Chih-yu Shih *Editor*

# Producing China in Southeast Asia

## Knowledge, Identity, and Migrant Chineseness

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# Contents

# Part I
# Perspectives

# Chapter 1
# Introduction: China and Chinese Migrant Scholarship

**Chih-yu Shih**

**Abstract** The strategy of survival and development of the descendants of Chinese historical migrants, along with their evolving self-understanding, inevitably affects the perspectives on China and Chinese studies in their countries. These perspectives are distinguishable from the perspectives of China studies arising elsewhere because Chinese cultural values and modern national identities are not merely the object of study. These studies simultaneously implicate subjectivity, which pertains to how authors and their readers position themselves among ethnic, national, and civilizational identities. To appreciate Southeast Asian understanding and research on China, studying beyond interstate perspectives is necessary. Our methodology is a preliminary attempt at an anthropology of Knowledge, which stresses the relevance of encounters and choices in the process of knowledge production that mirror and reproduce as well the survival of human groups.

**Keywords** Anthropology of knowledge · Southeast Asia · Sinology · China · Chinese migrant · Chineseness · Intellectual history

Humanity and pragmatism are two distinctive features of how intellectuals of Southeast Asia understand China and Chineseness in the twenty-first century. These features emerge because descendants of Chinese historical migrants comprise a significant portion of the population in Southeast Asian countries. Hence, these descendants live in various versions of the legacy of Chinese humanity, and improve their ways of living according to their present conditions. The strategy of survival and development of the descendants, along with their evolving self-understanding, inevitably affects the perspectives on China and Chinese studies in their countries. These perspectives are distinguishable from the perspectives of China studies arising elsewhere because Chinese cultural values and modern national identities are not merely the object of study. These studies simultaneously

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implicate subjectivity, which pertains to how authors and their readers position themselves among ethnic, national, and civilizational identities. National-level identity necessarily involves dangerous self-interrogation and, at times, politics that is often suppressive and confrontational (Campbell and Shapiro 1999; McClintock et al. 1997). Intellectual writings on China that stick to the ethnic and civilizational levels provide sensible exits. In Southeast Asian Chinese studies, humanities usually prevail over social sciences at these two alternative levels. In addition, how humanities can be instrumental to their choice of identity strategy makes pragmatism an important theme.

Southeast Asian studies of Chinese humanities are intertwined with the changing discourses and practices of Chineseness of indigenous Chinese residents. However, scholars rarely encounter this subject. Chineseness is an intrinsic characteristic for a good number of Southeast Asian countries; some perceive Chineseness is a long, diverse, and evolving phenomenon (Chun 1996; Hau 2004). Studies of humanities imbued with Chineseness are categorically different from those relying primarily on civilizational resources that marginalize Chinese cultural values. For example, humanities in Europe are founded on continental philosophy and church history (CAN 1990; Zürcher 1995). Their epistemological trajectory usually gives rise to an approach based on differences, which examines how the disparity between China and Europe is a model to be emulated or a villain to be converted (Bersick 2012). In addition, studies in Chinese humanities are epistemologically almost irrelevant to Hindu. Indian scholarship on China in the area of humanities is unlikely to incur anxiety toward the loss of certainty as regard to Indian national identity (Shih et al. 2012), although the Indian national identity is constantly disputed by differing local trajectories.

## Historical Contexts of China and Chinese Studies

The colonial administration was the first to document Chinese diasporic communities in Southeast Asia at a time when the Chinese basically identified their motherland as China. To facilitate colonial governance, colonial authorities found Chinese useful collaborators but potentially dangerous groups at the same time (Kuhn 2009; Lee 1991). The China factor in the intellectual construction of China became rooted as Southeast Asia at the outset and went through the Second World War, decolonization, Chinese Civil War, Cold War, and most recently, China rising (Wang and Cushman 1988). The decolonization split the Chinese communities to the extent that rivaling political stands had to be adopted. None of the rivals were generally convincing; nevertheless each stand enlisted some romanticizing and the opportunistic strategy of side taking (Wickberg 1964; Williams 1960; Wilson 2004). The Cold War imposed anti-Communism that rendered Chineseness as suspected liaison with Communist China. In addition, nation building in each country generally discouraged identification with homelands in China. Accordingly, China did not qualify to be a subject of academic inquiry.

To remain culturally Chinese, Chinese studies continued primarily through private schooling, novel, drama, and magazine. This privatized endeavor has induced a hidden string of humanism in the seemingly archaistic study of classic Sinology in Southeast Asia. Sinology is consistently the intellectual source of Chinese literature that undergirds the Chineseness of Southeast Asia. Such Chineseness has evolved into a variety of professional activities that are ostensibly unrelated. A Singaporean drama that reifies a particular type of connection with China as cultural object, a Malaysian middle school Chinese curriculum that enables future generations to enjoy Chinese classics and assimilate Confucian values, and a Philippine professional society that coordinates scholars on China studies, Chinese education, and ethnic Chinese studies share a common string of humanity that indirectly and yet powerfully sustains the Chineseness of many different and changing forms. Together, a Chinese intellectual tradition that preserves Chinese consciousness has been embedded in the history of migration, which readily answers the call for creative modes of reemergence in the resumed and intensive contact with a rising China (Yeoh 2009).

The Second World War instigated the pressure of nation building, which compromised ethnic identities trespassing beyond legal borders. This factor signified the last step for overseas Chinese to turn into Chinese overseas (Chua et al. 1991; Reid and Kristine 2001). Wang (2002a, b) coined the term "Chinese overseas" to indicate the indigeneity of Chinese whose national home is Southeast Asia and yet their ethnicity is Chinese. The process has not been always smooth, as the subsequent Cold War divided Communist China from its anti-Communist neighbors. With overseas Chinese heartedly supportive of their motherland during the latter's War of Resistance with Japan, they immediately suffered the politics of anti-Communism, which reduced their Chinese loyalty as the suspected hot spot of subversive activities. To soothe its neighbors, China formally relinquished its role as Chinese homeland by repealing its permission of dual citizenship (Fitzgerald 1972). Nevertheless, different countries underwent the process with different degrees of severity and elicited various responses.

The defeated Nationalist Party of China that had led the war against Japan, with its determined anti-Communist ideology and firm alliance with the United States, was able to continue providing the intellectual resources of being overseas Chinese from Taiwan. In a sense, the Chinese Civil War continued in Southeast Asia. However, Chinese overseas originally came from China, not from Taiwan. To transfer loyalty from China to Taiwan in accordance with anti-Communism was unlikely to be effective. Therefore, the connection of Taiwan to the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia primarily relied on its alleged authentic Chinese cultural lineage. Before China rising became apparent in the late 1990s, Taiwan supplied the primary human and pedagogical resources of Chinese language to Chinese overseas. Although Taiwanese support made a safer sense politically from the anti-Communist viewpoint, it was not conducive to integration expected from the nation building perspective. The University of Malaya, for example, had to choose non-Chinese Wolfgang Franke to lead the first professional study of Chinese to avoid overly relating to either China or Taiwan (more on this in Chap. 2).

The worst scenario occurred in Indonesia. General Suharto's coup to bring Indonesia to the Western camp came with a massacre on Chinese Indonesians. All of the Southeast Asian nations joining the same camp coincided in their policy of banning Chinese language education. Chinese schools across Southeast Asia went through irrevocable decline, to the effect that Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia in the twenty-first century, with little Chinese inherited, joined the native society in the faddish learning of Chinese language to capitalize on the rise of China. This preoccupation with the language skill contrarily attests to the paucity of social science interest in the study of China. Chineseness may have appeared so indigenous and familiar to Southeast Asian communities that a research on China seems intellectually redundant. In addition, in a country such as Singapore where Chinese comprise 80% of the population, intellectual interests in China could not have avoided the unwanted Marxist or nationalist sensibilities from spreading among the students of China, hence the alienation of the authorities from China studies.

Meanwhile, Thailand has been slightly different. Social science research on China in Thailand has similarly not been competitive as opposed to humanities and religions. Thailand was able to remain independent, while its neighbors experienced European colonization in general and respectively British, German, French, and American colonialism. Chinese Thais were not torn between the European, Chinese, and indigenous forces. Moreover, they were religiously and socially well fit in the whereabouts. With Chinese Thais successfully assimilated, discrimination was indiscernible in the indigenization campaign of Thailand (Skinner 1957; Tong and Chan 2001). Consequently, the people in China have interestingly felt closer to Thailand than other indigenous Southeast Asian communities. The peacefully reduced Chineseness of Chinese Thais, because of the merge (Coughlin 1960), ironically contributes to the misperception of the Chineseness of Thais among the Chinese people in China.

Thailand is therefore in sharp contrast with the situation in Malaysia, where Chinese communities struggle to maintain their own Chinese education and speak Chinese at home. However, Malaysia has been an exception to the extent that the separation along the racial line lingers on (Abraham 1997). Chinese in other Southeast Asian countries, with or without Chinese consciousness, feel comfortable with their indigenous citizenship (Tan 2010; Thung 1998), even in Indonesian where the last anti-Chinese massacre was as recent as 1998 (Lindsey and Pausacker 2005; Purdey 2006). Pragmatism has been the essence of Chineseness in Southeast Asia and of scholarship on China. "Chinese studies" characterize Southeast Asian scholarship on China considerably better than "China studies." Chinese studies include both language and ethnic studies. Although social science studies on China may be lukewarm, social science studies on ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia are common, especially among indigenous Chinese scholars. This case has been true to largely Confucian Singapore, Buddhist Thailand, the Catholic Philippines, and Muslim Malaysia. Implicitly, understanding ethnic Chinese is a substitute for understanding China, but this premise could be politically misled if stated explicitly.

That said, Chineseness has survived several regimes and upheavals in history in various way. In fact, centennial Chineseness quickly reemerged in the aftermath of the short-lived Cold War. In fact, Chineseness has survived several regimes and upheavals in history. Nevertheless, modernity and its statist derivative generated a national consciousness defined by borders reinforced during the Cold War. How Chineseness adapted to these ingrained borders testifies to another feature of Southeast Asian perspectives on China. Namely, Southeast Asian writings on China attend to pragmatism as a principle whereby the symbol of China is constantly reappropriated to present Chineseness in accordance with the contexts and choices of its authors. This study tackles these two distinctive features, which are humanities and pragmatism, of China studies exemplified by selected intellectuals in several Southeast Asian societies. Geographically, these studies cover Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China.

The level of connection between China and Chinese civilization is one of the two major parameters that determine the nature of the context that intellectuals face in writing about Chineseness and China. For the Chinese descendants, the conscious connection of Chinese civilization and difference from contemporary China are how the Chinese community preserves their sense of dignity in face of domestic ethnic politics. However, this pursuit of civilizational linkage inadvertently generates misperceptions in China that the Southeast Asian Chinese are from the same Chinese group. For non-Chinese Sinologists in Southeast Asia, their research on Chinese civilization is often functional to the restoration of relationship between their government and the Chinese government. Their scholarship could contribute to a different misperception in China, in which their countries are considered culturally inferior to China. In short, civilizational studies that serve pragmatic purposes in Southeast Asia may backfire to the extent that it reinforces China-centrism among the academics in China.

The other parameter is the interethnic relationships existing in each Southeast Asian country. Judgment on how to improve interethnic relationships affects the academic agenda and approach to Chinese humanities. This is particularly true in Peter Ngeow's description of Malaysian pedagogy in his article in this collective volume. For the Chinese communities to survive domestic politics, the emphasis on a common origin in China would be counterproductive. To ease their assimilation into indigenous politics, the Chinese communities can do better by showing how a Chinese community in one neighborhood is categorically different from other communities in another neighborhood because they are practicing and combining Chinese and local customs in their own ways. Ethnic Chineseness is Southeast Asian than Chinese. China is as foreign to the Southeast Asian Chinese as to indigenous communities.

To appreciate Southeast Asian understanding and research on China, studying beyond interstate perspectives is necessary. State or national-level studies of China exist, but those analyses are popular primarily with media commentaries and think tank reports, which sometimes take alerted and alarmist standpoints. Thus, short-term analyses such as these perspectives tend to be volatile over time. Often the national-level analysis is mutually estranging even though the analysis reports

on friendly relationship with China. At this level, the Chinese humanities that inspire local intellectuals, Chinese descendants, and indigenous Sinologists are largely irrelevant. Nevertheless, these latter groups carry Chinese humanities through domestic and international upheavals and train China scholars of future generation. John Wong could be an exception of national-level writer. His economic analysis is one of a kind that attends to the distinctive features of Chinese economy that no other Western economist has ever done. According to Chuei-ling Shin's article in this collective volume, this is because Wong's pragmatic sensibility directs his focus on real and pragmatic China, as opposed to the methodologically oriented agenda of the mainstream economics.

Extensive and deep knowledge on Chinese cultures and phenomena are available at the civilizational and the ethnic levels. This observation is probably true anywhere because Chinese migrants all over the world make a significant ethnic presence. Civilizational studies focus on how Chinese humanities are analyzed and simulated in similar ways or reappropriated and practiced in different ways, in which both directions claim their authenticity as dubious, and challenge the impermeability of territorial borders, and yet reproduce a kind of root consciousness (Katzenstein 2012). Ngeow and his colleagues examine the interaction between civilizational and ethnic components. According to their research, components of Chinese civilization are always multidirectional as these features are acquired via classic texts, fiction and dramas, and religious and ancestor worship. Reciprocal civilizational exchanges make the Chinese ways of life better accepted outside the dense Chinese cultural areas and make the Southeast Asian indigenous ways of life better acquired by the Chinese migrant communities and their descendants.

Ethnic studies, however, do not focus on how acquisition, succession, and innovation of Chinese civilization have made things easier for its practitioners. Rather, ethnic studies attend to how Chineseness survives in a larger national environment. The discovery of distinctive characteristics is usually the goal of ethnic studies of China. Thus, any particular ethnic Chinese group can and ought to be different from another as these ethnic groups are different from non-Chinese groups. If civilizational studies indicate the obscuring of national and ethnic borders by taking note of the spread and mix of Chinese values and rituals, ethnic studies rely on the possession of the same values and rituals to claim distinction. Civilizational studies are inclined to find results that are simultaneously Chinese and Southeast Asian, whereas ethnic studies are disposed for one of neither just Chinese nor just Southeast Asian (Chow 1997; Suryadinata 2005).

The ethnically sensitized motivation and the civilizational-accommodating methodology together achieve the same function for opposite political effects between Singapore and Malaysia. This same effect consists of the preservation of the national identities of both countries. In Singapore, the political authorities are consciously estranged from ethnic Chineseness to make the construction of a multicultural nation convincing. The use of civilizational resources from the West allows the reconnection with China to proceed without the unwanted implications of Singapore joining the trend of China rising, which could dangerously alienate, and possibly threaten, its Southeast Asian neighbors. In Malaysia, however, ethnic

consciousness reflects the ubiquitous struggle for survival in the predominantly Malayan and Islamic environment. For Chinese descendants in Malaysia, the connection with Chinese civilization is the foundation of collective dignity that competes for equality and recognition in their nation. This approach is a different type of nation building agenda from that of Singapore. While Singaporean Chinese join officially sanctioned English education, the Malaysian Chinese funds private Chinese education.

In Malaysia, as Ngeow and his colleagues demonstrate, the academic department of Chinese language and classic Sinological studies are not separate disciplines. The Chinese communities are strongly involved in the continuation of Chinese language education at all levels. Children of Chinese descendants go to Chinese schools that their communities privately sponsor. This support extends to college education after Chinese language was made an official discipline. The intensive interaction between the Chinese communities and Chinese language education provides a case of living Sinology. Sinology and Chinese language are no longer limited to the classics or in the classroom. The Chinese languages and values, which are practiced in the Chinese communities, accompany the pedagogy of education. Even in think tank analysis, this Sinological rooting has a certain degree of truth. Chuei-ling Shin's study of East Asian Institute in Singapore in this book, for example, detects a genealogy that began as an institute of Confucianism.

Equally importantly, social science disciplines in general and sociology and anthropology in particular are presently the components of the academic department of Chinese literature and language (Franke [1963] 1969). The Chinese language program in the University of Malaya is responsible for obtaining and recording nuanced practices of Chinese communities, for introducing the diversity of local Chinese communities, and ensuring these features less of the integrated mass that appeared threatening to the authorities during the colonial period and the Cold War (Suryadinata 2007a). Colonial officials and the subsequent national authorities treated Chinese descendants as possible sources of conflict in light of their perceived alliance with political China (Suryadinata 2007b; Wang 1999). The indistinguishable boundary between China studies and Chinese studies continued in the aftermath of the Cold War. However, the Chinese descendants contributed actively to the irreconcilable differences among Chinese, which dissolved the threatening image of being inadvertently lumped together. This representation of incongruent Chinese communities shows the diverse ways to see China (Reid and Kristine 2001; Suryadinata 1997a; Wang 1998).

Vietnamese scholarship on China and Chinese studies are similarly embedded in the recollection of Chinese civilization, even though scholars are not of Chinese descent. Vietnam encountered the intrusion and occupation of colonialism and imperialism in the late nineteenth century. Chih-yu Shih, Chih-chieh Chou, and Hoai Thu Nguyen's article shows that Chinese humanities continue to provide sources of imagination that support the establishment of Vietnamese national identities in face of the two colossal civilizations of the Chinese and the West. In fact, Nam Nguyen's research details how early literature reveals a tendency for people who resisted Western influences to enlist civilizational resources from

Confucian texts. The response of Chinese intellectuals of the same period to the Western influences also served as possible models for the Vietnamese counterparts seeking to preserve Vietnamese subjectivity. Vietnamese Sinologists are embedded in the Chinese classics such that they could draw lessons to form their own strategy of survival.

In the early-twentieth century, a noteworthy parallel existed between Vietnamese and Japanese Sinologists with regard to their treatment of Chinese classics. For an example, in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* Japanese intellectual reading used to incur a sense of learning as if the fiction came from a common history shared by the Chinese and Japanese (Tung 2013). Later, the fiction became an object of study with scholars taking the role of external examiner. Although still popular in Japan today, the historical novel is seen as exotic image of foreign culture for sale on the consumer market. Nam Nguyen's fascinating tracing illustrates that the Vietnamese Sinologists who studied the wisdom of the Confucian saints or the historical records as if these were their saints and records found their texts as thinking weapons in resisting Western influence at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite China and Vietnam being on the same footing in their facing of the West, perceptually they were two entities. These scholars learned from the Chinese responses to the West viable options for Vietnam to consider. These options were already different from the individual learning derived from the saints to improve individual moral cultivation. However, Confucianism or Chinese saints were not reduced to an exotic product for sale on the contemporary consumer market in Vietnam.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Vietnam took modernist stand. From an evolutionary point of view, the Confucian impacts on Vietnam necessarily dropped because Confucianism simply could not cope with the requirements of modernization. However, Chinese humanities proved to be long living. Shih, Chou and Nguyen note that Ho Chi-minh, who led the independence of Vietnam, was by himself a lover of Chinese culture, and he was an excellent Chinese poet. Sinologists in Vietnam were able to sustain their own studies despite Westernization of the society. After independence in the 1950s, many Vietnamese scholars went to China to study. The freezing of relationship with China in the 1980s due to the war in 1979 witnessed another strike on Chinese studies because Chinese humanities were useless in resolving the conflict between China and Vietnam. Nevertheless, these humanist sensibilities survived this low period and international relations with China were revived during the late 1990s. Shih, Chou and Nguyen specifically present two veteran Sinologists of this quality in their article.

The cyclical history of Chinese studies in Vietnam indicates a national choice between China as a good model or an irrelevant one. Nam Nguyen's article picks up one particular point of history that witnesses the parallel of the good and the irrelevant at the same time. Pragmatism plays a guiding role in this movement. Chinese humanities remain the source of inspiration during the time China was considered a good model. Learning from the Chinese model could more smoothly proceed along a ready revelation of the shared civilization Vietnam has had with

China. Private studies of Chinese humanities have never ever ceased. Despite the problematic relationships between the two nations, Sinologists are always prepared to answer the call for a humanistic portrayal of China whenever politics of the times in Vietnam demanded this view. Chinese humanities remain strong at a deeper level, intertwined with the daily lives, and ubiquitous in providing perspectives on events and the wisdom of decision-making. With the Communist Party of Vietnam ruling stably, studies of contemporary China served the purpose of the nation and remained instrumental. This observation means that Chinese humanities, in light of its availability and adaptability, will continue to be part of the major elements in the Vietnamese academic training of scholars on China. In addition, the reading of Chinese materials will still be the way Sinologists learned about Chinese affairs in order to inform their own policy makers, and will be the method they use to train Vietnamese think tank researchers to study China in the future.

Non-Chinese descendant Sinologists are used to textual analysis that record grand traditions and major Chinese values. Nam Nguyen's study of early twenty century Sinologists in Vietnam in this issue displayed this feature. Their use of Chinese humanities has little to do with supporting the claim of distinction or subjectivity than the scholars of Chinese descent, who perceive the loss of Chinese consciousness among the younger generations but hope to restore such consciousness. While veteran Vietnamese Sinologists are deeply engrossed in Chinese humanities, they rarely lose Vietnamese consciousness when enjoying their studies as do other East Asian Sinologists, who typically conceive of a major research goal as one of proving their Confucianism is not the same as Chinese Confucianism (Chun 1968; Tanaka 1993). The civilizational approach to China studies has the potential to bridge the gap that defenders of territorial borders contrive at the national level.

Ethnic studies of Southeast Asian Chinese similarly rely on Chinese humanities to maintain or to restore Chinese consciousness. Ngeow, in this collective volume, traces those public and private researchers who look into clothing, conventions, languages, and subjective awareness to show how Chineseness has evolved (Suryadinata 1997b; Tan 2004). Contemporary cultural studies extend to dramaturgical and identity studies. Multiculturalism leads to the research on mass politics in examining how Chineseness affects the struggle for civil rights and the participation in competitive electoral campaigns. Socioeconomically, the Chinese descendants in Southeast Asia are the first to take advantage of business opportunities since the beginning of socialist reforms in China. New migrants arrive in Southeast Asia to answering the need for human capital (Liu 2005; Liu and Wong 2004). Singapore is most active in this regard. The intensity of human interflow is another reason as to why ethnic studies of Chinese communities and studies of China cannot be separated.

National level analyses have not surged to any significant level to claim a community of Sinologists in most Southeast Asian countries. Research institutes were set up in major universities such as Chualalongkorn University, University of Malaya, National University of Singapore, and Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, to study China. Attempts were made in recent years to join the English

world by publishing English journals and books. Even though more writers are joining the national-level studies of China, mostly from intelligence-, event-, and policy-oriented perspectives, these scholars are predominantly trained Sinologists in the traditional sense. Their insight on Chinese affairs is rarely theory-informed. Rather, common sense embedded in generations of investment in Chinese humanities is the foundation of the confidence of scholars in their capacity to follow Chinese events quickly and analytically. This observation is true to scholars of Chinese descendants as well as non-Chinese Sinologists. The notion of a China threat is rarely popular among them despite they may account for only a minority in the public forum.

Generally, Southeast Asian Chineseness does not answer the call for re-worlding in the contemporary international relations literature (Tickner and Blaney 2012, 2013), which rises on multiculturalism and its capacity for appropriating hegemonic institutions and values for the use on each specific site. Sitedness, re-worlding, and multiculturalism could be inspiring to any group or place that seeks ways of representing local subjectivities that are neglected by the mainstream discourse. However, existing literature on Southeast Asian Chineseness that attends to their sitedness is mainly interested in showing differences that are not resistant. Shin's paper indicates a way of economic analysis that alarms at neither the threat of China rising or China disintegrating. Rather, she shows how Singapore as a model for China reflects the immigrant society's quest for a sense of superiority. This difference aims at soothing the anxieties of indigenous communities toward integrated Chineseness answering to the rise of China. In other words, recognition of sited Chineseness in Southeast Asia is actually a plea for acceptance and not resistance.

The existence of Chinese communities gives the three levels of Chinese studies in Southeast Asia a unique meaning. Humanities support different practical requests by different people. At the civilizational level, humanities transcend territorial borders to prepare for the restoration of relationships undermined by interstate disputes. At the ethnic level, the humanities provide resources to support the claim of differences by making individual Chinese communities independent, less threatening, and easily assimilating into indigenous society. The influence of humanities on the national level analysis is seen in the breeding of the interpretive faculty via the Sinological training of analysts working for the authorities or their think tanks. This is definitely the case according to Nguyen's and Shih, Chou and Nguyen's discussion of Vietnamese Sinology despite that the sore international relations will last in the foreseeable future between Vietnam and China.

The discussion of the book opens with Ngeow, Ling and Fan's Chap. 2 on Malaysia, which specifically identifies three aspects of Chinese Studies, namely Sinology, China Studies, and Chinese Overseas Studies in Malaysia corresponding to the aforementioned three different levels of looking at China: civilizational, state, and ethnic. All these agendas take place within the confinement of the Malaysian state, allowing examining how identity politics in Malaysia shapes the development of these fields and how these fields created different image of China. Sinology depoliticizes China and presents the magnificent Chinese culture as positive element in Malaysian nation building project. Chinese Overseas Studies de-centers

China and examines the multiple identities of the Chinese people. China Studies were officially pushed under the agenda of inter-civilizational dialogue and friendship between China and Malaysia. The chapter detects the emergence of the peculiar "living Sinology" in the pragmatic and humanistic sensibilities of the Chinese Malaysian scholars toward their ethnic identities and embeds them in a civilizational origin in need of their conscious care in order to survive the on-going nation building in Malaysia.

Sinology evolves upon individual choices. Nguyen's Chap. 3 discovers, amidst changes in political, social and cultural conditions, the pressure of new paradigms requires severing some existing modes of knowledge. This speaks of Confucian philosophical and moral values of still a semi-colony and a semi-vassal in the early-twentieth century Vietnam. Sinologists of the time were all Chinese-French-Vietnamese trilingual and literate in Confucian studies in China, France and Japan, each of which sought a way to re-World Confucianism. Vietnamese Sinologists of the time painstakingly promoted Confucianism via reinterpretation and reconstitution of its values, both to rescue Confucianism and to protect indigenous values, national independence as well as cultural distinction. The chapter examines Nanfeng (The Wind of the South) and Youxuebao (Travel and Study), the two particularly important forums for the early intellectuals of the time, to represent Confucian studies in the 1920s and 30s, in order to contextualize contemporary Sinology in Vietnam and its intellectual history.

The last two chapters introduce two modes of scholarship associated with intelligence gathering of the think tank. Even here, humanities can impact indirectly. Shin's Chap. 4 provokes social scientists by the claim that economic research is never value-free, but tells a lot about a researcher's methodological choice and understanding of how knowledge should be. Specifically, she discusses how and why John Wong, the veteran Singaporean expert on Chinese economy develops his own and unique research strategy on accurate reading the Chinese economy. John Wong's conceptual model of Chinese economic development consists of three major components: Singapore as the reference point; economic scale as the first adjusted variable; and the economic development phase as the second variable. He cannot be neatly categorized into any existing school of economic analysis in the Western academic tradition, but pursues an accurate understanding of China through pragmatism and identification and his institutionalized research position constitute the methodological foundations for his research strategy and conceptual framework.

Shih, Chou, Nguyen's Chap. 5 traces the intellectual paths of two Vietnamese Sinologists, Nguyen Huy Quy and Phan Van Cac, tell a distinctive history of Confucian scholarship in Vietnam's think tank on China. Through their intellectual growth, they show how humanities have survived political upheavals of and between the two countries and returned in the process of national reform. The perseverance of humanist concerns demonstrates the relevance of individual determination in the evolution of Vietnamese scholarship on China, indicating an epistemological agency to transcend politics. Three particular aspects emerge as critical in the evolution of their scholarship: family, travelling, and determination.

The mechanisms of historical cycles, strategic silencing, self-learning and human judgment connect the individual paths to the larger historical context of Vietnamese Sinology.

Our methodology is a preliminary attempt at an anthropology of Knowledge, which stresses the relevance of encounters and choices in the process of knowledge production that mirror and reproduce as well the survival of human groups. Between civilization and individual, there could be an unlimited number of cultural sites where one can acquire perspectives through learning, practicing, or simulating particular identity strategies that make sense to the sites, which home the available alternatives for the time being. Not only could the choice of identity at a particular site well be unstable over time, but also the choice of sites in itself is unstable, reducing the choice of identity to no more than the act of taking on particular role except that the latter usually requires a conscious, context-specific, and immediate decision.

The national time challenges individual identities especially of those who are involved in transnational knowledge. The national time is also the modern time that makes the amorphous past existing in non-delineated territory awkward and unbearable. Politics of modernity and nationality took place simultaneously to make strategies of identity intrinsic to the production of knowledge that provides direct hints to one's skill of adaptation. Sinologists are caught between China as the source of one's own civilization and the representation of an alien civilization. Whether one's Chinese ethnicity and understanding of Chineseness are assets or debts depends on one's encounters, the times of interrogation, and one's epistemological reflections.

Globalization obscures the distinction of identity from role due to the increasingly destabilizing effects of globalization on self-other relations. Intellectual paths that come through the transformation—overthrowing, lingering-on, disappearing, reproducing, fading, or backfiring–of the party-state leadership in China as well as its foreign relations are compelled to encounter such dislocation of self-other relations, which generate frustration, hope, emptiness, fear, opportunity, and other types of anxiety. Sites are accordingly as much intellectual, psychological, and social as physical.

Reflections on one's choice of a site from which one has written different things on or about China could begin easier from recalling one's traveling experiences—as an immigrant, a student abroad, a conference participant, a visiting scholar, a field researcher, a tourist or other experiences, whether mentioned or unmentioned in one's curriculum vitae—whereby encounters that necessitate constant decision making are essential. Similar pressures to make a different choice likewise take place when hosting, willingly or not, arriving travelers in various forms—when surrendering to their colonial governing, enlisting their services, reading their writings, subscribing to their religion, consuming their products, marrying their members, and so on. Travel is intrinsically a method of China studies and a methodology of re- or de-Sinicization.

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# Chapter 2
# Pursuing Chinese Studies Amidst Identity Politics in Malaysia

**Chow Bing Ngeow, Tek Soon Ling and Pik Shy Fan**

**Abstract** This chapter seeks to analyze the development of three aspects of Chinese Studies, namely Sinology, China Studies, and Chinese Overseas Studies in Malaysia. Each aspect corresponds to different levels of looking at China: civilizational, state, and ethnic. It also examines how identity politics in Malaysia shapes the development of these fields and how these fields produced different images of China. Sinology depoliticizes China and presents the magnificent Chinese culture as positive element in Malaysian nation-building project. Chinese Overseas Studies decenters China and examines the multiple identities of the Chinese people. China Studies were officially pursued under the agendas of inter-civilizational dialogue and friendship between China and Malaysia.

**Keywords** Intellectual history · Sinology · Chinese overseas studies · China studies · Malaysia–China relations

Kazuo Ogoura, a past president of the Japan Foundation and an academic, once wrote an article in *The Japan Times* that analyzed the declining trends and challenges of Japanese Studies. He observed that a country's strategic, political, and economic fortunes tend to have a corresponding effect on the foreign studies of such country (Ogoura 2006). In contrast, the rising Chinese political and economic influences have made Chinese Studies to become a prominent field of inquiry in many countries.

