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WHAT DOES "CHINESE" MEAN? AN EXPLORATORY ESSAY

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by

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"CHINESE" AND NON-"CHINESE"

What does "Chinese" mean? This question involves at least a quarter of the world's population, a large area of the world, and perhaps five thousand years of world history. I do not pretend that such a big question can be answered in the short space of this paper; I can merely examine some of the implications of this necessary question. I embark on this attempt not just as an anthropologist studying the phenomenon of Chinese-ness, but also as someone who is considered as "Chinese" in one sense or another. In other words, I adopt the dual perspective of objective observer and subjective native, thereby presenting my discussion as what Bateson (1980:146) would term a "double description".

In this paper, Chinese-ness is treated not as a given but as a problematic, which has therefore to be deconstructed as one would any other social and historical phenomenon. In this process of deconstruction, several related questions arise: For example, who are the Chinese and why are they so labelled? What is "China" and how did such a territorial differentiation come about? What are the historical continuities and discontinuities that relate to being Chinese?

Much of the existing literature on Chinese identity refers specifically to the overseas Chinese, as if it were a problematic only in relation to those living outside China. (See, for example, Gosling and Lim 1983.) I would, however, argue that such an easy assumption is unwarranted: what constitutes "China" and "Chinese" cannot simply be assumed. In this paper, I shall therefore attempt to examine the foundations and implications of Chinese-ness both inside and outside China proper.

I propose that whatever the phenomenon of Chinese-ness may be, it cannot be understood as an isolated entity that is somehow

miraculously self-emergent. On the contrary, I think that Chinese-ness must be understood as one part of an interacting relationship between Chinese and non-Chinese. Chinese-ness implies non-Chinese-ness. Therefore to say that about a quarter of the world's population is Chinese is also to say that about three-quarters are not Chinese. To say that a large area of the world is Chinese is, similarly, to say that an even larger area is not Chinese. To say that Chinese history is five thousand years old or more is also to say that during an even longer span of human history, there was no such phenomenon as Chinese-ness. The relationship between Chinese-ness and non-Chinese-ness may thus be understood as a differentiation of people, place, and time. In other words, to ask what "Chinese" means is really to ask what the *difference* is between that which is "Chinese" and that which is not, in terms of people, place and time.

To examine what this difference is, I offer myself as a case in point. I was born outside the area of the world that is traditionally considered "Chinese" (I avoid the word "China" with good reason), and I have lived all my life outside that area. I was born on the Southeast Asian island of Singapore, and without even moving away from there, I have been first a British subject, then a Malaysian citizen, and now a Singaporean citizen. Throughout these political changes on the island, my identification as Chinese has remained. So I have been identified as Chinese from the time of my birth, even though I was born in a non-"Chinese" area of the world, and even though I have never been a Chinese citizen in any sense of the word. Since this identification was put upon me from the time of birth, it means that it is primarily an identification by others -- by family, government, and even strangers. How I deal with this identification is therefore a secondary matter. The identification of people as Chinese is thus through ascription by others, and not through achievement by self.

Such ascriptive labelling precedes any behavioural learning of cultural content such as language, since it occurs at birth. One is born either Chinese or not Chinese. Conversely, one can neither become nor un-become Chinese. Chinese identity cannot be achieved through cultural change -- for example, through language acquisition or language loss, or through the adoption of religious tradition or conversion to another religion. Thus a non-Chinese does not become Chinese by virtue of language acquisition, nor does a Chinese lose his or her label by virtue of language loss; there are sufficient numbers of Mandarin-speaking *yángguǐ* ("foreign devils") 洋鬼 and Chinese who do not speak any Chinese language to demonstrate this. Similarly, a non-Chinese is not able to become Chinese by adopting

Chinese religion, nor does a Chinese lose his or her label through conversion to a non-Chinese religion such as Christianity.[1] Not even is marriage a means to becoming Chinese -- a non-Chinese married to a Chinese remains non-Chinese, irrespective of gender.

Identification through ascription contrasts with identification through achievement. The essential difference between the two modes is that identification through ascription is exclusivist while identification through achievement is inclusivist, at least potentially so.

To give an example of the latter, "Malay" identity is achievable. Thus it is possible for a non-"Malay" to *masuk Melayu* ("enter Malaydom") through religious conversion to Islam, the habitual use of *bahasa Melayu* (the Malay language), and the adoption of *adat* (Malay custom). In my research in Riau, Indonesia, I found many cases of this, including "Chinese" who have become accepted as Malay by Malays, though among other Chinese they are apparently still regarded as Chinese. (See Wee 1985:405-469.) In Riau, Chinese who convert to Islam are said to have *rùfān*, or in Hokkien pronunciation, *jip hoan* ("entered barbarism") 入番 . However, such deculturation or assimilation (depending on how one looks at it) does not, apparently, nullify Chinese identity.

A similar process seems to apply to Chinese elsewhere. For example, a very Westernised Chinese in Taiwan, Hongkong and Singapore is said to be *yánghuà* 洋化 or, in Hokkien idiom, *âng-mô khoán* 紅毛款 or *hoan-á khoán* 番哪款 (that is, become foreign or barbarian in manner). However, even a very Westernised Chinese person is still regarded as Chinese by other Chinese because he or she has been born as such.

The basis of such an ascriptive mode of identification seems to be patrifiliation, whereby the legitimate child of any Chinese male would be labelled Chinese as a matter of course, even with a non-Chinese mother. Projected backwards towards the past, such patrifiliative reckoning expresses an orientation towards one's ancestral origins, even if these are only vaguely presumed and not genealogically known. So in sum, one is ascriptively labelled "Chinese" because at some point in the past, a patrilineal ancestor was so labelled.

But how did such a first ancestor come to be so labelled? Logically, it would have to be through achievement, not ascription, since the first ancestor is "first" because there was no other Chinese ancestor before him. Logically, therefore, the first ancestor would have

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[1] For example, Lee Kok Joo (1976) reports that in Malaysia, the aboriginal Temuan people have adopted certain beliefs and practices from Chinese religion, but, apparently, without being thereby identified as "Chinese".

had to achieve his Chinese-ness and not just inherit it. However, as we shall see below, even the achievement of sinicisation involves ascriptive identification in terms of finding a fictive line of descent. This achievement thus hinges on the acquisition of a particular body of knowledge that would allow for such genealogical manipulation -- namely, knowledge of the principles of Chinese kinship and knowledge of what Chinese-ness means. In other words, Chinese identity can be achieved only by finding a patrilineal source of ascriptive identity that is acceptable to other Chinese. However, such a process does not seem to be universalistic in scope: only certain types of non-Chinese are eligible to become Chinese through achieved sinicisation -- namely, those who are inhabitants of the "Chinese" area of the world. It is in this context, I suggest, that there is an intersection between Chinese-ness as pertaining to people and Chinese-ness as pertaining to place, because territorial appropriation is the context of social incorporation.

But once a patrilineal source of identity has been found and accepted, this achieved identity may be ascriptively transmitted to descending generations outside the "Chinese" area of the world. Thus, while the achievement of Chinese-ness seems to be circumscribed by place, the subsequent ascriptive transmission of the label is contextualised in time, not place. This seems to be the underlying logic whereby I have been ascriptively labelled "Chinese". Of course, my case is by no means unique. Millions of people who are born outside the "Chinese" area of the planet and who live outside that area, are ascriptively identified as Chinese. So in terms of the differentiation of people, place and time, this implies that the differentiation of people as Chinese is independent of the differentiation of place. People can be born as Chinese outside the "Chinese" area of the planet.

The converse of this also appears to be valid: not everyone who is born inside the "Chinese" area of the planet is necessarily identified as Chinese. I refer, in this case, to the millions of people in the "Chinese" area who are identified as "Tibetan", "Turkic", "Mongolian", "Tungus", "Korean", "Tai", "Chuang", "Miao", "Yao", "Lolo", "She", "Min-chia", "Hani", "Lisu", "Lahu", as well as by any other non-Chinese label. (See, for example, Wiens 1967.)

In terms of the relationship between that which is Chinese and that which is not Chinese, we have the four relationships:

- Chinese people in the "Chinese" area;
- Chinese people in the non-"Chinese" area;
- non-Chinese people in the "Chinese" area;
- non-Chinese people in the non-"Chinese" area.

THE "CHINESE" AREA OF THE WORLD

What then is the basis for identifying a particular area of the world as "Chinese" and for identifying certain people as "Chinese"? To answer this, let us consider the word *Chinese*. This is, of course, an English word, for which there are other European equivalents. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1973:325), the first occurrence of the word may be dated to 1555; it is "not a native Chinese name, but found in Sanskrit as *Chīna* about the beginning of the Christian era, and in various modified forms employed by other Asiatic peoples. The origin is still in dispute." Whatever its historical derivation, the term *Chinese* is indubitably an outsider's term for referring to that which pertains to the area of the world known as *China*. So to understand what *Chinese* means, we must first understand what *China* means. To do so, let us examine the insiders' terms for the phenomenon in question. The following does not pretend to be a comprehensive list; it includes only some of the more common usages.

Let us first consider the terms for the "Chinese" area of the world. The most important of these is perhaps *Zhōngyuán* 中原 (Central Plain) -- that is, the Yellow River valley. It is this central plain that constitutes the territorial core of the polity known as *Zhōngguó* 中國, a term usually translated into English as "The Middle Kingdom" (cf. Wiens 1967:xiii). The word *zhōng* (centre, middle, inside) 中 itself implies a relationship between inside and outside, centre and periphery; *zhōng* thus stands in opposition to *wài* (outside) 外 and *biān* (periphery) 邊. *Zhōngyuán* and *Zhōngguó* should thus be understood in relational terms. Territorially, there is *Zhōngyuán* (Central Plain) vis-à-vis the *biānjiāng* (peripheral territories) 邊疆. And politically, there is *Zhōngguó* ("The Middle Kingdom") vis-à-vis *wàiguó* (outside countries) 外國.

