

The Cultural Logic of Chinese Transnationalism: Malaysian-Chinese Students in Guangzhou*

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Introduction

When Ernest Gellner published his theory two decades ago just as the discourse on globalization was gaining thrust, he did not anticipate any diminution of either nations or nationalism. Instead, “differences between cultural styles of life and communication, despite a similar economic base, will remain large enough to require separate serving, and hence distinct cultural-political units, whether or not they will be wholly sovereign” (1983:119). Yet, it is difficult to deny certain countervailing evidence to imply that during those same decades, the real and perceived effects of globalization in the Southeast Asian region may have altered the conditions that made nationalism the only form of social organization open to the modern imagination, and that made education the monopoly of the nation-state. The school is the particular institution that theorists of nationalism have long identified as central to the perpetuation of national identity and national unity. Over the recent years, however, globalization envisions the creation of transnational networks, whose identification with a particular state does not preclude the nurturing of a transnational identity, or identities for that matter (Lincicome, 2005:179, 188).

The transformation that globalization has brought to bear upon education is presumed to be especially outstanding in Malaysia. The ethnic cleavages between Malays and non-Malays, especially the Chinese, are well-known to students in intercultural studies. Each of the ethnic groups maintains its own culture, and most of their social conflicts, even those which are socioeconomic or political in nature, are coined in ethnic terms. In other words, class conflicts and power struggles, though sometimes overlapping within ethnic divisions, are often directly or indirectly reduced to ethnic problems. The Malaysian government has pursued what may be called “pro-Malay” policies, and it is doubtless that ethnic categories remain important in the institutional life of Malaysians, *bumiputra* (“sons of the soil” indigenous inhabitants) or non-*bumiputra* alike. Higher education is one of the critical domains; since it disfavours the ethnic Chinese from acquiring tertiary education domestically (Cohen, 2000), many well-off Chinese send their children to western universities where education is quite expensive (Pong, 1993:247). However, the less well-off Chinese send their children to mainland China, especially as the economic ties between China and Southeast Asia have greatly improved in recent years. China-Malaysia bilateral trade has increased by 258% since 1999, the worth of which has reached US\$18.8 billion, and is currently at the top among all countries in Southeast Asia; and Malaysia is China’s seventh largest trading partner (Beeck, 2005). To help their children establish certain *guanxi* for their future careers has become the prevailing mentality of the parents of Malaysian-Chinese. Meanwhile, the overseas Chinese policy of the Chinese government has become more proactive in recent years with the aim of strengthening the emotional ties between overseas Chinese and their

hometowns in mainland China. Higher education is expected to play a certain role in this new strategic orientation, especially for institutions run by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office on the State Council which is assumed to “promote the superior traditional culture of the Chinese nation and to unite overseas Chinese into contributing to the nation” (Sun, 2004:73).

This specific group of young Malaysian-Chinese is an interesting research target for students in intercultural studies who would want to explore the logic of cultural identity of the new generation of ethnic Chinese. Particularly—in light of the newly argued transnationalism perspective—we want to explore terms of national identity, especially the foundation of their diaspora that seems to be weak because they were born and grew up in Malaysia. However, their country’s ethnic policies are assumed to be biased on them, and as a result, they have become ‘reluctant exiles’ as they pursue higher education in China—the cultural homeland of their ethnic origin. Would a special kind of cultural identity be developed during this period that they are supposedly in touch with their “Chineseness”? Recently, some studies found out that after certain forms of communication and living experiences, changes in the degree of identification to Taiwan or China happened among Taiwanese businessmen in mainland China (Chen Chao-Cheng, 2005; Chen En, 2005). They provided justifications to the assumption of this study.

