai's spirit of single

---

62 Ibid.
citizenship was, thus, enshrined into law for the first time. This law was modern for it respected the "free will" of an individual and did not force any ethnic Chinese to remain a Chinese national when living overseas.\(^6^4\) Article IX of the 1980 Nationality Law stipulated that "any Chinese national who has settled abroad and who has been naturalized there or has acquired foreign nationality of his own free will, automatically loses Chinese nationality".\(^6^5\) As to the protection of overseas Chinese abroad, the Chinese leadership readopted in the Constitution of 1982 the policies adopted in the 1954 Constitution. Article 50 of the 1982 Chinese Constitution thus stated, "The People's Republic of China protects the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese nationals residing abroad and protects the lawful rights and interests of returned overseas Chinese and of the family members of Chinese nationals residing abroad."\(^6^6\) The article made it clear that protection was only granted to Chinese nationals.\(^6^7\) However, such promises of protection were more rhetorical in nature. In general, as Stephen Fitzgerald writes that the policies of the 1980s was the reiteration of 1957-58 'three good' policies: encouraging Chinese nationals abroad to become naturalized, encouraging them to integrate locally and using repatriation in case of persecution as a way to protect Chinese nationals abroad.\(^6^8\)

In 1990 September, the "Law of the People's Republic of China concerning the protection of the rights and interests of the returned overseas Chinese and the relatives of overseas Chinese" was adopted by the National People's Congress.\(^6^9\)

\(^6^4\) Leo Suryadinata, "China's Citizenship Law And The Chinese In Southeast Asia", p. 176.
\(^6^5\) Appendix 3, in Ibid., p. 199.
\(^6^8\) Stephen Fitzgerald, China and the Overseas Chinese, pp. 141-155.
\(^6^9\) Mette Thuno, p. 917.
The Law was concerned primarily with protection and privileges in economic matters and rights to maintain contacts with relatives living abroad. This law no longer allowed remittances to be used to improve the living standard of the relatives of the Chinese overseas, only special quotas for higher educational institutions were allowed to the relatives of overseas Chinese in China.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 917-918.} The second important change in post- Mao China was that unlike in the 1950s when remittances were encouraged to attain foreign capital, in the 1980s such donations and remittances were not seen as being adequate to the state’s need.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 919.} With the open door polices, the demand for greater investments led to the establishment of export-oriented development zones in Xiamen and Shantou.\footnote{Ibid., pp.920.} The third departure from the Maoist era lay in the policies concerning dependents and returnees earlier used as strategies to woo overseas Chinese funding. Though the privileges to the domestic overseas Chinese were retained, \textit{ethnic Chinese} became the focus of wooing investments from abroad.\footnote{Ibid., pp.922.} Ethnic Chinese were defined as those Chinese connected to China by race, place of birth and culture. This strategy was essentially meant to court the Chinese overseas in Taiwan and thus take a step towards unification with the Mainland.\footnote{See Mette Thuno, pp. 922-925.}

\textbf{Overseas Chinese policies in the post-Deng era}

The post- Deng era saw the continuation of Deng’s policies. In fact, relations between China and the overseas Chinese remained mainly economic. As Chinese Vice-Premier Qian Qichen said at the National Overseas Chinese Affairs
Conference 2001, overseas Chinese were assured of having their legitimate rights protected in their motherland. With China's accession into the World Trade Organization (WTO), overseas Chinese would have more frequent and closer cooperation and exchanges with the motherland than ever, Qian stated. At the meeting, Qian also stressed the importance of promoting the teaching of Chinese language abroad, and said that this will not only satisfy the eagerness of overseas Chinese, especially the younger generations, to learn Chinese and the Chinese culture, but also help promote friendly ties between the countries they live in and the motherland. It is important to notice that in decade of the 90s saw the emergence of a growing number of “new migrants”. These new migrants often included Chinese students studying abroad, particularly in the West and who have settled locally. While these new migrants did not qualify as overseas Chinese, they emerged as a new link for spreading Chinese influence and wooing investments. Several associations, propaganda activities and educational schemes were launched to gain their support. Thus Mette Thuno aptly concludes that by categorizing the recent Chinese migrants as ‘new migrants’ rather than as ‘overseas Chinese’ and by undermining the status of dependents and returnees, the PRC is signaling a re-conceptualization of its policies towards the overseas Chinese. The Office of Overseas Chinese affairs in Beijing mentions its missions as:

- Study to formulate guiding principles and policies on the overseas Chinese work; provide information on the overseas Chinese to the central authorities.

