

**GLOBALIZATION AND NATIONALISM:
THE POLARIZING AND UNIFYING FORCES OF LANGUAGE
IN THE 21st CENTURY**

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One assumes that with globalization come increased mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and decreasing nationalistic and sectarian zeal. Yet we see that globalization does little to assuage xenophobia whether in North American and European democracies or in autocratic regimes such as Russia and China. Recent examples range from the Chinese boycott of foreign films that invoke cultural icons to the Ladies Professional Golf Association's outlandish and swiftly abandoned policy to impose an English-language test upon "foreign" (mainly Asian) competitors. Such forms of rejection of the other camouflaged as either patriotism or economic and cultural patent rights (business interests fuel the Chinese boycott and corporate endorsements lie behind the L.P.G.A stricture) are simply a disguised practice of nationalism that connotes narrow-mindedness and insecurity. This study explores the 21st century ideologies of isolationism—both cultural and economic—as reflected in geolinguistic policy making.

Globalization no doubt brings nations together in commercial trading and cultural exchanges. With increased dialogue among nations, one would naturally assume heightened mutual understanding and tolerance. Hesitate a little before this assumption takes you too far to unwarranted surprises. This article focuses on the role that language plays in securing a national sense of identity and the tenaciousness of a desire to maintain and nurture differences. The examples to be used in this paper will be exclusively about the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

Let us review the history of modern China briefly to provide a better understanding of the current tension among the Chinas under different government policies.

Hong Kong became a dependent territory of the United Kingdom in 1842 under the Treaty of Nanking as a result of the Opium War between China and Britain. It remained so until the transfer of its sovereignty to the People's Republic of China in 1997. In the ensuing years until 1997 when the British relinquished reign over Hong Kong, people in Hong Kong showed no ambivalence about their desire to affiliate with classical Chinese culture and a Chinese national identity. Though in private and informal settings, Hongkongers speak Cantonese, they employ Mandarin Chinese in public speeches and education. Interestingly, Hong Kong educated people speak Mandarin when conversing with their mainland counterparts while even some mainland Cantonese cannot speak the official variety. Their language choice indicates a strong desire to be viewed as Chinese under the British colonial

reign and the people's sense of national belonging. With China safely tucked away behind the bamboo curtain, Hong Kong people were free to claim their authentic Chineseness through nostalgic reconstructions of classical Chinese culture in the popular media and education. Political shifts before and after 1997 brought anxiety into the homes of Hong Kong people who rallied against the Chinese regime in support of the Chinese students' democracy movement in 1996.

Today with the mainland's show of economic power, Hong Kong people's sense of whom they desire to show allegiance to becomes murky. On the one hand, Hong Kong business entrepreneurs and venture capitalists find China a vast backbone pillar for their economic gain, and on the other hand, Hong Kong liberals denounce their fate at the hand of the communists, the new colonialists in their view. A film produced in 1997, *Made in Hong Kong* (Fruit Chan), forecasts a Hong Kong under communist China, by portraying China as a symbolic protecting father figure like the British colonialists. Shi-mei Shih, professor of Asian Languages and Culture at UCLA, sees the film as an open announcement of Hong Kong's desire to be an independent nation. While "...Hong Kong is not a nation-state with an army of its own or those who are willing to die for it as is required of a national imagined community..." (144), the death one after another of the four teenagers in the film against the backdrop of China's takeover of Hong Kong becomes allegorical. The underlying message of a China overtaking Hong Kong is marked by the radio broadcast from the mainland:

You the peak of your power like the morning sun. We have placed all our hopes on you. You are listening to People's Radio in Hong Kong. What we have quoted was a speech given by Chairman Mao to the leaders of the youth. Let's repeat and study the message in *Putonghua*.

Translated by Shu-mei Shih (214, 2007)

(Directly translated, *Putonghua* means "common language" or "language of the common people". It is used interchangeably now to mean Mandarin Chinese.)

The key to the finale though is telling about the role of a language variety that is not Hong Kong's, *Putonghua*. It is the reigning Mandarin Chinese in daily broadcast that signals a Hong Kong of the past no longer. It is now an unwilling part of China whose identity is defined by Cantonese, not *Putonghua*. The suicidal characters in the film represent a symbolic sacrifice for the cause of Hong Kong as a nation defined by an identity of non-Mandarin origin. The linguistic rift between the two Chinas becomes an impetus for hatred and animosity toward mainland politics, and inevitably altering Hongkongers' sense of whom they wish to identify with. The resentment ripples through the Pacific Ocean to the United States, where Cantonese speaking Hong Kong immigrants stick together in Asian organizations as a result of a phobia towards mainlanders with a strong suspicion against immigrants from the mainland.

In this case, language is the key identifier of origin that serves as the basis for solidarity and identity among Chinese within and outside China. In her argument against the naming of Chinese immigrants as the "Chinese diaspora," Shih claims that this notion is highly problematic, despite its wide adoption and circulation. The inclusiveness of the term Diaspora discloses a Han centrism as it refers mainly to the diaspora of the Han people. The term "Chinese" then becomes a national marker passing as an ethnic, cultural, and linguistic marker.