According to Aihwa Ong (1999:4), “trans” denotes both moving through space or across lines, and changing the nature of something. Analytically, globalization is concerned with transnationality—the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has been intensified under late capitalism. Hence, transnationalism refers to the cultural specificities of global processes, which traces the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of “culture.” In this study, transnationalism is associated with the practices and imagination of the potential elite Chinese, and their varied responses to mobility, cultural and national identity. In Asia, transnational processes are carried out by cultural practices. Transnational flows and networks have been the key dynamics in the formation and shaping of cultural practices, identity, and state strategies (Ong, 1999:17).

Section 2 of this paper reviews three major theoretical perspectives which examine the implications of Malaysia’s “pro-Malay” policies on ethnic Chinese, with emphasis on transnationalism. Section 3 includes the report from our original case study on a specific group of young Malaysian-Chinese who are pursuing their higher education in mainland China. Based on this study, discussions are made in Section 4 regarding the possible changes and limitations in the cultural logic of transnational identity of young Malaysian-Chinese who are having an intercultural communication experience in mainland China.

Why does Transnationalism Especially Matter?

Three distinctive but not mutually exclusive theoretical perspectives in studying the implications of Malaysia’s “pro-Malay” policies on ethnic Chinese are reviewed below. While the first and second approaches have been widely applied to examine the identity politics in the post-colonial Malaysia, the third approach is argued to be an interesting one in investigating the dynamics of the region in recent years.

The Ethnic Conflict Approach

According to the ethnic perspective, the Malaysian political economy is characterized by communalism in terms of ethnic identity that is based on rather static primordial attachments (Crouch, 1996; Bowie, 1991; Jesudason, 1990). Ethnic tensions were legacies

from the colonial period. The British perceived the Malays to be culturally unprepared for any economic role other than as rice-growing peasantry (Alatas, 1977). Thus, the British imported the presumably hardworking Chinese and Indians to Malaya to deepen their territorial exploitation, and this created a division of labour on a racial basis. As a result, ethnic cleavages were developed between the urban mercantile and professional classes of the predominantly non-Malay population and the rural Malay peasantry. This enabled the colonial state to employ a “divide and rule” strategy (Abraham, 1997) by using the ethno-class consciousness resulting from the ethnic division of labour to inhibit any possibility of the emergence of challenging forces, especially the communist threat, that could have transcended racial lines and disrupted the orderly decolonization process (Brown, 1994:214).

On the other hand, the colonial state, in seeking to monopolize the means of coercion and the means of building the colonial state apparatus, co-opted the Malay rulers (sultans, rajahs, etc.) and elites to facilitate its rural as well as urban governance and to quell any possible challengers (Kahn, 1996:54-5). As a result, a different ethnic division was deliberately demarcated along the political dimension. The subsequent post-war ethnic conflicts and fissures, as well as state policies, were in part the consequences of the superimposition of these two totally divergent political and economic ethnic divisions.

However, the thesis that ethnic demands, in terms of equalizing Malay political and Chinese economic power, are the key to understanding Malaysian political economy cannot be established without questioning first the ethnic categorization of the “*bumiputra*”, the “Chinese”, the “Malay”, and the “Indian”. Indeed, the very concept of ethnicity is often manipulated by political and economic elites, as well as middle classes, for mobilizing resources to pursue their own interests. As Brown (1994:5) puts it, ethnicity should be depicted as an ideology which provides people with “a simple psychological formula which resolves the ambiguities and uncertainties as to the relationship with society and with the state”, and the “psychological formula employed is that of the kinship myth: the endowment of the ‘imagined’ cultural community with the attributes of the real family.”

Brown’s arguments about the malleability of ethnicity and about ethnicity as a psychological and political ideology are further substantiated by scholars who tried to explain the failure and the continued efforts of the ruling Malaysian elites to construct a national identity that encompasses all ethnic groups (Watson, 1996), to delineate the variety of ideas on nationhood (or nations-of-intent) within each ethnic group (Shamsul, 1996), and to expose the ambiguities and myths of the ethnic category *bumiputra* (Means, 1985; Nagata, 1993). They argue that there is simply no single encompassing Malay identity, *bumiputra* identity, Indian identity, nor Chinese identity. Simply using the static and ideal-typical ethnic categories is inadequate to understand the ever-changing, complex political economy of Malaysia.