---

75 Rights of Overseas Chinese Protected in Motherland, Vice Premier, http://www.chinaembassy.ch/eng/23807.html

76 See Mette Thuno, pp.922-925.

77 Ibid., p. 927.

• Help the premier of the State Council to manage the overseas Chinese work;
• Protect the legitimate rights of overseas Chinese.
• Conduct the work towards Taiwan via the channel of overseas Chinese.
• Conduct surveys and research on the situation of capital, technology, and personnel inflow conducted by overseas Chinese; promote the work that helps the inflow of capital, technology and personnel from the side of overseas Chinese.
• In charge of the work of settlement on the mainland of overseas Chinese.

The Overseas Chinese affairs still mention the protection of the legitimate rights of the overseas Chinese but it is not clear what it actually means in terms of application. During the May 1998 Medan riots in Indonesia China did not intervene except to raise its concern that the Indonesian government should punish the guilty and treat ethnic Chinese as it does the rest of the native Indonesian population. Therefore, the policy of the PRC is essentially to encourage the Chinese diaspora to make economic and financial investments and in doing so it harks on the cultural ties that the diaspora shares with the Mainland. The Chinese leadership, by wooing the ethnic Chinese, is also conscious of not alienating the Southeast Asian countries. But at the same time by using the term ethnic Chinese rather than overseas Chinese or huaqiao, the Chinese leadership’s overseas policy is mainly geared to the cause of unification of Taiwan with the Mainland. Thus by using notions of shared race and ethnicity, the PRC essentially depends on the diasporic Chinese political support for the national cause and thereby promotes the cause of Chinese nationalism.
What Chineseness means today?

In defining the Chinese today, David Yen-ho Wu says two sentiments identify all those who are Chinese. One is the term Zhongguoren and other is the term Zhonghua minzu.\(^\text{79}\) Incipient in the term Zhongguoren or Chinese people, is the modern notion of patriotism and nationalism. The Chinese people feel that they belong to a nation, which as Tu Wei-ming notes, is a geo-political center that evolves around a definable core and retains deep-roots in the Chinese psyche.\(^\text{80}\) Coupled with this is the cultural heritage shaped by China’s uninterrupted, rich civilization and a strong historical consciousness. This sentiment pervades the Chinese people including the diaspora. Second, the Chinese perceive themselves as Zhonghua minzu, which David Yen-ho Wu says is a close but inadequate translation of the term “the Chinese race”.\(^\text{81}\) Zhonghua minzu is a rather modern concept that emerged only in the twentieth century. The term Zhong meant middle or center and hua meant language or culture, therefore implying the culture of the middle country. The term minzu implied the great Han people. The term minzu (min for people and zu for tribe or clan) was imported from Japan. Though the Han dynasty in China was preceded by three dynasties, Xia, Shang and Zhou, it was Han which transcended region and became the basic mark of all Chinese people.\(^\text{82}\) This is because as the authors explained, “it was during the Han dynasty that recognizable shape was first given to the culture, social structure, political system

---


and economy of China as they were known until recent times.”

Essentially, then, the term Zhonghua minzu connotes a cultural idea rather than the modern notion of nationality and citizenship for Han did not identify with a particular superior race but with that race which was seen to embody the best notion of China’s culture. Thus David Yen-ho wrote “both Zhongguoren and Zhonghua minzu represent an identity based on concepts of cultural and historical fulfillment.” Thus the Chinese diaspora in Chinese mind rightly belong to this cultural notion of being Chinese. They are Chinese for they can claim a Chinese male ancestor in China and observe certain rituals related to the Chinese culture. This cultural conception of being Chinese imparts the Chinese all over the world a kind of civilizational identity. Since Chinese people draw their identity from the civilization and not from the political state of China, the notion of Chineseness survives the separation from China.