Traditionally, Chinese Studies are overwhelmingly concentrated in developed powers such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and Western Europe as well as some major non-Western countries such as Korea, India, Taiwan, Russia, and East

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European countries. However, Southeast Asian countries (with the exception of Singapore and Vietnam), despite having one of the longest historical relationships with China, have been conspicuously absent in the academic studies of China. This is true in Malaysia too.[1]

The case of Malaysia is interesting. Chinese population in Malaysia amounted to about 40% just before Malaya received its independence in 1957, and today the figure stands about 25%. In terms of ethnic composition, Malaysia has the largest proportion of Chinese people in its population, with the exception of Singapore, outside of the Greater China (Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao) area. The Chinese people in Malaysia are remarkably resilient in preserving their own language and culture. Hence, Malaysia boasts the most complete Chinese education system (from kindergarten to college) outside of Greater China. It also maintains a large number of Chinese newspapers and other media outlets. Many Malaysians of Chinese descents also do business and receive education in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Mahua literature (Malaysian Chinese literature) has gained attention in the Chinese literary circle. Malaysia is also the first among the ASEAN countries to establish diplomatic ties with the People's Republic, and it was a pacesetter in this sense among the Southeast Asian countries. Furthermore, China is one of the most important trade partners of Malaysia, and both the government and business communities have recognized the importance of studying China for strategic reasons. And yet, ironically, all these supposed advantages count for very little when it comes to making intelligent and informed studies of contemporary Chinese politics, economy, and society.

Perhaps the intellectual paucity will not be that severe if we take into account a broader conception of Chinese Studies. If we define Chinese Studies to include studies of language and literature, Sinology, studies of Chinese Overseas, and not confine it to the social scientific-oriented "area studies" of contemporary China, then the academic record of Malaysia in this regard will appear to be more respectable. This Chapter therefore aims to answer the following questions: how did the different components of Chinese Studies develop in Malaysia? What factors shaped their development? In their encounter with the political, cultural, and academic environments in Malaysia, what choices did Chinese Studies scholars make? How their personal identities play a role? How such identities interact at the level of nation-state construction in Malaysia?

Based on the materials gathered from the interviews with, memoirs of, and memoirs and biographies about the senior Chinese Studies scholars, as well as other publications and documents, this paper will attempt to answer the above-mentioned questions. This paper is divided into three parts. The first is a discussion of the different levels of Chinese studies. The second presents an analytical history of the various components of Chinese Studies in Malaysia. The last offers a conclusion.

[1]This paper focuses only on the intellectual development of Chinese Studies at Peninsular, or West, Malaysia.

## Chinese Studies: Civilizational, National, and Ethnic Levels

As Prof. Shih Chih-yu has argued, the study of China can be pursued at three levels: civilizational, national, and ethnic (Shih 2014). Each level then corresponds to different aspects of the Chinese Studies field. Civilizational perspective on Chinese Studies stresses the importance of Chinese culture, philosophy, history, classics, literature, arts, etc., where things Chinese worthy of serious scholarship are not confined to the territory governed by the nation-state only. It does not see the state as the most important unit. Instead, examination of the development of Chinese civilization that extends beyond the conceptual constrains of the state seems to be more pertinent. Sinology (*guoxue/hanxue*) perhaps is the best illustration of civilizational perspective on Chinese Studies. Traditionally, Sinology, which was first pioneered in Europe, maintains a certain detachment from active involvement in contemporary developments of China the political entity (Brødsgaard 2008, 35). Firmly grounded in the humanist tradition, its main focus is on the Chinese "high culture," mostly recorded in texts. The pursuance and study of Chinese texts, language, and culture make Sinologists less reliant on the use of observation or interviews as firm basis for the production of knowledge about China. Field research often is less about interviewing people or participant observation but more about discovering and collecting written materials engraved in various places. Consequently, Sinology can thrive without being able to have access to China, as long as texts are available. Often, its critics charge, but which Sinologists will accept and see as strength instead, that the kind of knowledge about China that is produced under this kind of scholarship is "ideographic," unable to lend to comparison or generalization.

The next level, China as a nation-state, is best captured by the modern, largely American-developed, social scientific-oriented "area studies" (*quyu yanjiu*). There is no question that area studies flourished under the Cold War context. Supported by generous funding from philanthropy foundations (Rockefeller and Ford) and government (National Defense Education Act), many American universities were happy to establish area studies centers. Grounded in social science disciplines, and believing that theirs were more "scientific" and offer "nomothetic" instead of "ideographic" explanations, area studies developed often time in revolt of the traditional Sinology, Egyptology, Indology, etc. (Pye 1975; Wallerstein 1997). Notwithstanding that many area studies scholars become defenders of the areas they study against US policies toward these areas, the knowledge produced under area studies is generally considered strategically useful by government policymakers. Area studies therefore tend to operate on the basis of nation-state, the primary unit in modern international relations. It incorporates the theory and methodology of the modern social science disciplines: political science, sociology, economics, etc., and often the tension area studies scholars have are with their disciplinary colleagues (Pye 1975; Szanton 2004). Access to the studied area (fieldwork) is crucial, but absent that access, observing, and scrutinizing contemporary documents and state's policies and actions can also generate knowledge with proper methodological tools.

At the ethnic level, the people themselves become the object of research. The vast Chinese diaspora has created the field of "Chinese Overseas Studies" (*haiwai huaren yanjiu*) in many countries, including Southeast Asia. The relationship between this field and China, however, is a bit more complicated. The Chinese diaspora has been a phenomenon for at least hundreds of years historically, but it only became a "research" topic when the Chinese presence was perceived to be an "issue" that needed to be dealt with. Many pioneers of this field hence were colonial administrators, who needed to understand and document the political, cultural, social, and economic dynamics of the Chinese people under their territory. Indigenous writings also sometimes described the Chinese, but often in worrying and xenophobic terms. The officials and scholars from China, who for a long time did not care about these overseas migrants, however came to see them as coethnic forces that could contribute to China's struggle or modernization in the modern era. Their studies of overseas Chinese communities henceforth were shaped by the nationalist agenda. For the ethnic Chinese themselves, they also developed a sense that they should preserve their history, identity, and culture through studies of their own communities. More significantly, many of them naturally pondered the issue of political loyalty toward China, local, or colonial authority. Finally, there were the professional studies from the academia, which did not really develop until the post-WWII era (Wang 1998, 4–6, 2002, 61–67). The different agenda henceforth resulted in different emphasis in the research of this field. Some may emphasize the political and economic connection between China and Chinese overseas, some may see the Chinese overseas culture and society as a substitute for studying China, while some others may approach this field from the perspective of interethnic relations in the local society. In the first case, studies of Chinese overseas overlap with China Studies as it touches upon an aspect of foreign relations of China, and how Chinese overseas make an impact within China. In the second case, the field complements Sinology, or could be seen as a way to understand the Chinese world. In the third case, not much connection to China is related, and sometimes, inaccessibility to Chinese language is not even considered an obstacle.

## Chinese Studies in Malaysia

Malaysia is an ambitious project that attempts to forge a nation-state (what kind of nation-state it should be can still generate no consensus) out of three major ethnic groups (in west Malaysia only): the majority Muslim Malays and the substantial Chinese and Indian minorities, who share cultural and ancestral ties with two large Asian civilizations and states (China and India). In addition, Malaysia also has British colonial influences. To a large extent, Malaysia is a site of civilizational encounters (Malay, Islamic, Chinese, Indian, and Western). However, this also makes the Malay majority to be suspicious of the Chinese and Indian minorities as conationals of foreign countries. In the case of China, the suspicion was even more pronounced because of the anticommunist stand the government maintained and the

affinity between the Malayan Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party. At the same time, ethnic politics inevitably permeates into various spheres of life, including academia. While many of the Chinese and Indians are keen to protect their own culture, education, and ethnic identity, substantial Malay opinions are that the country is a Malay-majority state so these minorities should accommodate and eventually assimilate into the Malay culture. Since the 1970s, the New Economic Policy of the government in overall has been to provide affirmative action to the majority Malays, strengthen Malay political power, and emphasize Malay culture and language. All these factors made the development of Chinese Studies not a simple matter of intellectual pursuits by individual scholars only, and to a large extent, it interfaces with the identity politics in Malaysia.

In the following, this paper will discuss the developments of Sinology, Chinese Overseas Studies, and China Studies (corresponding to the civilizational, ethnic, and nation-state levels, the order between the nation-state and the ethnic level is changed because of the affinity between Sinology and Chinese Overseas Studies in Malaysia).

## *Sinology at the Department of Chinese Studies, University of Malaya*

The Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Malaya was established in 1963. Reportedly, when the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur planned to appoint an acting head for the new Department of Chinese, it did not want anyone from either the People's Republic or Taiwan, due to political reasons (Franke 2013, 296).[2] Instead the University approached Wolfgang Franke, an eminent German Sinologist, who was unwilling to pursue research in the politically charged environment in both the People's Republic and Taiwan as well; hence conducting research with a substantial Chinese surrounding could only be materialized in Southeast Asia (Franke 2013, 295, 362).

The Department of Chinese Studies was not set up as a typical department of Chinese that focuses only on language and literature. Instead, it was designed to be a multidisciplinary department focusing on all aspects of Chinese society and culture, or in short, a Sinology department. The model of scholarship that Franke established left an intellectual legacy in the Department, including the strong emphasis on researching the local ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia, especially its cultural aspects. In a short essay written to envision the character of the department, he wrote:

[2]A reviewer of the early draft of this paper also pointed out that traditionally the Chinese Studies departments of the universities under British colonial influence tended to be headed by a non-Chinese Europeans.

> […] It is obvious that Chinese Studies in Malaysia will have to pay special attention to the Chinese living in this country and to their background. Anyone engaged in Chinese Studies in this country should have at least a basic knowledge of the history and the actual conditions of the Chinese in Southeast-Asia. Moreover, there is in this country an almost unique opportunity to do practical field work in research into Chinese traditions which are to a large extent still alive. Gradually the University of Malaya may become a center for the study of and research into Chinese and Chinese civilization in Southeast-Asia. Its facilities for research into Chines language, literature, history, archaeology, sociology, economics and so on may well attract scholars from all over the world (Franke [1963] 1989, 573).

In the subsequent 3 years, he published his first pieces on studies in Chinese overseas, including issues of Chinese education, and began the collection of Chinese epigraphic materials, in addition to carrying out his professional interest in Ming history. Note that in his vision, "Chinese and Chinese civilization" is the focus, not China the state. Franke was an apolitical scholar; he kept a distance from both the People's Republic and Taiwan, while ascertained the values and contribution of Chinese civilization. Given the political sensitivity at that time, this model of heavily humanity-based Chinese Studies scholarship was considered most appropriate in the Malaysian context.

The first department head, Prof. Ho Peng Yoke, was originally a physicist, but eventually developed his interest and made his career in the history of Chinese science, the highlight of which was to become a collaborator with Joseph Needham and director of the Needham Research Institute. Ho was instrumental in putting together a star-filled faculty at the Department, recruiting some of the best European and Taiwanese Sinologists. At the same time, he was also a high-society intellectual who enjoyed good relationship with the establishment. After the 1969 racial riots,[3] the Malaysian government suspended democracy and enacted emergency rule. A National Consultative Council was established to offer opinions to government about how to improve national unity after the racial riots, and Ho was invited to be a member of that Council. After the emergency ended in 1971, he was even offered a cabinet post (which he declined) (Ho 2005b, 93–95). Ho therefore could not be unaware of the sensitivity of racial issue in Malaysia, and how scholarship can become a cultural bridge.

Ho had always insisted upon the view that studies of Chinese science can meaningfully gain much from the studies of Indian science and of Islamic science (and vice versa) and that the West should have a greater understanding of the scientific achievement of the East. By such understanding of different cultures and traditions of science, human conflicts, either at the world scale or in Malaysia only, could be reduced (Ho 1994, 2005a, 2009, 19–23). In his own work he documented the numerous cases of transmission of scientific knowledge between China, the Islamic world, India, and other places. For example, in tracing the development of alchemy in ancient China, he wrote that "alchemy did not develop in splendid isolation in China. It should be looked upon as part of the world enterprise of early

[3]In the general elections in May 1969, the ruling coalition suffered significant setbacks, and afterward racial riots and violence erupted in Kuala Lumpur and other places.

chemistry that resulted in the birth of modern chemistry in Europe" (Ho 2007, 125). The ultimate superiority of Western civilization was demonstrated in advances in science and technology when Western and non-Western civilizations encountered centuries ago. Hence, exploration of common ancient achievement in science among the major non-Western civilizations perhaps could foster significant intercivilizational understanding, interethnic harmony, and even economic achievement:

> Asia has produced three great cultures that influenced the development of science in Europe in the past, namely Chinese, Hindu, and Islamic, in alphabetical order. The consciousness of its own heritage has greatly stimulated the Chinese to participate as a full member of the global community of scientists and technologists of today, and we all witness the remarkable economic growth of China in the past decade. Similarly, we can now see the same to be happening in India. Malaysia is a country where all three great cultures meet. Perhaps some attention given to the study of science and technology aspects of its heritage would stimulate more interest among its people in science and technology leading to a greater economic growth—at the very least the sharing of common heritage would go a long way to promote harmony and goodwill among people of the three different cultures that would be fundamentally even more important than economic growth itself (Ho 2005a, 18).

Scholarship, therefore, could be seen to facilitate significant interethnic and intercivilizational understanding that would be vastly important to the nation-building project in Malaysia.

Ho Peng Yoke's chairmanship of the department was succeeded by his doctoral student, Prof. Ang Tian See, whose doctoral dissertation at the University of Malaya was praised by Needham as on par with or even exceeding those of Cambridge University (Ho 2006, 13). Ang's greatest scholarly achievement was in the history of Chinese science and mathematics; he also once worked with Needham, but his interests also extended beyond that. The courses he started or taught included classical Chinese literature, modern Chinese literature, and Mahua literature (Khor and Chia 2006). After Ho and Ang, however, the strong beginning of research into the history and philosophy of Chinese science at the department sadly did not sustain itself. After all, this field requires combination of scholarly expertise in both humanistic and hard science knowledge, a rarity in many instances.

Without the history of Chinese science to serve as a cultural bridge, the Sinology at the Department turned toward a much more Sino-centric orientation. After Ho and Ang, the two another eminent scholars of the department were Prof. Tay Lian Soo and Prof. Lim Chooi Kwa. Together with Ho and Ang, they are pioneers of Malaysian Sinology; as many of their students (and students of their students) become academic members of other Malaysian universities and colleges that have Chinese Studies departments or programs.

Tay Lian Soo studied and received his Ph.D. from National Taiwan University, and his teachers included eminent Sinologists like Tai Ching-nung, Ch'u Wan-li, Yeh Chia-ying, Wang Shu-min, and others. Hence, unlike Franke, Ho, and Ang, Tay could be said as the first one to inherit directly the finest tradition of Chinese scholarship. He made his career in studies of Classical Schools (*zhuzixue*), especially the Legalist school of thought, textual criticism (*jiaokanxue*), authentication

studies (*bianweixue*), and historical studies of the Malaysian Chinese society and education. Tay's Sinology is notable for its comprehensive treatment of a particular topic or subject. He once commented that there are two kinds of Chinese Studies/Sinology, one that clarifies the Classics, covering highly specialized fields such as bibliography, textual criticism, authentication studies, annotations—the purpose of which is to ascertain the authenticity of the author, date, and content of the Classics, while the other analyzes the Classics, develops and examines their philosophical system and historical context (Tay 1993, VII, 2008, 332). The first kind of Sinology was crucial because many nongenuine writings had been attached to different versions of the Classics, the clarification of which would then lay the foundation for a more accurate assessment of the Classical thinkers in the second kind of Sinology. In his own work on the thinkers of the Legalist school (Tay 1993, 1998), he applies this kind of approach and achieves recognition from the Sinology's circle.

Tay Lian Soo spent 17 years in Malaysia before he departed for a professorship in Hong Kong. He was deeply involved in the affairs of the Malaysian Chinese community, such as overseeing the revision of Chinese language and literature textbooks for the Chinese secondary schools, founding the Malaysian Chinese Cultural Association, and, perhaps the most important for scholarship, pioneering several important works in the history of the Malaysian Chinese society, including a four-volume history of Chinese education. Trained as a Sinologist, Tay could have chosen to focus exclusively on classical Sinology. However, his extension from classical Sinology to Malaysian Chinese studies is both driven by his love of and his mission to preserve and spread Chinese culture. Interestingly, he saw that there was an inherent tension for both fields to be housed within a single department. In his words,

> For the Malaysian Chinese community, Chinese Studies department and Malaysian Chinese studies are both important. The former is the birthplace of our culture, the source of our civilization, ethics and morality, and without it, our culture will decay. The latter is our shelter and foothold, which we must understand, in order to know the past and predict the future, and chart our future steadfastly (quoted in Mao 2002, 226).

In another instance, he argued,

> [The purpose] of Chinese Studies department is to study Chinese literature, history, and philosophy, and through this study, we will be able to know Chinese culture, absorb its essence as the foundation for us (the Chinese people) and for Malaysian society…If subjects of Malaysian Chinese studies become the main theme [of the department], then I will not agree. Think about it, how long a history the Malaysian Chinese people have? What is the essence?…When the curricula of the Chinese Studies department become all about Malaysian Chinese Studies, is it still Chinese Studies department (Tay 2008, 329)?

Despite the example of himself who made huge achievements in both fields, Tay is very adamant and clear that classical Sinology should remain the core of the Department because it is where the finest Chinese culture can be learned, whereas studies of Malaysian Chinese should assume a more peripheral status, a vision departed significantly from Franke's vision.

There is no question that Tay identifies strongly with Chinese culture and civilization ever since his youth (Tay 2013, 1). However, there is also without a doubt that he identifies closely with Malaysia too. He was once asked why he wanted to go back to Malaysia after his Ph.D. from National Taiwan University: he could have gone to more advanced centers of Sinology rather than returning to a rather "backward" academic environment in Malaysia. Tay's answer was straightforward: "I am a Malaysian" (Tay 2013, 5). Tay could not see how Chinese culture could become an obstacle for nation-building in Malaysia. On the opposite, he argues that Chinese culture in Malaysia could be a constructive partner with other cultures in shaping a new Malaysian culture, and that the long history of Chinese culture has already proved that Chinese culture historically has always welcomed exchanges and interactions with other cultures (Tay 1999, 140–141). Unfortunately for Tay, his service at the University of Malaya also coincided with the rise of the pro-Malay New Economic Policy in the 1970s and 1980s, where most Chinese began to feel the pressure of marginalization in politics, culture, and business. The nation-state project began to take a turn toward a Malay-centric nationalism. Assimilationist pressures started to build up. It was only in the early 1990s that such pressure, to a certain degree, relaxed. As the best Sinologist in Malaysia, he felt terribly painful for such a state and felt compelled to respond, even if it was to no avail. Tay's scholarship, in this sense, was conceivably also driven by a sense of crisis for the identity and culture of the Malaysian Chinese.

The last of the four, Prof. Lim Chooi Kwa, was a doctoral student of Ang, and hence, by extension, a grand student of Ho. However, Lim's style of scholarship was much more similar to Tay rather than Ho. Lim's primary area of scholarship is classical Chinese literature, and secondary is studies of Malaysian Chinese community. He served as the principal editor of *A History of Malaysian Chinese* and *A New History of Malaysian Chinese*. In explaining his turn toward studies of Malaysian Chinese, he mentioned how being a Malaysian Chinese, being a scholar teaching at the Department of Chinese Studies, he was obliged to contribute to this area of scholarship (Lim 2013, 9). Much like Tay, Lim's love for classical Chinese literature was natural, while his interests in the studies of the Malaysian Chinese community were fostered within the environment in Malaysia [in fact, most Malaysian staff at the Department are, on the one hand, Sinologists or literary experts, and on the other hand, assume a research area in Malaysian Chinese studies (Wong 2005)]. Lim also mostly published in Chinese, and was actively involved in the affairs of the Chinese community. After his retirement from the University of Malaya, he continued to serve as the director of the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies and the head of the Chinese Studies department in a new university.

As much as Sinology would want to stay out of politics, it does have political relevance in a multiethnic Malaysia. From Wolfgang Franke, Ho Peng Yoke, and Ang Tian See to Tay Lian Soo and Lim Chooi Kwa, seemingly the Department of Chinese Studies went through a transformation from a hopeful participant in the Malaysian nation-building project to a defensive articulator for Chinese culture in the face of the assimilationist pressure generated from the new Malay-centric nation-state. This could be illustrated best by contrasting Ho Peng Yoke and Tay

Lian Soo. Ho was a noticeably cosmopolitan scholar and was well acquainted with the university authorities, the establishment, even with the Malaysian royalty. Tay, a master Sinologist whose achievement was on par with Ho, his reputation within Malaysia however basically was confined within the Chinese-speaking community. He probably was on no friendly terms with the establishment too, and had to stand to guard the Chinese culture from being attacked and assimilated. The type of scholarly training one received played a role here, but it seemed that to a large degree, the changing context of identity politics in Malaysia has also been determinative of such transformation. On the other hand, the civilizational focus of Sinology depoliticizes China in the sense that it does not have to deal with the real communist giant that posted a security threat to the country but only a noncontroversial "China" that exists in classics, arts, history, and literature.

## *Studies of Malaysian Chinese Community*

Chinese Overseas Studies (with a strong focus on the Chinese in Malaysia) can be said to form the main bulk of Chinese Studies in Malaysia. The number of scholars who have participated in this field is indeed large, and covers a diverse range of subjects. So in this section we can only selectively discuss a number of representative individuals and groups. Its history is long as well, extends to pre-independence days. One pioneering scholar (also a colonial administrator) was Victor Purcell; his *The Chinese in Malaya* and *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* remain as classic works in the English language. In the Chinese language stream, there was the "Nanyang Studies" (*Nanyang yanjiu*) group. "Nanyang Studies" refer to an early generation of scholars, who were concentrated in the South Seas Society (*Nanyang xuehui*), founded in 1940. The society boasted eminent scholars such as Hsu Yun Tsiao, Chang Lee Chien, Yao Nan, and others. Often their work was not on the Chinese community per se but focused on the history of the Southeast Asian region and its people. This group of scholars mostly came from southern part of China, and also inherited from China the "frontier history" (*bianjiangshi*) and "China-foreign communication history" (*Zhongwai jiaotongshi*) scholarships. In its early years, the scholarship undoubtedly adopted a China-centered perspective toward the studies of "Nanyang." It was even originally considered as a branch of Sinology, because many historical materials pertaining to Southeast Asia can be culled from classical Chinese historical works (Lew 2013, 12–22). But as more scholars developed "Nanyang consciousness," their scholarship was driven in part to make the Chinese readers more aware and conscious of the importance and relevance of "Nanyang." In the context of political independence in the 1950s, it also promoted a sense of nationhood.

"Nanyang Studies" flourished from 1930s to early 1970s (apart from the interruption of the Pacific War), and was mainly based in Singapore's Nanyang University (1955–1980). It was a strongly history-based discipline; almost all scholars affiliated with it were historians, with some exceptions in political science

or sociology. From the 1970s onward, "Nanyang Studies," together with the Nanyang University itself, experienced gradual decline and eventual demise. Hereafter, two trends emerged. First, the baton of the study of Chinese overseas in this region was passed to the Chinese Studies departments in other universities, most importantly at the University of Malaya and National University of Singapore. We have already discussed the Department of Chinese Studies above. Second, the legacy of "Nanyang Studies" was carried on by a number of history graduates of Nanyang University, and among those from Malaysia, they included Prof. Yen Ching-Hwang, Prof. Yong Chin Fatt, and Mr. Lee Yip Lim. They would however shift the focus of historical writing. Remember that "Nanyang Studies" was regionally focused; it was not focusing on the Chinese per se. However, after 1970s, Chinese historical writing from Singapore and Malaysia began to focus mostly on the Chinese overseas in the region (Lew 2013, 153–154). The demise of "Nanyang Studies" and the rise of "Ethnic Chinese Studies" in Malaysia and Singapore also signified a trend, in which locally born scholars of Chinese descent, in facing the emerging assimilationist pressure in the context of the 1970s and 1980s, naturally paid more attention to their coethnics. It was, in short, a scholarship turning to the "struggle for the subjectivity of the Chinese people" (Lew 2013, 155, 179).

A brief account of the intellectual history of a fine product of "Nanyang Studies," Yen Ching-Hwang, will illustrate the way scholarship interacts with identity politics. Yen started as a hopeful history student at Nanyang University. He excelled in Chinese history, but he had been conscious of the necessity of doing more studies of Malaya, especially with the impending independence of the state from colonialism, turning against the advice of a professor (not in the "Nanyang Studies" group) who prodded him to focus on history ofChina (Yen 2008, 46–47). Nevertheless, his interests in Chinese history remained, so naturally he concentrated on the history of Chinese overseas in the region—intersecting the histories of both China and Malaya. His first book traces revolutionary activities of the Overseas Chinese and their contribution to the success of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement in toppling the Qing dynasty. In the last words of this book, he wrote that "… [if]… the Overseas Chinese were to be termed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen as 'The Mother of the Revolution,' then the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya deserve to be honoured first and foremost" (Yen 1976, 318). In this sense, he was affirming the importance of Sun Yat-Sen's overseas revolutionary activities and establishing the subjectivity of the Overseas Chinese in shaping historical events at the same time. Yen was particularly uncomfortable with the new trend of some revisionist scholarship (in the US predominantly) since the 1970s that downplayed the role of Sun Yat-Sen (and by implication the importance of overseas Chinese) and the 1911 Revolution. Years later, he continued to assert that "when the 1911 Revolution is viewed in its totality, the Overseas Chinese did play an important role in the movement leading up to the overthrow of the Manchus" (Huang 2011, 95–96). In this sense, Yen was insistent on establishing the subjectivity of the Overseas Chinese vis-à-vis China itself.

After his Ph.D., he gained an academic position at the University of Adelaide in Australia. Free from the government's constraints in Malaysia, he could have

pursued more China-related topics hereafter, but he chose to remain in the field Chinese Oversea studies, mainly because it remained a "niche area" (Yen 2008, 111–112, 2012, 9–10). In the 1970s, however there was an encounter that made him decide to adopt Australian citizenship. He was attending an international conference in Canberra and met a Malay scholar from Malaysia. Naturally they were chitchatting until the subject turned into Yen's research area. The Malay scholar was irritated and angered that Yen was doing research related to China and Chinese Overseas, implying that Yen was still only interested in things China and not being conscious about or politically loyal to the Malaysian nation. Yen was surprised that a Malay intellectual could hold such views, when all the while in his career he had been conscious not to adopt a China-centered framework and stressed the importance of Overseas Chinese on their own right. He was afraid that the academic environment could be too politicized that he decided to settle down in Australia for good (Yen 2012, 24–25), although he continued to maintain close ties to Malaysia. He also started to see his scholarship on Chinese history in Malaysia as politically relevant. The government's national archive has not preserved much of the historical records of the Chinese people, which could be alleged as a deliberate policy to neglect the historical contribution of Chinese to this country under the pro-Malay ethno-nationalist agenda, in which the historical subjectivity of the Malays as the master of the land has to be well established in the national historiography. In Yen's own words, "I see this as a crisis for the Malaysian Chinese community" (Yen 2008, 249). His historical writing therefore is actually politically important again in establishing the subjectivity of the Chinese people, this time vis-à-vis Malaysia.

Another giant in Chinese Overseas Studies from Malaysia is no doubt Prof. Wang Gungwu. Wang grew up as "an insider in China's 'great tradition'." During his formative young adult years, he experienced firsthand the disintegration of the British Empire and Republican China and the political problems associated with it in Malaya, which shaped his "lifelong pursuit of the big questions: how do civilizations fall apart and recreate order from chaos and how do people's identities change as they adapt to changing circumstances?" (Vogel 2010, vii, viii)

This Chapter wishes to highlight that Wang, despite now maintaining some kind of distance from Malaysia, Singapore, and China to assert his disinterestedness for the sake of professionalism in scholarship, once closely identified with Malaysia. When he was just back from London, fresh with his Ph.D., and given the option to continue teaching at the University of Malaya's campus in Singapore or the newly established branch at Kuala Lumpur, he opted for the latter. He said, "That was a clear indication that my real identity lay in the new country that was being established" (Wang 2010, 26). When the proposal of Malaysia (merging of Malaya with Singapore, Brunei, Sabah, and Sarawak) was materializing, he mobilized his colleagues to come up with a volume on Malaysia, showing his desire to use scholarship to contribute to the nation-building project. He was a founding member of University Socialist Club when in Singapore, and later the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysia's People Movement Party), a party that advocated for democratic socialism and multiculturalism. He did not envision his departure from the University of Malaya, and Malaysia the country, to be permanent. He originally

planned to conduct several years of scholarship in Australia under a "no-pay leave" scheme and came back. However, he ultimately had to resign, and took up Australian citizenship, due to factors from the university and the government, not his own preference. He once received government's permission to visit China, but his second request was turned down by the Home Affairs Minister, who suspected him, because of his Chinese background and his short stint in left-leaning politics, that he probably was a communist sympathizer (Wang 2010, 45–47).

Wang Gungwu is well known for his writings on "multiple identities," especially applied to "the complex and changing identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese as they related to China, to their local regions within China, and to the country where they lived," and through his scholarship, his belief "that people of diverse heritages could enrich local cultures while being loyal citizens to their nations" (Vogel 2010, ix). The personal episode described above hence reminded us once again the relationship between the personal and the political in shaping the intellectual project of this eminent scholar.

As mentioned before, the Department of Chinese Studies has long been a center for studies of Malaysian Chinese in addition to the "Nanyang Studies" group, and after the latter's demise, it could even be considered as the main force in the field. We have already discussed Franke, and Tay's contribution to Malaysian Chinese Studies in the previous section. Mostly, but not always, this tradition is an extension of Sinology. There is another stream within the Department, which also focuses on cultural persistence and adaptation, but takes a different approach, and was started by Prof. Tan Chee-Beng (he spent 4 years at the Department of Chinese Studies, and later he moved to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, at the University of Malaya). The difference between Tan and the earlier Sinology stream at the Department is that Tan and his followers are much more sociological, focusing on observing actual behaviors, through the ethnographical method, while the Sinology stream relies mostly on cultural relics and texts for studying the preservation and change of Chinese culture in Malaysia.

Tan was trained as an anthropologist. His first book is a study of the Baba Chinese community in Malaysia. Baba Chinese are a type of Peranakan (indigenous) Chinese who experienced significant acculturation with the dominant ethnic group, but who have not lost their Chinese identity and become assimilated. Through natural acculturation (meaning without political pressure), these Chinese borrowed and adopted from the Malays certain cultural practices as their own, including most importantly language (with modifications), resulting in a new kind of ethnic category, the Baba Chinese. The natural tongue for Baba Chinese is therefore Baba Malay, but the loss of Chinese language does not constitute the loss of their Chinese identity (Tan 1988). Acculturation goes hand in hand with the persistence of identity. From here, and drawing from the theoretical perspective of Frederick Barth, Tan contended against the use of fixed, objective markers (such as language) as a standard for asserting ethnicity and identity, especially in a multi-ethnic society. Nevertheless, he also does not totally dismiss the importance of these objective markers, for they continue to be the "emotional" and "conservative" elements in identity formation. What is crucial, however, is that with the subjective

component of identity, these objective markers serve as "indicative" rather than "definite" factors (Tan 1988, 3–4). Identity formation and maintenance is therefore not static but dynamic.

In a sense, his anthropology has the effect of de-essentializing Chineseness. Tan would later broaden the theorization of comparative studies of Chinese communities into what he calls the "Chinese ethnographical field of research," in which the Chinese people worldwide is seen as an ethnological field, shaped by different political, economic, and historical contexts in different countries, and respond differently in their patterns of cultural reproduction and adaptation (Tan 2004). The "Chinese ethnological field" thus facilitates comparative studies of different Chinese communities. The concept actually denotes a certain "decentering" of China as well, in which Chinese in China (and different regions of China too) is treated not as the standard in which Chinese communities in other places are measured against, but only one group of Chinese community in the world.