The Class and Ruling Elite Approach

From the class perspective, emphasizing too much about the ethnic divisions within Malaysia risks missing the class dimension in explaining the intra-ethnic variations of involvement in the Malaysian and the world political economy, as well as the making and remaking of their cultural identity. Kahn (1996:71) reminds us that the political demands of culture building, of drawing boundaries within and between cultures, and of defining the content of different cultures, are in fact the very aims of certain members of the middle class. The New Economic Policy (NEP), in fact, has its roots in the pressure exerted by middle-level

Malay bureaucrats and businessmen rather than in the involvement of all ethnic groups (Jomo, 1990:469-471). However, even under the supposedly discriminating NEP, not all Chinese suffered (Brown, 1994:247-8; Jesudason, 1990:139), as the NEP was more purposeful in reaffirming the “superiority” of ethnic Malays. A number of politically connected big businessmen gained much through the protection of senior Malay politicians or through the Ali-Baba arrangement (Lim, 1983).

In addition, the class dimension intertwined with state institutions, which is created and maintained by a small number of the ruling elite, is indispensable in understanding how and why ethnic divisions are maintained and even reinforced. After decades of independence, Malaysia has still failed to establish a national identity or to instil cultural plurality; instead, cultural separatism has been maintained. Freedman (2001) attributes the unsuccessful acculturation of the Malaysian-Chinese to state policies and institutions, especially to educational institutions and policies that are biased. Even worse, the ruling elite and state managers prefer to reinforce ethnic and cultural boundaries so as to avoid the Malaysian society from being structured along class lines, which may jeopardize their class interests. Thus, in order to fully understand the cultural and identity politics in Malaysia, ethnicity cannot be treated as a static primordial attachment, but it is constantly constructed and remade by class and elite struggles.

The Chinese Transnationalism Approach

Besides the class and state interest dimensions, the effects of globalization, especially in the cultural aspects, have been neglected within a simple static ethnic framework. As summarized by Waters (1995:136-7), cultural globalization is a dual process, both differentiating and homogenizing, through the rapid mediation of ideas by electronic communication and personal mobility. On the other hand, globalization makes certain previously territorial-bounded national cultures transnational and deterritorialized, thus facilitating the emergence of a common global culture. However, the negative impact is that globalization “weakens the putative nexus between nations and states thereby releasing absorbed ethnic minorities and allowing the reconstitution of nations across former state boundaries” through its differentiating effects. The effects of cultural globalization are even felt in Thailand where the assimilation policy is often regarded as quite successful. As documented by Jory (2000), Thailand has experienced resurgence in expressions of ethnic culture and identity, especially in popular culture. Nevertheless, would popular culture similarly be the “catalyst” of Chinese transnationalism in the case of Malaysian-Chinese?

Ong & Nonini (1997:326) argue that the identity of overseas Chinese is constituted through transnational systems rather than through stable cultural entities. As some overseas Chinese have been tremendously successful in the global economy especially in the Southeast Asian region and in China recently, a Chinese transnationalism discourse that revives old images of Confucian Chinese culture to characterize and romanticize the Chinese culture and identity has emerged (Chan, 2000; Weidenbaum & Hughes, 1996; Redding, 1993). In this discourse, Chinese transnationalism is often explained or examined under the umbrella of the peculiar Chinese culture and identity that foster entrepreneurship as well as business networks. Chinese words like *guanxi* and terms like “bamboo network” and “Greater China” frequently occur in popular and scholarly literature as well as in mass media. Both the discursive effects from this discourse and the “real” transnational Chinese interactions, exchanges, and business

activities influence the cultural and identity politics in Southeast Asian states, especially in ethnically divided Malaysia.