This double differentiation is missing from the outsider's concept of "China", which may be regarded as equivalent to *Zhōngguó*, but which lacks the implication that such a polity is territorially centred in a particular area -- namely, *Zhōngyuán*. From an insider's point of view, *Zhōngguó* is inherently a territorially differentiated polity, the historical outcome of a political process whereby the polity emanated outwards from its territorial core to appropriate the peripheral territories. The names *Zhōngyuán* and *Zhōngguó* are thus not merely labels for static geographical areas arbitrarily differentiated, but terms for dynamic historical processes that were territorially expressed. *Zhōngyuán* is thus the originating territory of a polity that reached outwards to appropriate its periphery, and *Zhōngguó* is thus the

amalgamation of both the originating territory and the appropriated peripheral territory.

Significantly, the word *yuán* 原 also means "origin, source, beginnings"; and the ideograph *guó* 國 has been analysed in the following way:

> A state, country. From 口 *wei²*, a boundary ... and 或 *yü⁴* [or] *huo⁴*, a primitive appanage, post, a center; the land -- that one baron defended with the weapons 戈 of his retainers, around his ... castle, or town, whose limits are not indicated because there were none.... With the 口 *wei²* or boundary added, it becomes an estate well defined, a country. (Wilder and Ingram 1974:26-27.)

The *zhōng* in *Zhōngguó* may be interpreted not as the centre of the world, as some translators have interpreted it, but as the political centre from which power emanated outwards; the *guó* in *Zhōngguó* may be interpreted as the extent to which this power emanated from its centre. Thus implicit in the name *Zhōngguó* is a reference to the historical appropriation of the periphery by the centre.

The history of this territorial appropriation is so well-documented that I do not feel it necessary to elaborate on it here. (See, for example, Wiens 1967, Lattimore 1951, Pulleyblank 1983, Fried 1983 and FitzGerald 1972.) I shall, however, note that the major part of this territorial appropriation was completed during the reign of the *Qín* 秦 and *Hàn* 漢 rulers.

> At the end of the 8th century BC there were well over a hundred independent states, many of them miniscule, and before 464 no less than 100 had been extinguished and incorporated into one or other of the major regional states. . . . By the middle of the 5th century BC the effective powers had been whittled down to seven major kingdoms, and a period of ever more bloody warfare now began. . . . The north-western border state of Ch'in ... [*Qín*] during the latter part of the 4th century BC developed a highly centralised state ... in which the population ... was disciplined and organised for two purposes, to produce revenue through taxation, and to provide manpower for the armies. One after the other, Ch'in extinguished the other states and in 221 the last of the independent kingdoms was destroyed, and Ch'in was ready to organise its new unified empire on the legalist ideal of an all-powerful highly centralised state. (Twitchett 1973:57-60.)

Significantly, the *Qín* ruler reigning in 221 BC is known historically as *Qínshǐhuáng* 秦始皇 (*Qín* founding emperor), apparently because it was in his reign that the many polities previously existing

in the Yellow River valley were incorporated into one, and political plurality was thereby replaced by centralised power. Under this "founding emperor", the *Zhōngguó* that was unified was, at that time, synonymous with *Zhōngyuán* (Central Plain). Still more significantly, it was during the reign of this "founding emperor" that the Great Wall was built as the northern border in order to differentiate physically the territory that was *Zhōngguó* and the territory that was not *Zhōngguó*. South of the Wall was *Zhōngguó*, north of it was not, at least at that time. The territory farther south of *Zhōngyuán* was, however,

> an "open frontier". Not only were there no barriers to Chinese settlers establishing their familiar patterns of life in the south; there were also no powerful and well-organised native peoples to present a formidable military challenge as in the north. In the south Chinese settlement, colonisation and assimilation of the various aboriginal inhabitants continued steadily throughout the centuries from Ch'in times onwards. (Twitchett 1973:60.)

Indeed, after unifying the several polities of *Zhōngyuán* into one *Zhōngguó*, the *Qín* founding emperor sent his armies to the south where they "conquered the area around Canton and pressed into northern Vietnam" (Twitchett 1973:60; also see FitzGerald 1972). His immediate successors, the *Hàn* rulers, continued the southward expansion, establishing in their reign the territorial relationship between the political centre (*Zhōngyuán*) and the political periphery (*biānjiāng*). Maps 1 and 2 indicate the territorial expansion that occurred from the 8th century BC to AD 220, when the rule of the *Hàn* dynasty ended.

HÀN AND *FĀN*, "CHINESE" AND "BARBARIAN"

The *Hàn* dynasty is historically so significant that to this day, the name of that dynasty is used to label practically anything that may be considered as Chinese, as, for example, in the terms *Hànrén* (*Hàn* people) 漢人, *Hànzú* (*Hàn* stock) 漢族, *Hànzì* (*Hàn* characters or script) 漢字, *Hànyǔ* (*Hàn* speech) 漢語, *Hànwén* (*Hàn* language or literature) 漢文, *Hànshué* (*Hàn* studies) 漢學. (See Lin 1972:1014-1015 and Wiens 1967:xiv.) The phenomena labelled as *Hàn* seem to be those that pertained to the originating area of *Zhōngyuán*.

In this regard, another term is significant: *Hànxìng* 漢姓 is a *Hàn* surname adopted by the non-*Hàn* people in the appropriated territories outside *Zhōngyuán*. (See Lin 1972:1015.) As noted by Wiens (1967:34-35), the adoption of a *Hàn* surname is an important step in

the process of sinicisation -- for example, among the *Zhuàng*僮 people of the south:[2]

> The orthodox cultural influence of traditional and feudal China has been so strong ... that almost all the southern tribes like to claim that their ancestors came from China Proper (the Yellow River area) and, moreover, must trace their descent from the Yellow Emperor, speaking of themselves as the progeny of the Yellow Emperor. They consider that to be recognised as indigenous southern tribes people by origin involves a loss of face and prestige. . . Some Chuang people force an interpretation of their genealogical registers to trace their lineage back to an ancestor from the Honan-Yellow River plain. For instance, all the Chuang with the surname Chao say that they stem from the palace retinue of the Sung court, and that their ancestors cross the Nan-ling to reside in the south. They are not aware that when Ti Ch'ing quelled the uprising of the Chuang chieftain, Nung Chih-kao, the Nung Clan members that surrendered all were bestowed the Chinese surname Chao.
>
> Again, the Chuang people of the surname Wei all say that they originally derived from Han Hsing, a great general of the Han Dynasty. They ingeniously declare that when General Han Hsing was executed, his friend Su Ho took the young son of Han Hsing and fled with him to South China. Here, to conceal his origin, the left half of the character for Han was deleted and the remaining portion of the character is the part pronounced Wei. Others among the Chuang who haven't been clever enough to devise such a story, but who also do not wish to be considered Chuang, state that they are the descendants of the soldiers sent south by the Sung Emperor to conquer the Chuang. In a recent investigation of the 152 clan names in a certain Kuang-Hsi district, every one of the clans claimed to have migrated there from some other province or other district at the end of the Ming Dynasty or during the early Ch'ing Dynasty. Not one recognised itself as indigenous. From this it would appear that the district was without inhabitants at the end of the Ming and beginning of the Ch'ing. This sort of genealogical falsification makes accurate studies on the basis of surname designation extremely difficult if not unreliable.

This passage is quoted at length to illustrate the process of sinicisation through which Chinese-ness is achieved. As I have argued above, Chinese identity is ascribed through patrifiliative transmission, whereby one is ascriptively labelled "Chinese" because at some point in the past a first patrilineal ancestor was so labelled, such that

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[2] An alternative character used for *Zhuàng* is 壯 (see, for example, Barlow 1986). The alternative usage of *Hàn* characters for this word implies that the name is not of *Hàn* origin.

even the process of sinicisation involves ascriptive identification in terms of a fictive line of descent. The sinicisation of the Chuang (that is, *Zhuàng*) people described by Wiens illustrates precisely this. As shown above, the *Zhuàng* who do not wish to be recognised as such but as *Hàn* people, achieve their desired identity through genealogical manipulation based on their knowledge of what Chinese-ness means. Quite clearly, they see Chinese-ness as an historical phenomenon emanating from "China Proper (the Yellow River area)" and ascriptively transmitted through patrilineal descent from a first ancestor who must necessarily hail from this core area. What makes their claim plausible and acceptable to other Chinese is the appropriation of their territory by the *Hàn* Chinese -- for example, through military expeditions "sent south by the Sung Emperor to conquer the Chuang". As noted above, territorial appropriation is the context of social incorporation.

Interestingly, non-*Hàn* people who are in the process of being sinicised are referred to as *shúfān* (cooked barbarian) 熟番, whereas those who are not being sinicised are referred to as *shēngfān* (raw barbarian) 生番. (See Lin 1972:1157.)[3] This terminology has at least two implications. First, it implies that sinicisation is a one-way process, since what is raw can be cooked but not *vice versa*; so according to this logic, de-sinicisation is impossible. Second, it implies that sinicisation is a process of appropriation, since what is cooked is ready for eating, and what is eaten then becomes part of the appropriating self. The transition from "cooked barbarians" to *Hàn* Chinese seems to entail precisely the process of genealogical manipulation discussed above; to be part of the *Hàn* Chinese self is thus necessarily to be derived from a particular historical past.