Tan's anthropology complements his activist side. During his university days, he was already an activist sort of student, fighting for the use of Chinese language in universities. However, by his own account, anthropology has significantly influenced his views about Chinese and interethnic issues in Malaysia. He suggested that the issues of Chinese community should be understood and viewed from the perspective of the whole Malaysia rather than just from the Chinese community only. Tan joined and participated in ALIRAN, a liberal NGO in Malaysia that envisions a deracialized Malaysia. He was no friend to the pro-Malay agenda of the government and a harsh critic of the disastrous effect of ethnonationalism on scholarship in university campus (Tan 2013, 12–13, 15, 16), but he also saw some of demands of the Chinese educationalists as unhealthy essentialization of the Chinese people, and as contributing toward patterns of not genuine multiculturalism but a form of "particularist multiculturalism," in which "diversity may be stressed at the expense of unity" (Heywood 2007, 324–325) and civic cohesion. He suggested that while it was perfectly legitimate for the Chinese to protect their rights, it was however incorrect to fight the government's racialist policy with Chinese own terms of racialism ("Lizhi de xunmengzhe: Tan Chee-Beng" (A Rational Dream Pursuer: Tan Chee-Beng) 1989, 6). This put him at odds with some of the Chinese educationists and got him into fierce debates, which was one factor that contributed to his eventual departure from Malaysia and taking up a job at Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he felt that he needed not be "reminded of the ethnicity" issue (Tan 2013, 14).

Finally, there is the stream of Malaysian Chinese Studies that does not look into too much the relationship between Malaysian Chinese and China. The focus is on Chinese as one of the ethnic groups in multiethnic Malaysia, and how this group differs from other groups in terms of political and economic activities, and how it interacts with other groups. Because of its heavily local focus, it can be said to have more association with Malaysia Studies rather than Sinology or China Studies. This does not mean that knowledge about or connection with China is totally absent, but it does mean that China connection is not the starting point of analysis here, and is often not required. Often in this stream of scholarship we can see more

non-Chinese-speaking scholars (English-educated Chinese or non-Chinese) contributing. Examples of which include Prof. Edmund Terence Gomez, who study Chinese business activities, Prof. Lee Kam Hing, who has written on patterns of Chinese political participation in Malaysia, and others (Both Gomez and Lee are attached to the University of Malaya).

While it seems that the University of Malaya has been the center for all kinds of Chinese Studies in this country (which is true), increasingly more institutions are setting up Chinese Studies departments and start making contribution to scholarship. It should also be mentioned here that the subfield of Malaysian Chinese studies is not an exclusive province of scholars attached in universities. The Center for Malaysian Chinese Studies (*Huashe yanjiu zhongxin*), a research center established and financed by the Chinese community in 1985—amidst the Chinese rising sense of crisis because of the government's pro-Malay agenda—has been formed for the purpose to act as some sort of "think tank" for the Chinese people, in addition to its role as a resource center. Although started with an ambitious agenda, its researches into Malaysian Chinese subjects eventually focus on three areas: cultural and historical issues (studies and collections of materials pertaining to the Chinese settlement history), social-economic issues (Chinese demographic patterns, Chinese education, Chinese "New Village"), and interethnic relations (Voon 2011, 35–36).

The field of Chinese Overseas Studies is looking toward Chinese and China at the ethnic level, and in the context of Malaysia, identity politics inevitably intertwines heavily with scholarship. Sometimes it serves as a motivator, other times it interferes in the scholarship. For "Nanyang Studies" scholars, raising the awareness of the Chinese readers regarding their own place of residence has been a leitmotif. For scholars such as Yen Ching-Hwang, affirming the subjectivity of the Overseas Chinese and recognizing their historical contribution to China (and Malaysia) are important. Similarly, for scholars working at the Department of Chinese Studies and the Center for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Chinese Studies is often pursued with the aim of emphasizing Chinese contribution to Malaysia so that it will not be implicitly "disremembered" by the Malay-centered ethno-nationalist historiography. For Wang Gungwu, the efforts to document and analyze the variability of "Chineseness" of the Chinese Overseas aim to dissuade those who hold the myth of a unified Chinese diaspora serving the interests of China, while for Tan Chee-Beng, the "de-essentialization" of Chineseness and the "decentering of China" in his "Chinese ethnographical field of study" complement his desire for a genuinely multicultural Malaysia.

## *China Studies*

Finally, for the last component of Chinese studies—the modern, social science-based "area studies"— the contribution from Malaysian scholars remains wanting. The reason is obvious. Chinese communist victory in 1949, its support for

revolutionary communist parties in Southeast Asia, together with the presence of a large number of Chinese people (many of them still held China-centered worldview at that time) in Southeast Asia, created fears among local indigenous elite that Chinese communities would simply become the extension of the communist giant. Unlike the United States, where academicians were encouraged to study their enemies (this is, after all, one *raison d'être* of "area studies"), generations of scholars were discouraged from studying communist China, fearing that studying a country will become advocating the interests of that country. As Myron Weiner has pointed out, "empathy," a quality sought and admired by area studies scholars, could be seen as being apologists or advocates of the regimes of the areas they study (Weiner 1992, 3) by the powers that be, and Malaysian government is no exception in this regard. The embargo imposed on the materials published in China, and the travel ban, made any serious attempt at China Studies in Malaysia impossible (Voon 2005, 121–122).

However, the Cold War ended, and Malaysia signed a peace treaty with the Malayan Communist Party in 1989. Beginning in the 1990s, travel ban to China was lifted. Malaysia-China ties began to grow significantly, while the government had by then greater confidence in the political loyalty of the ethnic Chinese. Researching China was no longer a taboo, although still a sensitive topic. In as early as 1990, a course on contemporary China was offered at the Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Malaya, by Prof. Voon Phin Keong, a geographer, and by Tan Ooi Chee, a Sinologist. The course, however, was unsustainable, due to the lack of students' interests (Voon 2013, 6). In 1996, a more serious attempt was made, in regard to the establishment of a Department of East Asian Studies. The department was set up under the context of the promotion of Confucian-Islamic dialogue (as part of larger civilizational dialogue), an agenda pushed by the then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and some Malaysian intellectuals in response to Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilization" thesis (in addition to the department, a Center for Civilizational Dialogue was also established). The department incorporated three components: China Studies, Japan Studies, and Korea Studies. The idea was to integrate the studies of three Confucianist societies as part of the Confucian-Islamic dialogue (Obaidellah 2012, 48) under the overall civilizational dialogue agenda. A preexisting Department of Japanese Studies was merged into this new department, but the Department of Chinese Studies, owing to its ties with the Chinese community in Malaysia, cannot be merged, as the loss of the Chinese Studies department would be seen as a political issue. The first department chair, Prof. Voon, to avoid competing with the existing Department of Chinese Studies, designed the China component to be more reflective of China's contemporary developments. Courses on contemporary China's politics and economics were henceforth offered in this department. However, due to the lack of real China Studies scholars, the staff members in the China Studies component in the Department of East Asian Studies were still mostly Sinologists with ties to the Chinese Studies department, including Prof. Obaidellah Mohamad, a rare Malay Sinologist originally teaching at the Chinese Studies department, and Prof. Hou Kok Chung, a student of Tay Lian Soo.

As a product of "civilizational dialogue," the Department of East Asian Studies however seemed to be not very well equipped to become a base for "area studies." Much of its content appears to be still oriented toward the humanities rather than social sciences. The next attempt at China Studies was the establishment of the Institute of China Studies (ICS) at the University of Malaya in 2004. Like the previous attempt, its creation also involved a political heavyweight, this time the then Deputy Prime Minister (and later Prime Minister) Abdullah Badawi, and it is actually also the first of its kind in Malaysia as well, an "area studies" center devoted to a specific country. In a visit to China's Xiamen University in 2003, Abdullah suggested that an ICS be established at the University of Malaya, while a corresponding institute of Malaysian studies at Xiamen University would also be established, to showcase the friendship and mutual learning and understanding of both countries. An ambitious proposal for the ICS was submitted, involving the study and research of almost all aspects of contemporary China (Obaidellah 2012, 48–50), regardless of the fact that there were simply not much scholarly expertise available in Malaysia to realize such an ambitious goal. A Sinologist and the previous head of the Department of East Asian Studies, Prof. Hou Kok Chung, was appointed as the first director of the ICS.

In his interview, Wang (2007/2010) did not give quite high a chance for China Studies to flourish in Malaysia. He suggested that the cautious attitude from the government side, which remains wary that the ethnic Chinese develop too close the ties with China, a scenario that Singaporean government would not have to worry, could be the main reason. In short, identity politics impedes the development of China Studies in Malaysia.

However, although Wang's observations might be true at a deep psychological level among some Malay ultranationalists, there are some other factors in play here, and identity politics also impacts in a different, subtle way. First, the underdevelopment of China Studies may have to do with the nature of area studies, grounded in social science disciplines. The serious underdevelopment of social sciences (only a few Malaysian universities offer true social science programs) means that the few Chinese-speaking graduates in social sciences (or humanities as well) are therefore more likely to focus on issues pertaining to Malaysia and Malaysian Chinese rather than a foreign country.

Second, the model of area studies scholarship that originates from the west has a strong calculative and utilitarian character. Malaysia, in its own self image as a site of civilizational encounter, may echo the views of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a classist scholar, who, in attacking the "manipulative" agenda of the social science-based area studies, argues that "you cannot understand persons if you treat them as objects. You misinterpret a culture if you approach it in order to manipulate it. A civilization does not yield its secrets except to a mind that approaches it with humility and love" (quoted in Wallerstein 1997, 212). The impact of identity politics therefore plays a more subtle role, in the sense that showcasing intercivilizational dialogue and Malaysia-China friendship is an important impetus pushing the development "China Studies" in Malaysia as a way to demonstrate to the ethnic Chinese community that as much as the government maintains a pro-Malay policy,

it is not a racialist regime and values very much intercivilizational, and by implications, the domestic interethnic harmonious relations. Understanding China ironically is not necessary the most important consideration for the official push for China Studies in Malaysia.

The impetus for China Studies henceforth came from top political leadership and was organized in a top-down fashion. Although created with ambition, there actually was limited understanding of what "area studies" kind of scholarship would entail. Library holdings, which have not had much contemporary China-related material to start off, have to expand significantly. Foreign experts, in view of the lack of such experts in Malaysia, need to be recruited for the long term. In short, significant and necessary investments had to be taken, which had not happened in Malaysia. Instead, Sinologists trained in the humanities, who of course had deep "love and humility" toward the Chinese civilization, were appointed to lead China Studies. Although competent scholars in their own field, they were however clearly uncomfortable with the requirements of the "area studies" scholarship. Furthermore, once these departments and institutes were set up, there were no sustained interests from the government anymore.

A brief contrast with the cases of Singapore and Vietnam is instructive here. Singapore understands the strategic significance of the rise of China to a small developed country surrounded by developing countries, and invests whatever that is necessary, including recruitment of foreign experts, to build up China Studies, mainly housed in the East Asian Institute, which has since emerged as the major China Studies center in Asia. Vietnam, like Malaysia, had to rely on the humanities-trained Sinologists to understand China (see the article by Shih et al. in this special volume). But Vietnam, eager to learn and emulate China's success in economic reforms, is serious about understanding China, and its Sinologists were consistently utilized and mobilized in such a way. In contrast, the intercivilizational dialogue and Malaysia-China friendship agendas continue to encourage the continuous focus on the highlights of Chinese civilization, which would be helpful for domestic identity politics as well, and ironically have not much encouraged the serious pursuit of understanding the real contemporary China, including all its follies and achievements.

Notwithstanding the underdevelopment of China Studies in Malaysia, some researches have been done, mostly regarding the impact of China's economic rise and China's foreign policy in regard to Malaysia or Southeast Asia, since these are most pertinent to Malaysia, and not much on domestic China. Incidentally, researches on China's economy or foreign policy toward Southeast Asia to a certain extent can take place without significant use of research materials published in China, so the lack of academic resources about contemporary China may not be a significant obstacle. Often, these scholars' interests in China are ephemeral; their real interests lie in the overall economic and security issues. Other than that, China Studies remain mostly a field undertaken by ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. In this sense, it is also easy for a Chinese-dominant field to be seen as not "Malaysian" enough, and hardly be able to gain more support from the establishment (Tan 2013, 16).

To conclude this section here, despite the growing importance of China to Malaysia, China Studies in Malaysia have not developed as much as Sinology and Chinese Overseas Studies, and often the official push for the development of China Studies is couched not in terms of understanding China objectively and strategically but for the purposes of intercivilizational dialogue or friendship with China. Research topics pertaining to contemporary China hence often involve China's economic and foreign policy impacts toward Malaysia and in the region. Identity politics shapes the *problematique* of the research in a more subtle way, and it also prevents the field from getting more establishment support and recognition.

## Conclusion

As Shih-yu Chih has argued, the intellectual identity of a scholar denotes a certain choice that could be profoundly political, not just personal. In the case of Chinese Studies, to study China as a civilization, nation-state, or ethnic group, and from what position such choice is made, consciously or unconsciously, may involve social and political contestations and negotiations over how China the object and scholars the subject should be defined and seen in different contexts. We can discuss the *problematique* of the different components of Chinese Studies and their relations to identity politics in Malaysia and the China image they help construct in the following Table.

| Levels of studying China | Fields in Chinese studies | Problematique | Image of China |
|---|---|---|---|
| Civilizational | Sinology | • Intercivilizational understanding<br>• Intrinsic values of Chinese culture for Malaysia | • Magnificent Chinese culture<br>• Depoliticized China |
| Ethnic | Chinese Overseas Studies | • Establishing the Subjectivity of the Chinese<br>• Hybrid identities of Chinese<br>• Variability of Chineseness among Chinese overseas | • Decentered China |
| State | China Studies | • Malaysia–China friendship and intercivilizational dialogue<br>• China's economic and foreign policy relationship with Malaysia | • Economically powerful and friendly China |

Sinology and studies of Malaysian Chinese community are able to develop more successfully in Malaysia, in which case China is basically approached at the civilizational and at the ethnic levels. The civilizational perspective on China depoliticizes China, taking away the sensitive question of how to deal with the

threatening communist giant and its relationship with the Chinese population in the country. As a largely humanities-based discipline, it ironically has a very pragmatic and strategic value for the Chinese community here, as it presents the splendidness of Chinese civilization as part of the common non-Western civilization in which the multiethnic Malaysia can draw strengths from. In the more pro-Malay period after the implementation of the New Economic Policy in the 1970s, it stresses and defends the intrinsic values of Chinese culture and civilization.

The ethnic perspective on China decenters China and focuses on the Chinese people outside of China, who vary in terms of different degrees of political, economic, and cultural relationship with China and their residing countries. The diversity and variability of the Chinese people become one of the themes as it serves to protect the Chinese from being seen as simply the extension of China. Often the identities of the Chinese are shown to be complex and hybrid, in order to assert that Chinese can be citizens politically loyal to the authority of their residing countries while remain culturally distinct. Much scholarly writings have also stressed the historical subjectivity of the Chinese as well.

The state perspective on China fails to develop in the Cold War years because of political sensitivity. After the Cold War, the rise of an economically powerful China, which has become one of Malaysia's most important economic partners in the world, did propel the government to pay more attention, but the main impetuses still came from agendas such as intercivilizational dialogue or Malaysia–China relationship, which originated from top political leadership. Such agendas show that the Malaysian government maintains friendly ties with China and appreciates its civilizations, and by implications it values and appreciates the Sino-Malay ethnic friendship and Chinese culture at home, notwithstanding its ethnic preference policy. These agendas however did not necessarily have the urgency to understand China objectively and accurately. The field also fails to attract non-Chinese; it is still mostly scholars of ethnic Chinese descent who are working on China Studies. In Malaysia, this could be seen as not multicultural enough to garner greater support from the establishment.

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# Chapter 3
# A Local History of Vietnamese Sinology in Early-Twentieth Century Annam—The Case of the Bulletin *Du Học Báo* 遊學報

**Nam Nguyen**

> *Our country [China] considers Confucianism the great progenitor of ethics and Confucians take ethics as the ambit for all spiritual sciences*
> Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 *Zhongguo lunlixue shi* 中國倫理學史

**Abstract** Totalitarian but crumbling regimes have always to face a common dilemma. They want to send their young elite abroad, hoping that the intellectual youth will come back well equipped with new knowledge to re-solidify the foundation of their in-peril regime. On the other hand, they undoubtedly feel the threat that those young people will also bring back with them revolutionary thoughts after having been exposed to and enlightened by a whole new world. Founded on Confucianism, early twentieth century Hue Court of Vietnam must defend its limited autonomy, ironically allowed by French colonialism, within their kingdom. Recognizing its own weakness, the court wanted to send its newly growing intellectuals overseas, having them trained in French educational system to better handle the intimidation of "Western civilization" toward intellectual tradition known as *Hán học* (Sinology). Aware of "dangerous temptations" from France as a country of liberty, the court organized a "Society for the Encouragement of Western Studies," and published a periodical called *Du Học Báo* (Bulletin for Overseas Studies) to keep their perspective and ongoing students in track with Sinological tradition. Despite its strong intentions, things were gradually going out of track and far beyond the imagination and control of the court. Conflicts in Vietnamese Sinology in the early twentieth century were thus reflected through the bulletin, and this chapter will analyze the tradition in trial through the stories reported in this publication.

**Keywords** Vietnamese sinology · Bulletin for overseas studies · Confucianism · France · Western civilization

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## Introductory Remarks

Despite more than two millennia of contact between China and Vietnam, the significant growth of Chinese communities within Vietnamese territory has come into being only since the seventeenth century, starting with the flood of Ming loyalist immigrants after the fall of the Ming dynasty and the establishment of the Qing government in China. After their arrival in the southern land, many Chinese successfully assimilated into new sociocultural, political environments, and together, they formed a Sino-Vietnamese ethnic community *Minh hương* 明香 (also written as 明鄉). Several *Minh hương* descendants would later join the Vietnamese Nguyễn 阮 court, and as John K. Whitmore has noted, "the diplomatic corps of nineteenth-century Vietnam was made up largely of *Minh hương*" (Whitmore 1996). As an ethnic group in Vietnam, the Sino-Vietnamese community has, on the one hand, lived out Vietnamese humanitarian traditions on the other, enriched and solidified preexisting Confucian values already well embedded in Vietnamese society. Considered part of Vietnamese tradition, Confucian humanity has been practiced by different ethnic groups, including Sino-Vietnamese people, in Vietnam.

Pragmatic aspects of Confucianism are observable at every corner of Vietnamese daily life. Although not at the same level, Confucian moral values, such as filial piety (Chinese *xiao*/Vietnamese hiếu 孝), or the Five Constants (Chinese *Wuchang*/Vietnamese *Ngũ thường* 五常), have been discussed and observed by both (Confucian) intellectuals and commoners. To serve candidates of pre-modern Vietnam's civil service examinations, a number of synopsis textbooks (Chinese *jieyao*/Vietnamese *tiết yếu* 節要) were compiled, outlining essential points of the Confucian classics, and thus more or less easing the examination preparation by furnishing the candidate with selected citations to learn by heart. A well-known example of this type of publication is the series compiled by the eighteenth century scholar Bùi Huy Bích 裴輝璧 (1744–1818), including *Thư kinh tiết yếu* 書經節要, *Tứ thư tiết yếu* 四書節要, or *Ngũ kinh tiết yếu diễn nghĩa* 五經節要演義to name just a few.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Sinology was known in Vietnam as "Hán học 漢學" (or occasionally as "Trung học 中學") (Hoàng Châu Tích 1993a), and due to the country's long history of Confucian civil service examinations, "Hán học"/"Trung học" was identified with Confucianism and Confucian learning. In order to avoid any grand narrative that overlooks the multifaceted nature of Vietnamese Sinology, writing its history should start with "local narrative," which tries to answer a series of "WH-questions" to form a small piece of the jigsaw puzzle. Following this direction, this chapter focuses on the promotion of Confucian ethics in early twentieth century Vietnam through a bulletin called *Du học báo* 遊學報 published under the sponsorship of the Nguyễn court in the protectorate Annam.

Selecting outstanding students and sending them to study in France was the Nguyễn dynasty's unprecedented mission, realized through the society *An Nam như Tây du học bảo trợ hội* 安南如西遊學保助會. Reconstructing the historical,

socio-cultural, and political environments of Annam in the early twentieth century will help to understand the establishment of the Society. An overview of the Society's bulletin can furnish us with a better comprehension of the Society's advocacy of Confucian learning. During its encounters with the West, Vietnam was exposed to a substantial number of Western moral concepts, introduced through different communication channels; traditional moral values were consequently put on trial, and there emerged the need to reconstruct Confucian morality and make it compatible with Western ethics. These issues were reflected in the writings of the bulletin's principal writer, Hoàng Châu Tích. Through the examination of his writings, we can see various textual sources available to Confucians of Annam; the employment of these textual sources to serve different political purposes is also worth our attention. When analyzed, all the aforementioned issues will reveal a local history of Vietnamese Sinology within a courtly group of Confucians in Annam. The present essay is a preliminary study on the Society and its bulletin, and the first of its kind in this research topic.

## The Birth of the "Society for the Encouragement of Western Studies"

This was Vietnam in the 1920s. The country had been divided into three parts under French colonialism: the French protectorate Tonkin in the North, the (semi) French protectorate Annam with the nominal rule of the Nguyen court in the Central, and the colonial Cochinchina in the South. Due to their resistance against the colonial power, two Emperors Thành Thái (1879–1954) and Duy Tân (1899–1945) were sent into exile by the French government in 1916. After the exiles, the French chose to enthrone Prince Nguyễn Phúc Bửu Đảo, and the new leader started his reign as Emperor Khải Định. Recently publicized historical documents have revealed quite a different portrait of Emperor Khải Định from the one that is most commonly held, both inside and outside of Vietnam. (Nguyễn 2013; Quốc sử quán triêu Nguyễn 2010; Quốc sử quán triêu Nguyễn 2012).

During his short reign (1916–1925), instead of resigning himself to performing as "a salaried employee of the French government," (Chapuis 2000) or being reconciled to being "a pallid figure, subservient in every sense to the colonial master," (Truong Buu Lam 2000) Emperor Khải Định endeavored to do something helpful for his country and its people within his limited power. Among his efforts was the plan to send Vietnamese youth to study in France. The Emperor believed, "[If] we wish to move forwards to civilization in order to benefit [the nation], it is impossible to realize [our wish] without learning, and without overseas learning it is also insufferable. Hence the court should send its progenies to France to study so that after completing their overseas study they will return and elevate the country, putting it shoulder to shoulder with advanced nations. If we cannot do it now, we should plan a [better] future for our posterities." From there he referred to his

personal case, “I used to entrust the prince’s overseas study matter to Resident superior [Jean Eugene] Charles. When meeting me in person, he respectfully listened to my suggestion. The Resident Superior was keen to take the responsibility, expressing his wish for the prince’s virtuous exploits to advance, to be known in [France] , and feeling honored to receive the entrustment” [34, article 0454].

However, the French colonial government was also concerned about the risk of exposing the prince, or for that matter any young Vietnamese elites, to anticolonial thoughts, or to democratic or leftist movements during their stay in France. At his hearing in France, Resident Superior Pierre Pasquier expressed his apprehension about the threat to the colonial regime, “Annam is an upright empire. As France has now acknowledged the Crown Prince of the Eastern Palace as the future leader to protect the empire, in terms of the Crown Prince’s overseas study for new insights, it is crucial to prevent democratic thoughts to leave any imprints in his mind.” Having heard Pasquier’s warnings, Emperor Khải Định praised him for his foresight, “For the nobles, high-and-mighty people, their families especially value ethics, and they are morally spotless, indeed. Now the Crown Prince is about to study in France, I think he should be acquainted with such people, and auspiciously will not be contaminated with liberal thoughts, and able to avoid troubles in the future. Thus I should compliment him [i.e., Pasquier] more for his profound thoughts” [34, article 0823]. Here was the meeting point between the Emperor and the Resident superior: they both wanted to see scientific and technologicial changes flourishing in the country thanks to the contributions of students who would return home from study; but more importantly, those changes should take place legitimately, without causing any harm to the monarchichal and colonial foundations of the nation.

In May 1922 the Emperor, his Crown Prince, and their entourage started a long and singular journey to France in order to learn more about “French civilization.” Once there, his activities included visits to the tombs of fallen French and Vietnamese soldiers of World War I. While in France the Emperor entrusted the Heir Apparent’s overseas study to the care of the former Resident Superior Jean François Eugène Charles and his wife [34, articles 828–855 (also “Réception” 1923)]. Just three years after this historical trip, Emperor Khải Định passed away in early November 1925 at the age of 40 (1885–1925). Immediately following the Emperor’s passing, a previously drafted convention was signed, giving the Protectorate (represented by the Resident Superior) the power to administer nearly all the major affairs of Annam, through consultation with the Court’s Ministers. The twelve-year-old Crown Prince Vĩnh Thụy returned to mourn for his father, and officially succeeded the throne as Emperor Bảo Đại on January 8, 1926. In March he left for France again to resume his studies. From then on the French Resident Superior and nominally the Council of Ministers headed by Catholic mandarin Nguyễn Hữu Bài (1863–1935) ruled Annam in the absence of the juvenile Emperor (Keith 2012).

In accordance with the French colonial government’s promises of “evolution” and “progress” in condition that “any reform not threaten the status quo” of the protectorate (Lockhart 1990, p. 41), a society titled “Société d’encouragement aux

études occidentales" or "An Nam như Tây du học bảo trợ hội 安南如西遊學保助會" (literally, "An Nam's Society for the Encouragement of Going to Study in France" , alternatively "Society for the Encouragement of Western Studies"; hereafter SEWS) was founded 7 months after the young Emperor's departure for France. On October 10, 1926 the Nguyễn Court's Privy Council reported the Society's program to the Office of the Resident Superior of Annam, and obtained the office's approval on October 23. Based on extant documents, it remains unclear whether if the deceased Emperor Khải Định's aforementioned suggestion to promote overseas study for a better future of the nation played any role in the formation of SEWS. However, the inauguration of SEWS entailed the publication of the bimonthly bulletin, *Bulletin bimensuel de la Société d'encouragement aux études occidentales Annam – Hué Du học báo*, or 遊學報 (literally "Bulletin for Overseas Study"; hereafter BOS), that provides us with captivating information not only about the cohort of young Vietnamese elites sent to study in France under SEWS' sponsorship, but also the Court's efforts to reconstruct Confucianism in the international context of the time.

## The Society and Its Bulletin

The need to travel beyond national borders to France to obtain new knowledge became more and more acute in early 1920s. Although patriots and collaborationists had different incentives for studying abroad, both groups encouraged their compatriots to do so. For the patriot, knowledge acquired through overseas study could help to earn back independence for the country. Inspired by the exemplary cases of some renowned Vietnamese anti-colonialist leaders, such as Phan Châu Trinh (1872–1926) or Nguyễn An Ninh (1900–1943) who had returned from France lately, Cochinchinese youth (and especially those from Saigon area) regarded France not only as a destination for science and modernity, but also saw it as a source of revolutionary thought. Hence, for them "study in France came to be seen as a sort of patriotic gesture" and "embarking on the long steamer trip across the ocean thus came to be seen as a sort of daring sacrifice that one would make for one's country" (McConnell 1989, p. 51). Having set foot on the soil of the French revolution, many of them would start a leftward journey, moving from patriotism to Marxism (Hemery 1975).

For the collaborationist, knowledge learned from the "mother country" would serve to strengthen the foundation of the colonial and protectorate system. The article entitled "Có đi mới biết" (Knowledge obtained only after traveling) printed in the France-collaborationist *Tân dân báo* (New Citizen Newspaper) on December 26, 1924 claimed that,

> Let's acknowledge that nowadays those who are knowledgeable and experienced must be students of Western learning (…) In the past, our nation miserably fell into the closed-door policy period, and our international intercourse was restricted merely within the relationship with China (…) Now we have France as a nearby teacher, our nation has recognized this

> communication a great benefit to our country, and we have no longer been bewildered in dreams as we used to be by this time."

In the same newspaper, there was another article informing us about the enthusiasm of affluent Cochinchinese households in sending their offspring abroad to study, "The number of students from Cochinchina going to France has been increased gradually. Wealthy families seem to compete with one another in sending their children to study abroad" ("Xuất dương du học," i.e., "Studying Abroad," January 17, 1925).

Although founded in Annam, the Society and its program were also introduced in Cochinchina's newspapers. Article one from the program reprinted in *Tân thế kỷ* ("New Century," November 25, 1926) reads,

> We now establish a society entitled "The Society for the Encouragement of Going to Study in France" to encourage learning. Sponsored by the Privy Council, the Society essentially encourages Vietnamese adolescents to go to France and study at secondary, higher, and vocational levels with the hope of accomplishment. The Society does not discuss religion, politics and other matters beyond its goals.

The goals were later reconfirmed by the Society in 1927 as follows,

> Thanks to the consideration of the two governments from above, and the consensus of our compatriots from below, since its inauguration until present, SEWS has built up its foundation, devoted to implementations, and kept expanding to achieve its goals that are *to assist the youth of our country to go to and study in colleges and vocational schools in the Great France, and later return to benefit society and the country.*" (emphasis added) (Mấy lời ngỏ cùng hội hữu về việc Du học báo 1927).

According to the program, each year the Society would offer full or partial scholarships, or only boat-transportation expenses to qualified male and female students admitted into this program. The Society was also willing to sponsor students from wealthy families that were able to cover all overseas study costs but did not know how to handle the whole procedure of sending their children abroad.

The Society had an honorary committee headed by Emperor Bảo Đại, and a few honorary presidents, such as Governor-General Alexandre Varenne, and Director of Medical Services Léon Normet. The Head of the Privy Council Nguyễn Hữu Bài also served as the Society's President. The Society's budget came from various sources, including the Society's members, governmental departments and offices, private contributions, and funds raised by the Society. One year after its establishment, the Society had achieved a budget of $25,000.00 *piastres* (Lời kính cáo của Hội đồng trị sự 1927) (in comparison to the cost of $6.00 *piastres* for 100 kg of paddies) (Bulletin economique 1927).

At the time of the establishment of SEWS, there were already a number of Vietnamese students studying in France, "The total number of Vietnamese in France is unknown; besides laborers and soldiers, the number of Vietnamese students does not exceed a maximum of 500. Among them the majority is from Cochinchina, next are those from Tonkin, and people from Annam remain minority" (Người Annam ở bên Tây 1927). Hence, to some extent, the foundation of SEWS may be seen as an effort to equalize the number of overseas studying

students from the three regions of Vietnam. Despite its efforts, during a period of 8 years (1926–1934), the Society patronized 34 students of which 14 students had achieved their study in France completely, and 10 had returned to Vietnam by 1934 (Société d'Ecouragement aux Etudes Occidentales (Siège Sociale Hué) 1934); three additional scholarships offered in 1935 brought the total number up to 37, and this was not the final number. During the period from 1937 to 1938, SEWS supported five new students to study in France and remained active for quite a long time after 1935 as seen in the *Rapport d'ensemble sur la situation du Protectorat de l'Annam pendant la période comprise entre le 1er Juin 1938 et le 31 Mai 1939* by the Protectorate of Annam (Hue: Imprimerie du Maridor, 1939) (Biên bản Đại hội đồng thường niên 1935a). Discussing the emigration of Vietnamese students to France and their source of scholarships during the first half of the 1920s, Scott McConnell also observed that,

> Scholarships for study in France—one key indicator of where France wanted its colonial students to study—remained tiny in number: about one dozen a year, including study grants from both the government and large French companies that sent future employees for technical training in France (McConnell 1989, p. 52).