As Ong & Nonini (1997) demonstrated, the discourse has produced transnational imaginaries of ethnic self-celebration which deeply affect the constitution and remaking of the identity of all Chinese, overseas or otherwise. Specifically, Nonini (1997) illustrated how this discourse about Chinese transnational capitalists, and the associated diasporic Chinese identity and culture, is constituted in the remaking of the identity of non-elite Malaysian-Chinese, through providing alternative and opposed positions to the notion of citizenship and indigenouness that was set by the Malaysian state. However, the “escape” and not the realization provided by these alternative identifications merely recast class, gender, race, and nationality differences in new ways rather than liberate the non-elite Malaysian-Chinese.

“Chineseness”: Who Cares?

The data for this research were collected from Jinan University in the spring of 2005 through questionnaire survey and group interview (4 sessions, totally over one-fifth of our target population was involved). Since its establishment in 1906, Jinan University has been renowned as the “highest academy for overseas Chinese” in mainland China. The principal spirit it evokes is patriotism toward the Chinese nation (Xia and Liang, 2004), which is assumed to “promote the superior traditional culture of the Chinese nation and to unite overseas Chinese into contributing to the nation” (Sun, 2004:73). In recent decades, it has been the most popular destination of ethnic Chinese students from Southeast Asian societies, and Malaysian-Chinese students have always comprised the largest group (information and opinion provided by Professor Cao Yunhua in an interview conducted in January 2005). Jinan is located in Guangzhou City. As a historical city that has existed for thousands of years, Guangzhou is well recognized as one of the most globalized cities in China today. Some studies believe that Guangzhou’s development path and pattern are comparable to that of New York in USA. Furthermore, Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong Province which is one of the two major homelands of Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia over the past hundreds of years (another one is Fujian Province). Over the past two decades, there has been frequent interaction in all fields between Guangdong and the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, such as in business and charitable activities (Liu, 2005:49). All of these considerations comprise a strong justification for our case study on Malaysian-Chinese students in Jinan.

By exploring how Malaysian-Chinese identity is constituted against the background of the Malaysian political and economic context, and Chinese transnationalism, our findings may provide insights for understanding the dynamics of cultural identification which is involved in overseas Chinese communities and its potential effects on the interethnic interactions between Southeast Asia and China. Below is a concise report of our findings.

Most of the respondents said they belong to lower-middle class families in Malaysia. As such, they cannot afford the expensive tuition fees in western and Taiwanese universities, including the high standards of living in these countries. Taking a degree in medical school, for example (3 interviewees are studying clinical medicine in Jinan), and completing the study in Taiwan is about seven times more expensive than in mainland China.

In addition to this, their English language proficiency is not good enough for them to gain admission to universities in the west. In light of these, Jinan has carried out several admission and recruitment activities, and has enjoined the alumni’s effort in attracting Malaysian-Chinese students to study in Jinan. In comparison with the larger alumni network

of Taiwan, and the greater cohesiveness and higher portfolios of the alumni in Malaysia's Chinese community, mainland China is a practical but reluctant choice for these students' overseas education. Their self-identification as non-elites in Malaysia, which is obvious, is also noteworthy.

For quite a number of the interviewees' families, they said that they send their children to mainland China because the economic ties between China and Southeast Asia have greatly improved in recent years, and they are hoping that their children will establish themselves there or at least nurture certain *guanxi* or "social capital" for their future careers. Nonetheless, for most students, establishing transnational economic ties is not their reason for studying in China. They may enjoy the prosperity of Guangzhou City, and the efficiency of Guangzhou's urbanization in recent years impresses them quite much. However, mainland China is still far beyond their prospects in terms of their pursuit of a transnational career.

The interviewees' perceptions about mainland Chinese were also not good. Sometimes, they feel that mainland Chinese are quite uncivilized, and some even said that the Malays are far more civilized. The most frequently mentioned example is the mainland Chinese's notorious habit of spitting in public places, whereas Malay-Muslims are generally clean and tidy. In contrast to Guangzhou City's untidy and noisy streets, the interviewees also feel that the quality of life in Malaysia, even in suburban areas, is much better.