This dissension regarding the term designation about what is Chinese and what constitutes Chineseness bring us right back, smack center, to the notion of globalization, which along with capitalist obsession inevitably brings ideological and political change. To be global is to accept heterogeneity and multiculturalism. The term *ethnic Chinese* is considered a misnomer as Chineseness is not an ethnicity but many ethnicities. Shih argues that “by the procedure of ethnicized reductionism, the Han-Centric construction of Chineseness is not unlike the gross misrecognition of Americans as white Anglo-Saxons” (24). Shih also believes that the conflation of the word Chinese with everything from China has been coproduced by agents inside and outside China. This scholar blames the Western powers for fashioning the racialized ideology that presented Chineseness along the color line, which disregarded the many diversities and differences within China. The war between the two sites, Sinophone and Mainland China, and the opposing ideological principles governing the two sites provoke healthy debate on the one hand and nationalistic fervor on the other.

When the film *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon* (2000), directed by Ang Lee, was released and shown in movie theaters in Taiwan, it was greeted with a tepid reception. The film was viewed as unauthentic Chinese as the actors and actresses spoke a spattering of Mandarin Chinese with anachronistic tonalities and vocabularies that defy the theater goers’ authentic Chinese experience of Chinese movies whose actors speak perfect standard Mandarin. When Hong Kong movies were exported to other Chinese-speaking communities, they are routinely dubbed in Mandarin. This tradition stems from the mid-20th century when China was behind the iron curtain, and Taiwan and Hong Kong were less ambivalent about their desire to affiliate with a classical Chinese culture which dictates a perfect Mandarin enunciation in the public sphere. In Taiwan under the Kuomintang reign, Chinese mainlanders felt culturally superior to the local Taiwanese such as the Hakkas and the aboriginals. As for Hong Kong, British colonialism engenders nostalgia for China. With China safely tucked away behind the bamboo curtain, Hong Kong and Taiwan were free to claim their versions of authentic Chineseness through nostalgic reconstructions of classical Chinese culture in the popular media. When they were confronted with Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger* which was produced with a Sinophone cultural sensibility, it was naturally not well received. Ironically though, the box office revenues did rise after the film was awarded the Oscar for best foreign film in 2001 at the Academy Awards. The Hollywood validation of the film indicates a transpacific sphere of cultural politics within which the filmic negotiations and transactions among China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are played out in political and economical terms.

Owing to global capitalism, Hollywood commercialism allowed the movie a success first in the West then Chinese communities outside of the US. Politically speaking, global capitalism nonetheless allowed for non-centrist and non-standardized articulations of “Chineseness” against China-centrism.

By the same token, globalization had also brought back the mainland Chinese people’s sense of national pride and of the country’s imperial status, thus occasioning Taiwan and Hong Kong people’s ambivalence toward what is Chinese and Chineseness. The Sinophone immediately prior to Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997 became the site where powerful articulations against China-centrism were heard. Taiwan followed suit in 2000 when the

Democratic Progressive Party nominee Chen Shui-bian defeated the reigning KMT and promoted the use of Tai-yu and other vernaculars in Taiwan. This linguistic tug of war is intensified with the production of the Chinese film director, Zhang Yi-mo's production of *Hero* in 2002.

The rumor about *Hero's* production has it that Zhang, the Chinese director wanted to show the world what an authentic Chinese martial arts film should look like after the global success of *Crouching Tiger*. Some of the resentment toward Lee's film felt by Chinese audiences also had to do with the issue of ownership—who owns the genre and who are the most legitimate inheritors of the genre. A film that flaunts something essential about Chinese culture needs certified producers from China proper, not from a Taiwanese American. A recent example of the Chinese nationalistic mentality is seen in the call for a boycott of *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), Dreamworks' blockbuster cartoon featuring an overweight bear named Po who saves the world, on the grounds that foreigners had taken one of China's most precious symbols, the panda, and were using it for their own profit.

At the turn of the century in Taiwan, language became the marker for victory in Taiwan's presidential election. The defeat of the KMT (Kuomintang) in the 2000 election by the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) was to a large extent affected by language differences. The KMT's rigid adherence to Mandarin as the national language alienated 73 percent of Taiwan's residents, while Chen Shui-bian, the DPP's presidential nominee, promoted the use of Tai-yu and other vernaculars to rally mass support. During his successful campaign, Chen strategically code-switched back and forth between Tai-yu to Mandarin for pragmatic as well as politically-inspired symbolic purposes. Chen used Tai-yu in his speeches to garner support from that constituency, and Mandarin to appeal to the rest of the national vote. With mainland China's firm stance on Taiwan's status as a renegade, the Taiwanese people are especially vigilant about their independent identity from the mainland. However, China's recent rise to power on the international stage has prompted the Taiwanese government to rethink its strategy and the 2008 presidential election's pendulum once again swung in favor of unification with the mainland.