This civilizational identity has been further reinforced with the spread of globalization and the greater interaction among the Chinese people all over the world. The emergence of the concept of ‘Greater China’ in fact, reinforces this Chineseness. As Wang Gungwu argued, the remarkable economic performance of China and the economic stimulus provided by the entrepreneurs of Taiwan, Hong Kong and diasporic Chinese settled in southeast Asia have created the perception of ‘Greater China’ reinforcing conception of Chineseness and creating a ‘common awareness’ among all Chinese people. This idea of Chineseness can be further understood in the Chinese term “guanxi” which essentially means personal

---

83 Ibid., p. 85.
84 David Yen-ho Wu, p. 150.
connections. "Guanxi" remains a very important ingredient in overseas Chinese business and the post 1978 reform era witnessed a resurgence of the role of "guanxi". In an imperfect market economy entrepreneurs overcame bureaucratic hurdles to business or obtained special advantages in the market through "guanxi". "Guanxi" is not confined to mainland China but is prevalent in all Chinese societies. It enables the building of a strong network among all Chinese across the globe and reinforces the meaning of being Chinese.

The Chinese State however, has an effective hand in defining and reinforcing Chineseness. It may be noted that while the Chinese State was groping for a definition of nationalism in the twentieth century, it also engaged itself with the idea of defining the diaspora. Thus, the term huaqiao cropped up at the same time as the term nationalism gained currency indicating as William Callahan points out that the construction of huaqiao identity is part of the production of Chinese nationalism. By doing so the Chinese State consciously inculcated the sentiment of being Chinese. The PRC has laboured to see that Chineseness is an essential identity tied to the State. Thus the Chinese diaspora is urged to support the modern transformation of China.

While the homeland impacts on maintaining Chineseness among the diaspora, the host country too has a role in negotiating the nature of Chineseness among the diaspora. This can be best exemplified from the peranakans and totoks of Indonesia. Ien Ang, has successfully portrayed the hybrid nature of peranakans

---

89 Ibid.
in "Not Speaking Chinese". Being a peranakan herself who finally re-emigrated to Netherlands, she effectively narrates her own experience about how she is under constant pressure to define her identity.

The peranakans, people of Chinese descent who are born and bred in Southeast Asia, settled as traders and craftsmen in Southeast Asia. With time they eventually lost many of the characteristics associated with Chinese culture. Many of them even lost their command over the Chinese language and instead spoke Malay. In contrast totok Chinese arrived from China much later and generally maintained much closer personal and cultural ties with the ancestral homeland. The Imperial Decree of China, dating from the early 18th century which formally prohibited Chinese from leaving and re-entering China and the change in this policy in the 19th century, prompted the two modes of a mass emigration from China and affected their development as well. The unassimilated totoks regarded themselves as real Chinese and did not consider the Peranakans as pure Chinese. The peranakans, in spite of their assimilation in the host country, were regarded as neither Chinese nor as natives of Indonesia. The peranakans Chinese thus developed an ambiguous hybrid identity. The identity of the ethnic Chinese both peranakans and totoks came under assault when Dutch colonialism followed a divide and rule policy in Indonesia. The Dutch colonizers set the peranakans and the totoks apart from Europeans on the one hand, and the natives on the other. This divide and rule policy prompted the ethnic Chinese to look to China to rediscover their Chineseness. Many of them were drawn towards the pan-Chinese nationalist movement that emerged towards the twentieth century. The Peranakans, being more rooted in the host country, responded only partially to the calls for the

---

rediscovery of Chineseness, prompting the *totoks* to regard the *Peranakans* as unpatriotic and creating an essential difference between the *Totok* and the *Peranakans* about who was more Chinese.\(^9\) With the end of Dutch colonialism, power passed to indigenous groups. In the new political environment the identity of the ethnic Chinese came to be negotiated and redefined yet again. Under the new circumstances, most *Peranakans* chose to adopt Indonesian citizenship. However, Indonesian nationalism defined the Indonesian nation as comprising only of indigenous people, excluded the Chinese and in the process dubbed them as an ‘alien minority’. The minorities were pressurized to assimilate fully and this amounted to giving up their ethnic identity or prompting many ethnic Chinese to re-emigrate to other lands.

From the narrative of Ien Ang, it appears that the Chinese migrants who had settled in Southeast Asia did not represent a homogeneous identity. Further, migration and remigration forced the Chinese to negotiate and renegotiate their identities. There were, thus, two levels of identity among the Chinese migrants: one induced by difference in the mode and timing of migration as exemplified in the *peranakans* and *totoks*. The second, when the Chinese were forced to remigrate from the host country to a new land. Therefore, identities of the Chinese were not static but hybrid. This hybrid identity, thus, imparts fluidity to the notion of Chineseness as a racial and ethnic category.