Getting closer to China strengthens the Malaysian-Chinese's consciousness of being ethnic Chinese. However, this identification is not nurtured by improved communication and appreciation of China and of mainland Chinese. The interviewees complained that mainland Chinese do not understand them in almost every aspect of life. In spite of their fluent *putonghua* and their Chinese features, the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with Jinan University and their schoolmates, some authorities in Guangzhou City, and occasionally, some mainland Chinese who treat them as "outsiders" just like other racial groups. In fact, mainland Chinese students' relationship with Hong Kong students is even much better as compared to their ethnic relationship with Malaysian-Chinese students, no matter how poor Hong Kong students' *putonghua* is and how weak their "Chineseness" is. In daily communication, Hong Kong's highly globalized economic prosperity and Malaysia's less-developed economy seem to be more decisive dynamics for establishing a relationship with mainland Chinese.

As a result, a "wall" has been deliberately built between the Malaysian-Chinese and the mainland Chinese. This "wall" has become a "mirror" which reflects that in comparison with the mainland Chinese, the Malaysian-Chinese have a stronger "Chineseness" that is reflected in their attachment to Chinese customs and traditions, and their better knowledge, understanding, and admiration of Chinese culture.

An incident happened to one of the interviewees (coded 'M'), which is widely-known among Malaysian-Chinese students in Jinan, and is very illustrative of the feeble inter-identification between Malaysian-Chinese and mainland Chinese students. M once participated in a debating contest. The motion statement was derived from a piece of classical text written by the very famous literate Tao Qian (365–427 AD). M's teammates who were all mainland Chinese had little knowledge of the statement and knew nothing about the full text, its historical background, or even its author. M has very good knowledge of it; hence, he tried hard to thoroughly explain it to his teammates during the preparation. However, they all ignored M's contribution and wasted hours in the library to research on it, until they found out that M's explanation was correct. The reason for the teammates' undermining suspicion of M

is obvious; they just do not believe (or accept the fact) that a “Malaysian” would have such a good knowledge of classical Chinese literature.

In each of the group interviews, this story made the interviewees express their own disappointment toward their mainland Chinese schoolmates regarding the concern of “Chineseness”. They were surprised that seldom do mainland Chinese students celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival (*Duan Wu*) and share their experiences of ancestor worshipping. They were also rejected by mainland Chinese students in their invitation to accompany them in visiting historical sceneries in Guangzhou. Even after months of interaction, mainland Chinese students still perceived them as Malays and not as Chinese.

The interviewees believe that mainland Chinese students’ perception of the level of development in Malaysia is a factor for the ‘wall’ in cultural identity. Malaysia is a less-developed economy. Hence, it is assumed that the process of civilization there is slow. An interviewee even related his experience in which he once made a joke by saying, “Most of the Chinese in Malaysia are still living in tree houses.” Seriously, a mainland Chinese student replied to his joke and said, “Well, I knew it.” Mainland Chinese students also prefer Hong Kong students as friends over the Malaysian-Chinese. They believe that Hong Kong students have better taste in Japanese/western fashion, computers and other Japanese/European high-tech electronic equipment, and Japanese/Korean/Hong Kong/Taiwanese TV drama and pop music which all comprise the “culture” that mainland Chinese students respect.

The interviewees also believed that to a certain extent, the university’s policy is part of the cause of the problem. Malaysian-Chinese students are *hua qiao*. The university authority does not emphasize their identity as *hua* (“Chinese”); on the contrary, they emphasize their identity as *qiao* (“live overseas”). Therefore, they are encouraged to organize their own student associations but are not encouraged to be involved in the student unions of Jinan. The university has classes for overseas students but seldom integrates them with ordinary mainland Chinese students. Malaysian-Chinese students do not perceive this as an act of caring for them or promoting their welfare but as an act of differentiating them from the rest.