Thus, in comparison to the number of French government scholarships given in the early 1920s, the number offered by SEWS during the period from 1926 to 1934 is roughly equivalent. The limited number of scholarships granted by SEWS reflected its modest financial resources and represented a counterbalance to what had been carried out by the French authority, in terms of overseas training for new Vietnamese elite for the colonial country.

In terms of gender distribution, by 1935 SEWS had funded only one female student, Ms. Lê Thị Hoàn (1928), to study medicine in Montpellier. In 1935 SEWS received an application for scholarship to study pharmacy from Ms. Tôn Nữ Viết Khâm but turned it down because at that time the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy had already been established in Hanoi, and she was not from an impoverished family, but a mandarin household. The SEWS Committee decided to encourage her to take the "pharmacie 1ère class" at the Hanoi Faculty, and if she wished to pursue a "Doctorat en pharmacie" in France, she could reapply for the scholarship later. Extant information does not let us know how this case proceeded (Biên bản Hội đồng trị sự 1935b).

Although the number of patronized students remained modest, their successes were truly significant (Trinh Van Thao 1995). The students not only played important roles in the development of sciences and higher education in Vietnam, but also engaged in political movements, fighting against French colonialism and striving for Vietnam's independence. Many of them became key figures in modern Vietnamese intellectual and cultural history, such as Phạm Đình Ái (1908–1992), Nguyễn Xiển (1907–1997), Hoàng Xuân Hãn (1908–1996), Tạ Quang Bửu (1910–1986), Nguyễn Tường Tam (aka. Nhất Linh, 1906–1963), Ngụy Như Kontum (1913–1991) , Phan Nhuận (1914–1963), Thái Can (1910–1998), Lê Viết Hường (unknown-1975), and Hoàng Xuân Nhị (1914–1990).

SEWS acknowledged the various challenges of exposing their students to Western society and thought, and they exerted effort to keep them on the right track with monarchical and colonial principles. One of its exertions was to create an informative forum in bulletin format. Article 17 of the Society's program provided for the publication of a bimonthly bulletin to inform readers about the Society's activities, "academic achievements and conduct of the Society-patronized students studying in France, and the essentials of our nation's general moral and educational issues" ("Hội Bảo trợ du học ở Trung kỳ" (The Society for the Encouragement of Overseas Study in the Central of Vietnam), *Tân thẽ kỳ*, November 25 1924). Printed in trilingual (Vietnamese, Chinese, and French), the bulletin was named *Du học báo* (literally "Bulletin for Overseas Study," hereafter BOS), and the first two issues were reserved exclusively for "the Society's activities and the list of its members." Starting from the third issue, the BOS editorial board decided to reorganize the bulletin and add more content to it. SEWS President Nguyễn Hữu Bài specified that, "Besides the records of the Society's affairs, this journal has a number of topics, wholly explaining our country's important issues of ethics and education, covering crucial points of contemporary civilization that our youth should follow and not fall into confusions and mistakes. These topics are from the selection of manuscripts submitted by people in the Society and will be published in sequence" (Nguyễn Hữu Bài, "Hội An Nam như Tây Du học bảo trợ" (Annam's Society for the Encouragement of Going to Study in France), Du học báo, no. 3. (September 1 1927). To keep the youth (SEWS students included) on the "right" track was the concern of both the late Emperor Khải Định and the SEWS. The "right" track was understood as "traditional" values of Confucianism (alternatively known as "Hán học 漢學" in the BOS).

## Reappraisals of Confucian Moral Values in the BOS

In his argument against Samuel Huntington's position of placing Confucianism in confrontation with the West as a "clash of civilizations," Yu Ying-shih recounts the cases of two May-Fourth leaders Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) and Hu Shi (1891–1962) as intellectual acknowledgments of the compatibility of Confucianism with Western liberalism and constitutional democracy. Yu also cites "A Manifesto to the World on Chinese Culture" signed by Tang Junyi, Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang), Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan in 1958, together with Chang Hao's observation, saying that through the Manifesto the four preeminent New Confucians try "to interpret the Chinese intellectual heritage in ways that could accommodate modern Western values such as democracy and science" (Yu 2005). Similar ways of thought and rationalization also emerged in early twentieth-century French colonial Vietnam where "Franco-Vietnamese collaboration" was promoted by various political groups, either to retrieve independence for the country in the long run, or to strengthen the foundation of the colonial and protectorate regimes.

Encounters with the West taking place in Japan and China in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century put traditional moral values on trial. During these historical encounters, the translation, introduction and circulation of new Western ethical theories and values in Japan and China became the premise for the formation of modern ethics. Their modern ethics was the negotiation between "traditional" (Confucian) and Western moral values, the adaptation of Western ethical concepts into the "traditional" ethical system, and the revision and adjustment of the "traditional" ethics to accommodate the new concepts from the West. As SEWS' official forum, besides keeping its readers updated with the Society's administration, correspondence with its members and grantees, and student activities, BOS also performed its duties in keeping the student fellows in particular, and the Vietnamese youth in general, on track with traditional moral values reinterpreted to suit new sociocultural environments.

During its 8 years (1927–1935), the BOS published a total of 74 issues (the first two issues are missing from the currently preserved microfilm format). A significant number of pages from the bulletins were reserved for discussions on Confucian ethics in reference to Western philosophy, Chinese New Culture Movement, and Japanese evolutionary thought. Articles pertaining to these topics are either works by Vietnamese authors, or translations of Chinese writers' essays purposely in response to local sociopolitical changes around that time. Among its contributors, Hoàng Châu Tích (penname Mai Thôn) is a key figure.

Son of Hoàng Côn (1850–1925)—the Minister of the Ministry of Rituals, Hoàng Châu Tích was from Trung Bính hamlet, Bảo Ninh village (now in Quảng Bình province of central Vietnam), and trained in the traditional Confucian educational system. A provincial graduate (*cử nhân* 舉人), Hoàng served as a junior compiler in the Historiography Institute (*biên tu Quốc sử quán* 國史館編修) ("Danh sĩ Huỳnh Côn 1850), and regularly contributed to the BOS. Starting from March 1934, he worked as adjunct secretary of the BOS, then editor (July 1934), and finally administration advisor (September 1934). All of Hoàng's articles reconfirm the compatibility of traditional Confucian values with Western moral concepts, and use the Confucian values as the basis for accommodation of the two systems (Fig. 3.1).

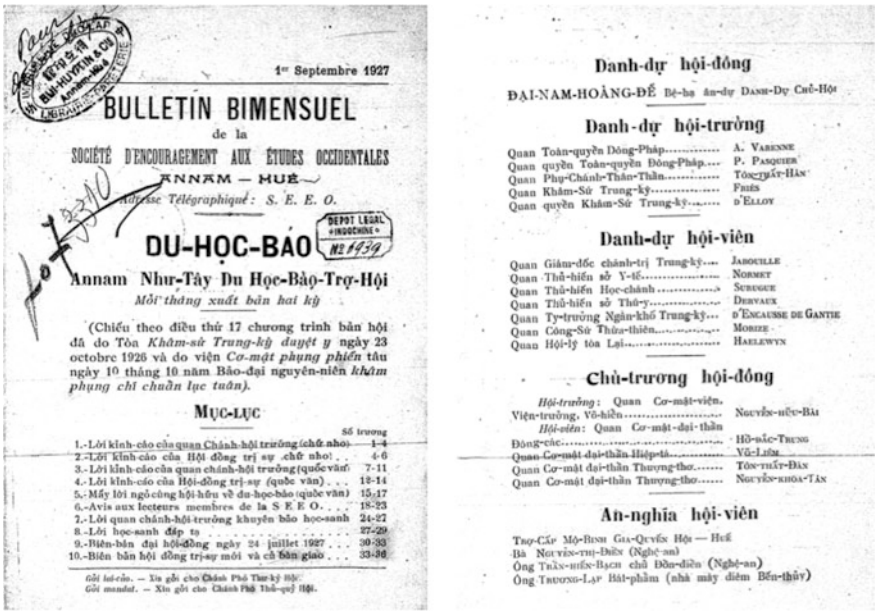
In its first issues, BOS began immediately its project of reappraising Confucian moral values with a series of articles by Nguyễn Bá Trác (1881–1945), such as "Thiếu niên với gia đình" (Adolescent and Family) confirming the patriarchship and the validity of the maxim "Filial piety is the basic among moral values 百行孝爲本" (no. 6, pp. 5–14), or "Giải thích nghĩa chữ *Tam cương* – Cương *quân – thần*" (Explaining the Meaning of the Three Bonds—The Bond of Ruler and Subject) proving subordination (thống thuộc 統屬) is always needed for family, community, and society, and the principle of "consulting and deliberating with all [ministers and people], *xunmou qiantong*詢謀僉同" [*Shuqing*, "Da Yu mo"] is close to "democracy" (no. 7, pp. 9–18). Also noteworthy is Nguyễn Cao Tiêu's translation of Zeng Chunyan's 曾純陽 "Daode zhi xiuyang道德之修養" (The Cultivation of Morality, nos. 13, pp. 8–17; 16, pp. 13–23). As stated in the beginning of the essay, Zeng wrote it in response to *Xin daode* 新道德 (New morality). The advocacy of

**Fig. 3.1** Some key figures of the Society for Encouragement of Western Studies (SEWS) and the Bulletin of Overseas Studies (BOS): Minister of the Ministry of Personnel Nguyễn Hữu Bài—SEWS President (*2nd from left*); Minister of the Ministry of Rituals— Hoàng Côn—Father of Hoàng Châu Tích (*3rd from left*)

"New morality" promoted by Chinese students returned from Japan in the magazine *Youth* called for an end to the patriarchal family in support of individual freedom and women's liberation (Wu 1988; Wu et al. 1985). As translator, Nguyễn Cao Tiêu fully approved Zeng's opinions, and in the introduction to the translation, he described the everlasting values of Confucian classics as "food and clothes [of daily necessities] 菽粟布帛," and considered his translated essay an "old moral gift" to young fellows who were studying (or about to study) in France (p. 9). As the BOS official views on moral issues had been well established, Hoàng Châu Tích stepped in and picked up from what his predecessors had written (Fig. 3.2).

## Reintroducing Confucian Ethics in Early Twentieth Century Protectorate Annam

Hoàng Châu Tích's first few essays in the BOS clearly project his ideological orientation and the general structure of his arguments. Under the penname "Mai Thôn," Hoàng presented his first article titled "Bàn về công đức và tư đức" (On Public and Private Virtues) in no. 20 of the BOS (August 1928), in which, following the thread of the previously published essays, Hoàng continued opposing the promotion of "new morality," "custom renovation," and "moral revolution," and



1er Septembre 1927

BULLETIN BIMENSUEL

de la

SOCIÉTÉ D'ENCOURAGEMENT AUX ÉTUDES OCCIDENTALES

ANNAM — HUÉ

Adresse Télégraphique : S. E. E. O.

DEPOT LEGAL INDOCHINE N° 1939

DU-HỌC-BÁO

Annam Như-Tây Du Học-Báo-Trợ-Hội

Mỗi tháng xuất bản hai kỳ

(Chiếu theo điều thứ 17 chương trình bản hội đã do Tòa *Khâm-sứ Trung-kỳ duyệt y* ngày 23 octobre 1926 và do viện *Cơ-mật phụng phiến* tâu ngày 10 tháng 10 năm Bảo-đại nguyên-niên *khâm phụng chỉ chuẩn lục tuân*).

MỤC-LỤC

| | Số trương |
|---|---|
| 1.-Lời kính-cáo của quan Chánh-hội trưởng (chữ nho) | 1-4 |
| 2.-Lời kính-cáo của Hội đồng trị sự (chữ nho) | 4-6 |
| 3.-Lời kính-cáo của quan chánh-hội trưởng (quốc văn) | 7-11 |
| 4.-Lời kính-cáo của Hội-đồng trị-sự (quốc văn) | 12-14 |
| 5.-Mấy lời ngỏ cùng hội-hữu về du-học-báo (quốc văn) | 15-17 |
| 6.-Avis aux lecteurs membres de la S E E O. | 18-23 |
| 7.-Lời quan chánh-hội trưởng khuyến bảo học-sanh | 24-27 |
| 8.-Lời học-sanh đáp tạ | 27-29 |
| 9.-Biên-bản đại hội-đồng ngày 24 juillet 1927 | 30-33 |
| 10.-Biên bản hội đồng trị-sự mới và cải bổn giáo | 33-36 |

Gởi lai-cảo. — Xin gởi cho Chánh Phó Thư-ký hội.
Gởi mandat. — Xin gởi cho Chánh Phó Thủ-quỹ Hội.

Danh-dự hội-đồng

ĐẠI-NAM-HOÀNG-ĐẾ Bệ-hạ ân-dự Danh-Dự Chủ-Hội

Danh-dự hội-trưởng

| | |
|---|---|
| Quan Toàn-quyền Đông-Pháp | A. Varenne |
| Quan quyền Toàn-quyền Đông-Pháp | P. Pasquier |
| Quan Phụ-Chánh-Thân-Thần | Tôn-thất-Hân |
| Quan Khâm-Sứ Trung-kỳ | Fries |
| Quan quyền Khâm-Sứ Trung-kỳ | d'Elloy |

Danh-dự hội-viên

| | |
|---|---|
| Quan Giám-đốc chánh-trị Trung-kỳ | Jabouille |
| Quan Thủ-hiến sở Y-tế | Normet |
| Quan Thủ-hiến Học-chánh | Sureuge |
| Quan Thủ-hiến sở Thú-y | Dervaux |
| Quan Tỵ-trưởng Ngân-khố Trung-kỳ | d'Encausse de Gantie |
| Quan Công-Sứ Thừa-thiên | Mobize |
| Quan Hội-lý tòa Lại | Haelewyn |

Chủ-trương hội-đồng

*Hội-trưởng*: Quan Cơ-mật-viện, Viện-trưởng, Võ-hiển — Nguyễn-hữu-Bài

*Hội-viên*: Quan Cơ-mật-đại-thần Đông-các — Hồ-đắc-Trung

Quan Cơ-mật-đại-thần Hiệp-tá — Võ-Liêm

Quan Cơ-mật đại-thần Thượng-thơ — Tôn-thất-Đàn

Quan Cơ-mật đại-thần Thượng-thơ — Nguyễn-khoa-Tân

An-nghĩa hội-viên

Thợ-Cắt Mộ-Bình Gia-Quyến Hội — Huế

Bà Nguyễn-thị-Điểm (Nghệ-an)

Ông Trần-hiến-Bách chủ Đồn-điền (Nghệ-an)

Ông Trương-Lập Bát-phẩm (nhà máy điêm Bến-thủy)

**Fig. 3.2** *Left* Front cover of the 3rd issue of the BOS (September 1, 1927); *Right* List of the BOS' Honorary presidents and its executive committee

bolstered the harmony and unity of Western and Eastern philosophies (especially Confucianism, pp. 15–24).

In the next issue (no. 21), Hoàng wrote another essay called "Giải thích nghĩa chữ *tự do*" (Interpreting the Meaning of "Freedom"). It is quite surprising to see that Hoàng's essay begins with Liang Qichao's definitions of *ziyou* 自由 from the essay "Lun ziyou 論自由" (On Freedom) without recognizing them as quotations: "Freedom is the general, public principle for all things under heaven, an essential condition of human life" and "Freedom is the opposite of slavery" (Xueshu yuekan 學術月刊 1987; Feng 1990). Hoàng's essay insists that freedom must be practiced within a lawful and sanctioned framework. When comparing Confucius' emphasis on the importance of the Way with Montesquieu's stress on the significance of law in human life, Hoàng again cited Montesquieu's saying, translated into Chinese from Liang's essay "Lun zizhi 論自治" (On Autonomy), "Law is undetachable even within a meal" (法律者無終食之間而可離者也) (Mai Thôn 梅村 1928, pp. 6 and 41]. The essay finally concludes by citing Mencius' "Lilou 離樓 I": "The path of duty lies in what is near, and men seek for it in what is remote. The work of duty lies in what is easy, and men seek for it in what is difficult. If each man would love his parents and show the due respect to his elders, the whole land would enjoy tranquility" (Legge 1991, p. 302).

This brief examination of the line of thought and of various supportive textual elements quoted in Hoàng's specific essay reveals a few noteworthy points. First,

writings of the reform movements' activists like Liang Qichao played a crucial role in Vietnamese Confucians' revision of Confucian moral values; the question why authors like Hoàng Châu Tích did not announce their referential sources will be discussed below. Second, depending on the writer's political standpoint, being either collaborationist or patriotic, Western moral concepts would be read/interpreted accordingly to suit different realities of feudal and colonial Vietnam. Third, for scholars exclusively trained in the Confucian education system like Hoàng Châu Tích, Western thought cited in their essays mostly came from Chinese intermediary sources. Finally, although starting their discussion with new Western philosophical or moral concepts, Vietnamese Confucian scholars always concluded by discussing preexisting Confucian values, thereby showing their compatibility and adjustability with Western thought and consequently preventing any radical changes that might challenge the status quo of society.

Like in Japan and China, the encounter with the West in Vietnam also invoked the revision of traditional moral values, and under the influence of Western culture and intellectual exchanges with East Asian countries (Liu 2012), Vietnamese scholars started their discourses on "ethics" (Japanese *rinrigaku* 倫理學, Chinese *lunlixue*, and Vietnamese *luân lí học*). Printed in three consecutive issues of the BOS (no. 22–24, 1928), the essay "Luân lý thiển thuyết 倫理淺說" (An Elementary Introduction to Ethics) by Phan Võ shows how the concept of "ethics" was understood by a part of contemporary Vietnamese intellectuals. The essay begins with a definition, "*Luân* 倫 means 'order,' *lý* 理 means 'proper arrangement.' Thus, *Luân lý* means hierarchically treating people with appropriateness on the basis of one's occupied position" (no. 22, p. 1). The author believes that human beings practice ethical principles as if following the laws of nature, and Asian ethics (in fact, Confucianism) is not suppressive even when compared to those of the West. The issue of gender equality in Confucianism is examined through several Confucian maxims, such as "spouse means equality 妻者齊也," or "husband and wife treat each other as honored guests夫婦相敬如賓." The author finally comes to the conclusion that the traditional ethics (i.e., Confucianism) still functions well with new concepts, such as "human rights" or "freedom" (no. 24, p. 11). Throughout the article, Confucian morality is verified compatible with Western ethics, and together they both should help to keep the current social order intact without any radical changes.

In the footsteps of Phan Võ, and in addition to his other articles reconfirming Confucian morality in modern Vietnam's contexts, Hoàng Châu Tích wrote "Lược khảo về luân lý Tây phương" (A Sketchy Research on Western Ethics), the main purposes of which were not to systematically introduce Western ethics, but to emphasize the importance of the individual's "rectification of the heart" (*chính tâm* 正心) in dealing with social changes (including newly introduced moral values from the West). In this article, Hoàng first classified Western ethics into six categories: self, family and clan, society, nation, mankind, and all myriad beings. Throughout the article, he frequently referred to the five successive and reciprocal phases advocated in the Confucian classic *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning), namely rectifying the heart, cultivating oneself, bringing order to the family, governing the

country, and bringing peace to all under heaven. Thus, Hoàng's classification of six types of ethics appeared not only in harmony with, but also modeled after the *Great Learning*'s five phases to bring peace to the individual and the whole world. Although presenting "Western ethics," Hoàng did not cite many Western thinkers or thoughts, except for Charles de Montesquieu and Herbert Spencer. Interestingly, Montesquieu's quote (in Chinese) in Hoàng's essay can be found in Liang Qichao's "Lun hequn 論合群" (On uniting into groups), "The vitality of a republic country originates from morality" (共和之國其元氣在道德). On the other hand, Spencer's citation (also in Chinese) is clearly a re-citation from an unknown Chinese text, and not a direct translation from its English origin. Following the same structure of his other essays, Hoàng concluded "A Sketchy Research on Western Ethics" with another Confucian citation, and this time it was from Mencius' "Teng Wengong 滕文公 I": "[It is said in the *Book of Poetry*: 'Although Zhou was an old country, it received a new destiny.' That is said with reference to Emperor Wen] Do you practice those things with vigor, and you also will by them make new your kingdom." (English translation from (Legge 1991, p. 243) with minor changes). Hoàng's final message is clear and sound: "In general all of us as people in the country must first and foremost keep our 'rectified heart,' next fulfill our individual duties, and finally care of other issues" (p. 6).

By the 1920s there were quite a number of essays endeavoring to revitalize Confucian moral values in the light of Western ethics in Vietnam, but they remained fragmented and needed a syncretism. To meet this need some Vietnamese Confucian revivalists decided to translate East Asian scholars' works on this topic. In 1920, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến (penname Đông Châu) translated Cai Yuanpei's *Zhongguo lunlixue shi* 中國倫理學史 (History of Chinese Ethics, 1910), and serialized it in the journal *Nam phong* 南風 (Southern Wind/Ethos) under the title of *Khảo về lịch sử luân lý học nước Tàu* (A Study on the History of China's Ethics) from 1920 to 1921, but mistakenly lists the author's name as "Sái Chấn/Cai Zhen 蔡振". A journal popularly read among Vietnamese intellectuals in a long period (1917–1934), *Nam phong* never went beyond the control of its editor-in-chief Phạm Quỳnh (1892–1945) who was a politically debatable figure. Under his influence, the journal reflected not only patriotic and reformist spirits, but also collaborationist attitudes. In other words all reforms promoted by the journal must not cause any harm to the colonial political system. Therefore, when translating Cai Yuanpei's work on the history of China's ethnics, *Nam phong* seemingly took a safe side to introduce Cai's philosophical thoughts without venturing to touch any colonial restrictions.

Twelve years later, in 1932, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến rendered another work on Chinese ethics: Miura Tōsaku's 三浦藤作*Toyō rinrigakushi*東洋倫理學史 was translated into Vietnamese through the Chinese translation *Zhongguo lunlixue shi* 中國倫理學史 (1926) of Zhang Zongyuan 張宗元 and Lin Ketang 林科堂. This Vietnamese translation was serialized from 1932 to 1934 in *Nam phong* under the title *Khảo về lịch sử luân lý học nước Tàu* (A Study on China's History of Ethics), but ended incomplete. Despite those momentous translations, Hoàng Châu Tích surprisingly (re)translated Cai Yuanpei's work in the BOS, stating that "This book,

originally written in Chinese by Mr. Cai Yuanpei from China, is about ethics with supportive evidence and wide-scope discussions. The Bulletin has translated into Vietnamese and will sequentially serialize it in order to more or less benefit younger generation" ("Trung Quốc luân lý học sử," Du học báo, no. 72, 1). Hoàng's translation project makes us wonder why he bothered to invest time and effort in a work already rendered into Vietnamese 14 years earlier.

It is not easy to find a satisfactory answer to the above question. However, by carrying out such a project, Hoàng Châu Tích might have felt the need of reintroducing Cai Yuanpei's work to the youth of Annam (SEWS grantees included) who did not have access to old issues of *Nam phong*. It was also possible that Hoàng was unaware of the preexistence of Nguyễn Hữu Tiến's translation, and if this was the case, it could show the limitation of communication within and between different regions of Vietnam under the French colonial regime, or the limited exposure some Annam Confucians had to the widely read *Nam phong*. This also brings us to the possible intentional omission of any content relevant to Liang Qichao and other thinkers and activists of the Chinese reform movements in the Annam Court-sponsored BOS. Although Liang's writings had been enthusiastically translated and printed in *Nam phong* in the early 1930s, the possession in Annam of certain works by Liang could be a cause to send a person to prison, as shown in the *Official Veritable Records of Đại Nam—The Seventh Period* [34, article 0732]. Thus, when reintroduced to and revitalized in the BOS, Confucian ethics was isolated from new sociopolitical and cultural movements taking place in the first three decades of the twentieth century in China. Although Liang Qichao had great impact on many Vietnamese intellectuals, especially on Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940)—one of the pioneers of twentieth century Vietnam's anti-colonialist and patriotic movements, Liang was cited but regrettably not acknowledged in the BOS possibly due to its political restricting principles.

## Japanese Thought and Chinese Intermediaries

In the article titled "Nhân nghĩa" (Chinese *renyi* 仁義, Benevolence and Righteousness), Hoàng Châu Tích emphasizes the importance of these two Confucian moral concepts. He cites Montesquieu's "intuitive knowledge" (*liangzhi* 良知) and Kant's "conscience" (*liangxin* 良心) to show the agreeable encounter between East and West in the concept of naturally intuitive and heaven-endowed "benevolence" in human beings. "Benevolence" serves as the foundation of the Three Bonds of which the relationship between "leader" and "subject" is most important. The concepts of "lý" (Chinese *li* 理, "principle") and "khí" (Chinese *qi* 氣, "life force") are also introduced, and within the contexts of the article, they can be identified as "rationality" and "emotionality" respectively. The author then rejects the propensity to classify the West as "rational" and the East (China) as "emotional"; he finally concludes that both Chinese and Western people need to

keep a balance between benevolence/emotionality and righteousness/rationality to appropriately practice and interact with one another (Hoàng Châu Tích 1933b).

In the second part of the article, Hoàng Châu Tích spells out the implications of "gratitude" and "retribution" from the concept of "Righteousness." More important is his argument on the magnitude of "self-love" ("tự ái," or Chinese *zi'ai* 自愛). According to Hoàng, "Wishing to carry out benevolent deeds, one must first and foremost love oneself; however, one also ought to weigh it down if there exists weightier righteousness, and if this is the case, one must exhaustively, full-heartedly to serve it, or feeling indebted to the other's gratitude, one must sacrifice himself to appropriately repay it. This is the conscience which urges him to act that way" (Hoàng Châu Tích 1933c). Hoàng's line of rationalization on the importance of "self-love" concludes by confirming the commonality shared by Eastern (in fact, Chinese) and Western philosophies: for him, there is no difference between *baoshen* 保身 (self-protection), *shoushen* 守身 (keeping oneself flawless) of the East and the individual "self-serve" (*shishen* 事身) of the West.

Furthermore, the author furnishes his readers with the summary of a work by a Japanese scholar named "Nha [Gia] Đằng 加藤", and employs it to support his reasoning. Although Hoàng does not supply sufficient authorial and bibliographical information with the citation, the Japanese scholar and his work in question is likely Meiji-thinker Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之(1836–1916) and his book *Dōtoku hōrotsu shinka no ri* 道德法律進化の理 (Theory on the Evolution of Morality and Law). Originally written in classical Chinese, Hoàng's summary of Katō's book was translated into Vietnamese in the same issue of the BOS as follows,

> In general the book asserts that *mankind possesses only the heart of loving oneself* [before] *coming up with the heart of loving others. On the other hand, the heart of loving others can be divided into two: one is natural* [tự nhiên] *and the other un-natural* [không tự nhiên]. *Natural love is that towards parents, siblings, spouse and children; un-natural love is the one towards compatriots, mankind, and myriad beings. However all those [un-natural] loves must originate from learning, progressively turn accustomed, and finally become natural*. The book's general idea claims that when our beloved people suffer from miseries, or enjoy happiness, we feel as if we are going through the same experiences. Thus, we must share our self-love with our beloved to obtain a loving heart. We should also extend this expanded love towards compatriots, and mankind, linking individual and communal interests together, avoiding estrangements, and preventing the risks of self-extinguishing. Although acknowledged as loving others, this is in fact rooted in self-love.

The italics in this paragraph represent citations whose authorship will be discussed below; and the rest of it is Hoàng's additional explanation. The entire paragraph serves as an interesting example through which one can see the availability of foreign texts and different receptions of Katō Hiroyuki's work in China and Vietnam in the early twentieth century.

Impressed by Katō's thoughts (Price 2004), Liang Qichao extensively cited this Japanese thinker in his study on Jeremy Bentham, "Leli zhuyi taidou Bianqin zhi xueshou 樂利主義泰斗邊沁之學說" (Theory of Utilitarianism of Leading Scholar Bentham, 1902). In Liang's essay, Katō's two key concepts of the "heart of loving

oneself" (愛己心) and "the heart of loving others" (愛他心) were mentioned to support Bentham's theory,

> Katō Hiroyuki from Japan wrote a book called *Theory on the Evolution of Morality and Law*. Its main ideas claim that mankind has only the heart of loving oneself, and does not have the heart of loving others. Moreover the heart of loving oneself in turn can be divided into two: one is called "pure and simple heart of loving oneself" [純乎的愛己心], and the other "disguised heart of loving oneself" [變相的愛己心], or the "heart of loving others" [愛他心] (…) Katō's theory in fact can be a great support to [Jeremy] Bentham's [theory of self-interest], since everyone seeks for self-amusement, he/she must finally come up to the emotion of the heart of loving others; as everyone seeks for self-benefit, he/she must conclusively reach the wisdom and strategy of the heart of loving others. When having these two types of the heart of loving others, it is sufficient to link personal interests with public interests, and they are inseparable. (Liang 1936)

In the same year, Liang Qichao wrote an article titled "Jiateng [Katō] boshi tianze baihua加藤博士天則百話" in *Xinmin congbao*新民叢報 (no. 21, 1902), expressing both his appreciation of and concerns about Katō's theory. Liang revealed his unwillingness to introduce Katō's evolutionism to China, for in his view, the Japanese thinker's theory too heavily emphasized on self-interest. As a result, Liang was afraid that if introduced, this theory might cause more harm than benefit to China (Wang 1995).

Hoàng's additional explanation of Katō Hiroyuki's book is also his understanding of the work. Katō's book actually should be read in the context of the other issues which are integral to his thinking, such as the theory of evolution, historically evolved rights and the social exercise of power, the values of the strong, power-based gender roles, and social evolution that allocates more rights to the weak or less powerful (Davis 1996). The issue of self-interested egoism deals not only with the development from "self-love" to "universal love" (thanks to education), but also with the unequal endowment of abilities in human beings to fulfill ego drives, which entails violence and confrontation, subjugation, and social classes. Picking up the key issue of the book, Hoàng has it serve his synchronization of Confucian and Western ethics in which the adoption of Western individualism into Confucian morality is a crucial issue, especially within the context of early twentieth century Vietnam.

Written in 1900, *Dōtoku hōrotsu shinka no ri* was the result of Katō Hiroyuki's closed studies of evolutionism, Darwinism, and German statist theory (Leaman 2006). Three-years later (1903), Jin Kangshou 金康壽 and Yang Dianyu 楊殿玉 translated this book into Chinese and had it printed by publishing house Guangzhi shuju 廣智書局 (Huang and Zeng 2008). It appears ambiguous whether Hoàng Châu Tích read Katō's book in its Japanese original, or only in the Chinese translation. However, based on the way Hoàng cited Kato's name in Sino-Vietnamese as "Nha [Gia] Đằng" (and not in Japanese as "Katō") as well as his oversimplification of the work, it is most likely that he might have read only a (summarized) Chinese version of the book. Having read both Liang's and Hoàng's summaries of Kato's book, one can easily identify Liang's writing as the origin of

Hoàng's citation. Thus, this example shows how early twentieth century Vietnamese scholars learned about Western philosophy and Japanese thoughts through Chinese intermediaries.