This incorporation of "cooked barbarians" into the appropriating *Hàn* self would seem to be an important process that should be considered in doing any historical sociology and demography of the Chinese. For example, Freedman (1958, 1966) and Pasternak (1969) have commented on the emergence of strong, highly corporate, localised patrilineages in the frontier zone of Chinese penetration, particularly in the southeast. Freedman (1966:162-163) states:

> There is another side to the question of the special position of the southeast on the lineage map. Has it anything to do with pioneering on the frontiers of China? ... Many of the Chinese ancestors of the people we study today in southeastern China moved down into the region

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[3] For example, American Indians in "cowboy-and-Indian Westerns" are termed *shēngfān* or in Hokkien pronunciation *chhi^{n}-hoan* (see Embree 1973:53; also see footnote 3 below).

> in T'ang and Sung times. They found barbarian societies which for the most part they gradually eliminated (to some extent by marrying their women), seizing their land and bringing empty land into cultivation. . . . It may be that these were the conditions which, acting upon patrilineally organised pioneers (or at least pioneers bearing patrilineal ideology), stimulated the growth of relatively independent and tightly settled local lineages.

Pasternak (1969:560-561), however, argues:

> The requirements of frontier life in southeastern China ... did not in and of themselves stimulate the emergence or reemergence of well-developed, corporate, localised lineage structures. To the contrary, it may well be that these conditions initially functioned to inhibit such development by requiring extensive cooperation for purposes of defence and environmental exploitation among unrelated family and lineage fragments. It may turn out, with further study, that it is only when the primitive and hostile conditions of the frontier have been *somewhat* ameliorated that full realisation of the "patrilineal ideology" is likely to take place. . . . In other words, there is the possibility that large localised lineages represent a *second stage* phenomenon in frontier regions.

To this debate I would like to add the suggestion that the emergence of these lineage structures in the southeast may be related to the incorporation of "cooked barbarians" as *Hàn* Chinese. In other words, I am boldly suggesting that the patrilineages that emerged in the frontier zone may have been formed, not by *Hàn* pioneers from the north, but by sinicising indigenes of the south who needed to achieve their Chinese-ness through identifying a fictive line of descent. As Eberhard (1962:116) and Freedman (1966:11-12) have noted, Chinese pioneers migrating south generally do not move in whole lineages, but as individuals or in heterogeneous groupings which may include friends, in-laws, and remote kin -- hardly the people who would be eligible to form a strong, cohesive lineage. It is thus more likely, I suggest, that perhaps initially through affinal links between *Hàn* male pioneers and female indigenes, as noted by Freedman (see above), that the "cooked barbarians" became "Chinese" through the means of lineage formation. They were thus incorporated, not eliminated, as suggested by Freedman (see above), even though a certain degree of genocide may have existed.

This suggestion seems to be borne out by the population figures of the time:

> Until about AD 800 ... [the population] ... remained stable at around 50,000,000. Between that date and AD 1200 it

> rose rapidly to more than 100,000,000 persons. (Geelan and Twitchett 1974:xvi.)

While part of this rapid increase may have been due to natural population growth, the incorporation of "cooked barbarians" into the *Hàn* "stock" (*Hànzú*) may also have to be considered an important factor. In this context, the date AD 800 seems to be particularly relevant. Although the major part of territorial appropriation was completed by the end of the *Hàn* dynasty in AD 220, it was not until the *Táng* 唐 dynasty (AD 618-906) that the *Hàn* people were to be found in substantial numbers outside the originating area of *Zhōngyuán*.

> Between 750 and the end of the 11th century the distribution of the Chinese population underwent a complete change. Until the early *T'ang* the old traditional centres of civilisation in the north had remained very populous; these now declined sharply. In a period when the total population rose from about 50 million to 100 million persons the population of the north-eastern plain [that is, *Zhongyuán*] fell by half, while the north-west remained stationary. The population of the south however, particularly that of the *Yangtze* and *Huai* valleys, increased several-fold and the southern provinces of *Hunan*, *Kiangsu*, and in particular *Fukien* were now settled heavily for the first time. (Twitchett 1973:69.)

So, out of a total of about 50 million who were living in the north, some tens of millions seem to have moved out of *Zhōngyuán* to peripheral territories in the south. Concurrently, as this happened, the total population rose to 100 million, with the majority in the peripheral territories of the south. Given this scenario, it seems plausible to attribute at least part of this population increase to the incorporation of "cooked barbarians" in the peripheral territories that had been appropriated some hundreds of years earlier by the predecessors of the *Táng* rulers, beginning with the *Qín* "founding emperor".

Unfortunately, this process of incorporation is not well documented. As noted by Treistman (1968:853), much of Chinese history is *Hàn* history written

> to serve the political end of unification and justification of Han expansion. Such history should be treated much as we do colonial history of any kind. . . . The Han tell us of *their* China -- a great and noble civilisation surrounded by "barbarians". Typical of colonial historians, they deny the attributes of civilisation to these barbarians, and frequently equate the "lack" of high culture with racial inferiority.

THE PEOPLE OF THE *TÁNG* MOUNTAINS

If the name *Hàn* is significant as a label for phenomena pertaining to *Zhongyuán*, the name *Táng* appears to be significant as a label for similar phenomena manifested in the south. To this day, southerners such as Cantonese and Hokkiens refer to themselves as *Tángrén* (*Táng* people) 唐人 ; this is *Tōngyán* in Cantonese pronunciation, *and Tn̂glâng* in Hokkien.[4] (Also see Wiens 1967:xiv.) Indeed, the "Chinatowns" in various foreign countries are generally referred to as *Tángrénjiē* (Street of the *Táng* people) 唐人街 , because the inhabitants of these Chinatowns are mostly from the southern provinces of *Guǎngdōng* 廣東 and *Fújiàn* 福建 .

Norman (1988:221) points out, significantly, in his historical analysis of the *Yuè* 粵 dialects spoken in *Guǎngdōng* province, that the Northern Chinese elements present in these Southern dialects derive from the late *Táng* dynasty. He notes:

> It is perhaps not irrelevant in this regard that the Yuè-speaking peoples will commonly refer to themselves as *thoŋ*^{2} *jan*^{2} "people of the Táng dynasty".

Interestingly, the Cantonese and Hokkien *Tángrén* refer to their homeland as *Tángshān* 唐山 (*Táng* mountains); this is *Tōngshaan* in Cantonese and *Tn̂gsoa*^{n} in Hokkien. The mountains referred to are apparently the east-west mountainous range which separates the southern coast from *Zhōngyuán* in the north. However, these mountains are themselves very sparsely populated. Indeed, as noted by Wiens (1967:8), "...the whole of the South China mountain and hill land in a sense constituted a resistance bloc to Chinese settlement".[5] The population of Cantonese and Hokkien *Tángrén* are concentrated along the southern coast. So it would seem that for these coastal inhabitants, to say that their homeland is *Tángshān* is to imply a

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[4] By the terms "Cantonese" and "Hokkien" I refer to the provincials of, respectively, *Guǎngdōng* 廣東 and *Fújiàn* 福建 . The "Cantonese pronunciation" and "Hokkien pronunciation I am using are derived, respectively, from the dialects of *Guǎngzhōu* 廣州 and *Xiàmén* 廈門 . (See Cowles 1965 and Embree 1973.)

[5] Wiens (1967:8) further elaborates:

> There were three major topographical blocs in South China which because of special geographical situation, resisted Chinese penetration longest. These are the eastern Che-Chiang Fu-chien coastal mountain bloc ... ,the Kuei-chou Yun-nan Plateau bloc, including western Kuang-hsi, and the Eastern Tibetan bloc comprising the western extremes of Ssu-ch'uan, northwest Yun-nan, and Hsi-k'ang Ch'ing-hai.

connection with *Zhōngyuán*, for to travel between the northern plain and the southern coast, it is necessary to cross these mountains.

As stated above, *Zhōngguó* is the amalgamation of the originating territory *Zhōngyuán* with the appropriated peripheral territories outside *Zhōngyuán*. Parallel to this, *Zhōngguórén* (*Zhōngguó* people) include both the original *Hàn* people of *Zhōngyuán* and the inhabitants of the peripheral territories. The population of the southern provinces, in particular, include not only the descendants of *Hàn* migrants from *Zhōngyuán*, but also the sinicised indigenes, as well as the un-sinicised indigenes of these provinces.

If this is the case, then is it still possible to trace the origins of particular local communities? In this respect, the local origin myths may be of some significance. On this issue, I can offer some autobiographical evidence. My late father was a Hokkien whose ancestral home was on Quemoy island -- that is, *Jīnméndǎo* 金門島 -- off the coast of *Fújiàn* province. My mother is a Hakka -- that is, *Kèjiārén* 客家人 -- whose ancestral home is in *Dàpǔ* 大埔 county in *Guǎngdōng* province.

My patrilateral kin have no myth that tells of how their ancestors migrated to the south from *Zhōngyuán*. On the contrary, it seems to be the generally accepted view among the Quemoyese that they are descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the coast and islands in the bay area of *Wéitóuwān* 圍頭灣 and *Xiàméngǎng* 廈門港. I have noticed that whereas the Quemoyese tend to treat people from this bay area (such as the Amoyese -- that is, *Xiàménrén* 廈門人) as *zìjǐrén* ("own people" -- that is, closely related people) 自己人, they tend to treat other Hokkiens from outside this bay area as people who are distant from themselves.

My Quemoyese kin explain this differential treatment in terms of language: they say that whereas we Quemoyese, Amoyese, and other people from the bay area speak in the same way, other Hokkiens from elsewhere speak differently. Even the people of the provincial capital *Fùzhōu* 福州 are treated as socially distant, because their speech is unintelligible to the Quemoyese.[6] So it seems that the Quemoyese

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[6] Indeed, as Norman (1988:188) confirms:

> Dialectal diversity reaches its highest degree in the Southern zone, especially in Fújiàn province, where most of the Mǐn dialects are spoken; in this region every county generally has its own distinctive dialect which often differs quite radically from those in neighbouring counties, and in some cases even neighbouring villages use forms of speech that are totally mutually unintelligible.

identify themselves as a distinct community in rather parochial terms, lacking even a sense of provincial solidarity.