Therefore, the meaning of Chineseness today is being constantly renegotiated and redefined by local circumstances. But the Chinese essentially cannot do away with their Chineseness and this is actually a problem emerging out of diasporic identity. As Ien Ang puts it, for migrants the relation between “where

\(^9\) Ien Ang,
you’re from” and “where you’re at” is a deeply problematic one. To be sure, it is this very problem which is constitutive of the idea of diaspora.”92 Secondly, the history of the Chinese diaspora is so deeply entangled with events in China and the changes in the host countries that the diaspora appropriates to itself a multiple identity- it can never possess a single identity.93 Therefore, a diasporic Chinese while he is an ethnic Chinese, a primary focal point of ethnic identification,94 also possesses a ‘hyphenated’ identity like, Sino-Thais, Sino-Burmese so on. He is Chinese by descent but “whose one-Chinese citizenship and political allegiance collapse ancestral loyalties”.95 Due to these characteristics the Chineseness of the Chinese diaspora is not a static feature. It is hybrid and ambiguous. Therefore, in the narrative of the diaspora the meaning of nation is shrouded in ambivalence.

**Impact on Chinese Nationalism**

In China according to Tu Wei-ming, the legacy of Mao’s Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution left a kind of collective amnesia among the Chinese. While the May Fourth era led to the disavowal of Confucianism, the Maoist era led to the disavowal of Marxism.96 This “double disavowal” raised the question about what Chineseness means today in China. Tu Wei-ming argued that when the center of ‘cultural China’ or the Chinese Mainland was groping for a definition of what it means to be Chinese, it was the diaspora or the peripheral groups who carried forward the notion of Chineseness. The Chinese identity of the diasporic Chinese has emerged only when the Chinese left China to settle in a host

---

93 Cultural Identities in the Chinese Diaspora, http://www.screwschool.com/term/pol42.htm
94 Ien Ang, “Migration of Chineseness”.
96 Tu Wei-ming, The Living Tree, p. 32.
country. Their identity was entrenched only in confrontation with the hostile, discriminatory circumstances of the host country. In effect, the diasporic connection with China was strengthened and they appeared to be more Chinese than the Chinese themselves. This Chineseness among the diaspora was visible in their successful amalgamation of both Confucian humanism and democratic liberalism in creating the East Asian economies. Thus when China was debating how to marry modernity with tradition and yet retain Chineseness, the diaspora showed the way. Thus, the notion of Chineseness was revived from the periphery. Further, as Tu Wei-ming observed, the remarkable economic performance in the Asia Pacific region has led to the creation of a powerful nexus between Mainland China (especially the coastal areas of Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai) on the one hand, and Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan on the other. This economic dynamism, according to Wang Gungwu produced the perception of 'Greater China', sometimes projected as a "Chinese Commonwealth." Tu Wei-ming perceived in this the reintegration and revival of China as a civilizational state. This cultural notion of civilizational state thus reinvigorates and complements the notion of Chinese nationalism today.

Chinese nationalism today is the product of history- a century of humiliation. China wants to set its history right and therefore aspires for the great power status that it once enjoyed. To retrieve its glorious past, it has anchored itself to economic globalization and modernization. It also wishes to acquire the territories it once held and rightfully considers its own. By doing so China intends to raise self-respect for all Chinese reflecting the rise of "restoration nationalism"

97 Cho-yun Hsu, "A Reflection of Marginality", in Tu Wei-ming ed., The Living Tree, p. 239.
in China today. Wang Gungwu explained this restoration nationalism as the "recovery of sovereignty, the unification of divided territory, and national self-respect." The success of this restoration nationalism will have great impact on the diaspora and this will reinforce the notion of China as a civilizational state. The fate and well being of the diasporic Chinese will also depend on the restoration of China's wealth and power. Thus, Chinese nationalism and the diaspora complement each other in strengthening the notion of Chineseness. The diaspora, on the one hand, by its economic dynamism helps to construct and strengthen the mainland economy, and, on the other hand, by reinforcing the idea of Chineseness aids in building the concept of China as a civilizational state. These two characteristics of the diaspora shape the idea of Chinese nationalism in Mainland China today. Mainland China by its cultural appeal attempts to influence the Chinese diaspora in its cause for national unification. Thus, by imparting the notion of Chineseness, China appropriates the leadership of Cultural China. In doing so it sidelines Taiwan and emerges as a representative of what Chineseness means today. Thus, the Chinese diaspora plays an effective role in building the notion of Chinese nationalism in China today.

100 Ibid., p. 114.
101 Ibid., p. 114.