## SEWS Students Who Returned Home: Turning Over a New Leaf?

From 1902 to 1927 there were about 4000 young Chinese intellectuals having arrived in France to study and work through a movement popularly known as Chinese "Work-study" (*qingong zhuxue* 勤工助學, or *qingong jianxue yundong* 勤工儉學運動) (Guyotat 2006). With the advocacy of "diligence and perseverance in work, and frugality (in order to save money) for study, thereby advancing the labourers' knowledge" [Bailey 1988], the movement would bring up several communist-leaders-to-be, such as Cai Hesen, Deng Xiaoping, and Zhou Enlai, who would partake in changing their motherland's sociopolitical circumstances radically after their return. Although SEWS' overseas study program had different goals, its students who returned home would also alter their homeland's current political system.

Just as the return of His Majesty the Emperor Bảo Đại from France in 1932 brought changes to the Nguyễn court [27, p. 77–98], so the SEWS students who returned would have significant impacts on Vietnamese society in general, and on the BOS in particular. The year 1931 marked the first harvest of SEWS with its graduated grantees returning and beginning their public service in the country. It is worth mentioning that some of the returned students also joined the editorial board and managing committee of the BOS. The BOS issue number 60 (January 1934) may be regarded as the inauguration of fundamental changes brought in by the returned students. In this issue Kim An Nguyễn Văn Định, a graduate in literature and *doctorat de 1er cycle* in law, wrote "Mấy lời cùng độc giả" (A few words to the BOS readers) as a declaration of new overseas-trained Vietnamese intellectuals,

> The civilization level of a country cannot be built up by one or two preeminent people, but it must depend on the whole nation's educational level to be uplifted. Students returning from their overseas study establish good examples for their people and communities, bringing enlightenment to their nationals and [a better] future to the government. Although studying overseas truly broadens what one has seen and heard, the undertaking during those three or four years remains modest, and the more one experiences, the clearer one recognizes the infinity of the realm of learning. Moreover, *the East and the West each has its own circumstances, and what one has learned from the West cannot be applied or carried out immediately* [in the East]. [Western] people are walking on a preexisting road, and now orderly moving forward. [For us,] *we have walked on a different road, and now we must follow the Western steps: how difficult it is! No, we, returned students, are not afraid of difficulties, but for those who are concerned about the future of the nation, if not trusted, and even though capable, they can do nothing but surrender to the reality*. (Kim 1934, emphasis added)

## Conclusion

The above passage announced that a challenging road lay ahead; it was an optimistic endorsement of a worldview which returning students must possess if they hoped to work effectively with their compatriots to build a better future for the country. Kim An's declaration was no longer concerned about keeping people "on the right track" in traditional monarchy, but urging people to "follow the Western steps." With the participation of the returned students in the management of the BOS, it is not accidental to find a Vietnamese translation of Edgar Poe's narrative poem "The Raven" that repeatedly sings out the coda "Nevermore" (pp. 11–14). In the same issue, the reader can read the first part of an introduction to Persian thinker Omar Khayyam (pp. 7–10), as well as an essay written in French titled "Orient et Occident" by Nguyễn Văn Định who requires equality and mutual understanding between East and West, "Time is no longer for this old joke, 'East is East, West is West.' *We must seek to understand each other*. The Orient has been instructed about science by the Occident; now *it's time for the Occident to scrutinize the spirituality of the Orient*" (p. 26, emphasis added). In June 1934, a Vietnamese translation of Chateaubriand's novella *Atala* was printed and serialized in the BOS, exposing more Western philosophical and religious issues to local readers. In such dramatically changing circumstances, Hoàng Châu Tích did not stop writing about Confucian ethics, but his voice had become far less dominant by that time. Chinese studies (with the study of Confucianism at the center) in Vietnam were about to enter a new historical period and move to a new phase. The SEWS program, its bulletin BOS, and one of its principal writers Hoàng Châu Tích, which have together been analyzed in this essay, have exposed the practicality and political orientation of Vietnam's Sinology in the context of a local history. Reading new meanings into the classics is surely not a novel practice. Contemporary studies on Confucianism, and particularly on this doctrine within Vietnamese contexts it is revitalizing Confucianism by pointing out the teaching's humanity and pragmatism, carefully adapted to the twenty-first century.

The students of the overseas study movement had great sociopolitical effects on the country's history, however, the role of the Nguyễn Court as the movement's organizer has grievously been forgotten. A current reading of the extant issues of the BOS provides important information not only on the effects the movement had, but also on its geneses. They show very clearly how the Nguyen Court decisively sent the nation's young elites overseas to study with the hope that they would help create a better future for the monarchy, and how anxious the court became when it witnessed a number of its students moving leftward beyond their control. The court's efforts in revitalizing Confucian values through the BOS forum illuminate an important piece of the history of Vietnamese Sinology and Confucian studies in the first three decades of the twentieth century. What the BOS tells us helps to fill a gap in our understanding of this historical period, and to recover significant historical events long forgotten.

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# Chapter 4
# Understanding Chinese Economy Accurately—John Wong and His China Research

**Chueiling Shin**

> *"Doing research on modern China—called China-watching—has never been easy. It is always controversial and difficult to be objective for so many obvious reasons: ideological difference, cultural difference, social difference and China being too big with rapid changes. Thus, China as a rising power is over-criticized, over-analyzed and over-scrutinized by Western scholars, journalists and commentators. This is particularly in regards to China's politics and China's international relations. Basically we are back to the Cold War period of scholarship. Economic analysis is supposed to be less opinionated as it is based on some well-established economic concepts and some hard data. Yet interpretation has still gone wild"*
> Quoted from written correspondence between the author and John Wong

**Abstract** Understanding China as it is, or chosen theories that fit it well? John Wong represents an example of the former, a case of economic realism in the discipline of economic analysis. This chapter first describes John Wong's conceptual model of Chinese economic development analysis, which consists of three major components: Singapore as the reference point; economic scale as the first adjusted variable; and the economic development phase as the second variable. John Wong seeks beyond simple academic tradition, but finds in his acute intuition accumulated from work and life a different approach to understand China. The chapter thus further explores the causes to John Wong's choice of methodology by anatomizing the researcher's research positionality. He cannot be neatly categorized into any existing school of economic analysis in the Western academic tradition, but pursues his accurate understanding of China. Pragmatism, identification and his institutionalized research position constitute the methodological foundations for his research strategy and conceptual framework.

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## Introduction

How and to what extent can the Chinese economy be more accurately understood? Is China best understood as it is or through theories that appear to explain it? John Wong, the leading Singaporean economist is an example of the former approach, a pursuer of economic realism in the discipline of Chinese economic analysis.

This chapter has two main purposes. First, it describes John Wong's attempt to formulate an accurate analysis of China by bringing social reality into economic analysis. It argues that instead of falling into economic scientism, John Wong embraces economic realism and understands the self-styled Chinese economy within its own context, that is, through its unique economic characteristics and participants. Moreover, the chapter unveils the underlying sources of John Wong's research methodology. Its hypothesis is that this researcher's positionality matters. A researcher is understood through the lens of his or her social, political and value positions, which influence the design, execution and interpretation of theory, data and conclusions. John Wong's research positionality is discussed in the latter half of the chapter.

Economic researchers employ diverse theoretical perspectives and analytical tools. Liberal economists, for instance, who are attached to the free market theorem, would judge a specific economy by the degree of liberalization of its components. Monetary economists would tend to assess a particular economy by focusing on monetary policy, since they believe in the primacy of monies and credit management. Welfare economists, in comparison, tend to evaluate the sustainability of an economy by examining its distribution and the allocation of its productive factors, wealth and welfare. Given the numerous branches of economics and the varied ideological positions of individual researchers, the above-mentioned list is clearly not exhaustive. In contrast, John Wong rejects the idea of judging the Chinese economy by following a particular school of thoughts or through fractured theories. This Western-educated economist with a Chinese ethnic background has his own way of interpreting the Chinese economy and cannot be neatly categorized into any existing school of economic analysis in the Western academic tradition.

More importantly, John Wong's study of the Chinese economy represents a deep reflection on modern economic studies and calls for bringing reality back into them through the addition of social order to explain and resolve problems. In fact, while the majority of economists seem to embrace the notion that the methods of economic analysis can ignore social phenomena and are content with the technical sophistication of their methods and procedures, he demonstrates the falsity of this view.

This chapter attempts to map John Wong's conceptual model of economic analysis by looking into his embedded ontological and methodological approaches.

The discussion focuses on his interpretation of the Chinese economy after the global financial crisis, since this is the moment when observers began to differ sharply in their understanding of the Chinese economic situation. The chapter then takes a further look into the background that shapes John Wong as a researcher and his choice of academic methodology.

To sum up, while John Wong's view of China is not an exception, it represents a particular research position and approach that differs from that of the mainstream academic analysts. This chapter does not intend to argue for or against John Wong's perspective on the Chinese economy but hopes to call attention to the development of his research approach.

## Assessing Chinese Economic Development

### *John Wong's Conceptual Model*

John Wong's conceptual model of Chinese economic development consists of three major components: Singapore as the reference point; economic scale as the first adjusted variable and the economic development phase as the second variable.

The formula starts with the Singapore model as the reference point, partly because Singapore, together with the other Asian Tigers, developed by the so-called Asian developmental state model and partly because China shows an eagerness to learn from Singapore. Economic development in Singapore is not only taken as a paradigm but as a benchmark. According to John Wong, the Singapore model is a successful case of political management of a national economy. Market-oriented yet effective governance and the on-going pursuit of sustainable economic growth constitute the two main pillars of the Singapore model and demonstrate how Singapore developed into one of the richest and most competitive economies in the world.

Among the different elements of the Singapore model, the role of government in its market-oriented economy cannot be overemphasized; this role cannot be identified as that of a state-planned economy, despite the prominent role of Singapore's authorities. 'State capitalism' as some Western researchers term it, nevertheless, does not explicitly capture the subtlety of intervention statecraft. For a Singaporean economist such as John Wong, market power is neither controllable nor reversible; the state, therefore, is needed to detect and steer around the turbulence in the market economy. By this, he does not, however, mean a government that engages in all-round intervention, since official bureaucracies tend to be less adventurous than private entrepreneurs; rather, he refers to government taking the initiative and paving the way for private capital to participate, especially when the market loses its momentum or falls into disarray.

However, the Singapore model is not only concerned with the current economic growth rate, but emphasizes the long-term sustainability of economic development.

Sustainable economic growth requires constant and varied tuning. Although Singapore achieved quick economic success by its rapid expansion of low-cost global exports and won the name of Asian tiger as early as in the 1970s, it began to be cautious about its export-driven model and to consider a possible breakthrough. Singapore has also been preoccupied about the possible social and political impacts of the uneven distribution of economic wealth, and it has thus developed housing and wage policies, engaged in labour relations management and renewed its political system. After all, it is not only the endless pursuit of national wealth, but also income distribution and management that guarantees the sustainability of a national economy.

Hence the economic development experience of Singapore, according to John Wong, has been successful, since its government has followed the right policies at the right times. Shortly after its independence, Singapore quickly industrialized and managed to accommodate its work force in the 1970s. The country was obsessed with early economic success and full employment and undertook a painstaking 'second industrial revolution' in 1979; at this stage the government deliberately introduced policies of wage increase, the phasing out of labour-intensive manufacturing industries and raising general income. It pursued these policies with a strong hand. Thus, Singapore began to restructure itself into a higher value-added industrial economy. Meanwhile, salary increase allowed the working class to share the benefits of economic achievement and shield Singapore from a labour struggle.

John Wong acknowledges the importance of manufacturing in a successful economy and believes that Singapore government's skilful and efficient industrial policy has guided the country to advance to a new stage, that of a knowledge economy. He appraises the role of government in industrial policy planning and argues that an industrial policy is essential in most Asian countries, which, unlike the US, usually do not have abundant private financial and capital resources and need official support of innovation. The Singapore model sets the benchmark for the evaluation of economic development; in principle, the more a country resembles it, the more promising its economic outlook will be.

John Wong's understanding of the Singaporean development model follows a realist framework that appreciates the contextual nature of social realities and the primacy of social and political relations. By contrast, other theoretical models of economic development, such as Linear-Stages theories, growth models or models of structural changes are oversimplified and do not offer meaningful accounts of the politics of paradigm shift. The overemphasis on the utility of injections of capital investment and savings by the Stages model is an example of their shortcomings.

Furthermore, John Wong adds two more variables to this conceptual framework of Chinese economic assessment. First, different economic scales matter. Singapore is a city-state of less than five million people, a fact that explains its high level of dependence on the global market. The same logic may not necessarily apply to an economy of a different scale. With its huge domestic market of 1.3 billion people, China is economically linked to the outside world in a diverse manner. Its extensive domestic market could serve as a buffer and allow China more flexibility in its

economic management during global recession, when it could rely on domestic demand to supplement a receding export market, which is of strategic importance for its export-driven economy. Moreover, a large domestic market also provides China more leeway and policy options in economic restructuring, a crucial test that the nation is currently facing. Since its vast hinterland could be used to host industries that have been phased out from coastal areas, China could adopt a geographical approach in restructuring its economy, an advantage that Singapore and most other countries do not have. An assessment of the Chinese economy must, therefore, take into account the factor of economic scale.

Finally, John Wong also emphasizes the positioning of Chinese economic development in order to gain a full picture of the nation's economy. China is thus not comparable to Singapore today. After three decades of an open-door policy, China is now reaching the end of the initial stage of economic development, which has been marked by rapid growth, and has begun to approach the point of transition and adjustment. It would be meaningless to measure Chinese economic performance with the same assessment tools as those of the previous stage. Instead, the key to judge the Chinese economic outlook lies in one's awareness of the strategic intentions and policy actions China has undertaken to adjust and transform itself.

## John Wong's Anatomy of the Chinese Economy

Following this conceptual framework, John Wong develops his perspective and diagnosis of the Chinese economy. The following discussion reviews several of his assessments of Chinese development after the global financial crisis. He highly admires the position, the strategy and the attitudes of the Chinese government, which proved to be calm and adaptive to the changes of the outside world.

According to John Wong, one must interpret the Chinese economy with the right measurements and statistical indicators, such as growth rate, growth revenue and the Gini coefficient. For instance, he does not think it is realistic for a giant industrialized economy, such as that of China, to maintain two-digital growth after thirty years of rapid development with an average annual rate of 9.9% (www.Fundscupermart.com 2009). An economic growth rate between 7 and 8% between the years of 2011 and 2020 shall be appreciated as China enters its transition period of economic development with the recession of the global economy (Star News 2012). John Wong criticized without reservation that 'some doomsayers to exaggerate the seriousness of China's slowdown and paint a gloomy picture of the possible hard landing' for China's growth' (Wong 2012), and holds that except for some problems like excess capacity and over-investment in some sectors, China's economic fundamentals remained quite robust during its period of slowdown and the Chinese economy was basically in good shape even as growth gradually slowed. 'The slower growth in China's export-oriented coastal regions this time was substantially compensated by double-digit rates of growth in the central and

western regions of China, where growth was primarily driven by domestic demand' (Wong 2012).

In fact, it is not the economic slowdown, but the Chinese authorities' determination to restructure and rebalance the economy that most impress John Wong. He asserts that the Chinese government approached the slowdown quite calmly, especially since inflation appeared with slower growth. The government's only counter-measure was a mild monetary boost, with two rounds of reduction of the bank reserves requirement ratio (RRR). John Wong argues that the Chinese government 'resisted the temptation of quick theory from altering its neutral fiscal stance by not applying even a mini-stimulus package, even though it had only tiny fiscal deficits along with strong revenue growth rate of 12% and all the necessary ammunition to pump-prime the economy' (Wong 2012).

He further highlights the fact that the slowdown changed the mind-set of the Chinese leadership and stimulated the real beginning of a new growth strategy. China's top leaders have clearly recognized that the super-growth era should be brought to an end, since the rapid economic increases of the past are unsustainable and disruptive for China and the world. The new leadership under Xi Jinping has demonstrated its strong political will in carrying out structural rebalancing. More specifically, Li Keqiang, the then Chinese premier who oversees the economy has singled out urbanization as the main driver of China's domestic demand-led economic growth in the future. John Wong observes that 'urbanisation will certainly expand China's domestic demand, in terms of not just greater investment in urban infrastructure and amenities, but also higher household and personal consumption in the cities'. Thus, China's economy had started to change course, and its growth pattern had shifted (Wong 2013a). John Wong points out that Li's economic package of micro-economic stimulation and macro-economic tuning mark a departure in Chinese economic management that will bring stability in the long run (Wong 2013a).

To sum up, John Wong explicitly endorses Chinese economic policies and endeavours to remodel the nation's development paradigm. He is confident of the economic outlook of the Chinese economy and tends to reject the on-and-off speculation of its possible 'hard landing' or even collapse. However, according to the Singapore experience, China should not ignore the social and political challenges of successful economic restructure. Corruption, growing unemployment, a widened income and wealth gap and surging real estate prices are among the most crucial issues that, if mismanaged, would harm the stable and continuous development of the economy (Wong 2013b). Although the Chinese official statistics shows a slight decline of the Gini numbers from 0.49 in 2008 to 0.47 in 2012, John Wong points out that China's true Gini coefficient could be higher, if the under-reported and grey area of high-incomes is taken into consideration.

The Chinese authorities under the leadership of Xi have acknowledged the importance of rebalancing economic development and called for increases in minimum wages social welfare expenditures, which, while relaxing current tensions, cannot radically cure problems. Instead, social pressure would diminish only with the more equitable distribution of wealth, greater opportunities in education

and the encouragement of innovation and entrepreneurship. These goals can only be reached by a long-term and full-fledged reform of Chinese social institutions, which may be resisted by vested interest groups (Wong 2013a). John Wong trusts that the Chinese leaders will have the ability and resources to deal with these problems, if they are ready to bear with the pain during the transition period.

John Wong has a strong and clear opinion about the best political system for an economy in transition. He argues that good governance does not require instant democracy to solve Chinese problems; instead it is politically, economically and socially less disruptive for China to avoid immediate democracy (黃朝翰 2013). John Wong states that 'Good government (or good governance) and good policy are, in fact, more directly relevant for economic development while a pseudo-democracy or a half-baked democracy may not be conducive to economic development… for a developing country to rush into a full-fledged liberal, competitive democracy in their early development phases, there can be unacceptable economic trade-offs in terms of poor economic performance' (Wong 2010).

Nonetheless, John Wong does not object to Chinese democratization, but he emphases the need for a gradual approach to political reform. Better governance, according to John Wong is not a substitute for the final goal of democracy, but sets down a strong foundation for this future objective. He points out the fact that 'the Chinese leadership in recent years has undertaken many reforms and introduced many measures to make the political system more open. These include greater intra-Party democracy, local elections, legal and constitutional protection of the citizens' rights, appointments of officials based on merits, and the like'. Since the Chinese leadership has adopted its first steps in political reform, the critical question is whether the time is now ripe for China to undertake bigger strides towards political change and democracy. He believes that China will eventually achieve a good economic and social system, albeit it might be 'democracy with many Chinese characteristics' (Wong 2010).

## John Wong's Research Methodology and Practice

John Wong's research on China and the post-2008 Chinese economy is unique. He understands China as an enlarged and adjusted version of Singapore in the past and assesses it by measuring the differences between the two countries, with Singapore serving as the benchmark. His findings are, of course, subject to debate, for knowledge is constructed by the interactions between a researcher and his subject, mediated by a specific methodology. Pragmatism and binary identity positionality are the two main elements of John Wong's research methodology. Pragmatism emphasizes the generation of useful knowledge and avoids standardized methods and methodologies. Identity positionality derives from cultural studies. It affirms that the positioning of a researcher in relation to others affects how he or she interprets and understands the world. The following discussion explains the methodological approach found in John Wong's work and research practice.

## *Pragmatism*

John Wong's research in Chinese economy radically differs from that of mainstream academics, who are predominantly oriented to econometrics and complex modelling techniques. In comparison, he apparently believes in pragmatic, useful knowledge; he shuns printable and publishable academic clichés with beautiful formats but without profound meaning.[1]

In fact, pragmatism does very well explain his choice of a research methodology. A pragmatic approach of methodology aims at generating truth and useful knowledge to solve problems in the real world. Unlike ontological realism, pragmatism sees a world in constant change. Knowledge of truth should be validated through discursive reflection among the communities, and is not timelessly and universally valid, but historically and socially contingent (Friedrichs 2009). 'Our current expedient theories, philosophies, and truths … might one day become thought of as of little use, that is, as false' (Franke and Weber 2012).

John Wong's persistence in following a pragmatic approach reflects his view on economic development, which is empirical and policy oriented, and his later work as a policy scholar at the East Asian Institute (EAI).[2] For John Wong, a good development economist should be more broad-minded and does not ignore factors such as social change and institutional make-ups, while sticking to the necessary theoretical bottom line of the economic discipline. The late Singapore Prime Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, had a strong intellectual impact on John Wong, who worked at the Institute of EAI under Goh's leadership. An economist by training, Goh stressed the importance of good policy papers based on sound scholarship, i.e. conceptually sound facts and up-to-date statistics. According to John Wong, Goh was, in a way, his mentor in policy research (see Footnote 2).

John Wong's rejection of slavish conformity to the general practices of the ivy tower allows him the autonomy and freedom to conduct independent research on China, both epistemologically and in arranging a research strategy; he very much echoes Friedrichs and Kratochwil's discussion of 'abduction':

> The typical situation for abduction is when we, as social scientists, become aware of a certain class of phenomena that interests us for some reason, but for which we lack applicable theories. We simply trust, although we do not know for certain, that the observed class of phenomena is not random. We therefore start collecting pertinent observations and, at the same time, applying concepts from existing fields of our knowledge. Instead of trying to impose an abstract theoretical template deduction or 'simply' inferring propositions from facts induction! we start reasoning at an intermediate level (Friedrichs 2009).

The pragmatic research strategy of 'abduction' is constituted more of evolving and negotiable concepts than of fixed and standardized theory, for humans typically work on the basis of 'family resemblance' and 'paradigmatic exemplars' through analogies and conceptual stretching (Friedrichs 2009). The same strategy can be

[1]Interview with John Wong, 2007. Taipei, Taiwan.

[2]Quoted from written correspondence between the author and John Wong.

detected in John Wong's conceptual framework of research on the Chinese economy, which developed from the Singapore paradigm. Statistics constitute an important reference for him, but he does not lose his way in fancy demonstrations of statistical skills; rather, he interprets numbers with experience and intuition. Friedrichs and Kratochwil explicate this issue:

> When using statistics, a pragmatic researcher will preferably use intuitive tools such as frequency counts or cross-tabulation, which keep it easy to check statistical findings against the qualitative record. The pragmatic researcher will therefore keep analytical procedures as simple and intuitive as possible, and prefer descriptive to inferential statistics (Friedrichs 2009).

John Wong's adoption of a pragmatic methodology allows him to understand the Chinese economy without falling into the ideology trap of many modern scholars.[3] He also rejects research projects that are bound by academic clichés and ridiculous formality.[4] Following the pragmatic approach, thinking independently, writing freely and using the right resources allow him to present his own view of the world.

## *Identity Positionality*

Pragmatism best explains John Wong and his research, while the perspective of cultural studies offers a different angle on the man and his work through the positioning of identity. In fact, the methodology of positional identity is constantly found in his work.

'One's positionality can bias one's epistemology.', as David Takacs puts it that 'We live much of our lives in our own heads, in a reconfirming dialogues with ourselves' (Takacs 2003). Positionality, being a central component in the production of knowledge involves a critical reflexive exercise to identify the web of power relations embedded in the research process (England 1994; McDowell 1998; Moss 1995; Nast 1994; Rose 1997). It shapes how subjects engage with researchers and, therefore, all aspects of the research process (Crossa 2012; Nast 1994). The complexity of power relations implicit in the research process is characterized by Nast (1994) as a state of 'betweenness' that captures the unavoidable negotiation of difference, which is 'an essential characteristic of all social interactions that requires that we are always and everywhere in between or negotiating the worlds of me and not-me when engaging with others' (Nast 1994). The identity and positionality approach affect one's epistemological choices in several ways:

Social belonging: Ideas of similarity and difference are central to our attainment of a sense of identity and social belonging. Identity reflects the way individuals and

[3]In the interview, John Wong asserted his determination to carry out research without being trapped ideologically, as many US scholars are.

[4]Interview with John Wong.

groups internalize themselves and the established social categories that shape our ideas about other people and groups.

Exclusion: Identities of self/other have some element of exclusivity and imply social categories of binary opposites that 'we' and 'the other' belong to different groups of belonging, identity and social status, as Simone de Beauvoir argued that 'Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus, it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without setting up at once the other over against itself' (De Beauvoir 1949).

Self-perception: The me and not-me, or the binary of self and other, one of the basic divisions by which the modern individual comprehends who he or she is by recognizing what he or she is not[5] also reflects self-perception. *I see you. I do not control your body or hear your thoughts. You are separate. You are not me. Therefore, I am me* (Rose 1997).

Power Relations: This term implies the arrangement of power among individual subjects. Zygmunt Bauman writes that identities are set up as dichotomies so that, for example, 'Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend' (Bauman 1991). Social identities thus are not natural. They represent a hierarchy where certain groups may be established as being superior or abnormal to other groups. The identity positioning thus implies the underlying bias of power relationships between self and the other (Okolie 2003).

A researcher's identity and positionality choices connote his or her underlying assumptions of social belonging, social exclusion, reflexive self-identification and hierarchical power with others. John Wong's research arrangement implies the complex self–other relations among Singapore, China, and any third country.

## *Social Belonging*

Despite his Hong Kong origin, John Wong's educational background and career path have led him into the inner circle of the Singapore policy-makers. His self-perception, social position and thus identity resemble those of the Singapore elites, most of the so-called *baba*, the decedents of Chinese immigrants to the Indonesia archipelago and British Malaya during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. After many generations, many *baba* families partially assimilated into Malayan culture; they are British-educated and are fluent in English and Malay as their first and second languages, although they still retain their Chinese cultural links to a certain degree. This is especially so for the British-educated *baba* elite,

[5]The self/other concept is originally attributed to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in Phenomenology of Spirit (1977).

which later became the ruling circle in Singapore; some of whom may even identify with the British more than the Chinese. With Chinese as an ethnic birthmark, the straits Chinese regard themselves differently and superior to 'traditional' Chinese people and modern China (陳昌宏 2011). They may not reject Chinese culture; some even learn to appreciate it, but they would not like to be misidentified as the same people as traditional Chinese. Lee Kuan Yew, who became prime minister of Singapore when his age was just 35 years, is a typical example. Goh Keng Swee, Lee's long-term deputy prime minister, was another epitome of the baba elite. Both were not brought up as a Chinese with a focus on China, but as a baba who looked to England, and institutionalized Singapore as a little England (Beckman 2004).

## *Power Relations*

In a word, there is a detectable and complex sense of superiority and self-assurance in the *baba* perception of traditional Chinese and hence of China as the other. The Chinese spoken in Singapore is different from that spoken by traditional or the people of mainland Chinese. Lee was sensitive of being mistaken as a traditional Chinese person and would emphasize his identity as Singaporean Chinese.[6] Goh, for example, was also not enthusiastic about Singapore's plans to invest heavily in China. 'A lot of Singaporeans will lose their shirts in China', he has said. China is messy, its legal system too poor, and the going will be tough. Singaporeans are not used to operate in such an environment, to paraphrase Goh. They may have ancestral roots in China, but the ways and means of China were no longer theirs (Beckman 2004).

This sense of superiority and self-assurance is also reflected in Singapore's belief in the primary values set up by Kuan Yew Lee. Given his authority, the doctrines endorsed by him have become the primary values of Singapore's government and public policy, i.e. elitism, Neo-Darwinism, pragmatism, rationalism, communitarianism, conservative liberalism and a preference for 'good government' (Business China, Singapore 2009; Chang 2000; Chua 1995; Han et al. 1998). Lee's primary values were collectively echoed in the whole of Singapore, which eventually become one the richest countries in the world, thus further guaranteeing their authority. Kwan-Yew Lee's speech, addressed to a business community in 2009, explained this underlying, high-flying confidence: 'We are a little red dot but we are a special red dot. We are connected with the world, we play a special role. And we are not going to be in anybody's pocket' (Business China, Singapore 2009).

[6]From his autobiography and John Wong's interview.

### *Self-perception*

The binary identity of Singapore and China shows the self-perception of Singapore as a high flyer, leading the way and showing itself as a model for China, the lag-behind, yet quickly catching up follower and explains John Wong's conceptual framework of the Chinese economy. He asserts that China cannot be analyzed in the manner of Western researchers, but should be understood in the right context. The following section discusses the mutual work John Wong and the East Asian Institute (EAI) of National University of Singapore to achieve that context.

## EAI as Research Practice

By their nature and development, the EAI and its predecessors explain that they are research projects under official guidance. The Institute of EAI (1997 to the present) is the successor of the former Institute of East Asian Political Economy (IEAPE 1992–1996), which was itself the successor of the Institute of East Asian Philosophies (IEAP 1983–1991), originally established by Goh Keng Swee in 1983 for the study of Confucianism (East Asian Institute). The EAI is a long-term research project, initiated and even sometimes under the direct command of the Singaporean authorities.[7]

As the EAI's former Research Director and currently Professorial Fellow, John Wong actually works on behalf of Singapore's ruling elites. Albeit he is a Hong Kong Chinese immigrant of the 1970s, he identifies with the Singaporean elite values of Lee Kuan Yew and agrees with the goals and functions of the Institute (陳昌宏 2011). He is sure of the purpose of the research objects of the EAI, which is to pragmatically understand the real China.

John Wong's duties in the EAI have turned him from an academic scholar into policy scholar. He does not want the EAI to generate useless knowledge, academic

[7]According to the interview with John Wong, each stage of the institute was given a different research assignment, based on the need to shift the focus of Singapore's China policy. The IEAP period, for instance, emphasized the study of Confucian thought, when the Singaporean government—which had chosen to westernize the country for quick development—learned from its East Asian neighbours the merits of Confucian philosophy in modernization and thus encouraged Confucian thought to maintain stability in the 1970s and 1980s.

The IEAP became the IEAPE at the turn of the 1990s, when the Singaporean authorities began to become aware of the necessity of understanding the PRC, following the Tiananmen Event and later the rise of the Chinese economy following the open-door policy. Watching China has since become the main task of the IEAPE.

The IEAPE was again renamed the EAI and affiliated with the University of Singapore in 1996, partly for the better recruitment of research staff and partly for its extended goals of long-term development as a Chinese research center in the East Asian Region. The most important reason was to ensure the work of the EAI continued, with the continuous growth of Chinese power; Singapore could not afford to neglect that nation's political and economic significance.

analysis with beautiful clichés, nor biased interpretations based on Western ideology. For that purpose, John Wong uses Chinese scholars with doctoral degrees as information translators and data interpreters in order to narrow the knowledge and perception gap between Singapore and China. John Wong and the EAI are very careful and selective about recruitment, for the appointed Chinese researchers act as important research agents and information mediums. The EAI does not trust Chinese scholars with Chinese degrees and prefers those with mainland origins but with Western educations, preferably with degree from prestigious American universities. Locally educated Chinese scholars are not appreciated and judged as lacking academic training 'Chinese academic paper does not usually show its hypothesis and argument'.[8] However, those who were capable and skilful at academic techniques and formalities but failed to prove their sensitivity to real China are also not welcome. Everyone who is employed must pass the security check of the Singapore government.