This parochialism contrasts significantly with the self-image projected by my Hakka matrilateral kin, who unanimously claim to be descendants of migrants from the north. According to the origin myth as told to me by my matri-kin, their ancestors came south from *Zhōngyuán* because of unrest there. They settled in scattered distribution all over the south; so their descendants are found in every southern province. These descendants are called *Kèjiā* (literally, "guest families") 客家 because they are not indigenes of the south, but are merely guests there. That is why, my Hakka relatives say, there is no province that they can call their own. Indeed, I have noticed among the Hakkas a distinct feeling of inter-provincial solidarity; for example, a Hakka person from, say, *Guǎngdōng* province and another Hakka person from, say, *Fújiàn* province, would very readily claim each other as *zìjǐrén* ("own people"), even if they are not related through kinship, and even if they have just met for the first time in their lives.

My matri-kin explain this in terms of the common ancestry from the north that all Hakkas supposedly share; they even say that Hakkas are not just *Tángrén*, but *Hànrén*. As evidence of this northern origin, they usually point to the Hakka language which, they say, is very close to Mandarin. According to my relatives, in the past Hakkas used to do very well in the Imperial examinations, because their northern-type language gave them an advantage. Not only do the Hakkas seem to have a feeling of solidarity among themselves, they also seem to have a feeling of superiority vis-à-vis the indigenous *Tángrén* of the south such as the Cantonese and the Hokkiens in whose provinces they themselves are supposedly "guests". Indeed, my Hakka relatives often remind me that I am not just a Hokkien, but that I am also half Hakka. Now according to the rules of patrifiliative transmission, I should inherit identity only from my father. But my matrilateral kin tell me that it is better to be half Hakka than just wholly Hokkien!

Such attitudes are not secret, but are commonly known among the different communities, who sometimes joke about the matter, sometimes fight about it, and sometimes ignore it altogether. But what is the historical validity of these origin myths? I think that the origin myth of the Hakkas goes some way towards solving a problem that seems to

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He attributes this dialectal diversity to the relative isolation of the various local communities, due to "the absence of major rivers and a wildly mountainous terrain" (Norman 1988:228).

have perplexed various observers. Forrest (1965:11-12, 236-237) articulated this problem thus:

> A well-known work of reference ... says of the Hakkas: "In disposition, appearance and customs they differ from the true Chinese. They speak a distinct dialect." From this one might legitimately infer that the remainder of the Chinese people do not, as a rule, differ from province to province; and that the Hakka dialect, instead of being, as in fact it is, one of the closest to the ancient language, is one of the most aberrant. Professor Vacca (article "Cina" in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*) is no better informed. But the acme of absurdity is reached in a recent work on the world's languages, where appears the statement that "the Miao and Hakka are rated as separate languages of the Sino-Tibetan group."
>
> For some reason or other, much mystery has been made about the Hakkas. . . . This determination to treat them apart from the rest of the Chinese people may have started from their name, which as written signifies "stranger families". As we shall see ..., little reliance is to be placed on the interpretation of Chinese proper names, as the language has so often preferred not to invent new characters when a homophone was ready to hand. . . . One not unreasonably doubts whether the name of Hakka meant when first applied that the people were in any more egregious sense foreigners to other Chinese than any other speakers of incomprehensible dialect, or whether its modern interpretation is anything more than a piece of folk etymology; and it is not very clear why the Hakkas should be without a name by which to describe themselves other than one which meant foreigners. There is nothing so strikingly different in physical appearance of the Hakkas, nor in their customs, which would set them apart from the other Chinese-speaking inhabitants of the south, with whom they seem to share just as much, or just as little, Chinese blood; and their language is much more in the direct line of derivation from old Chinese than those to which we shall presently come.

In the context of my Hakka relatives' origin myth, these observers have apparently caught hold of the wrong end of the stick. The people that Forrest criticises seem to realise that there is something distinctive about the Hakkas but, failing to grasp the nature of this difference, have instead jumped to the opposite conclusion that the Hakkas are not "true Chinese". Forrest disputes this view because, being a linguist, he realises that the Hakka language is "one of the closest to the ancient language" and is "much more in the direct line of derivation from old Chinese" than the other southern languages. However, this being the case, he is stumped by the name "Hakka"; he does not understand why the speakers of a language closely related

to old Chinese should be called "strangers" or "foreigners". So he resorts to suggesting that we should not take the proper name seriously as it may have been just a homophone. The origin myth as related by my matri-kin would seem to resolve this paradox for, as they explain, the Hakkas are guests in the south because that is not their homeland, which is in *Zhōngyuán* of the north. Indeed, Forrest's (1965:237) own data appear to support the claims of my Hakka relatives:

> The speakers of Hakka have been estimated variously at four to fifteen millions, but the higher figure is more likely to be correct. They occupy at present, roughly speaking, a band of country stretching east and west from Fukien to Kwangsi, and compressed between two lines, one running along the mountain range bounding Kwangtung on the north, the other parallel to it a few miles north of Canton. . . . This is their most compact area of settlement, but boundaries are everywhere irregular and fluctuating, and ... Hakkas are found ... as far as the extreme south of Kwangtung. Their settlement in Kayingchow in the east of the province is dated, by the family records of the district, to later Sung and Mongol times; and they appear to have entered the province from the north-east. . . . The isoglosses separating Hakka dialect forms from those of other southern dialects are everywhere clear-cut; there are no transition dialects. Their traditions indicate an origin in the far north-east, but others have traced them to emigration from Honan between the fourth and ninth centuries.

What is also of relevance to this discussion is the historical usage of the term *Kèjiā* ("guest household") as a regular census category to denote *Hàn* migrants to the south. For example, as noted by Barlow (1986:22),

> Early in the Sung period [between the tenth and thirteenth centuries], one district registered a total of 17,760 households, both Zhuang and "guests" (Han immigrants). By 1078-85, the same zhou registered 56,596 "guest" households alone.

Interestingly, as Norman (1988:221) noted, the Hakkas were considered as unwelcome guests by the Cantonese and Hokkiens among whom they lived:

> Many non-Kèjiā people in Guǎngdōng developed a strong antipathy towards these "strangers", and the erroneous notion that the Kèjiā were not ethnically Chinese but some sort of non-Han "barbarians" became widespread.

The *Kèjiā* themselves, however, claimed to have originated from the northern provinces of *Shānxī*, *Hénán* and *Ānhuī*:

> At the fall of the Western Jìn dynasty, these peoples moved southward into the present-day Huīzhōu region of southern Ānhuī and into northern Jiāngxī; later, as a result of disorder in the late Táng dynasty, a part of the Kèjiā moved into their present homeland in southwestern Fújiàn and northern Guǎngdōng.
>
> (X. Luó 1933; C. Luó 1958; quoted from Norman 1988:222).

In contrast, neither the Cantonese nor the Hokkiens seem to make any such genealogical claim about their ancestors originating from the north. So if my suggestion above is valid -- that there was a large-scale incorporation of "cooked barbarians" in the appropriated peripheral territories -- then I would further suggest that the difference between the Hakkas and other Chinese in south China is that the former are the patrilineal descendants of the *Hàn* migrants from the north, whereas the latter are the patrilineal descendants of sinicised "cooked barbarians". I am thus arguing that descent transforms into ethnicity.

But even if we accept the origin myth of the Hakkas as historically valid, what is its significance in the context of our discussion? I think that it is striking that some one thousand years after the supposed migration from the north, the Hakkas are still maintaining their sense of separateness from other southerners by claiming that they are really Northerners who are merely sojourning as guests in the south. Not only that, my Hakka relatives seem to have carried this attitude with them outside *Zhōngguó* to Singapore and Malaysia, where they apparently still find it relevant to talk about social superiority in terms of origins from *Zhōngyuán*. Why is this so? I suggest that it is because at present, the power centre of *Zhōngguó* is still perceived as being in the north; the south is still regarded as politically peripheral. Therefore, to claim northern origins is to imply that one belongs, at least nominally, to the political centre and not to the political periphery, and that one is hence socially superior to those who belong to the political periphery.

Even among those who do not claim northern origins, there seem to be differences in terms of their relative priority in sinicisation. For example, Cantonese people seem to feel somewhat superior to Hokkien people. This is particularly noticeable in Singapore, where the Hokkiens constitute the majority and the Hokkien language in the form of the Amoyese dialect has become a *lingua franca*, almost in the way that the *Guǎngzhōu* dialect is a *lingua franca* in Hongkong. (See

Kuo 1976.) Yet a significant number of the Cantonese minority, including those born and bred in Singapore, seem reluctant to learn the Hokkien language in whatever dialectal form; indeed, my Cantonese friends tell me that they regard the Hokkien language as (C) *tsó* (coarse, rough, rude)粗 , and therefore find it embarrassing to speak. Hokkiens, on the other hand, seem not to reciprocate with a similar attitude of snobbery towards the Cantonese language. Indeed, it is more common to find, in Singapore, Hokkiens who can speak Cantonese, than Cantonese who can speak Hokkien, even though in the Singapore Chinese population, the Hokkiens far outnumber the Cantonese.[7] However, I have to report that we Hokkiens regard the language of the Hainanese (*Hǎinánrén* 海南人) very much in the same way as the Cantonese regard the Hokkien language.