The interviewees also fully recognize the difficulties and the slim chances of cooperating with the Malays back home. As one of them remarked, “Of course we can live peacefully with the Malays. However, doing something more than everyday life routine interactions like greetings and casual conversation will be difficult. You see, we have different cultures, religious beliefs, and outlooks (in life).” Generally, though, they think that the Malays and the Malaysian-Chinese can co-exist peacefully. They also said that the elite groups of the Malay and the Chinese are similar with respect to learning English as their major language, studying overseas especially in western countries, and investing in businesses without any regard for ethnic factors. However, they recognize that there is class division or discrimination between the Malay and the Chinese population in their country. A lot of state policies affecting all citizens, may they be Chinese, Malays, or Indians, are influenced by the elite groups. The ordinary Malay population has no voice in the creation of state policies. As Anthony Milner argues (1998:168-9), “The majority community in Malaysia, therefore, is to be seen, at least in part, as the product of ideological work. The innovative Malay ideologues ... operated in the context of the challenge of dynamic Chinese minority, and in some situations they actually defined Malayness with reference to Chineseness.” The considerate and tolerant attitudes of the interviewees make us believe that they would have certain understanding and endorsement of Milner’s analysis.

It is also very common experience for a Chinese to be asked by a westerner whether he/she is Japanese or Korean. Despite recognizing the unfair treatment of Malaysian state policies toward ethnic Chinese, most of the interviewees still identify themselves as Malaysian when asked if they are Malaysian, Malaysian-Chinese, or Chinese. Only two identified themselves as Malaysian-Chinese, and one identified herself as Chinese (These three interviewees admitted that such identification is deeply influenced by their families and is not a result of their experience of studying in Guangzhou). The interviewees' national identity has not been changed by their experience of studying in mainland China except for two who said it was. They were born and raised in Malaysia and as such, they think it is but proper that they say they are Malaysians and that they identify with Malaysia in a national sense.

Most of the interviewees also noticed that their parents would identify themselves as Chinese but in a cultural sense only. They were encouraged by their parents to study in mainland China for them to establish transnational economic ties but without any patriotic aspiration toward the Chinese nation. Except for the parents/families of two interviewees who have business experience, all of the interviewees' parents know China through the local mass media only in Malaysia. However, most of the information provided by the mass media is focused on China's economic growth, while other aspects are neglected. Furthermore, the interviewees believe that their parents do not know much about China's problems on economic disparities, environmental destruction, governmental bureaucratism, and the perceived low quality of "civilization" which may hinder the country from further development sooner or later. Hence, families' socialization of their national identification towards China is not strong. Meanwhile, the interviewees are of different major areas of study like clinical medicine, journalism, international politics, economics, foreign trade, business management, and Chinese language. Interestingly, most of them do not have any ambition to stay in mainland China to pursue their respective careers, nor do they have any optimism toward the so-called "social/cultural capital" that they may possibly gain in Guangzhou.

In fact, our survey found out that more than 80% of the Malaysian-Chinese respondents assert that they are Malaysians, which is much higher than their counterparts in Indonesia (less than 11%). More than 70% of Malaysian-Chinese students think that they would stay in Malaysia to develop their respective careers in the future, while less than 2% would move to mainland China. About 44% of Malaysian-Chinese students think that the Chinese would always be Chinese and would remain with their ethnic characteristics forever, while 56% think that the ethnic Chinese would successfully be assimilated by the society in the long run, though the current conditions are not yet mature enough to allow this. Our findings are generally similar to those of a previous study conducted in 1999 (Cao et al., 2004: Chapter 2).