Proposing that China and Taiwan set aside the ideological differences at the heart of their conflict and engage in a sweeping program of economic and cultural exchanges, Ma Ying-jeou, the newly elected Taiwan president, contended that the heightened traffic of people and money would strengthen ties between the two countries, boost their economies and reduce the risk of war. In the renewed power of China in the global economy, a subversive trend is taking place in Taiwan against its prior democratic call for independence. The newly elected president's meeting with the Chinese delegation in November 2008 further confirmed a desire for alliance rather than animosity. Amidst protests from the DPP supporters, calls for a pan-Chinese identity from Taiwan iterated the desire to be ethnically recognized as Chinese while maintaining a separate identity from mainland China politically and linguistically. Mainland China, on the other hand, seems to be reconciling with the notion of Taiwan being part of China and willing to negotiate on the level of economics and trade, neglecting political as well as Taiwan's internal linguistic wars.

Within China, globalization brought gargantuan economic growth and widespread discontent at the same time. From visual art to literature, works subtly criticizing the Chinese

government somehow escape the scrutiny of the government censors in favor of the publicity and wealth that accompanied them. China has received exponential attention and the price tag of many living Chinese artists' work has risen significantly. Take for example Zhang Xiao-gang's "Blood Line," which sold at Sotheby's in 2007 for \$2.1 million.

Contemporary Chinese visual artists use photography, paint, sculpture and installation to express similar concerns about social ills and change. A battery of hot young artists constitutes now well-recognized names on the gallery scene in the West, including Cao Fei, Zhang Da-li, Leong Sze-tsung, Qiu Zhi-jie and Sheng Qi, among others. Acting within an unusual market economy characterized by a centralized political system and adhering to a strictly defined "Chinese style," these young artists seized the occasion to define themselves as participants not only in a global economy (specifically, the red-hot international art market) but on a personal, regional and national scale as well. Cao Fei examines a new era of Chinese cosmopolitan life by subtly depicting subjects on the verge of social and cultural dislocation. "Not Going Home Tonight" (2002) and "Beautiful Dog Brows" (2001) both depict female characters as the topic of newly found sexual freedom, satirizing a society that blindly follows *isms* and movements, or influences from the West. Leong's "No. 6 Huashishang Fourth Lane, Chongwen District, Beijing" (2003) and Zhang Da-li's "Demolition" (1996) speak to Beijing's massive urban transformation and the disappearance of its architectural heritage. The embedded message here is the inevitable and mandatory dislocation of its citizens, along with their familiar, family-oriented life style. The tragedy is most pronounced in the countryside where farmers are sent thousands of miles from their native region to start a life in a completely strange climate and environment.

Sheng Qi's "Me" shows the artist in a picture when he was a little boy in the hand of a presumably hard-working man or woman whose missing finger indicates the result of an accident on the line. The ambiguity is not at first apparent. Industrialization in the global economy has a double edge. It accomplishes wonders in terms of "lifestyle" and such measurable quantitative factors as "living standards." Yet we cannot but help noting the damage to the hand, the price of a vastly enhanced income is a disability. Somehow apart from all this, the child in the picture remains unchanged. The artist does not wish to grow older and have to grapple with the changing society. Like Dorian Gray in reverse, he does grow but wishes to remain innocent in the sense of William Blake's "Songs of Innocence." His identity faces a crisis in this dilemma. Visual work has a lower linguistic threshold and hence is more easily decipherable and consumable across geolinguistic and geo-cultural spaces.

Literature, however, has a hard time finding a global market but it is no less powerful in the indictment of the society's ills. As just one illustration of the condemnation of the poor conditions for workers, I offer my translation of a Chinese contemporary poem in a forthcoming anthology: *China's Fourth Generation Poetry*, by Xie Xiang-nan (□湘南 1974 -):

"Report of a Work-related Injury" (一起工□事故的□□□告)

Gong Hui-zhong
Female
Twenty years old
Native of Jiangxi province
ID Number: Z0264
Department: Molding
Line of Work: Beer machine
Employment Date: 24 August 1997

While stocking beer machine,
product fails to drop into mold
Safety door fails to open
Putting her hand in from the side
to push product down
Hand touches safety door
Mold folds
Crushing hand
Middle finger and little finger
Two segments of middle finger, one segment of pinkie
Result of investigation:
“Violation of factory safety procedures”

Accordingly
her hands had been burnt often.
Accordingly
she had been on the job for over twelve hours.
After the accident, she
accordingly
did not cry.
neither did she
holler
holding her fingers she
staggered

At the time of the accident
there were no witnesses.

忠会
 女
 20
 江西吉安人
 工卡号：Z0264
 部：注塑
 工种：啤机
 入厂：970824

啤塑, 品未落, 安全
 未开
 从面伸手入模内脱
品。手
 触
 安全
 合模

 中指及无名指
 中指2, 无名指一
果
 属“反工厂 安全操作程”

据
 她的手常被机器出泡
 据
 她已工作了十二小
 据事后 她
 没哭 也没
 喊叫 她握着手指
 走

事当 无人
 目 睹

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