I think that these relative degrees of social evaluation are historically explicable in terms of sinicisation. As Map 2 indicates, the area that became *Guǎngdōng* province was already part of *Zhōngguó* during the time of the *Hàn* dynasty; indeed, as mentioned above, it was the *Qín* founding emperor who first sent his armies into that area to conquer it. This seems to have happened some time between 221 BC and 207-6 BC when this *Qín* emperor ruled over the *Zhōngguó* that he had unified. In contrast, as Map 2 also indicates, the area that became *Fújiàn* province was not yet part of *Zhōngguó* in AD 220 when the *Hàn* dynasty came to an end. One indication of territorial colonisation is the presence of *Hàn* Chinese found in these provinces. This may be discerned in the number of *xiàn* 縣系(districts) listed for anyone province. As noted by Wiens (1967:174), the demarcation of a *xiàn* was based on the registration of at least 10,000 "Han-Chinese residents or the tribesmen that were rather completely Sinicised in culture". It is thus significant that in AD 464, there were only two *xiàn* listed for *Fújiàn* province, compared to eight *xiàn* listed for *Guǎngdōng* province; three centuries later, in AD 740, there were still only nine *xiàn* listed for the former, compared to twenty-four listed for the latter. (See Li 1928:235.) This implies that the sinicisation of the area of *Fújiàn* province lagged some centuries behind the area of *Guǎngdōng* province. The snobbery of the Cantonese with regards to the Hokkiens may thus be explained in terms of an implicit awareness of their relative priority in sinicisation.

In this context, the case of *Hǎinán* island is interesting. As Map 2 indicates, the island had already been appropriated as part of *Zhōngguó* by AD 220, yet up to the present time, the population is not

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[7] According to the *Census of Population 1980*, out of the 1,856,237 Chinese in Singapore, 43.1% were Hokkiens, while only 16.5% were Cantonese.

wholly sinicised. The people in the northern half of Hainán island are sufficiently sinicised to be accepted as *Hànzú* (*Hàn* stock), but the people in the southern half are Kadai-speaking *Lí* people (黎 or 俚) who are at best regarded as *shúfān* ("cooked barbarians").

By explaining the relative degrees of social evaluation in terms of the history of sinicisation, I do *not* thereby imply that the Cantonese and Hokkiens of Singapore are all so historically and ethnologically knowledgeable such that their attitudes have arisen as a result of explicit knowledge. On the contrary, what seems to have happened is that these attitudes have been institutionalised as stock responses which contain in themselves an implicit historicity. Indeed, these attitudes seem to be so institutionalised to the extent that, again to use a personal example, learning to be Hokkien involves learning to laugh at the Hainanese. There are even certain stock jokes about the Hainanese, almost in the way that the English have stock jokes about the Irish. The significance of these institutionalised stock responses seems again to be relational vis-à-vis the power centre in the north. If that is the case, the maintenance of these institutionalised responses would be understandable within *Zhōngguó* itself. But why do overseas Hakkas, Cantonese, and Hokkiens persist in maintaining these attitudes outside the polity of *Zhōngguó*?

This brings me back to the point I made earlier: that from an insider's point of view, *Zhōngguó* is in its very nature a territorially differentiated polity, which is the historical outcome of political appropriation. So one way of remaining an insider is to act and interact in terms of this territorially differentiated polity. In other words, to remain socially an insider while physically outside the polity, one could behave as if one were still inside the historical polity by relating to the power centre in provincial terms. From the insider's point of view, there seems to be no such phenomenon as a generalised Chinese; there seem to be only the inhabitants of particular provinces and particular localities within these provinces. From this perspective, overseas Chinese who forget their ancestral sources would be considered by other Chinese to be deculturated.

POLITICAL ONE-NESS AND POLITICAL PLURALITY

The *Zhōngguó* I have been discussing above in territorial terms may be considered as an historical phenomenon going back a few thousand years. But how much of this historical *Zhōngguó* still remains? If the historical *Zhōngguó* may be understood in terms of a political relationship between *Zhōngyuán* (Central Plain) and *biānjiāng* (peripheral territories), then I suggest that *Xīn Zhōngguó* 新中國 (New China)

may be understood in terms of a political relationship vis-à-vis the wider world of *wàiguó* (foreign countries). Officially, the historical *Zhōngguó* is gone: there is no emperor, no imperial government, no dynasty left. Even the polity is not unified as one.

Of course, this is not the first time in history that the polity has been divided. As mentioned above, there were well over a hundred independent states in *Zhōngyuán* at the end of the 8th century BC, all of which were *tǒngyì* 统一 (incorporated into one) in 221 BC. Although in subsequent periods, the reality did not always match the idea of a single incorporated polity, that idea remained as a political ideal. So the periods of political plurality were regarded as aberrations which had to be rectified through a campaign of unification. Indeed, the capacity to impose political one-ness on the territory of *Zhōngguó* was the ideological basis of political legitimation. In terms of the insider's view of history, the periods of political one-ness constituted the high points of the civilisation when "under heaven all was at peace" *(tiānxià tàipíng* 天下太平). Since the emperor was the "son of heaven" *(tiānzǐ* 天子), this worldly peace seems to have hinged on the equal submission of all to a single ruler.

In the insider's view, the periods of political plurality were considered as chaotic times, when the very existence of a *Zhōngguó* became a matter of controversy. Let us consider the proportion of time that the territory of *Zhōngguó* was unified, as compared to the periods of political plurality. If we take a time-span of 2133 years, beginning from 221 BC when *Zhōngguó* was incorporated into one, and ending on 1 January 1912 when the last emperor of *Zhōngguó* abdicated and was replaced by a republic, some 710 years were marked by political plurality. Only for about 1423 years was there a single unified polity, and out of this, at least 357 years were spent under foreign occupation -- namely, the Mongolian *Yuán* 元 and the Manchurian *Qīng* 清 rulers. So it was only for a total of 1066 years in this time-span that *Zhōngguó* was politically unified under indigenous emperors. The details of this political chronology are given below.

POLITICAL ONE-NESS		POLITICAL PLURALITY
221–206 BC: Unity under the *Qín* 秦		
	→	206–207 BC: The fall of the *Qín* and the rise of the *Hàn* 漢
207 BC – AD 7: Unity under the *Hàn*	←	
	→	AD 7–25: Political disunity
25–220: Reunification under the *Hòu Hàn* 後漢	←	
	→	220–265: Civil war between *Sānguó* (Three Kingdoms) 三國
265–317: Unity under the *Jìn* 晉	←	
	→	317–590: Civil war between *Nánběicháo* (Northern and Southern Dynasties) 南北朝
590–618: Unity under the *Suí* 隋 618–906: Unity under the *Táng* 唐	←	
	→	906–1279: Civil war between *Wǔdài* (Five Dynasties) 五代 *Hòu Liáng* 後梁 *Hòu Táng* 後唐 *Hòu Jìn* 後晉 *Hòu Hàn* 後漢 *Hòu Zhou* 後周 *Liaó* 遼 *Sùng* 宋 (later *Nán Sùng* 南宋) *Xīxià* 西夏 *Jìn* 金 *Yuán* 元
1279–1368: Unity under the *Yuán* 元 1368–1644: Unity under the *Míng* 明 1644–1912: Unity under the *Qīng* 清	←	

(Dates derived from Lin 1972:1455–1456.)

Thus, instead of an unchanging monolith, there seems to have been a pendulum-swing between political one-ness and political plurality. The idea of a single politically unified *Zhōngguó* approached realisation only during the periods listed in the left-hand column. The longest period of unification was from 1279 to 1912, but as mentioned above, 357 years of that period were under foreign occupation.

HOW NEW IS NEW CHINA?

The significance of the pendulum-swing in the context of our discussion is that the Republican period (1912 to the present) could be seen as just one phase of the historical process. Since 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party unified the mainland under its rule, the pendulum seems to have been moving back towards political one-ness. The military take-over of Tibet in 1959 was a further move in the same direction. All that is now needed to achieve political one-ness is to re-incorporate Hongkong, Macau, and Taiwan.

The political urge to achieve unification, to replace plurality with centralised power, is in keeping with the ideology of one-ness that has been established as a political ideal since 221 BC. At the present time, both the People's Republic of China on the mainland and the Republic of China on Taiwan claim to be the rightful "China", although the claim of the former has, in recent years, been receiving increasingly greater international recognition as the claim of the latter has become increasingly implausible. In this sense, the *Xīn Zhōngguó* (New China) that is the People's Republic of China (PRC) is really not new. Historically, it is the political successor to the dynastic powers that unified *Zhōngguó* as a single polity. The capacity to impose political one-ness on the territory seems to be a major factor in the legitimation of the Chinese Communist Party's power. For example, some overseas Chinese are known to say: "Never mind if they are Communist -- at least they have kept China one."

In another sense, however, *Xīn Zhōngguó is* new. It is not an empire existing in political self-sufficiency; it is, rather, a republic, a nation-state, that exists in relation to similar institutions in the wider world. (See Schwartz 1968 and Benjamin 1988:3.) There has been a shift in orientation which may be expressed in the following way. In the historical *Zhōngguó*, the emphasis was on the idea of *zhōng*, the political centre from which power emanated outwards, at least during those periods that such a centre did exist. In *Xīn Zhōngguó*, however, the emphasis seems to be on the idea of *guó*, the political boundaries

of which must be defended against outsiders. In other words, power is now no longer seen as emanating outwards from the centre; instead it is seen as coming in from the outside. The role of government in this context is to regulate the flow of power coming in from the outside: for example, it has to decide whether to stop all foreign influence from entering the country, or to have one type of influence but not another? In the field of knowledge, should it decide only to admit only science and technology from outside but nothing else? In the field of finance, should it decide to have only loans but no aid? Should it decide to accept help from this country but not from that one? These and other such questions arise because the power of the outside world is now an issue no Chinese government can simply ignore or despise.