The Cultural Logic of Transnationalism: Limitations

Instead of surrendering to the totalizing impact of globalization as an economic rationality, other sociologists have turned toward studying "the local". They are examining how particular articulations of the global and "the local" produce "multiple modernities" (Ong, 1999:4). Arjun Appadurai argues that such a "global production of locality" happens because the transnational flow of people, goods, and knowledge becomes imaginative resources for creating communities and "virtual neighbourhoods" (1996:178-9). "Multiculturalism" has gained its worldwide currency, because it implies that not only the world is a heterogeneous

cultural mix—something that everyone already knows—but also the cultures of individual nation-states. One debate that crosses national boundaries is, therefore, whether or not multiculturalism can unify a nation (Thomas, 2004:136). Regrettably, after experiencing a deeper level of cultural exposure, Malaysian-Chinese students' transnational identity that predispose to "Chineseness" has been so far nonexistent, if not at all impossible to achieve. Our case study stands by the negative side, with the analyses below.

The Myth of Jinan

"The university's foremost responsibility is to hold out against the current trend of remodelling itself as a business organization. At the same time, it should alert society against transferring the norms of commerce to cultural institutions," Subramani argues (1998:161-2). From the experience of our interviewees, Jinan is a university specialized in the education of the overseas Chinese, but it failed in its mission of nurturing cultural transnationalism. In fact, a scholar in Jinan also criticized the university's failure in making use of its advantage in terms of its multi-racial student population to achieve multicultural education (Wen, 2005:93). According to his own survey conducted in 2003, in terms of knowledge in Chinese history, and literature and art, and attitude toward patriotism and social awareness, mainland Chinese students lose to the ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia (Wen, 2005:90-1). Hence, it is difficult to enhance multiculturalism in the student community through an active and positive mode of intercultural communication.

Cultural Hometown of Huaqiao?

Guangzhou is a typical globalizing city. As compared to the economic setback experienced by Malaysia after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 (Case, 2003), Guangzhou's rapid economic growth is admirable, yet a potential crisis arising from its further and long-term development is seen as inevitable. Cultural globalization in Guangzhou, hand in hand with economic globalization, is stagnated at the level of fanatic of popular western culture (with Hong Kong and Taiwanese style of "translation"). Furthermore, it pursues the exclusion of less-globalized or less-westernized "others", and shows the least cultural logic between China and "Chineseness". Over the past two and a half decades of economic reform and opening, both Guangzhou City and Jinan failed to facilitate the emergence of a new face of "Chineseness" across different Chinese societies, nor to inspire the identity imaginaries of the ethnic Chinese, not to mention the development of transnationalism. Paradoxically, Guangzhou's advanced economy and highly-globalized urban setting attract the young ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia to pursue their higher education there, but these undermine the transnational imaginary of this historic Chinese city in the minds of the ethnic Chinese. In contrast to this, Malaysian-Chinese students from the lower-middle class are able to enjoy studying abroad with lesser expenses, and their life is no less different from that of their rich counterparts in western societies.

Limitations of the Overseas Chinese Policy

The objectives of China's overseas Chinese policy are mobilizing Chinese overseas to support China's modernization thrust through financial investment, realizing reunification, and facilitating the development of better relations with various countries in support of China's "peaceful rise" strategy. Hence, it is vital to strengthen the emotional ties, and to promote Chinese cultural communication between the *qiaoxiang* (the hometowns where many

of the overseas Chinese originated) and overseas Chinese communities (Ngok, Cheng & Cheng, 2004: 175, 182). Guangzhou is the capital city of one of two major *qiaoxiangs* of the Malaysian-Chinese, yet it is not that successful in achieving the goals mentioned. The Chinese government's effort in using traditional festivals or occasions like the "root-seeking" summer and winter camps to strengthen the emotional ties is probably instrumentally meaningful for the older generation which has business with China (Cheng and Ngok, 1999). However, for the young generation, "Chineseness" in mainland China is not that "real". Pragmatic ideology and economic rationality still dominate China's overseas Chinese policy (Guo and Nie, 2004; Xia, 2004) and hence is reflected in most of the apparatus of the policy, including "the highest academy for overseas Chinese". Recently, some reflections advocate that overseas Chinese policy should be less emphasized on the country's interest and more on the people's concerns (Liu, 2005:50-1), and less on materialistic interest but more on the affection level (Shi, 2004:82; Zhao, 2004:9). However, according to the scenario revealed in our case study, such reflections are minority views for now. The party secretary of Jinan, as the top authority of the university, obviously does not share these views, not to say Wen Feng's criticism mentioned above (Jiang & He, 2003).