John Wong ensures that the Singapore government obtains insightful and complete information about the real China. He regularly checks Chinese publications and systematically frames questions in different policy areas for Chinese researchers. With few exceptions, the Chinese scholars do not obtain tenure but work on two or three year contracts. With such a personnel scheme, the EAI is able to obtain the most diversified and best Chinese talent. The organization, function and recruitment of the EAI indicate that the institution is pragmatic and instrumental and that it functions exactly as John Wong thinks best for research.

## Conclusion

Therefore, John Wong's pursuit of an accurate understanding of China through pragmatism, identification and his institutionalized research position constitute the methodological foundations for his research strategy and conceptual framework. Underlying his accuracy pursuit for knowledge is his long-time status as an independent and free thinker. John Wong mentioned again and again during the interview that he wants knowledge free from Western ideological constraints and academic clichés (*Ba Gu* 八股). Understanding China within the right context and no *bagu* but real reflection and a choice of methodology is what he expects of himself and the EAI; they are objectives that perhaps others in the academic world would also want to achieve. When that goal is really achieved, academic research will not be just a simple reproduction of standard formalities, but a piece of art, created from one's intuition and interaction with the real world. With that objective, can a social scientist ask for more?

[8]Interview with John Wong 2007.

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# Chapter 5
# Two Intellectual Paths that Cross the Borders: Nguyen Huy Quy, Phan van Coc, and Humanities in Vietnam's Chinese Studies

**Chih-yu Shih, Chih-chieh Chou and Hoai Thu Nguyen**

**Abstract** The drive to enhance knowledge and the determination to carry out a humanistic tradition made self-silencing a fruitful mechanism for knowledge acquisition. A tradition greater and longer than individuals' existence buttressed their determination. Indeed, the family tradition inherited from familial teaching remains fresh in both Phan and Nguyen's recollections. Self-study proved to be critical in reclaiming the humanities lost in the crucial 15 years of censorship. Without the drive for self-study, self-silencing would have amounted to an unalterable and irreconcilable epistemic schism. Therefore, national confrontation is not the same as complete confrontation because individual paths are capable of preserving alternative, if not oppositional, paths. Such individual intellectual paths are not predetermined because human judgment and determination are varied by time and location. Spatial and temporal constraints are not completely binding. Moreover, such constraints are fallible, making borderless history and bordered territories clash, and creating a wider range of options for younger generations. Therefore, the lessons provided by Nguyen and Phan exceed the tangible manifestations of their scholarship.

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## The Context

In the twenty-first century, Vietnam encountered a series of maritime disputes with China, seemingly damaging the gradual restoration of a relationship that had been completely ruined by war in 1979. Before that, Vietnam and China had been in a perfect comradeship that started at the end of the Second World War, as symbolized by the friendship between Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969). Subsequently, during the peak of the Vietnam War, the rapprochement between China and the United States led to disillusionment in Vietnam. In retrospect, the creation of the contemporary relationship between the two nations was not smooth. However, they were by no means natural enemies. In fact, in ancient history and even by modern standards, Chinese and Vietnamese were not even two distinctively different national groups. Despite sporadic incidents of conquest and resistance, no clear-cut territorial demarcation between the two peoples existed. Their spiritual lives, world views, and institutions were based on Confucianism, in addition to Buddhism and Daoism, which also prevailed amongst the Chinese. Togetherness, in one way or another, characterizes their world of humanity. Note that the maritime dispute between the two countries contradicts what one would expect of two rival countries in a major way: the dispute coincides with a bilateral agreement of strategic partnership between the two governments as well as a joint drill of maritime rescue between the two navies (Lin 2012).

The contemporary dispute is harder to manage conceptually than similar conflicts before modern time. Consider that the dispute is made sensible in a world where territorial sovereignty constitutes the essence of statehood. Although the attainment of sovereign nation/statehood was how the two countries, in the face of the West, have achieved independence, the institution of sovereignty arbitrarily separates people on the two sides of the border despite all kinds of groups residing and flowing in a historically borderless state of mind. Modern statehood even extends to the sea where maritime resources for all turn into territorial waters no longer shareable. Adopting the institution of sovereignty was the decision of neither the Chinese nor the Vietnamese. Relatively, world politics arrived in their polities with an irresistible force of transformation. Once reduced to merely two sovereign states, territorial concessions, however minor, could mean national shame and jeopardize political stability. Consequently, hostility and estrangement surge in their mutual images every once a while.

Conversely, for the strategic partnership and the willingness to cooperate to proceed in the institutionally structured rupture, human judgment must have influenced these paradoxical arrangements. The judgment on how China and Vietnam ought to interact intrinsically reflects an inexpressible and likely politically incorrect attitude on both sides that the disputes should have a limit, if not

immediate reversion. This inexpressible feeling of affinity, probably embedded in a shared historical trajectory before 1885, cannot promise practical success in conflict resolution. However, this feeling preserves the shared spirit of humanities embedded in Confucianism that have carried Sinologists in Vietnam through the changing world time and the vicissitudes of the bilateral relationship. Humanistic Sinology, in turn, provides contemporary sovereign thinkers with a vehicle to reach outside of the sovereign mindset.

The ensuing discussion presents the intellectual paths of two prominent Vietnamese Sinologists, Nguyen Huy Quy and Phan Van Cac, both retired from the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (VASS). Through their intellectual growth, we hope to show how humanities have survived political upheavals of and between the two countries and returned in the process of national reform. The perseverance of humanist concerns demonstrates the relevance of individual determination in the evolution of Vietnamese scholarship on China, indicating an epistemological agency to transcend politics. Humanities remain influential in their support for Sinology in Vietnam that inspires the younger generations to understand their mission in the shaky bilateral international relationship that marks the beginning of the 2010s.

This chapter first places Vietnamese Sinology in a comparative perspective. Sinological traditions elsewhere that are rooted in humanities can similarly be found in Korea and Japan in Northeast Asia—which Vietnamese Sinologists sensitively watch and compare—Mongolia in North Asia, and India in South Asia. Along with the European Sinology of over three centuries, scholarship of humanities in Asia also enables the understanding of contemporary China significantly, albeit indirectly. In comparison, China studies constituted by social science approaches in the Anglosphere seem recent and unique. All these Sinological traditions serve as excellent cases of comparison each in a peculiar perspective, underlining the call for sited knowledge in the multicultural age (Blaney and Tickner 2012). After this broader discussion, the spirit of humanity in the scholarship of the two scholars, as well as their epistemological strategy toward politics and the contemporary meanings of their careers, will be examined.

## Vietnamese Sinology in a Comparative Perspective

Humanities comprise an important dimension of China studies in many parts of the world, including the former communist party bloc, the East Asian Confucian sphere, and the civilizational divides across the Himalayas. However, Vietnamese China studies, which also host a humanity perspective in their origin, do not belong to any of them. Vietnam is comparable to them each in a peculiar way. One significant feature that makes Vietnam distinctive from all others is that Vietnamese Sinologists believe that Chinese cultural elements have been integrated into Vietnamese history and are inherently Vietnamese. Although the country has experienced cycles of confrontation with China since the beginning of Détente in

the 1970s (Womack 2006), no noticeable effort has been made, political nor intellectual, to reconceptualize its Confucian legacy as an external resource that has been appropriated by Vietnam for its own instrumental use. Rather, Confucianism and other Sinological components continue to make up Vietnam's own value to the extent that transnational Confucianism does not compromise Vietnam's national identity as it does in Japan, Korea, or Taiwan. Later, the two academic trajectories of Nguyen and Phan will show this distinctive feature.

Korea and Japan are the two most conspicuous cases in contrast. As scholars of both countries acknowledge their cultural indebtedness to Confucianism, most of them have joined the national campaign for independence and dignity in modern times to make sure that being Confucian is not the same as being Chinese (Tanaka 1995). The identity strategies of China's two northeastern neighbors consistently, although apart from each other in terms of the exact period of time of doing this, require the conscious treatment of Confucianism as an imported resource premised upon a local subjectivity unique in its own way. This imagined local subjectivity painstakingly reproduces itself through scholarship that trivializes grand traditions into specific interpretation and practices in the hope of demonstrating a certain local reappropriation of Chinese cultural resources for functions entirely irrelevant to the Chinese intellect.

In fact, intellectuals that led Westernization during the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century Japan were invariably those with Sinological training, if not in themselves prominent Sinologists. Their self-conscious mission often included the explication that their Confucianism was exclusively Japanese in style. Korea displays an alternative strategy in its mainstream proposition that genuine Confucianism exists only in Korea because Koreans never encountered any annihilation campaign against Confucianism as happened in Chinese history (Sima 2013). Both Nguyen and Phan believe that the frank and tolerant attitude among Vietnamese colleagues toward shared indebtedness to Confucianism actually enables a level of learning that their Northeast Asian counterpart cannot reach. Based on the depth of learning tantamount to an indigenous Chinese learning, in addition to the same Communist leadership and its reform orientation, Sinological students in Vietnam are able to appreciate contemporary Chinese affairs effectively.

This intellectual capacity to conceive Chinese humanities as Vietnam's own without feeling threatened as regards Vietnam's self-identity is also reflected in Mongolian Sinology. Mongolian Sinology distinguishes itself through its strong interest in Chinese fiction and history, which is therefore different from Russian Sinology that includes a significant dedication to classics. The popularity of Chinese fiction, which represents an exotic agricultural civilization, encourages the intellectuals of nomadic civilizations to improve their ability to translate novels, nonfictions, and theaters for ordinary audience. Language training is the foundation of Mongolian Sinology. Mongolian historians usually read Chinese records. Mongolian historiography benefits enormously from Chinese records because the nomadic civilization does not survive on written texts. The analysis of

contemporary China also relies more heavily on reading Chinese documents than on theoretical frames that are universally applicable.

Similar to Vietnam is the political intervention in Mongolia's China studies by the Sino-Soviet rift that lasted for almost three decades since the 1960s. Mongolian Sinologists could only receive training in the former Soviet Union, and their exclusive mission was to criticize China (Manaljav 2011). Although Vietnamese Sinologists did not rely on Soviet training to the same extent as Mongolian Sinologists did, the political intervention similarly silenced scholarly presentation. The Soviet control was equally merciless in East Europe, leading to a synchronized Sinology in the Soviet bloc. However, the loosening up of the control in the 1990s witnessed the return to traditions of all these former Soviet bloc member-states. A return to humanities occurred in Mongolian Sinology, along with a national appeal to the legendary Genghis Khan. Although both Mongolian and Vietnamese Sinology rely on Chinese texts for self-learning, contemporary Mongolian Sinology is exempted from the marginal feeling that can be registered in Vietnam's perception of China as a shadow too overwhelming to ignore (Nguyen, H. T. 2009). Rather, Mongolian Sinologists take pride in their historical ruling, albeit brief, of the world, including China's Yuan Dynasty. This sense of superiority in the civilizational strength ingrained in the historical nomadic conquest of the world is not present in Vietnamese Sinology.

Vietnam's Sinology is more comprehensive in comparison, but the Soviet legacy is equally volatile in Vietnam as it is in Mongolia. Few ever chose Russia for advanced studies of China before or after the breakdown of the Soviet bloc. By contrast, language abilities are much stronger in Vietnam. The historical mingling with Chinese people makes live interaction and observation in person another tool of analysis for Vietnamese scholars. This explains the family traditions of Nguyen and Phan, which are embedded in common sense Sinology pervasive in society, in contrast to the contemporary Mongolian Sinologists' family traditions, which are often affiliated with the academic establishment. The reliance on personal experiences is a distinctive feature of Vietnamese humanities. There are more Sinologists in Vietnam than any other place in the world that are self-learners of Chinese culture and language, as opposed to the training received in established pedagogy. Self-learning is possible only when Vietnam is full of Chinese cultural resources. The sense of cultural affinity nurtures the intuition that personal experience can be the most useful and confident way of research. Self-watching requires no felt sense of methodology as watching an exotic object does. For Mongolia, the difference in civilization attracts Sinologists; for Vietnam, the shared spontaneity in civilization requires no exercise of Othering. The contrast explains how Chinese studies of humanities pertain to self-understanding in two countries differently. In fact, Mongolian Sinologists readily treat Inner Mongolians in China as Chinese.

Civilizational sensibilities are also powerful in India's China studies, which reflect the emotional investment of Indian China experts in their subject—liking, disliking, or ambivalence toward China. These sensibilities carried an affective intimacy or betrayal thereof and primarily came from Rabindranath Tagore's humanist legacy, hope for reconnection to a Buddhist tradition, and Jawaharlal

Nehru's non-alignment movement, which China joined with pleasure. One significant and yet hardly noticeable parallel between China studies in India and Vietnam is that international politics in the 1960s forced a drastic turn from humanities toward think tank analysis. Note that Nguyen was intensively involved in this think tank tradition. Vietnam's Sinology style was in between that of Russia and India in the sense that Russia similarly relied heavily on staff trained in humanities to work on current affairs, whereas India began to recruit social scientists. Chinese language programs in India suffered a strong blow after the 1962 border war. The war between Vietnam and China in 1979 had a similar chilling effect on Chinese studies in Vietnam. Thereafter, Indian think thank staff has been trained by university faculties that have been heavily influenced by social science traditions in the Anglosphere, but Vietnamese think tanks have begun to recruit Russian-trained social scientist in the twenty-first century, in addition to those trained via Vietnam's own Sinological curriculum. Nonetheless, Sinologists such as Nguyen and Phan were able to draw from their training in humanities in their new assignments to become early think tank analysts.

India's civilizational sensibilities remain relevant to the extent that the think tank analysts of China's policy behavior tend to see a civilizational root (Li 1996; Sen 2003; Shih et al. 2012; Tan 1998). This resort to civilizational understanding is not exclusively Indian. Contemporary phenomena have to come from something in the remote past to find audience in Vietnam as well as in Russia and India. However, for the time being, only Indian China scholars specifically theorize the civilizational influences on the flow of mundane affairs (Gupta 1971a, 1995). Since the mid-1990s, China scholars in both India and Vietnam have focused on China's economic development, drawing pragmatic lessons for their own societies, respectively. Moreover, both India and Vietnam are involved in territorial disputes with China. The combination of confrontation and sharing will characterize China's interaction with both countries in the years to come, but the civilizational sharing between Vietnam and China will make the range of options much richer for Vietnam than for India. Moreover, Vietnam is a Communist party-state practicing socialism, making China a particularly pertinent model. *The Economist* actually calls Vietnam a good student of the China model (Goscha 2004), but China experts in India view China as a competitor. By contrast, the notion of the China threat never appears between Nguyen's or Phan's lines.

## The Intellectual Paths of Nguyen and Phan

The spread of Confucian influence in Vietnam can be traced back to the Han Dynasty. Before 1885, Vietnam had been a kingdom member of the Chinese tributary system. The kings in Vietnam owed their legitimacy partly to the recognition by the Chinese court through the tributary relationship (Woodside 1971). The political institutions unfailingly adopted the same classics and codes that informed the ruling of the celestial court. Both the Chinese and the Vietnamese elite faithfully

performed according to the same Confucian Book of Rites. The social value similarly granted higher status to scholars and tillers than to handicraftsmen or merchants. Under the French Colonial rule, Vietnamese Sinologists sought inspiration from the responses made by the contemporary Chinese Confucianists to the arriving forces of modernity in order to devise Vietnam's own strategy of adaptation. After the Second World War, the newly independent state established a friendly relationship with China. No clear sign of discomfort in Vietnam points to Confucianism as an alien element that had to be restricted. In fact, Ho Chi Minh was a lover of Chinese culture. Nguyen's and Phan's families came from the same cultural tradition. Despite the intervention of the Sino–Soviet rift for about two decades, Vietnamese Sinology has been able to sustain its own intellectual momentum embedded in a Confucian past.

To trace the contemporary intellectual trajectory that has an origin in pre-independence Vietnam, this chapter uses an oral history interview as methodology. Both Nguyen and Phan were interviewed by Thi Hue Phung in 2008 who was at the time in charge of the oral history of Sinology sponsored by the Center for Mainland China and Cross-Strait Relations of the Department of Political Science at National Taiwan University. The interviews were recorded and conducted in Vietnamese. They were later translated to Chinese in Taiwan.

Nguyen Huy Quy used to be the most senior scholar in the Institute of Chinese Culture of VASS before he retired. He underwent Chinese language training in China from 1956 to 1962. Before his trip, he learned rudimentary French aside from native Vietnamese. At the end of his career, he was quadrilingual, with knowledge of minimal Russian and advanced Chinese. His Confucian father, who was also a Communist, willfully bred his child with the spirit of humanity at an early age. Nguyen Huy Quy was among the rare few who were selected for learning abroad to have a non-European destiny. Upon his return, he joined the research staff of modern world history. His knowledge of Chinese historiography fit in this area of studies. He recalled a whole decade of academic extinction starting in 1979 during which period no single paper on China was published and no Chinese language curriculum was active. However, he did not drop out of his studies. In 1980, he was able to fulfill his assignment of writing and publishing *The Great October Revolution of Socialism*. He proceeded with the editing of *Modern World History* in 1983. Finally, he was appointed director of the newly established Center of China Studies in 1993.

Phan Van Cac, the other interviewee, was the former head of the College of Hán Nôm studies. Phan went to China for Chinese training for 2 years in 1954 and went again to Nanjing University in 1976 for another 2 years to earn a college degree. His teaching was more influenced by his father than by his official education at a teacher's school in China. A self-learned Confucianist, his father, innovated a curriculum using phonetics, consequently nurturing a strong liking in Phan to Chinese culture. Phan's professional expertise began with translation. According to his recollection, poverty disallowed him from voluntary choosing schooling or profession. After performing a few years of social work assigned by the government, he was appointed by the government to study in a normal school in South

China, pushing him into the academic profession. His private liking of Chinese culture together with his family tradition carried him through the tumultuous years. Eventually, he succeeded in his self-learning to become an expert on Hán Nôm studies. He did not leave his profession during Vietnam's confrontation with China. In 1985, he took over the task of editing *Hán Nôm Curricula* (Phan 1985). At the point of his retirement, he found himself completely satisfied with a career immersed in the intertwined legacy of Chinese and Vietnamese ancestors.

From the oral history interview of the two scholars, three particular aspects emerge as critical in the evolution of their scholarship: family, traveling, and determination. The larger historical and political contexts are out of individual choice. Both scholars shifted from one position to another upon the order of their respective superiors. They also had no control over their family tradition. Phan's relative poverty and Nguyen's somewhat better off condition made little difference in their professional opportunities. The exception is that Nguyen had a choice between being a researcher of history and a college professor on his return from China. He chose to teach in college because he preferred to be in contact with the younger instead of the older generation. Nevertheless, he agreed to transfer to the Institute of History later on. He also took the assignment in the Center of Chinese Studies after his work with modern history. No qualified scholar other than Nguyen was available at that time to head the newly installed center because most scholars already left Chinese studies after 1979. Although their career paths seemed externally arranged overall, other noteworthy factors shaped their intellectual paths. We will touch upon the three aspects of family, traveling, and determination in the ensuing discussion.

Both scholars obviously acquired their love for Chinese culture from their families, especially from their fathers. Phan began to learn Chinese characters when he was five years old. Phan's father chanted to him poems of the Tang Dynasty, allowing Phan to become obsessed with Tang poems since childhood. His drive for self-learning reflected his father's self-learning spirit. However, the technique Phan's father uses to teach him was different and reformist. Phan's father began his own Chinese lessons with the Three Character Classic. Conversely, Phan's lesson began first with one character and the terms associated with it, followed by the other characters with exactly the same pronunciation, and so on. Both Phan and Nguyen proved the cultural intimacy between Vietnamese and Chinese cultures. Confucian and other cultural wisdoms and conventions are spontaneous in the daily lives of Vietnamese people. Learning in daily life and learning more through extended personal experiences ensures a style of scholarship oriented toward humanism.

Traveling is a significant method for studying China. Nguyen and Phan represent two alternative methodological aspects of traveling, respectively. Nguyen, in his capacity as director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, was responsible for policy analysis and recommendation. During his travels to China, he took advantage of his encounters and observed on site the words and deeds of the people in the vicinity. He compared Hong Kong and Taiwan in terms of the Chinese consciousness and Taiwan and China in terms of the level of democracy by observing the behavior of real people. During his interview, he recalled his various lessons during the many

trips he made to China. Phan was not a policy maker, although he did suggest in vain to the Minister of Education to preserve Chinese pedagogy at the time of its abolishment. Phan benefited methodologically from his research as well as from his conference trips to China and other Chinese societies. He learned how Russian colleagues take an external position on China, how American colleagues conceptualize China as a sheer other, and how Japanese colleagues use Chinese characters. This knowledge enabled him to reflect on Vietnam's unique perspective on the Chinese culture.

Learning through living contacts makes both scholars' dedication to the studies of Chinese humanities a personal choice. To begin with, they did not retreat from their studies during the political downturn. Chinese documents were only accessible in private and even illegal channels during those years. Phan managed to stay in touch with his studies by transferring to Ho Chi Minh studies, in which he focused on the Chinese poems written by Ho. His scholarship survived on this peculiar and yet innovative connection with his expertise. He taught students to persevere in their language training as if his own struggle could be reproduced. Nguyen reflected upon the imposed assignment by the government and concluded that Vietnam should no longer be engrossed by blind learning from or reacting to China but focus on real issues. He attempted to transcend politics; even if the purpose of research was no more than "performing a duty, one could still do it objectively and treat it as a scientific task" (Nguyen, H. Q. 2009).

## Nguyen's and Phan's Identity Strategy

Retrieving the sources of identities to make one's own nation independent of Chinese identities is a usual strategy adopted by communities that once shared a history with China. Strangely enough, celebrating the convergence, rather than the divergence, of histories can also be useful in representing contemporary identities. Considering the increasing disputes over maritime sovereignty, Vietnamese scholars are legitimately suspicious of Beijing's intentions toward its Southeast Asian neighbors, but the Sino-Vietnamese war and the historical dominance of China did not monopolize their contemporary narrative on China. Nguyen and Phan, both veteran scholars of humanities, have a great appreciation for the common history of Vietnam and China. Their scholarship is embedded in both family traditions and their training in the humanities. Instead of feeling threatened by a politically, economically, and culturally overwhelming neighbor, they both regard the 1000 years of shared history as an asset that contemporary Vietnam can deal with skillfully. Knowing China better than anyone else is even a source of pride. By contrast, other East Asian scholars always find proximity a threat to self-identity. Nguyen and Phan do not feel that Vietnam will lose its own identity by acknowledging that it shares a historical path with China.

These two scholars do not derive a sense of security from the possibility of a different historical path for Vietnam. Rather, their sense of security is increased by

their confidence in their knowledge of China. For them, if there was a historical Sinic sphere, it should have already split into China and Vietnam after 1945. This self-confidence encourages them to deal with the evaluative comparison between Korea and Japan, thus insinuating contemporary Vietnam's externality to China as an observer. Nguyen is comfortable having both Chinese and Vietnamese identities in his own scholarship, as he indicates in the following:

> Because Vietnam belonged to China proper and was under Chinese administrative jurisdiction for a thousand years, the Chinese and Vietnamese cultures have for long converged into one despite the fact that Vietnam is politically independent. The relationship is still intimate although there have been a few confrontations. The exchange relations between China and Vietnam were so early that Vietnamese today are able to write Tang [618–907] style poems in Han characters. The Koreans and the Japanese have adopted a different tonality, resulting in their inability to write Tang-style poems. For example, one kind of Tang-style poem is the eight-line poem, which Vietnamese can write. Vietnamese write beautiful Han characters. Vietnam could proudly announce that Vietnam's China scholarship ranks number one in the world; (Nguyen, H. Q. 2009).

The Chinese identity provided the basis for Nguyen's formulation of the Vietnamese identity. His view was in sharp contrast with mainstream Korean Sinology. This particular Sinology pursued to separate the history of Korea from the Sinic world order. Such differing attitudes toward the Sinic world could have been derived from the two-decade-long Vietnam–China conflict. This conflict, after all, confirmed their separate identities. In a similar vein, Korean literature took pains to record examples of instances in which Korea politically outwitted China. In this way, Korean literature tends to subdue or deny the sharing of social and cultural meanings lest sharing should enable mutual trust and communication to obscure the differences between China and the desired Korean identity; (Gupta 1971b, Yun 1998).

Contemporary literature on Vietnamese international relations draws a veil over China–Vietnam relations in the two decades between the demise of Ho Chi Minh in the early 1970s and the rapprochement in the early 1990s (Nguyen, H. T. 2009). This gap, which was sanctioned by the regime, worked to the advantage of such scholars as Nguyen and Phan. The humanities were a vehicle for self-understanding. Equipped with a universal spirit, the humanities provided Vietnam with a means for coping with the overwhelming Chinese nation. Nguyen and Phan were subsequently able to transcend the previous iterations of socialist politics and reconnect with their families and cultural legacy. According to Phan,

> Chinese poems should not be restricted to my personal liking. They are for the whole world. The Chinese should feel good about Chinese poems. Tang-style poems are a human treasure. I was born into a Confucian family. My father taught me to write Han characters when I was five or six. I heard him chant poems. Tang-style poems imperceptibly, powerfully influenced and attracted me. Once grown, I went to China to perfect my Chinese. My only goal at the time was to teach Chinese one day at home. As I went along, I immersed myself in Chinese literature. When I had no classes, I spent all my leisure time in the library reading Chinese fictions (Phan 2009).

Phan stated that shared cultural skills attest to the proposition that studying China is functional to the self-understanding of Vietnamese identity. Such awareness incorporated the wisdom of ancient Vietnamese scholars who believed that Chinese humanities constituted Vietnamese characteristics. Similarly, Vu Tam Ich, as cited by Chen Li, said that ancient Vietnam achieved the Confucian ideal rule of virtue. People were guided by personal exemplification through self-cultivation and self-rectification—concepts all highly regarded by the ruling strata and bureaucracy (Lin 2012). Therefore, Confucianism must still be positively regarded in the process of modernization because of the innate importance of Confucianism in Vietnamese culture. As such, Vietnam's stability will be ensured:

> To begin, the founding of the principle of the clan system, along with the monarchic autocracy, ensured the stability of the country, consolidated identification with the nation, and cultivated the collective conception and the national interest consciousness… Secondly, Confucianism, with its pedagogical stress of pragmatism, has prepared a group of talents ready to build the country… Moreover, Confucian ethics normalized the moral thoughts and the code of conduct in the Vietnamese society (Qi 2006).

## Connecting Humanities with International Relations

Both veterans are think tank scholars in a communist country. This means that Vietnam's relationship with China is destined to be a dominant subject on the agenda of their Chinese studies. This is especially true for Nguyen who headed the think tank. While international relations is a politically dominant category expected to prevail over the concerns for humanities, this section shows how the direction of influence flowing the other way around has been equally true, so that Vietnam's Chinese studies of humanities have nonetheless left marks on the think tank assignment to study international relations with China.

Having taken over the Center for Chinese Studies in 1993, Nguyen extended his research to cover mundane affairs. He covered all areas of study because few scholars previously pursued research on China after the war in 1979. Nguyen wrote reports on Chinese foreign affairs and domestic reform. He was keen to point out the fact that Vietnam was facing exactly the same challenges of reform China had previously experienced. However, Vietnam had the advantage of being a latecomer. The Center for Chinese Studies had the duty to cut the Vietnamese path of learning short through the access of Chinese lessons. Behind this motivation to learn was the confidence and belief that China would eventually become a dominant and influential country. Nguyen was also optimistic because of China and Vietnam's evident shared culture and history. He exhibited an optimistic attitude toward Chinese development and the Vietnamese ability to benefit from Chinese experiences. Such traits reflect the philosophical readiness of both China and Vietnam to jointly face the future.

This shared spirit of humanity embedded in Confucianism formulated a hidden agenda in the study of problematic China–Vietnam relations. A few easily overlooked points in Nguyen's and his colleagues' studies on Chinese foreign relations deserve to be discussed. First, little, if any, reference was made to the Chinese threat. The reason is most likely China's large presence in Vietnamese history. An even larger Chinese presence will not result in any additional alert at Vietnam's own relative marginal position. Second, no singular general theory on China's foreign relations was referred to in the attempts to explain such relations. Nguyen and his colleagues applied neither Marxism nor the realist balance of power in their analyses. Writings were primarily event based and supported by official statements or documents. Third, their studies show no concern whatsoever for China's grand strategy. This disinterest toward China's ultimate purpose indicates that no competition exists between China and Vietnam on status or influence in other parts of the world. Nguyen did not publish studies on the China–European Union (EU) relationship. This deficiency suggests that the normative power the EU stands for fails to affect Vietnamese views on China.

The last omission concerns the confrontational history of Vietnam and China. Nguyen made several references to the traditional and more than 1000-year long bilateral friendship between the two nations. Nevertheless, he did note the existence of potential territorial conflicts between China and a few Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam. Mundane disputes were minimally referenced by placing such events in a largely harmonious historical context. In another interview, Nguyen hinted at the rationale behind such omission, that is, to give special concern for good and neighborly relationships:

> Western or American scholars can straightforwardly and candidly discuss problems because they have no worry of exacerbating the bilateral relationship. However, Vietnam is different. We have a big neighbor on our side. Even though we disagree or dislike, we have to protect the relationship with the big neighbor. We can change friends, but not neighbors (Nguyen, H. T. 2009).

The difficulty in defining China's international identity does not cause much anxiety because the primary task only requires learning from Chinese domestic reform experiences. Nevertheless, the maritime dispute is pressing in reality. The extent to which Vietnam is comfortable in incorporating itself within the modern international system and the extent to which both countries relate humanely with each other may determine how Vietnam should place China between historical imperialism and contemporary socialism. If determining China's nature poses a challenge, then the better approach to the learning of and from Chinese reform experiences must not impose theoretical analysis or define right or wrong.

After the early 1990s, Vietnam enjoyed the absence of imperialist intrusion for over a decade. The socialist revolution of 1949 presumably dispelled the likelihood of future Chinese imperialist experiences. In 1975, the US withdrawal from the Vietnam warzone further removed the remaining traces of imperialism from the region. The war of 1979 seemed to reactivate imperialism. Rapprochement was gradually achieved in the early 1990s. This state of affairs is better left to the

Vietnamese memory. In the first decade, upon the establishment of *the Journal of Chinese Studies* in 1995, one could easily cite praise on the Vietnam–China relationship. Nguyen led the celebration of friendship by writing at least four articles.

The agenda of resistance dominated the first half-century of Vietnam. In 1993, the Center for Chinese Studies was established and, for the first time, an academic institution encountered an environment not subject to immediate imperialist threats from the United States, the USSR, or China. This Center pursued patriotic scholarship. Given that a review of the contemporary history of Vietnam–China relationship could result in an embarrassing situation between the two countries, the Center would rather avoid this. After all, the whole purpose of having the center is to prepare learning from Chinese Socialist reform. Eventually, the potential for upgrades and full-fledged institutionalism was achieved. Both Nguyen and Phan appreciated the national need for reform and stability, evading the useless maritime territorial disputes. Together, reform and humanities formed an epistemological vehicle for the two countries to jointly face the future.

Silence usually ensued among Vietnamese academics when they examined the problematic side of the bilateral relationship. This was unlike the established academic setup in Mongolia where scholars of Chinese studies were requested by authorities to use China as the subject of their academic writings during the Cultural Revolution. The former Soviet Union was the same with regard to the Sinologist staff of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Academics in Vietnam did not confront or discuss China in the 1980s. Only scholars immersed in the humanities were able to sustain interest in Chinese studies through self-study. Thus far, the research on humanities presents an effective way out of aborted international relationships.