This shift in orientation strikes at the very root of the historic worldview, for instead of being an appropriating self, the Chinese polity is now a receiving self, receiving ideas, values, standards, techniques, and other things from the outside. Instead of being an inherent source of power, the political centre is now a mediator, a sluice-gate regulating the flow between the inside and the outside. Even when the sluice-gate was completely closed, as, for example, during the Cultural Revolution, it did not mean that the outside had become unimportant; all it meant was that the government of the time felt that enough had been received from outside to be used, and no more was needed. As Mao (1969:306, 312) said:

> The theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin is universally applicable. . . . Studying it is not merely a matter of learning terms and phrases but of learning Marxism-Leninism as the science of revolution. . . . When in addition to reading some Marxist books our intellectuals have gained some understanding through close contact with the masses of workers and peasants and through their own practical work, we will all be speaking the same language, not only the common language of patriotism and the common language of the socialist system, but probably even the common language of the communist world outlook.

According to this quotation, what is needed from the outside is the "revolutionary science" of Marxism-Leninism which can learnt from "some Marxist books"; after some practical application, everyone would then be speaking "even the common language of the communist world outlook". Thus, even during the Cultural Revolution, it was apparently still a desideratum that China should not be a world unto itself, but belong to a wider world, albeit a communist one. The present government of the People's Republic of China, however, seems

to have decided to belong not just to the communist world, but to the modern world as a whole, and it now presents itself not just as the mediator of "Marxism-Leninism as the science of revolution", but as the mediator of modern science and technology.

While the role of mediator may legitimate the power of the government for those who are living within the polity, except for a minority of overseas Chinese (for example, the Chinese members of the Malayan Communist Party), such a role is irrelevant for the majority of overseas Chinese who are living outside the polity and who do not need the mediation of the PRC government to obtain either "Marxist-Leninism as the science of revolution" or modern science and technology or anything else pertaining to the outside world. In other words, *Xīn Zhōngguó* is able to promise "new-ness" only to its captive citizenry, few of whom are allowed to have direct access to outside sources.

But it is apparently not so easy to define this "new-ness". Mao (1965:339-340) said:

> Our aim is to build a new society and a new state for the Chinese nation. That new society and new state will have not only a new politics and a new economy but a new culture. . . In short, we want to build a new China. Our aim in the cultural sphere is to build a new Chinese national culture. . . What we want to get rid of is the old colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal politics and economy and the old culture is their service. And what we want to build up is their direct opposite, i.e. the new politics, the new economy and the new culture of the Chinese nation.

So what is new is simply not-old. Such a vague projection seems no less mythical than the existence of a bygone imperial *Zhōngguó*. Indeed, to overseas Chinese living outside the New China, the latter may even seem more real.[8]

Be that as it may, the fact is that the imperial order is defunct. The historical *Zhōngguó* in the context of which one's provincial origins made sense, now exists only in myth. At the same time, there is a sharp incongruity between the mythologised *Zhōngguó* of the bygone past and the *Xīn Zhōngguó* of the present which promises a utopian new-ness yet to be delivered. Caught between a defunct past and a futuristic present, a significant number of those who are

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[8] This may perhaps explain the unceasing flow of popular Hongkong and Taiwan movies set in a generalised imperial (yet often "modern") *Zhōngguó*.

labelled "Chinese" seem to be undergoing an identity crisis, as they try to work out what it means to be Chinese.

THE ETHNONYM *HUÁ*

In the context of this identity crisis, the current use of the term *Huá* as an ethnonym meaning "Chinese" is interesting. The People's Republic of China is *Zhōnghuá rénmín gònghéguó* 中華人民共和國; while the Republic of China is *Zhōnghuá mínguó* 中華民國. The term *Huá* is also used for the Chinese living outside the historical territory of China; for example, Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia are not allowed by their respective political authorities to use the term *Zhōngguórén* to describe themselves, because that would suggest that they "belonged" either to the PRC or to the Republic of China in Taiwan. So they can use only the term *Huárén* (*Huá* people)華人 to indicate that they are Chinese without being politically affiliated to either of the two republics.

As a word in itself, *huá* 華 means "glory, halo, diffuse light, essence, the prime of one's youth". The term *Huárén* thus carries the connotation that the Chinese are "glorious people". In an historical context, however, the earliest occurrence of this term dates back to the very beginnings of Chinese civilisation:

> On the basis of early state forms created as a result of the Chou invasion, and because of intensive interaction with neighbouring tribes speaking Tibetan-Burmese, proto-Tungus, Austronesian, and Thai languages, an ethnic Hua-Hsia 華夏 entity took shape in the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. in the Central China Plain; this can be called "Ancient Chinese". (Kruikov, Sofronov and Cheboksarov 1978:338, quoted from Jettmar 1983:224.)

The name thus also implies a claim to descent from the ancient *Huá Xià* who, according to Kruikov *et al* (1978:272-274), regarded themselves as superior to their neighbouring "barbarians":

> Kinship feeling was used as a political element at that time, and the losers in conflicts claimed to belong to the Hua-Hsia -- whose name can be translated as "Chinese" -- to save themselves from being sacrificed en masse or enslaved. The outsiders, on the other hand, were called wild beasts, jackals and wolves, and brutality was allowed against them. (Jettmar 1983:229.)

The term *Huá*, as a label of ethnic identification, is thus of very ancient derivation. Indeed, just as the ancients who claimed to be *Huá Xià* did so to differentiate themselves from others who were

Huá Xià did so to differentiate themselves from others who were considered "barbarians", so the moderns who now identify themselves as *Huárén* do so to differentiate themselves from others who are non-Chinese. Both usages, ancient and modern, thus imply that *Huá* is a category defined in negative relationship to its opposite.

The term *Huá* further implies that all those who are so labelled belong to the same camp, because of their common descent. Thus, periodically, depending on the ideological swing of the moment, the PRC beams shortwave broadcasts to the overseas *Huárén*, calling on these *chiáobāo* 僑 胞 (literally: "consanguines abroad") to make contributions to the *zǔguó* 祖 國 (ancestral country). So even at a macro-political level, the language of patrifiliative transmission is used.

EMBLEMATIC IDENTIFICATION

Very often, the use of the label *Huá* is substantiated by taking from the past certain objects to serve as the emblems of identity. Usually what is chosen as an emblem is something discrete, portable, and most important, easily identifiable. As a result of this emblematic identification, a lot of what passes for "Chinese" culture nowadays seems to be almost a caricature: among the stock items are the obligatory lion dance, a few steps of *Tàijí* 太 極 , the few pieces that constitute the repertoire of *Huáyuè* (*Huá* music) 華 樂 , some calligraphic brush strokes, some standard banquet dishes.[9] This seems to be true not only of the overseas Chinese, but even of those living on the mainland.

What is the point of this emblematic glorification? It is, apparently, a means of displaying what passes for "Chinese" civilisation to the non-Chinese. So, for example, important foreign visitors are received with the lion dance, and told that this a "Chinese" way of showing

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[9] *Tàijí* is a slow-moving form of shadow boxing which has become very popular because it is relatively easy to learn. *Huáyuè* (*Huá* music) is a generalised form of Chinese music which does not derive from specific local traditions, such as Cantonese music or Teochiu music. It is usually notated in roman numerals introduced to China by Christian missionaries for teaching hymns, rather than in the traditional character system. The important element of improvisation is totally lost from *Huáyuè*; instead, *Huáyuè* may be considered as an imitation of Western music, to the extent of being performed by "orchestras" organised along the lines of a symphony orchestra, with newly developed instruments, such as the *dàhú* (literally, "big spike-fiddle") 大 胡 introduced to fill in a kind of harmonic bass line. Chinese music being based on monody, ornamentation and percussion, such arbitrarily introduced "harmonies" are alien.

respect, which indeed it may have been in the context of animistic ritual. But as it is, the lion dance is now simply a hollow emblem, an artefact of tradition taken and used out of context, denuded of its historical content.[10] (See, for example, Yap 1986.)

But why is there this felt need for an emblematic display of Chinese-ness? Apparently it is to maintain a sense of separateness between those who are considered Chinese and those who are not. So the cultural artefacts chosen as emblems are those that seem to be ***unique*** to the Chinese, and not what may be regarded as the most artistic or the most profound. Indeed, since what is artistic and profound tends also to be universalistic, it is usually not suitable as an emblem of separateness.

But does this desire to maintain a sense of separateness not contradict the desire to belong to the wider world? It does and it does not. There would indeed be a contradiction if one were to pursue both desires with equal sincerity, and those who try to do so would likely end up in a schizophrenic double-bind, where they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. One possible way out of this dilemma is to agree to enter the world, but only as a separate entity competing with other separate entities. The world is thus construed as an arena which one enters in order to win. Once a sense of separateness is established through emblematic glorification, the members of this separated entity can then participate, with alacrity, in such non-Chinese activities as international sports contests and international music competitions. Of course, the desire to win in the world arena as a separate entity is wholly in keeping with the ethos of nationalism, the dominant world ideology of the twentieth century. What this implies is that to understand Chinese-ness as a present-day phenomenon, we must necessarily place it in the context of a world order that is territorially divided into separate nation-states. In such a situation, it is non-Chinese-ness that defines Chinese-ness.

THE RESOLUTION OF DISCREPANCY

As Erikson (1968:299) has noted of the process of identity construction:

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[10] The use of the lion dance as an emblem of Chinese-ness seems to be understood as such by at least some non-Chinese. For example, a controversy arose in Malaysia some years ago when some Malay politicians criticised the lion dance and said that to show their loyalty to Malaysia, the Malaysian Chinese should have instead a tiger dance! This controversy apparently still rages.