The New Generation's View on Malaysia's Identity Politics

The issue of racial disintegration raised by the younger generation of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia today is not viewed in the same manner by the older generation. Especially for the lower-middle class, whose expectation regarding their upward social mobility may not be as strong as the elite class (Cao, 2004:Chapter 2; Mu, 2005). Their understanding of the history of discrimination against the ethnic Chinese is not as "bitter" as that of their parents or the upper class. In the urban areas, for example, the impact of NEP three decades ago was that the well-educated Malays earned more than the well-educated Chinese, while the poor Malays earned less than the poor Chinese (Mazumdar, 1981:201). Such understanding seems to be more acceptable among the young generation of Malaysian-Chinese. Their national identity as "Chinese-Malaysian" is much stronger than as *huaqiao* in Malaysia—for many years, Tang has been actively advocating that sooner or later, the term "Chinese Malaysians" would replace "Malaysian Chinese" in the discourse of identity politics. The new generation's national identity is firmly rooted in Malaysia; hence, they will become one of the hosts of the society, and the ambiguous identity of *qiao* would be wiped away (2005:101). Such a view is positively echoed by anthropologists like Chee Beng Tan (2000). They are more tolerant of Malaysian government policies, with special empathy on Mahathir's good will to the ethnic Chinese (Phoon, 2004:78-84). While the Malaysian government's "pro-Malay" policies are undeniable, plans for the resolution of problems on inequality and ethnic difference, without option for a discourse on "multiculturalism", are set in place (Fenton, 2003:135). A certain degree of prudence is expected from the younger generation as they cultivate closer relations with China. In the old cultural logic of "tug-of-war", globalizing China's "Chineseness" seems to be too weak in redirecting the affection for Malaysia of the young generation of Chinese in order to mobilize across and "re-produce" a transnational identity.

Conclusion

Research in recent years has paid much attention to the government policies of China in attracting financial capital at the transnational level, especially across Chinese societies in Southeast Asia. From an entrepreneurial perspective, engineering cultural capital creates

benefits for the strategy of both sides, i.e., not only for Chinese authorities but also for business investors from Southeast Asia. An evident dynamism prevails within Chinese-owned enterprises, which has been attributed to intra-ethnic cooperation (Gomez, 2004:13). Nevertheless, this kind of view also coexists with the evidence that competition rather than cooperation among Chinese-owned firms may be more severe, and there is more evidence of interethnic corporate ties. Edmund Gomez further argues that there is little evidence that a common ethnic identity promotes economic pursuits and helps unify a community (2004:13-14). Some studies on small- and medium-scale ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia also indicate that entrepreneurs' strategic position to exploit the opportunities brought about by China's economic rise is not necessarily tainted by any diasporic sentiment or putative ties with ancestral lands, but this is mainly because they have been 'othered' by indigenous compatriots (Wee, Jacobsen & Wong, 2004).

Transnational business success of overseas Chinese throughout much of Southeast Asia provides good case studies from which answers might be sought to the question: Are the values of Southeast Asian Chinese more inclined to generate high levels of transnational entrepreneurial drive and dynamism than those of other cultures in the region? (Mackie, 1998:129). Such kind of economic transnationalism may possibly derive certain political benefits for Beijing in its cross-strait rivalry against Taiwan (Baginda, 2002:244). Whether transnationalism would develop a certain thrust for change in the cultural identity of the younger generation of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia or not becomes a new concern. From our study of a specific group of young Malaysian-Chinese students who are now mingling with the "Chineseness" in one of the most globalized cities in mainland China, transnationalism probably provides a weak cultural logic for their identity reconstitution at this stage.

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