## Nguyen's and Phan's Perspectives on Chinese Studies in Vietnam

Chinese studies in Vietnam currently face similar political constraints as Communist Party Sinologists did during the Cold War. On the one hand, the Vietnamese Communist Party conceived of China as a source of inspiration. After all, Chinese cultural products were ideal for the preservation of political and social thoughts adopted by the Vietnamese authorities (Yi and Yu 2010). Moreover, the successful reform carried out by the Chinese Communist Party was indirectly credited, ideologically and institutionally, to the Vietnamese Communist Party. On the other hand, a strong anti-hegemonic and anti-imperialist theme is currently dominant in the contemporary Vietnamese political culture. Vietnam triumphantly survived the war with the United States and China. The Vietnamese are mindful of their historical marginal position within the Chinese sphere of influence. Accordingly, they are sensitive to China's possible return and dominance. In spite

of this psychologically alerted paranoia, China still poses a better model of reform for Vietnam than other countries:

> After normalization of the bilateral relationship in 1990, China studies have returned and reached a peak today. The progression witnesses the restoration and fast growth of the Institute of Chinese Studies, the Department of Chinese Literature in colleges, and the textbooks and the pedagogical curricula. The studies of Chinese philosophy begin to substitute for the once popular studies of Western philosophy. The most important sign has been the founding of the Center for Chinese Studies in the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences. In 1995, in addition, a journal of Chinese studies came into being. These have been two most significant developments, indicating that Chinese studies in Vietnam are more objective… (Nguyen, H. Q. 2009)

Nguyen divided Vietnam's intellectual history of Chinese studies into three periods. The first period refers broadly to the pre-modern era that ended at the turn of the twentieth century. Classic Sinology was the main thrust and pursuit of the period. The second period lasted through the independence of Vietnam in 1945. Chinese studies lost their relevance because of French colonization. The concomitant arrival of Western civilization lured students away from Sinology and toward "Western Scholarship (Gries 2005)." Nguyen further divided the third period, beginning in 1945, into a series of sub-periods. Post-independence Vietnam saw students sent to the former Soviet Union and China to study. Students were educated in history, literature, politics, and military strategies. Both Nguyen and Phan stayed in China during this period. When the Vietnam–China relationship turned bitter in and after the mid-1970s, Chinese studies were virtually frozen in lieu of the situation further exacerbated by the war of 1979. The interaction between the two countries was terminated for the most part. The situation was not entirely resolved until the 1990s. Once the frozen state of politics thawed and was made mobile, interaction was impressively regained. These periods substantiated the history and eventual rehabilitation of Chinese studies. A formal organization was installed in the VASS with the sole intention and pursuit of studying China. In 1993, the Center for Chinese Studies was established. This center is now known as the Institute of China Studies.

The second sub-period within the third period acutely shrank the size of Sinology. In lieu of the dearth of Sinology scholars, the resurgence of Chinese studies in the 1990s was not quick enough to make up for the loss in the break resulting from the second sub-period. As a result, current academics suffer a significant generational and scholastic gap. The retiring generation is mostly composed of people aged over and above 70 years. By contrast, the succeeding generation mostly consists of people aged 40 and below. A small number of scholars still acquire the Chinese language through self-study methods. Therefore, these scholars attest to the strength of the Vietnamese humanistic tradition of Sinology. In spite of the slowness caused by historical factors, social science research is now emerging fast as the humanities loses strength.

In light of subsequent Chinese and Vietnamese economic reforms, Nguyen found that a multitude of lessons remain to be learned. According to Nguyen, China would have collapsed without reform. Therefore, lessons must not be restricted to

the study of the means through which China generates capital resources. More importantly, Vietnam must concern itself with the means of "cultivating a new generation of intellectuals." Nguyen was optimistic about China's future. By extension, he was also optimistic about Vietnam's Chinese study venture (Nguyen, H. Q. 2009). In lieu of the Vietnam–China territorial dispute, reform studies placed each country's maritime entities side by side. Both China and Vietnam faced the task of social reform and the challenge of survival in terms of the ruling Communist Party. In other words, these two countries were natural allies with regard to their most important policy concerns.

Phan was satisfied about his contributions to Chinese studies and the contribution of Chinese studies to Vietnam:

> I take pride in my long-time awareness of the necessity to have China well studied. I know better than anyone else that Vietnam needs harder research work on China. This is not merely an academic issue. This is a matter of national survival. The cutting edge issue is about national development. The agenda begins with politics and culture, but will gradually cover economics and technology. I feel most proud for having adhered to Chinese studies… In the future, China will make a subject that attracts the world attention. China will affect all aspects of our development. I have thought of this in the past and continue to believe so. Chinese studies in Vietnam must keep abreast and even grow. Our subject of study is so colossal that we will need a large number of researchers, each specializing in an area. To develop in both quantity and quality in China studies requires the government to invest properly in the discipline (Phan 2009).

Another perspective with regard to scholasticism coincides with the sense of achievement. Nguyen recalled that every project must go through review after review before final approval. The initiation of a project and the subsequent writing of a project required approval. Furthermore, publishing was complicated. Publishing not only required the approval and consent of one's own institute but also the approval of other related institutions. In this regard, writings on international affairs were particularly sensitive. If Nguyen wrote primarily about China, the Chinese embassy was consulted before the article was published. Nguyen sympathetically understood these complicated review processes because he also agreed that the Vietnam–China relationship should take priority.

## Conclusion

Certain circumstances beyond the individual's control were taken into account in the evolution of two intellectual paths. Since the Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.), the greater historical setting, which consists of cycles of conflict and mutual belonging, left contemporary scholars Nguyen and Phan with a means of imagining the positive aspects of the Vietnam–China relationship amidst the negative aspects resulting from disputes. The intermingling of people not bound by borders and the sharing of Han characters enabled later generations to anticipate limitations when conflict arose. Cycles of conquest and resistance served as mechanisms of

civilizational learning, conflict resolution, confidence building, and mutual understanding. Both Nguyen and Phan posit that Chinese humanities are intrinsic to the self-understanding of Vietnamese identity.

The intermingling of people across vast lands was made relatively impossible through the arbitrary and colonial implementation of borders. After 1945, conflicts between peoples were no longer resolvable through mingling. The nature of historical cycles changed from one of tributary relationship to one of international relationship. This spatial setting provided endless opportunities for a third power to intervene, manipulate, and realign intentions. The United States successfully accomplished the translation of these intentions in the Vietnam War, the China–Vietnam War, and the recent Vietnam–China maritime disputes. Chinese studies in Vietnam faced the challenges presented by the reconceptualization of borders and neighborly relationships. For example, Nguyen found no proper framework for presenting the potential irony of alliance formation amidst conflict. He looked for ways to highlight the necessity for alliance. Alternatively, Phan urged for the continued learning of humanities.

The necessity for alliance formation exists in reform socialism. Reform socialism simultaneously characterizes the prioritization of Chinese and Vietnamese national goals. In the past three decades, previous Chinese reforms provided the most relevant lessons for Vietnamese iterations of social reform in a later period of history. Concerns for reform automatically brought the neighbors together as they looked forward to theorizing a common destiny and maintaining the political legitimacy of the ruling Communist Party. The Institute of Chinese Studies primarily focused on development studies. In this regard, research was presented in an objective manner in spite of the resultant avoidance of other sensitive topics. Thus, the politics of forgetting was revealed.

Alongside the promising interest in reform studies, the scholarship of humanities reconnects the very culture and people presently separated by borders. The Institute of Hán Nôm Studies sponsors research that testifies to the inseparable Vietnam–China relationship. Phan stressed the significance of such a relationship by citing how the knowledge of Chinese Han characters unambiguously contributes to the knowledge of Hán Nôm. As for Nguyen, his devotion to current affairs and event observation has not been tempered. His long-existing ambition to write a comprehensive book on Vietnamese history persists. This dedication to the enhancement of humanities trivializes the international conflict arising from contestations over land or super power realignment.

Human judgment, which is under the scope of the humanities, underscores the creative responses to international confrontation. With regard to the issues of dispute, responses remained unstated. Such reaction was not merely a scholarly decision. The Vietnamese authorities deliberately eliminated research on China or Chinese culture after 1979. Hence, academics were excluded from the embarrassing polemics with China. Although the majority of Chinese studies students had abandoned their scholarship in favor of different professions or disciplines, those who remained were exempt from any serious involvement in the type of politics Soviet bloc scholars suffered. Silence or self-silencing is a political decision by any

standard. Therefore, silence protected scholars from a premature and probably futile show of China-bashing.

Ultimately, the drive to enhance knowledge and the determination to carry out a humanistic tradition made self-silencing a fruitful mechanism for knowledge acquisition. A tradition greater and longer than individuals' existence buttressed their determination. Indeed, the family tradition inherited from familial teaching remains fresh in both Phan and Nguyen's recollections. Generations from the post-1990s pursued Chinese studies alongside professional and talent-based pursuits. The drive for self-study of these generations is much weaker than that of their mentors' generation. In retrospect, a father–son relationship fostered the love for Chinese humanities in the young lives of both Phan and Nguyen. Self-study proved to be critical in reclaiming the humanities lost in the crucial 15 years of censorship. Without the drive for self-study, self-silencing would have amounted to an unalterable and irreconcilable epistemic schism.

Therefore, national confrontation is not the same as complete confrontation because individual paths are capable of preserving alternative, if not oppositional, paths. Given some time, a confrontation may lead parties in conflict to revert to a history of mingled peoples, recombined languages, and shared cultural values. Such individual intellectual paths are not predetermined because human judgment and determination are varied by time and location. Spatial and temporal constraints are not completely binding. Moreover, such constraints are fallible, making borderless history and bordered territories clash and creating a wider range of options for younger generations. Therefore, the lessons provided by Nguyen and Phan exceed the tangible manifestations of their scholarship.

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# Part II
# Interviews

# Chapter 6
# A Determined Ethnologist: Interview with Professor Tan Chee-Beng

**Chee-Beng Tan, Chow Bing Ngeow and Tek Soon Ling**

**Abstract** This interview transcript covers a brief professional and intellectual history of Professor Tan Chee-Beng, an eminent anthropologist who has made scholarly contributions to the studies of Chinese overseas, ethnic minorities in China, indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia, southern Fujian, food culture, and others. Professor Tan discusses his intellectual upbringing, methodology in research, research agenda, views on Malaysia's society and China's developments, and so on in this interview.

**Keywords** Tan Chee-Beng · Malaysia · Chinese studies · Chinese oversees · Malaysian Chinese

*Ling: Has anyone interviewed you before? About your background, the growing up experience, etc.?*

Tan: I did my degree in Penang, at that time the university was called Universiti Pulau Pinang (Penang University). It was a new university then, now it is called Universiti Sains Malaysia (Science University of Malaysia). It had a good academic environment back then. When the government changed the name (from Universiti Pulau Penang to Universiti Sains Malaysia or USM), we students protested against

*Interviewers* Dr. Ngeow Chow Bing and Dr. Ling Tek Soon
*Time* 6 December 2012

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the name change. When Mahathir assumed the post of Education Minister, he banned students' demonstrations. He and Musa Hitam[1] used to be involved in the student movement, so they understood the power of student movement.

I was born in Batu Pahat, in the state of Johor. My primary school was SJK(C) Yeong Chang, and afterwards I entered governmental secondary school. Transition from a Chinese-medium school to an English-medium school was quite difficult, but it was worth it. My personal experience told me that it was better to attend a Chinese-medium primary school for the learning of the Chinese language, otherwise it would be very difficult, and rather challenging for those students who are not quite capable. In my high school years, I already liked to go to read books in the town library, such as books related to psychology. So, I intended to study psychology when I entered Penang University. At that time Penang University was planning to establish a psychology department. However, after I entered the university, the foreign professor who was supposed to take charge of the psychology department did not come, so the psychology department was not established. I then took a course in anthropology, and found it interesting. My first anthropology teacher was Professor Shuichi Nagata, from the University of Toronto. He founded the anthropology department at Penang University. He is a Japanese Canadian. His wife is Judith Nagata, a British. Professor Nagata's classes were interesting; he frequently brought some archeological artefacts to the tutorials. I then decided to major in anthropology. I remember that there were only four in my batch of students, while there were six or seven anthropology lecturers.

*Ngeow: Do you still remember their names?*

Tan: Yes, all of them [except Prof. Nagata and his wife] just got their PhDs, and were serious in teaching. Dr. Anthony Walker was one of them, another was Dr. Clifford Sather, who was graduating from Harvard. He started researching the Bajau in Sabah while teaching at USM, and he had since published a book on the Bajau, a good ethnographic work. At that time there were a lot of foreign lecturers. However, during the Mahathir era, the Malay nationalism was rising. Foreign lecturers were let go. Letting nationalism to influence a university is a big problem.

Let me state briefly. The academic environment during my undergraduate years was still fine. I started conducting anthropological field research in my second year; I went to research the aboriginal (Orang Asli) settlement in Ulu Grik in Perak. It was a bit frightening, because my teacher Professor Shuichi Nagata arranged for me to stay on my own in a Temiar resettlement village on a jungle fringe. It was quite frightening for a young student.

*Ling: You lived with them then?*

Tan: Yes, living with the people. It was a so-called "black area" at that time, because government troops were fighting with members of the Communist Party of

[1]Musa Hitam, the first deputy prime minister under Mahathir.

Malaya in the jungle, and I was afraid to get killed by either party. I heard that many young Malaysian soldiers would shoot on sight in the forest. At that time, I needed a special permit to do research in Ulu Grik. My first anthropological field research lasted only about a month, but I learned a lot from it, and it felt like a long time. It was the first time I left the Chinese cultural environment and stayed in an Orang Asli village that felt like another world to me, and it was in a remote hill area.

I was doing old-style anthropological work then, which was to record everything —I was trying to emulate Malinowski. I wrote a report on the Orang Asli in Ulu Grik[2]; it was quite detailed, describing the leadership system, the kinship system, etc.

In the second year of my undergraduate study I went with Dr. Antony Walker, together with another two male students, to do some field research among the hill people, then called tribal people, in Northern Thailand. I was assigned to study the Yao people. We published a book, edited by Anthony Walker (in 1975). Perhaps I performed well, several teachers encouraged me to continue my studies in the United States. Every time I met Professor Shuichi Nagata I was asked about the application. Finally, I applied for the PhD in Anthropology program at Cornell, and got admitted. Cornell gave me tuition fellowship, [which I turned down as I could not afford to pay my own living expenses.] Later the Department arranged a teaching assistant post for me. Thus, I entered Cornell in 1974, and graduated in 1979.

At that time I was interested in studying other cultures, and I wanted to study the Yao people in Northern Thailand. But considering the fact that I would return to Malaysia after my studies, perhaps choosing a research topic that was not related to Malaysia might not be helpful for me to find a job in Malaysia, so I abandoned the plan to study the Yao. At that time ethnicity studies were just beginning to be popular, there weren't many theories back then, the main one being the "ethnic boundary" theory of Fredrik Barth, published in 1969. Nowadays there are so many books on ethnic studies. At that time I found the Baba interesting, because many people did not understand what constitute the Baba; many say they were Malays. Whether the Baba were Chinese or Malays, it was not very clear at that time. Researching the Baba could illuminate on ethnic identity, cultural identity, and cultural changes, so I chose this topic. Dr. John Clammer in Singapore was already doing something on this topic, but I did not know (when I chose the topic). I stayed in Melaka with the Baba for a whole year, 1977–1978, mainly in the rural area, about one or two months in Melaka town, to make comparison.

*Ngeow: So between 1974 and 1979, you went back to Malaysia in 1977?*

Tan: Yes, one year. Anthropology PhD research usually requires one year of field work. I learned some Baba Malay, still not very fluent. Some styles I simply was unable to emulate. I think the greatest contribution of my book on the Baba is ethnography. I organized the primary materials related to the Baba. At that time

[2]Tan (1973).

many people, including those in the academia, were not clear whether the Baba were ethnic Chinese or Malay. From the perspective of cultural identity, although many Baba speak Malay even at home, their consciousness has always been Chinese. Also, many Baba still maintain traditional Chinese practices, such as ancestor worship. From this research, I learned one thing: that losing a language does not necessarily make people lose their ethnic identity. I stayed with some Baba families for a whole year, and I was certain that these Baba were proud of their Chinese identity, some even emphasized their Eng-Choon (Yongchun, a Hokkien dialect group) origins, because a number of the early Baba merchants were Yongchun people. I found that their Chinese consciousness was still strong. In the rural area, I had seen a non-Baba Chinese pork-seller who made fun of the Baba: "You are Malays, why do you buy pork?" The Baba replied, "*apa lu cakap macam itu, gua memang Cina* (Don't say like that, I am a Chinese of course)." The Baba used the Malay language to argue against those non-Baba Chinese who made fun of them, to stress that they were Chinese. So in my dissertation I emphasized a point, losing some cultural practices does not mean losing the whole ethnic identity, because ethnic identification is about consciousness. I separated ethnic identity as ethnic consciousness from cultural identity, with the ethnic consciousness coming before cultural identity. For instance, you received Chinese education, your Chinese consciousness is strong, and you emphasize Chinese education as the main pillar of Chinese identity. But, the non-Chinese-speaking Baba do not emphasize Chinese education, instead they emphasize ancestor worship as constituting the main element of the Chinese identity. I brought one of my doctoral students from China to Melaka to visit a Baba family, at that time it was 1 or 2 days before the *dongzhi* festival, and an old woman (*nyonya*) was folding joss papers in preparation for ancestor worship. I translated for my student, who asked why the *nyonya* was doing this. She replied in Baba Malay, "How can Chinese not worship their ancestors; those who do not worship their ancestor are not Chinese (*buang bangsa*)." My student was from the Hokkien region in southern Fujian, yet she found this surprising, and she said, "In Southern Fujian we don't say things like this, ancestor worship has nothing to do with Chinese identity." But this *nyonya* linked ancestor worship with Chinese identity. She did not speak any Chinese language, but she did not lose her Chinese consciousness. But Baba are looked down by the non-Baba Chinese, so they may speak English in front of strangers, not Malay, to hide their Baba identity.

From my research on the Baba I began my interest in the study of ethnic Chinese as well as in the study of cultural identity and cultural changes, so I went to a number of places to conduct research. During holidays, I drove to many places to investigate. For a long time I had been interested in the study of the rural Chinese in Kelantan. They did not call themselves Peranakan, nor Baba, they called themselves "Teng-Lang" (Tang people), but they were similar to the Baba, they spoke fluent Kelantanese Malay, although they also spoke localized Minnan dialect (southern Fujian or Hokkien). The Malay folks over there called these highly

localized Kelantanese Chinese "Cina Kampung." The first time I described them in English I referred to them as "Peranakan Chinese", but later I used the term "Peranakan-type Chinese," to differentiate from those Baba who called themselves Peranakan. It was not easy to research these localized Kelatanese Chinese, for they spoke at least three languages, and interchanged them all the time. Young people spoke Kelantanese Malay among themselves, while at home they spoke to their parents in the highly localized form of Hokkien, and then suddenly they shifted to speaking localized Thai. I was intrigued by this kind of Chinese culture. Later I went to other places in Malaysia, to learn the different cultural types in different Chinese societies.

*Ngeow: Did you receive funding then?*

Tan: University of Malaya had the so-called "Vote F" funding then. Although amounting to just about Ringgit Malaysia 2000–3000, it was enough for me. I liked to do research, and needed not a lot of money, sometimes I paid on my own a little, which was fine. After studying the Baba, I did research on Dejiao, and visited all Dejiao organizations in Malaysia. When I was in Melaka studying the Baba, I already learned of this Chinese religious organization, which stressed the faith of "five-in-one (*wujiao tongzong*)," and honored the five founders of religions including Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad, very interesting. This syncretic Chinese religious group emerged first in China. In the late nineteenth century and twentieth century, in China there already existed several forms of syncretic Chinese religious organizations. And Kang Youwei's efforts to promote Confucianism also influenced the development of the religious faiths of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. But promoting Confucianism as a religious faith has not been successful in China, nor in Malaysia; only in Indonesia does Confucianism exists as a religious organization.

Back to this "five-in one" religious organization, it was a trendy thing in the early twentieth century China. Yiguandao is also a religious organization that emphasizes "five religions from one source." Dejiao is quite successful in Southeast Asia. It originated from the Chao-Shan region in China in the 1930s, originally related to the *shantang* temples, and the main purpose was philanthropy and providing some medical relief to the people. Its theology was built upon Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, while also honoring Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad as deified saints (*shizun*), but the core of it is still the Chinese "three faiths" (*sanjiao*). While doing "spirit writing" (*fuji*), sometimes "Jesus" or Prophet "Muhammad" would appear, and the *fuji* script attributed to "Jesus" would be written in English, perhaps Jesus was thought of as an Englishman. Most of the time the requests relayed to "Jesus" were about education, like wishing children doing well in exams. During the colonial era, the British sent their educated men to assume colonial official posts, so the impression left in the colonies was that the Westerners were well-educated, and so it was not surprising "Jesus" became the deity in charge of education. After researching this, I originally wanted to write an article, but since I had to categorize

different Dejiao organizations, the whole introductory piece became too long, so I turned it into a short book, published by ISEAS in Singapore.[3]

I was interested in Chinese popular religion, so I went to do field research in many places, including researching Nadu Gong. At that time I went to different places of Malaysia; I was young and it was convenient to drive around. In the late 1980s I returned to studying indigenous people in the interior. I went to Sarawak to do research. While doing research on the indigenous peoples in Sarawak and Sabah, I also used available opportunities to visit local Chinese temples. Although my main objective was to research the indigenous peoples, but before I went to the remote interior regions, I would first visit the Chinese temples in the surrounding towns. In the early 1990s, I went to Sarawak during every university vacations. I was more interested in Sarawak, went to the interior area, and studied the Badeng. The Badeng is a subgroup of the Kenyah people. I liked doing research in the interior; it brought me closer to nature, and sometimes it was exciting too.

*Ngeow: So you brought along a notebook and wrote down whatever you saw.*

Tan: Of course, this research method was to jot down things quickly, and I had to organize the materials everyday, otherwise they could be forgotten easily.

In 1996 I resigned from the University of Malaya and joined The Chinese University of Hong Kong. After that I also went to China to do research. Because I am able to speak Minnanhua (southern Fujian, called Hokkien in Malaysia), my research basically focused on Southern Fujian, this allowed me to also link up with the study of Southeast Asia, so that I do not have to abandon the study of the Chinese overseas. It was interesting to do research like this, with multiple topics and field sites, but it also required reading a lot of books. I had to update myself on the literature on Borneo studies and overseas Chinese studies, and I had to try to read new books, while the reading list on the anthropology of China is also long, so I had to handle three bodies of literature and research [including Malaysia and Southeast Asia]; it was quite challenging. After 1996, I went back to Sarawak a couple of times, but my main research sites were now in Fujian, especially the place where my grandfather was born, Yongchun. Quanzhou was the city I went very often. Also, I was still interested in studying ethnic minorities, so I went to many places in China where I could learn about China's minorities, although most of these trips were short-term field trips.

*Ngeow: So you have far more materials than what you have published so far?*

Tan: Of course, I only wrote about a portion of these materials. Especially since I came to Hong Kong, I was head of department for eight years, very busy, and it was difficult to write a monograph. If I could complete three or four papers in a year, this could be considered good. After retiring from The Chinese University of Hong Kong [in 2012] I joined Sun Yat-sen University as a Distinguished Professor [in the Anthropology Department].

[3]Tan (1985).

I think I would like to publish first a book on the Chinese religion in Malaysia. In Hong Kong I also did some investigation, and published an article on the returned overseas Chinese from Indonesia.[4] I also did some study on the Chinese Muslims in Hong Kong, but had not published it.[5] I am interested in the study of Chinese Muslims. I wrote about a Hui community in Terengganu, probably the only one in Malaysia then; it was a community of six families. When I was researching them I found out that at one of their grocery stores there was a signboard with the characters "Hui Hui" engraved on it. The people told others they were from Yunnan, to differentiate themselves from the non-Muslim Chinese. My early draft on them was read by an educated member of the community, which aroused some debates within the community. They were worried that my analysis would disclose their identity, because the Malays did not understand the differences between the Hui people and other Chinese. They are Muslims, but the Hui in Terengganu worried that the Malays would not accept them, so they said they were from Yunnan, because the Malays there knew there were Muslim communities in Yunnan. Later, I decided not to publish the paper in Malaysia, I sent it to *Archipel*, in France.[6]

I went back to Terengganu again, and found that the signboard, which has important historical and ethnographical value, had been taken down, and this important symbol of Hui identity was never to be seen again.

*Ngeow: Now there are a lot of Chinese Muslims from China studying in Malaysia.*

Tan: Yes, some are under the sponsorship of Malaysia, some of them have new experience and new view on religion after going back to China. For instance, in the town of Chendai, Quanzhou, there are Ding-surnamed people who are classified as Hui. They are the descendants of the Arabs, who after many generations have been totally Sinicized and now practice ancestor worship, and during ancestor worship they do not offer pork because their ancestors did not eat pork. Very few of them are Muslims. Nevertheless, they have made some Islamic decoration in their family tombs to showcase their Hui *minzu* identity. One or two members of this Hui community in Chendai came to Malaysia and studied at the International Islamic University, and after they went back to China, they wanted to spread Islam, but their village folk did not support.

*Ling: Does it mean they started promoting practices like wearing the headscarf for women?*

Tan: No, this is not what I meant. Chinese Muslims in China also wear headscarf. Islam in China has its own local characteristics. The Chinese mosques have many Qing architectural designs, and there are censers in the mosques. Chinese Muslims are relatively free, because their religious life is not regulated by the government. In this country (Malaysia) the Muslim life is more regulated by the government.

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[4]Tan (2011a).

[5]Since the interview, this article has been published: Tan and Ma (2014).

[6]Tan (1991).

*Ngeow: China's Muslims are freer than the Muslims here?*

Tan: Yes, other than those regions with conflicts with the state. The government does not really interfere in private Muslim life. I remember back in 2008, the year of the swine, the Chinese government instructed all television stations not to show pictures of pig during the Chinese New Year, this was out of consideration for the Muslims.

*Ngeow: Your anthropology is quite different from theoretical anthropology.*

Tan: I conducted a more traditional form of anthropology. Look at my published works; they emphasize ethnography. Anthropological data are ethnography. Sociology is quantitative, ours is qualitative. Theory has to be combined with ethnography, or at least reflected in ethnography. I do not exclude postmodernism, but the postmodern anthropology that neglects ethnography is unacceptable to me. But still, I can adopt some postmodern concepts; some of which are quite useful. For instance, two or three years ago I published an article on the "Bali village" in Quanzhou.[7] This is a "Returned Overseas Chinese Village." Chinese scholars in China also visited this village, but they did not know that this was a Balinese village, because they could only speak with the villagers in the Chinese language. I went there and I could understand and speak Malay, and I stayed there with the villagers, and found out they spoke Balinese. The villagers came from Bali in Indonesia. So in this article, I used the concept of reterritorialization. This is a postmodern concept. Postmodern scholars like Aihwa Ong emphasize deterritorialization. I find this unacceptable, how could one deterritorize? Of course, what they meant was the break arising from cross-boundary mobility. Some scholars felt that there was a need to introduce the concept of reterritorialization, to bring attention to reterritorialization after deterritorialization. I felt that this concept of reterritorialization could be useful. Why? I studied this returned overseas Chinese from the Bali Island in Indonesia. What I saw was that they were reterritorializing some of their own Indonesian cultures in China. Their ancestors came from different parts of China, such as Guangdong, Fujian, Hainan, who migrated to Bali. Over the years they adopted some aspects of local Indonesia's culture and spoke Balinese. And when they came to Quanzhou, they continued to speak Balinese and Indonesian (similar to Malay), and brought with them also the food culture of Bali. These people were forced by events of the time to "return" to China in 1961. The Chinese government, out of convenience, put them together in one place. And this resulted in the formation of a community. Originally, they came from different places of Bali Island, but now they were brought into a group or community. I stayed in the village, and listened to Indonesian songs everyday. The liked Indonesian folk songs, and still missed their Indonesian hometowns. Overseas Chinese, like Zhejiang people, new migrants, their hometowns are in China, and they have attachment to their China's hometowns. But, the Balinese Chinese in Quanzhou imagine their hometowns in Indonesia. These Chinese migrants from

[7]Tan (2010).

Indonesia had been localized to the Indonesian setting, so when they re-migrated to China, their hometown that they felt nostalgia about was Indonesia. I think this is interesting, and I used the concept of reterritorialization to illustrate.

I have another article related to Quanzhou, and used a theoretical concept for analysis, but is not a postmodern concept. The article was co-authored with a PhD student of mine.[8] She also studied Quanzhou and is a Quanzhou local. We wrote about Quanzhou's urbanization, and used such concepts as administrative urbanization, physical urbanization, sociocultural urbanization for analysis. If we want to write a good article, we have to combine the empirical materials with theories or theoretical concepts. We coauthored another article, on tea consumption in Quanzhou, and combined political economy approach with ethnographic data to analyze the tea marketing and tea consumption in Quanzhou.[9] China has a long history of tea consumption, but our article shows that the tradition of tea consumption in Quanzhou was reinvented.

After I came to Hong Kong, because my department was interested in the study of food culture, so I began to write about the food culture of the Baba, and then I met some [relevant] scholars. A key advantage in Hong Kong was its connectivity with many international scholars, much better than in Malaysia. Academic exchanges are very important. Anthropologists started writing about food and culture in the 1930s, but most anthropologists preferred to write about religion or lineage; they ate the food of the communities hosting them but did not write about their food. Research on food made a comeback in the 1980s, and now studies of food and culture are an important area of research. Later, I got to know the renowned anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz. His book, *Sweetness and Power*, is very famous, and specialists in history, anthropology, and economics read his book. In his early days, he researched the sugar cane farmers in the Caribbean. He combined ethnography with history and wrote about the globalization of sugar, and this book becomes his magnum opus. He came to the Department of Anthropology of the Chinese University of Hong Kong as a visiting scholar, and he had since kept in touch with me [Note: Prof. Mintz passed away in December 2015]. I cooperated with him on the study of the globalization of tofu (bean curd). People generally mention the globalization of McDonald or Kentucky Fried Chicken, but the tofu of China actually had a much longer history of globalization. Tofu was spread to Japan during the Tang Dynasty, and is still being globalized today. Later we coedited, together with a student of Mintz, Christine Du Bois, a book entitled *The World of Soy* (2008). Actually the study of food and culture is not my main research. An anthropologist needs an ethnographic base, and my base is the study of the Baba. From the materials that I collected about the Baba, it is not difficult to write about their food culture. For instance, I published an article on Baba food symbolism.[10] Now I wish to write about the food of the indigenous minorities. I studied the

[8]Tan and Ding (2008).

[9]Tan and Ding (2010).

[10]Tan (2011b).

Kenyah people in Sarawak, and I would like to analyze how their foodways are being influenced by commercialization since the 1980s. They are being influenced by the Chinese food culture too. I would like to write a paper on the changes of their food culture.

*Ngeow: Would you say your scholarship is under the influence of a certain school of thought?*

Tan: Many people said they were influenced by this or that school of thought, but I do not think I am under the influence of any particular school. When I was studying anthropology in 1970s in the United States, the dominant school was functionalism, structuralism was still rather new. In the 1980s, I did a lot of catching up in study, because functionalism was outdated then, and theoretical influences from Bourdieu, Foucault, etc., were becoming important. I graduated in 1979, so I had to learn a lot of the new things on my own. So, I can't say I am under any particular school's influence. I learned from all the schools; at least enough for me to guide my students.