> Each *positive identity* is ... defined by *negative* images,... and we must now discuss the unpleasant fact that our God-given identities often live off the degradation of others.

As I have shown above, Chinese identity is ancestor-given; therefore, like "God-given identities", it is other-given, ascribed. It is precisely because such other-given identities cannot be easily shaken off, changed or replaced, that they may give rise to what Erikson (1968:183) terms "identity-consciousness" -- that is, "a special form of painful self-consciousness which dwells on discrepancies between one's self-esteem, the aggrandised self-image as an autonomous person, and one's appearance in the eyes of others". Such discrepancies may indeed arise when one is labelled "Chinese" in a world that is clearly dominated by the non-Chinese, because implicit in the notion of being Chinese, whether one is labelled *Hàn* or *Huá*, is the assumption of superiority, both culturally and even racially. Such an assumption is apparent in the way in which, for example, many Chinese abroad still refer to the non-Chinese as "foreign devils" (*yángguǐ* 洋鬼 in Mandarin) or "barbarian devils" (*faan-kwái-ló* 番鬼佬 in Cantonese or *hoan-á-kuí* 番囝鬼 in Hokkien), regardless of whether they are in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, the United Kingdom, or the United States of America. Such terms apparently refer to a blanket category of non-Chinese, without making too fine a differentiation between them, since their non-Chinese-ness is regarded as their essential similarity: they are all equally "foreign/barbarian", and hence implicitly inferior.

The discrepancy that arises from an assumption of Chinese superiority in a world that is dominated by the "foreign/barbarian devils" thus needs some kind of resolution. There are basically two ways to resolve this. One way is to acknowledge that the Chinese are not superior and are just like everyone else. This resolution would imply that there is no special advantage to be derived from being labelled "Chinese", apart from the biographical experiences of Chinese culture, such as family life, language, food and religion. Such experiences would, however, intermingle with other biographical experiences of other non-Chinese cultures. With no status of superiority attributed to those experiences that are specifically Chinese, these would not be elevated over and above the other experiences. In this case, one's biographical experiences of Chinese-ness remain only part of a general cosmopolitan blend.

The other mode of resolution is to try to prove Chinese superiority by identifying with certain external phenomena that are considered as powerful or power-bestowing. Such phenomena may include,

Great Wall of China, built by none other than the *Qín* founding emperor), the People's Republic of China (especially after it exploded its first nuclear bomb), the Republic of China (as a bastion of the non-Communist Chinese), the Chinese population as one-quarter of the world's population, the Mandarin language as an international language recognised by the United Nations, and of late, "Confucianism" as an ideology of economic development.[11]

Those who identify with the People's Republic of China often regard themselves as "Communist" or "leftist", simply because the government of the PRC is Communist. Such a mode of identification, however, means following the alternately "leftward" or "rightward" turn of the PRC Government. For example, after the Cultural Revolution and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, some Hongkong "leftists" who had ardently supported the Cultural Revolution, now became equally ardent businessmen because, as one such person said to me, "Now things have changed: now making money is also patriotic".

In the Chinatowns of USA, certain businesses, households, and streets are said to "belong" to the Mainland or to Taiwan in this sense of political identification. To some extent, Singapore, as a "Chinese"-dominated nation that is economically successful, is now regarded also as a powerful or power-bestowing phenomenon that Chinese in the world, not just the Chinese in Singapore, may identify with.

The recent international interest in "Confucianism" is of some relevance to our discussion. It is ironic this interest has been generated from the economic rise of Japan as an industrialised nation and, in its wake, of the so-called "four little dragons" (South Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong and Singapore). Another irony is that the linkage between the economic development of these particular nations and "Confucianism" was first imputed by two non-Chinese persons, Hermann Kahn and Edwin Reischauer. Apparently, it was only after this that some Chinese became interested in Confucianism as an emblem of identity. The motivation underlying this interest, however, seems to be a desire for power: Confucianism is validated as a suitable emblem of Chinese identity because it has been internationally identified as the ideological motor of economic development in Japan and the "four little dragons". In this context, "Confucianism" may be regarded as a code-word for the economic success of those of East Asian origins; the economic failures of those of similar origins (for example, the People's Republic of China and North Korea) are not

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[11] I remember that when China exploded its first nuclear bomb, in Singapore crowds queued up at the cinema halls just to see a short documentary film on the explosion lasting only a few minutes.

attributed to "Confucianism". Significantly, this interest in the use of "Confucianism" as an emblem of Chinese-ness seems to be shared by the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China, as well as Singapore.[12]

The desire for power may also be discerned in some others who seem to feel Chinese in another way. These are Christian converts who appear to be replacing *Zhōngguó* with *Tiānguó* 天國 ("heavenly kingdom"); this applies more to the overseas Chinese than to those living on the mainland. Presumably, compared to the unreality of past, present and future *Zhōngguó*, a wholly other-worldly country would seem just as real or unreal. In recent years, the self-avowedly "Chinese" church has grown so much that it now seems to be an independent sect based on the Chinese-ness of its international congregation. For example, it has been reported that in the last decade, in New York City, the number of Chinese churches has apparently increased from three to at least twenty-six. In London, empty Welsh Methodist churches are reportedly being taken over as Chinese churches.[13]

It may seem very odd that those who still desire to feel Chinese should attempt to do so through Christianity, a foreign religion. However, some Chinese Christians claim that Christianity had always been immanent in Chinese history and culture; now is simply the time for this immanence to be expressed. One such claim goes thus: the Chinese fondness for the colour red is interpreted as a harbinger of the blood of the Lamb. Another such claim is that the Chinese character for "boat" 船 actually means "Noah's ark" because the elements of this character are: "boat" 舟 [for] "eight" 八 "mouths" 口 ;the logic of this claim is that "eight mouths" refers to the pairs of animals which took refuge in the ark. The international Chinese ecumenism that is now evidently flourishing should perhaps be interpreted not simply as Christian conversion, but as Chinese revivalism.

Christianity provides for some Chinese the idea of a direct relationship with an omnipotent God located outside the world. Such an idea is plausible only in the context of a fundamental shift in

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12 This common interest was symbolically expressed in an international conference on "Confucian Learning, Its Development and Influence" held in August/September 1987 in Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, in the People's Republic of China. The conference was jointly organised by the Institute of East Asian Philosophies founded by the Singapore government and the Confucius Foundation of China founded by the PRC government. (See *IEAP News* October 1987:8.)

13 According to an informant, one such sinicised church is in Chiltern Street and another one at the bottom of Charing Cross Road.

orientation, whereby power is no longer seen as emanating from the political centre within *Zhōngguó*, but coming in from the outside. So to give a political interpretation to this situation, we might say that using Christianity as a vehicle of Chinese identity would imply that the Chinese people are powerful in this world because they have a direct relationship with what is supposedly the one source of power in the other world. Some Chinese Christians are even saying that the Chinese are God's new Chosen People!

Such being the case, there is concern among the overseas Chinese Christians to convert their fellow Chinese on the mainland who have not yet realised their supposedly immanent Christianity. Indeed, such a concern has been explicitly expressed by various evangelical organisations. For example, the Steering Committee Chairman of the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism, Rev. Wu Ming Jie, said in its magazine *Chinese Churches Today* (February 1987):

> There is a burden that remains heavy on our hearts, that is, what have we done for our 1.1 billion fellow Chinese in Mainland China? (Quoted from *Sky Waves* December 1987:1).

Another example of such concern is to be found in FEBA Singapore, which is a local programme supply centre of the Far East Broadcasting Corporation.[14] The radio programmes produced by this broadcasting centre are mainly proselytising messages in Mandarin and other dialects aimed at the People's Republic of China. As its Executive Director, Dr David Chen, stated in its in-house magazine *Sky Waves* (December 1987:4):

> We sincerely agree with ... Rev Jonathon Chao of the "Chinese Church Research Centre", Hong Kong ...[who] ... sees the 1.1 billion souls as the primary responsibility of Chinese Churches because Mainland China is the world's largest harvest field.

Among overseas Chinese congregations, talks are held on the specific topic of how to smuggle bibles into the PRC. Indeed, some non-Christian overseas Chinese travelling to the People's Republic of China by train from Hongkong, have told me that they were surprised to find that all that the PRC customs officers seem to be interested in was whether any bibles were being smuggled in.

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[14] The Far East Broadcasting Corporation is an international Christian broadcasting network with headquarters based in San Francisco, U.S.A. The acronym FEBA stands for Far East Broadcasting Associates.

The choice of a foreign religion as a source of power to prove Chinese superiority is perhaps not so strange, if we consider that that was the very reason why Communism, a foreign ideology, was chosen, particularly after the success of the Russian Revolution. Indeed, the political use of Christianity in this way may be dated to the *Tàipíng Tiānguó* (Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace) 太平天國 which was a rebellion launched by a self-converted Christian during the 1850s-60s, to assert Chinese-ness against the reign of the "Manchu demons" (see McAleavy 1967:70).[15] The similarities between the *Tàipíng* rebels and the later Chinese Communists have been noted by Fairbank (1965:162). The main significance is the use of not just any foreign ideology, but the major European ideologies which are regarded as sources of power. In this light, "Confucianism", Chinese Christianity, Chinese Communism and other such phenomena may be regarded as symptomatic of an ideological quest for power, which seems to be what Chinese-ness has come to mean, at least for some.

SO WHAT DOES "CHINESE" MEAN?

I have attempted to show in this paper that Chinese-ness is the result of historical and political action, relating to time, place and people. A central aspect of Chinese-ness is its self-presentation as a superior civilising force in a world of barbarians. While such a self-presentation was relatively more congruent in the past when the *Hàn* people were spreading themselves and their civilisation southwards, there is nowadays a discrepancy between this traditional construction of a Chinese-centred world and the modern construction of a Western-dominated world. The attempt to resolve this discrepancy has led some Chinese to identify themselves with what they regard as sources of power. These may even include foreign ideologies such as Communism and Christianity, which are thereby adopted and sinicised.

What may aggravate the experience of this discrepancy is that Chinese-ness has long been established as a civilisation in world history, known as such not only to the Chinese themselves but also to the world at large. Therefore, even if one who is labelled "Chinese" wishes to forget or perhaps simply take for granted his or her Chinese-ness, others will neither forget nor ignore this fact. Thus, for example, a Chinese person travelling abroad may be asked in conversation what "the Chinese" think of this, that and the other, as if all Chinese thought alike. I have myself been asked such a

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15 "Manchu demons" was a term used by the *Tàipíng* rebels for the *Qing* rulers.

question by non-Chinese, even though I told them that I have never been to China, and that no single Chinese person can possibly represent the opinions of more than one billion Chinese.

In other words, Chinese-ness exists not only in the Chinese world but also in the non-Chinese world. Furthermore, just as some Chinese may like to assert that they are superior beings, there are non-Chinese who respond to such a claim, either positively or negatively. Those who respond positively are giving assent to the claim of Chinese superiority, usually through the cult of a superior mystical Orient. The recent Western interest in so-called "Confucianism" may perhaps be regarded as an example of this. If the response is negative, the Chinese claim to superiority is being seen as a threat that has to be countered. An example of this is, perhaps, the Malaysian Government's policy of defending indigenous Malay rights in the face of what is seen as aggressive Chinese economic interests.[16] Either response, positive or negative, is likely to feed into the Chinese assertion of superiority. A feedback relationship thus emerges between Chinese-ness and the non-Chinese responses to it. Whatever changes there may be in the constructions of Chinese-ness are likely to occur in the context of this relationship.

As noted in this essay, Chinese-ness implies non-Chinese-ness. On the other hand, non-Chinese-ness defines Chinese-ness. The crux of the matter seems to be simply the maintenance of ***difference*** between the two.

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16 As Siddique and Suryadinata (1981) argue, the *bumiputra* policy in Malaysia and the *pribumi* policy in Indonesia may be understood as expressions of "economic nationalism", particularly in relation to what is viewed as the economic superiority of the Chinese. The terms *bumiputra* and *pribumi* may both be translated as "sons of the soil" -- that is, indigenes.

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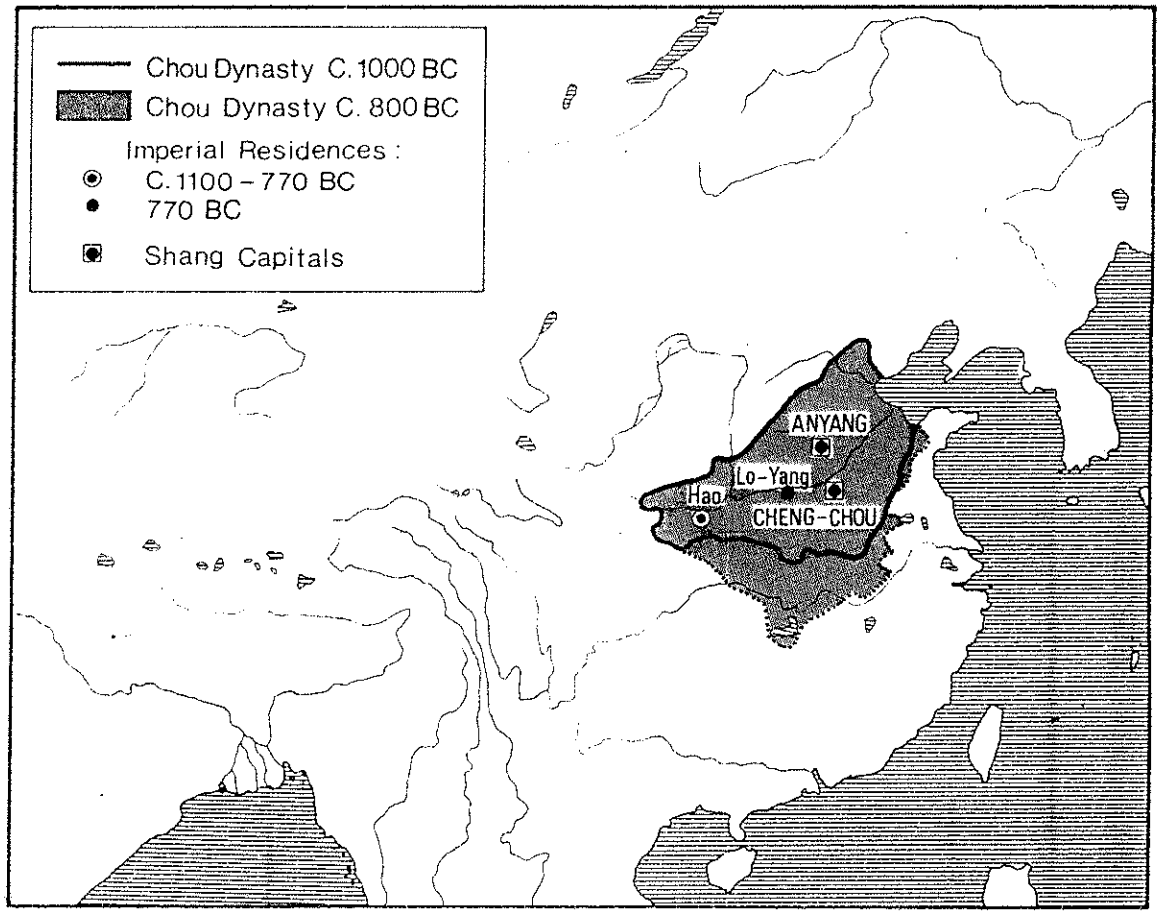
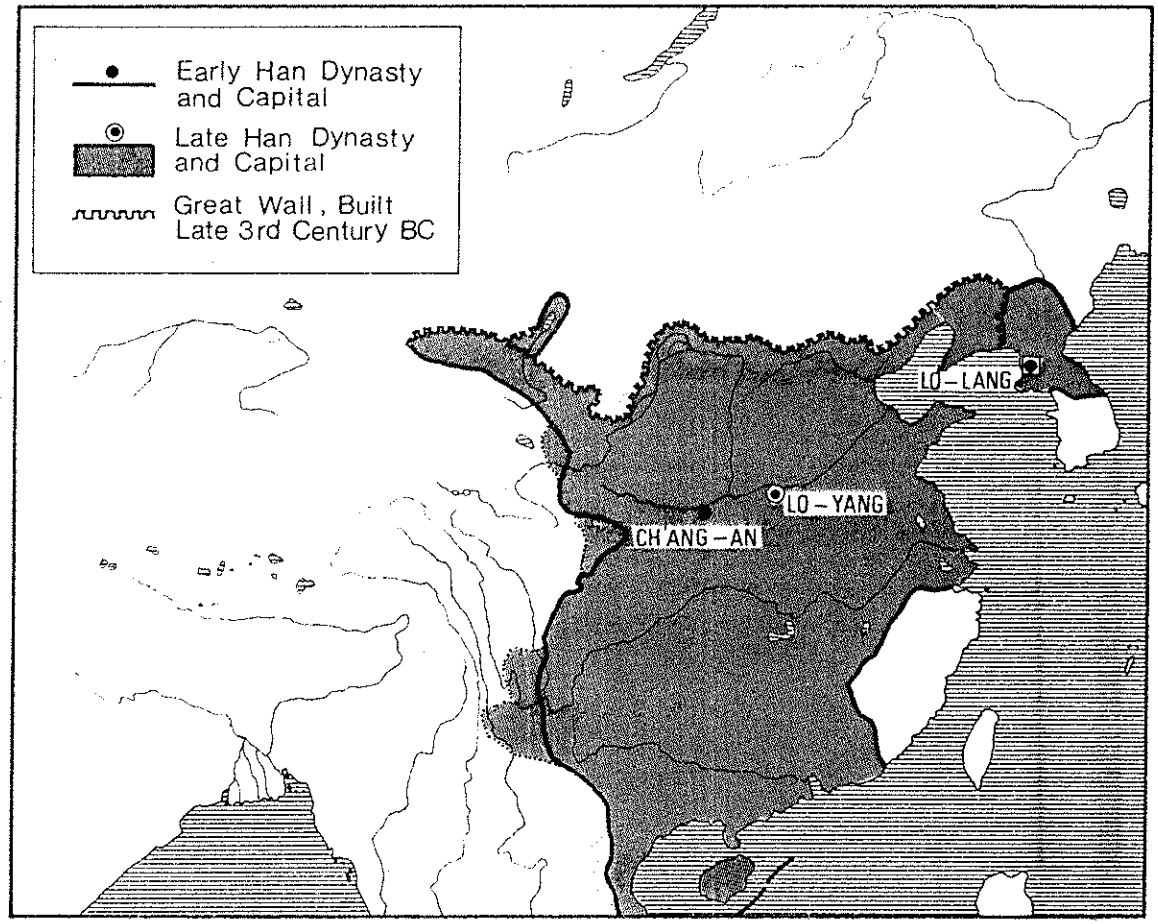


MAP 1

The shaded area within the boundary represents *Zhōngyuán*; the places marked within were four of the major political centres in the 8th century BC. (*Source*: Twitchett 1973:56.)



MAP 2

The shaded area within the boundaries represents *Zhongguó* during the *Hàn* dynasty, which existed in two phases -- early *Hàn* from 206 BC to AD 7, and late *Hàn* from AD 25 to 220. (*Source*: Twitchett 1973:56).

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