My scholarship has no particular preference of school of thought, but as for my worldview, I like Taoism and Buddhism. I began reading books on Taoism during my undergraduate years. The Taoism I refer to here is not the Taoist religion but the Taoist philosophy, like Laozi and Zhuangzi. I like the Taoist way of being close to the natural ways of things and enjoy the freedom associated with the naturalness of nature. In addition, from my undergraduate years to the doctoral level, I have always been reading some Buddhist thought. But my preference is still Taoism. Of the Buddhist teachings, I like that of Huineng. Why? I prefer Buddhist teachings that relate to the existing world, like the teachings of the modern Buddhist master, Master Taixu.

*Ling: Human-realm Buddhism you mean (renjian fojiao).*

Tan: If you trace the roots of human-realm Buddhism, then Huineng was the beginner. I very much like *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* by Huineng. Real Buddhism has no God, Buddha only showed a way, a Tao, for people to be liberated from suffering…. Huineng inherited some Chinese traditions, such as *xiushen yangxing* or cultivation of the self, although not that of the Confucian kind; his cultivation of the self was to see the essence of the self, to cultivate the mind. He said

> The kingdom of Buddha is in this world
>
> Within which enlightenment is to be sought.
>
> To seek enlightenment by separating from this world
>
> Is as absurd as to search for a rabbit's horn.

This Chan (Zen) school (by Huineng) was influenced by Taoism, so Hui Neng's Chan can go along with Taoism. I was a baptized Christian, but this change of thought made me leave the church. Right now some of my Christian friends still

pray for me, a lost lamb! But I respect Jesus very much. Jesus was one of the greatest humans in history, he died being crucified in his thirties, I don't think he foresaw his death this way, most heroes did not foresee their own ending. I still very much respect Jesus and his spirit, but I don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, so I can't be said to be a Christian anymore. My thought is Taoism. I don't believe in a single God, I believe the whole universe is just the way it is, natural cycle, and we as human beings should understand this *dao*. What is truth? There is no truth. Postmodernism attacks the truth, actually from ancient times the Taoists already discussed this question of the truth. Truth is not an essence that can be seen. What is Tao, Tao is like between beauty and ugly, which one is real? There is no real one, ugly or beauty, the truth is a discourse about ugly and beauty and the between. In some cases, the English translation of Taoist text is easier to understand. A Chinese professor at the University of Hawaii, Chang Chung-yuan, translated and annotated *Laozi*, in the book *Tao: A New Way of Thinking* (published in 1975). I think he annotated it very well, explaining the concept of *dao* (like with regard to ugly and beauty) with the notion of "unity in differentiation," meaning *dao* is all embracing into One.

Toaism is a good teaching…. I taught a course at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, "Religion and Culture." A student asked me, "What is your religion?" I answered, "You don't need a religion, but you must have a religious life." Understand what I am saying here? I explained to the student what religious life is, and it is not about incense burning. I once saw an Orang Asli, he was walking up the stairs of a building, and he saw an ant. He picked up the ant carefully, walked down the stairs, and let it go. This was religious. How many people would have thought of helping the helpless ant at the stairs? I think this was religious, a behavior like that conveyed the sense of loving all beings out there. Agree? So we don't need to have a religion, but we must have a religious life.

*Ngeow: How long did you serve in the University of Malaya then?*

Tan: It was like this. Just as other young scholars at that time, such as Loh Kok Wah,[11] Jomo K.S.,[12] we had a vision or an ideal of Malaysia, of being a non-racialized country, and we wished to push for this. Those of us who went overseas for studies in the 1970s generally had this ideal that Malaysia could be a non-racialized country. We felt that we could do something, so none of us thought about staying on overseas after graduation. I was informally offered a good job overseas, but I did not accept; I wanted to come back, to do something for the country. However, after coming back I found that Malay nationalism had become too strong in the universities; I applied for jobs in Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia and received no response. So I went to the University of Singapore. Not long afterwards I went to Hawaii for a conference and met the Vice Chancellor

[11]Francis Loh Kok Wah, Professor of Political Science at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

[12]Jomo, K.S. Professor of Economics at Universiti Malaya.

of Universiti Malaya, Professor Ungku Aziz[13]; he invited me to come back, so I joined Universiti Malaya in 1980.

I left Universiti Malaya in the 1990s, and anguished about this decision for a very long time, and finally still decided to leave. I was satisfied with my students, but I no longer felt pride for the university; the hegemony of Malay nationalism, it made me uncomfortable.

After I retired from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I really felt the sense of being in diaspora. I still need an academic affiliation. I taught at Universiti Malaya for 16 years, and in Hong Kong for another 16 years, and recently, I accepted the appointment by the Anthropology Department of Sun Yat-sen University (since 2012). The Anthropology Department at Sun Yat-sen University is China's most comprehensive department of anthropology.

*Ngeow: I read one of your edited books,[14] and in Introduction, you mentioned you already treated Hong Kong as your home.*

Tan: It is like this, Malaysia is home, Hong Kong is home. Now I live in three places, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou. In terms of doing research I like The Chinese University of Hong Kong; it has a very comprehensive library, with materials from both Chinese and English.

Back to the question of home. When I was in Malaysia, I never thought of another home, but later I settled down in Hong Kong, every time I flew back from Hong Kong to Malaysia I was especially happy. My mother, younger sisters and brothers, they are all in Malaysia. But every time I flew back from Malaysia to Hong Kong, I also felt very happy, seeing its beautiful evening scenery, etc. I realized that I have experienced Hong Kong as a home, too.

In Malaysia, we were always reminded of our ethnicity. Our ethnic consciousness was always reminded. In Hong Kong, as a Chinese you are Chinese just like the Cantonese are Chinese, and there is no need to think about issues like race and ethnicity. But, the Indians of Hong Kong are different. Hong Kong can be my home, so is Malaysia, but I think it is difficult for me to feel "home" in Guangzhou. I can do research in China, but not to stay on as a home. China is more open now; its economy is huge, but politics and the freedom of speech are not quite open yet.

*Ngeow: Your research on China, meaning the research on Fujian, were carried out during your stay in Hong Kong, but not during the time you were in Malaysia?*

Tan: Right, there was no opportunity before. I had interests in China Studies during my undergraduate years. My teacher Anthony Walker had taken Maurice Freedman's courses. Freedman is an expert on both China and overseas Chinese. Walker taught a course on Chinese anthropology at USM, so I began to study the anthropology of China. During my years at Cornell I continued to read books in this area. Since I had an early start in the study of the anthropology of China, I was able

[13]Ungku Aziz, Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya.

[14]Tan (2007).

to keep up with the literature. The anthropology of China is a huge field, if you do not follow the literature you will not be able to keep up, and so I continue to read a lot of books. At The Chinese University of Hong Kong I taught a graduate-level course, "Seminar in the Anthropology of China." I started research on China only after I went to Hong Kong. As I did not want to abandon my research on Southeast Asia, I chose to study in Fujian, as this can be linked to overseas Chinese studies as well.

*Ngeow: When our Institute was first setting up, you were here to deliver a speech. You said that establishing an Institute of China Studies in Malaysia is important and timely, but Malaysia's China Studies are very weak.*

Tan: I still stand by this statement. First, of course our conditions are problematic. Because if you want to do well in China Studies, it is still important to go to China for research, collaborate with the academic institutions there; another thing is that the government has to be open, and the university has to be open. You see China is very important, but how many China experts are there in Malaysia? Another thing is that doing China research in Malaysia should also get the Malays to be involved. Now there are some Malays who can read Chinese, so this should not be a problem. The government itself recognizes the importance of China studies as well. Anwar[15] mentioned this as well.

*Ling: Abdullah*[16] *also strongly emphasized this.*

Tan: When Abdullah visited Quanzhou Maritime Museum in Quanzhou, my student, Ding Yuling, received him. Ding is the Curator of the Museum. Abdullah said to Ding, "My ancestor is also a Chinese," he said he could trace his ancestry back to the Hui in Hainan. He wished to push for China Studies in Malaysia, and he did after the visit, but he could not do much, the whole system has been too much constrained by Malay nationalism, and it was difficult. But Malaysia needs China Studies. Singapore has been doing very well, but Malaysia is difficult. If you have only the ethnic Chinese doing China Studies, then the Malay nationalists may have negative things to say….

*Ngeow: May I ask you to discuss the relationship between China Studies and Overseas Chinese Studies (haiwai huaren yanjiu)? Do you think overseas Chinese studies are a branch of China Studies or a totally new field?*

Tan: I discussed this in a book chapter.[17] I said if China Studies and Overseas Chinese Studies were totally separated, this is something not good. Because originally Overseas Chinese Studies were related to China Studies, because studying China also required researching Chinese people outside of China, but later

[15]Anwar Ibrahim, a deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia during the Mahathir's administration, now a leader of the opposition.

[16]Abdullah Badawi, the Fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia.

[17]Tan (2012a).

somehow the two studies became separated. Those who work on overseas Chinese Studies in general still care about China Studies, but those who work on China Studies pay very little attention to Overseas Chinese Studies.

I once proposed a concept, "Chinese Ethnographical Field of Study." It means putting all Chinese cultural traditions, cultural changes, etc. together, so that whether you are researching the Chinese in China or in the Philippines or in Malaysia, all these traditions can be studied under one whole field, so that the differences, the changes, the political implications, would appear to be very clear in each place. This also means that the concept can link up China and the overseas Chinese, putting together the original source of the culture and the overseas elements into one ethnological field for analysis, this is an anthropological standpoint.

On the other hand, nowadays cross-national research is important, and in this sense China Studies cannot be separated from overseas Chinese studies. I give you a good example. I recently reviewed a book[18] written by Julie Y. Chu. She researched Chinese migrants from the Fuzhou area. A lot of illegal migrants came from that area, and many wanted to go to the United States. The US now has a lot of Fuzhou people, who changed the demographic landscape of Chinatown in New York; the Chinatown is no longer dominated by Cantonese people anymore. She researched this Fuzhou migration, and wrote about the villages in Fuzhou, so her work is both a China Studies book and an Overseas Chinese Studies book, because she discussed transnational networks. This book has a good new concept. Julie Chu wrote about the ethnography of desire. What is ethnography of desire? The example she used is interesting. All the villagers wanted to go to the United States. A young man wished to go too but he failed many times. Later he died. His family members modeled his tombstone after an American green card. This is ethnography of desire, and the desire was shown in the tomb stone.

This book is about China studies, but it cannot be separated from overseas Chinese studies. Many local places have cross-national networks, so doing China studies cannot leave out studies of overseas Chinese, and vice versa. Of course, there are aspects that are not related to overseas Chinese, like its own internal issues, but I still think that China studies and overseas Chinese studies should not be separated.

*Ngeow: You also edited the Journal of Chinese Overseas.*

Tan: Because I was interested in publishing journals in Asia. The earliest was my collaboration with Anthony Walker while I was in Singapore (at that time we were colleagues already) in publishing an occasional journal named *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*. I had long felt that anthropology was too much dominated by Europe-American academia, and felt that Asians should have their own anthropology journals. But publishing a journal needs money. When I collaborated with Anthony Walker on *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, we published one issue per year, or one issue in two to three years, so it was not

[18]Tan (2011c).

ideal. When I came to The Chinese University of Hong Kong, I discussed with my colleagues about journal publication, so we started *Asian Anthropology*, edited by myself and another colleague, Gordon Mathews. Later I convinced Hong Kong University Press to start a new journal on Chinese Overseas. Hong Kong University Press sent out my proposal to reviewers, and it was approved. But then, I learned that the Chinese Heritage Centre in Singapore was planning a similar thing, so I contacted the Centre, and wished to link it up with Hong Kong University Press. Ultimately, Hong Kong University Press did not sign the contract with the Centre, instead the journal was jointly published with National University of Singapore Press [published by NUS Press for Chinese Heritage Centre]. Professor Wang Gungwu provided support and help too. So the *Journal of Chinese Overseas* has always been sponsored by the Chinese Heritage Centre in Singapore.

*Ngeow: Can you compare the China or Chinese Studies in the West, Singapore/ Malaysia, and Hong Kong/Taiwan?*

Tan: While some people criticize Westerners, saying that Westerners being Westerners, they could not do a detailed study on our own turf, I disagree. I believe that research knows no boundaries. A good academic work is a good academic work, and a good academic work is based on good research and collection of materials. Foreigners going to China, even if hampered initially by the language problem, but if they could settle down and do serious research and learn the language, they could do well also. In contrast, most Han Chinese, while studying ethnic minorities, do not want to learn the minorities' languages. So, whether a research is good or not depends on the determination of the researcher. What is significant is that most European-American scholars, when they conduct research, they come with a theoretical perspective, and then test whether the theory is applicable or not, and the theory also guides them. Chinese researchers may not think clearly, and not many of them like to do long-term research; some of them just prefer to do short term field research. This includes the situation in Malaysia. Let's say anthropology, in Malaysia there is no shortage of anthropology teachers, but the really good ones are very few. Two reasons. First, the unwillingness to do long-term field research. Second, many of them do not have good command of English, do not read English books and international journals. The lack of [good] local journals also impacted Malaysian scholars doing research.

A good research has to have theory as well, this requires a lot of reading of journals, so that one can communicate with the academia in foreign countries. For example, it is impossible to read only Chinese books but not English books on the anthropology of China. Many works on the anthropological study of China are written in English, even Chinese students who study overseas write in English. China's anthropology students have this language issue, so do Malaysian students. In Malaysia, the Malay nationalism was the cause why many Malaysian young people do not understand English well and do not read English books. In social science, English is very important. In this sense, the Americans and the British have a natural advantage. This is an unfair phenomenon in the academia. We send our

manuscripts for them to review, but they seldom send to us to review. This is inequality in the academia. I have a forthcoming article that discusses this issue.[19]

*Ngeow: Last question, what do you think about the future of China?*

Tan: Since the reform era, China's economic achievements are undeniable. China's rise is of course very important, now and in the future, unless Chinese leaders are careless in dealing with important issues; they are very careful in dealing with the Americans. A serious issue now is the South China Sea, and the Chinese leaders are dealing this carefully. A lot of crises of China occur internally also, there are many conflicts. Hu Jintao proposed the harmonious society concept a few years ago. This slogan shows that the Chinese leaders understand that China's development in the future depends on maintaining harmonious relationship internally…actually the current administrative structure of China is a bit like the imperial era, because the Center cannot really provide sufficient supervision over the provinces and the counties, and in some places the local governments neglect the downtrodden, and even repress them. There are good local governments too, but there are also bad local governments, so in some places there are a lot of conflicts. On the one hand China is a big country, and an economic powerhouse, on the other hand it still has a lot of poor areas, including very poor ones. The problem is how China resolves and handles these internal issues. Without solving these issues, China may experience instability, and China is most afraid of instabilities. This is where I have reservation about China. The Chinese Communist Party treats dissents and some sensitive areas with coercive measures, and this is counterproductive. In sensitive areas, the government should implement policies that win the heart of the people. Repressive policies also discriminate against minorities. For example, Tibetans and Uyghurs not able to book hotel rooms in Shanghai, how would they feel? What causes this kind of discrimination, and this is a problem. Also, another big issue is local corruption. How to resolve? Permitting a more open space for free speech can help, because news reports on corruption can expose corrupt officials. But Beijing is afraid of freedom of the media. How do you control corruption if you do not allow reports on it? I always tell my students that during the imperial era, wronged people could petition in Beijing by beating the drum outside of the court, and magistrates would listen to their cases. Nowadays there are hundreds of petitioners in Beijing and no one cares about them. Some local officials even sent their men to track down and detain these petitioners. So what will be the future of China? I don't know. And then there is the rule of law issue. The central government knows about all these problems, but how to deal with them? They seem not to know how to deal with them. On the one hand they want to loosen the government's control but are afraid of doing so, and on the other hand they cannot resolve issues without loosening control. So the future of China's development is still full of difficulties. When I was doing research in southern Fujian, in some of the poor areas, I heard villagers complaining of the corrupt officials as even worse than during the Kuomintang era.

[19]Tan (2012b).

This is serious, people supported Mao Zedong and got rid of Kuomintang because Kuomintang government was corrupt, but now people accused the corrupt officials as worse than Kuomintang's era. So China is really a very complex country, a big economic power with a lot of internal problems.

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# Chapter 7
# A Witness to History: Interview with Professor Yen Ching-Hwang

**Yen Ching-Hwang, Chow Bing Ngeow and Tek Soon Ling**

**Abstract** This interview transcript covers a brief professional and intellectual history of Professor Yen Ching-Hwang, an eminent historian who has made scholarly contributions to the studies of the history of Chinese overseas, history of China's late Qing and Republican eras, Chinese business history, and others. Professor Yen discusses his intellectual upbringing, methodology in research, research agenda, views on Malaysia's history and China's developments, and so on in this interview.

**Keywords** Yen Ching-Hwang · Chinese overseas · Malaysian Chinese · Malaysia · Chinese studies

Ngeow: Hi Professor Yen, first we would like you to discuss your own academic history.

Yen: I will start off with my family background. I was born in 1937 in the Yongchun county in Fujian Province. My grandfather did not receive much education and my father studied only for one year at Jimei College, Xiamen. But I think they had little influence on my studies or direction of scholarship. In 1947, we migrated to the town of Kemayan, and later to Mentakab both were in the state of

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Pahang, Malaya. I went to the Chong Hwa primary school in the town. I still remember vividly every Monday morning there was a flag-raising session and we had to read "The Last Will of Sun Yat Sen." In 1951 I went to the Confucian Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur. During the weekly assembly we just listened to the teachers' speeches, no more flag-raising. The principal at that time was Mr. Yu Siqing. Mr. Lim Lian Geok, the famous Chinese educationist and fighter for Chinese education in Malaya, served as director of academic affairs. Yu used his heavily Hakka-accented Mandarin to deliver his speech, while Lim's Mandarin was fused with strong Hokkien-tone. I met a lot of good teachers there, who made my studies progressed. I was admitted to Nanyang University's (Nantah) History Department in 1957. Dr. Yong Ching Fatt[1] also, like me, came from Confucian Secondary School.

In my first year at Nantah I was elected head of the academic section of my class. Influenced by Leftist thought at that time, I was interested in Chinese history. Nevertheless, I entered university in 1957, and that was the year of national independence of Malaya, so my research direction was influenced as well. I also took time to learn the Malay language. I was thinking at that time, that if I wanted to continue as an academician, researching Chinese history might not be the best road to take. At that time, China Studies were still sensitive in Malaya and Singapore. But my teacher, Professor He Sijun, had high expectation of me, because I was among his best students, and I was also interested in Chinese history. I even gave lectures to my classmates who did not do well in Chinese history. But in my second year, I decided to switch to history of Malaya. That was 1958, so I was influenced by the independence of Malaya.

Ling: Other than Malayan independence, did you have other considerations?

Yen: I was getting more interested in the history of Southeast Asia and the history of Malaya only during my second year; I thought this was the field that I could work on, and if I put in enough efforts I could achieve something, while many were already working on Chinese history, so it was competitive in this field, this one I understood all along. After I made the decision, and starting in my third year, I used spare time from classes to take a bus to the library of University of Singapore. My method of collecting materials was to use card system, and I made a lot of cards. But sometimes I forgot the time, and missed my classes. If I missed Professor Hsu Yun Tsiao's[2] class, he would keep asking my classmates where was Yen Ching-Hwang.

Nantah students were not well received at the University of Singapore. The library staff did not care for us. But I still had the audacity to go and talk to the history academic staff at the University of Singapore, such as Professor K.G. Tregonning, Dr. Wong Lin Ken, and Dr. Eunice Thio. I went to University of Singapore for two purposes. First was to use the English materials for my writings

[1]Dr. Yong Chin Fatt, Reader of History at Flinders University.

[2]Professor Hsu Yun Tsiao, Professor of History at Nanyang University.

of academic articles, and second was to practice my English speaking. Also, I was asked to join politics by some leftist students as well, but I declined. Before I joined Nantah, I had also been interested in some political issues and current events, and read some related articles. However, getting involved in politics required another skillset such as good communication skill and the ability to handle well person-to-person relations. I do not think it fitted me. After graduation from Nantah, I went to Chinese High School at Batu Pahat, Johor, to teach, and only came back to Nantah in 1963 to serve as a tutor in the History Department. In 1965 I received a scholarship to study at the Australian National University's Department of Far Eastern History, School of Pacific Studies for a doctoral degree in Chinese history, and in 1968 I completed my Ph.D. thesis and started teaching Chinese history at the University of Adelaide.

Ngeow: You taught modern Chinese history, yet your research was mainly on Overseas Chinese. Do you think there are connections between the two fields, and do you feel that they complement each other or are different fields?

Yen: Knowing Chinese history is crucial for the research on Overseas Chinese. From the perspective of Overseas Chinese, they played an important role in China since late nineteenth century. They brought in a lot of novel ideas into China. But studies of Chinese history did not mention about this, they saw Overseas Chinese studies as marginal area. So when I taught modern Chinese history at Adelaide, my research in Overseas Chinese was not much useful for my teaching, but for my research into Modern Chinese history. My Ph.D. was in between Chinese history and Overseas Chinese history, so I was for a while unsure which direction I would proceed further. Originally I thought of doing biographical research on the 1911 revolutionaries, but the best scholars on this were also working at Harvard, Princeton, Yale; their libraries were well stocked, and they had a lot of talents and could exchange research results easily. I thought this was an important factor. The topic was already very hot, how could you compete with them from Australia? That means, within the academia, what is your niche?

Early studies of Overseas Chinese history were written by Westerners, such as G. William Skinner, Lea Williams and Victor Purcell, they were the main scholars in the 1950s and 1960s. Those who work on Overseas Chinese studies that have a background in Nantan and write in English, I think there were only myself and Yong Ching Fatt, and a few. We were also looking to define our own direction, but we believed we could compete with the Westerners in researching our own history. Teaching in a foreign university, of course English had to be good enough to articulate one's own viewpoints, but we had to read more than the Westerners, and in reading Chinese materials, they could not compete with us, this was very important. As for contemporary China Studies, since I was at Adelaide, our library holdings were not good enough (to do China Studies), unlike Australian National University. As well, to compete with the Westerners, who generally received disciplinary training well and were well versed in political science, and who could write in English easily and fast, we could not match these. Another thing to

consider was that studies of current affairs may not have long-lasting value, because the issues could be overtaken by events. All these considerations were in my thought. So finally I decided to concentrate on Overseas Chinese Studies. At least I thought I held a competitive edge in this field. At least I could go back to Malaysia and Singapore where I had my networks, like Nantah alumni, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, clan-based associations, etc. In Malaysia and Singapore I am confident to get the support I need.

Ngeow: So you felt that Overseas Chinese studies are only a branch of China Studies, or are the two of them different?
Yen: While I was working on Overseas Chinese studies, I treated it as an extension of China Studies. But now it constitutes as an independent field.
Ling: What else did you think about when you were orienting yourself as a scholar?

Yen: When I was publishing my second book, Coolies and Mandarins (Yen 1985), I consulted with Professor Wang Gungwu. I researched the Chinese coolies; it was a topic that covered a lot of areas, and many materials were scattered in different places, and no one had yet pieced them together. When I started working on this, I spent many years to get the materials. I was one of the first few scholars to get these materials from the Qing archives. Only Taiwan later published these materials. Before I went to Taiwan for collecting research materials, I spent times at the Chinese libraries at Melbourne, Sydney, and Australian National University. I had to digest all these materials, putting them together from scattered pieces. Some were very difficult to find, such as Qing's diplomatic materials, so I went to the archives in the Modern History Institute in Taiwan. Other than these, I also went to Britain and the United States, such as the British Public Records Office, Kew Garden, and the National Archives of The United States in Washington, etc. They contained a lot of materials, and I went to study them. In London, I mainly searched for the archives on Qing diplomats, especially the materials related to Xue Fucheng, the first Chinese ambassador posted in Europe. These archives had both Chinese and English versions, and I compared them and found out Chinese and English versions sometimes differed; it could be because of translation mistake when some Chinese-reading British officials translated these Chinese government documents for the British government. Some of these documents were official memorials or notes to the Qing Emperor. This was in 1979, and I spent two months of my sabbatical in London looking at these materials. I also thought that without these materials and field trips to Europe and America, it would not be possible to complete this topic. Some historical places you must also visit, it is not enough based on just imagination. So I went to San Francisco, there was a Chinese Museum, and it had information regarding how the Chinese laborers did dangerous works while constructing railways, such as exploding mountains to make holes and laying down the rails. I learned about how they did it only through this visit to the museum. I also went to Harvard's Yenching Library, which has many materials, and I read some Zhang Yulan's stuff. There was another archive that was about the fundraising of the railroad between Guangzhou and Wuhan, and some other fundraising

activities of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. This was not easy. The then overseas Chinese still maintained strong ties to their hometowns, they felt that the railway between Guangzhou and Wuhan had nothing to do with Fujian, so they refused to donate, this proved that provincial identities were strong at that time. I remembered that to record these materials I had to bring a pack of cards, no ball pen, only pencil.

Ling: How was this book received in the academia after it was published?

Yen: Generally positive, but I had different views from Lea E. Williams. His assessment was not that fair. In the footnotes of my book I pointed out his mistakes, I only meant to correct factual errors but not attacking him personally, but he had that sense of superiority as a Westerner. Also, in February 1988, at an international conference in Canberra, I spoke to G. William Skinner and said that in his report, there were some factual errors. He said that those errors weren't his but his assistant. My view is that if you are wrong than you should accept criticism. Scholarship has to be concerned about authenticity and truthfulness, and if not, then is no point in doing scholarship. Maybe I offended Lea E. Williams. I wrote about the Confucian Revival movement in Singapore and Malaya, and pointed out that in his book "Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1916", where he talked about how the movement was strongly influenced by English-educated Chinese, that was a huge mistake. Probably he concluded from the fact that Lim Boon Keng was English educated. I based my argument on the newspaper reports at that time, which showed that most supporters of the Confucian Revival movement were Chinese-educated, this he had missed.

Ngeow: Your first book, Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution (Yen 1976), there were some reviews that critiqued your book, saying that you had focused too much on Sun Yat-Sen and the revolutionaries and less on Liang Qichao. How do you respond?

Yen: There are several schools in the studies of the 1911 (Xinhai) Revolution, and I have been seen as belonging to the traditional school. All these articles I rebutted, I do not agree with them. For example, Joseph Esherick. He wrote about the reforms and revolutionary movements in Hubei and Hunan in his early career, and he was much celebrated in the West. But I disagree with his explanation of the 1911 Revolution. He is a Neo-Marxist. This school treated the center of the 1911 Revolution was within China itself not overseas, such as Hong Xiuquan's Taiping rebels and Mao Zedong, all of these people never left China and their supporters were peasants. But I held the view that Sun's 1911 Revolution was an exception because the main revolutionaries were foreign-educated, such as the members of the Xinzhonghui, Tongmenghui, etc. This school's explanation put too much emphasis on historical determinism, and does not put enough emphasis on historical contingency. I always think that Neo-Marxism is a kind of mechanistic world view.

I argued that the exception of the 1911 revolution in modern Chinese history may not be a predetermined thing. Hung and Mao did not receive foreign education and Sun did, a lot of his supporters also received English education. Look at his supporters outside of China, many of them were Overseas Chinese. I rebutted Esherick, and they treated me as a traditionalist. But history is not about trendy new thing, and cannot be explained with sweeping generalization, so they were wrong. In Taiwan, of course, Sun and Tongmenghui were treated as the mainstream because of political reason, and in Mainland the mainstream opinion is still that Tongmenghui was the center of the 1911 revolution. My main point is that before Tongmenghui, there was no mainstream because there were Xingzhonghui, Huaxinghui, and Guangfuhui, and none of these revolutionary organizations could be seen as the leader. Only after 1905 that Tongmenghui emerged as the mainstream. Though it had its own problem of internal division, but it still maintained an overall consensus. Last year I presented a paper in Singapore on this issue, it is about to be published, and in it I have a more detailed rebuttal.

Ngeow: Have you met these scholars in person?

Yen: No, I have not met Esherick before, he is based in the United States, too far away. They did invite me to a conference on Overseas Chinese in San Francisco, and also another time on Chinese history; they wanted me to make a report on the role of Chinese secret societies in Chinese history. I did not go. I was with the University of Hong Kong at that time; if I had gone I probably would have met Esherick and others.

Ngeow: Now let's talk about your another book, A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya (Yen 1986). Professor Wang Gungwu differed with you on a point when it came to the discussion of the absence of an intellectual (shi) class in the Malayan and Singapore Chinese society. What do you think?

Yen: When I mentioned the notion of "shi," I said that the class was already forming. If you looked into the English-educated professionals, and those traditional Chinese educated people like the teachers, they were different from the merchant class. They were of course different from the "shi" in traditional Chinese society, but within this Overseas Chinese society, they were the educated lot. "Gong" (workers) referred to those coolies and shop assistants in the nineteenth century, but those in charge of bookkeeping were educated people.

Ngeow: So they were the small "shi," not the big "shi" in Chinese society?
Yen: They were different; if we used China's standard, they were different.
Ling: I read that in the early Republican years, they differentiated those "shi," meaning who maintained their own status, from "intellectuals," those who received education.

Yen: Right, but I did not do that, I put them in one group, although some Overseas Chinese were Western educated. After 1911, we should use "intellectuals," all the schools were modernizing.

Ngeow: Among all these books you authored, which one you like the most?

Yen: I put in many efforts in all three books, Coolies and Mandarins took up the longest time. How satisfied I am? Well, I won't want to spend time rewriting them again.

I think in doing scholarship, we have to produce valuable scholarship. Recently someone wrote to Lianhe Zaobao,[3] arguing a new theory about how many times Sun Yat-sen came to Singapore. He proposed nine times, more than one time from the convention. This I can accept. But some other issues I still maintain my views. Any book on historical research had its restraints, but if there were new materials that needed to be included, then it was okay, but the main direction had to be correct. I did not write anything to respond to this piece, because if I had to do it, I had to bring out all my old materials, which would have taken a lot of time, because this was a topic I worked on decades ago, many materials are now scattered. My materials collection is a big problem; basically I have a good card system, which is fine for looking for certain materials. But now I have too many books, and the room is small, and my body cannot withstand anymore.

Ngeow: Many of your books were translated into Chinese and published; how were they received by Chinese scholars?

Yen: They had the same evaluation like you have it here. For example, Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution received attention in both China and Taiwan. Most Overseas Chinese had the consensus regarding the views on the 1911 Revolution, but the Western scholars liked to be different, to come up with novel ideas. In 1980, the third Asian Studies international conference was held at Monash University in Australia, and there was a panel on the 1911 Revolution. I did not present a paper; I was a discussant. I discussed a paper presented by Mark Elven, a famous British historian on China; his paper was titled "The 1911 Revolution in Shanghai", discussing economic, social, and political factors. I critiqued him, I said he should have more information about the revolutionaries themselves when discussing "the role of the revolutionaries in Shanghai," because rebellions were not equivalent to revolutions. Revolutions were combinations of violent events and the work of revolutionaries, and if there were no combinations, there would not have real revolutions but rebellions. I still insist the view that only revolutions participated by dedicated revolutionaries were real revolutions; those who weren't prepared to sacrifice themselves, they were only armchair revolutionaries. You cannot just talk only, you have to take up action, like Huang Hsing, so the Qing court put a bounty on their heads.

Ngeow: I see that your two early books, Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution and Coolies and Mandarins, still were connected to China as a theme of research, but after the third book, you had less work directly related to China. Why?

[3]Lianhe Zhaobao, a popular Chinese-language newspaper in Singapore.

Yen: When I was writing my first book I was already considering my direction. At that time there wasn't much research on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, so I had plenty of room to move. I also considered in Australia, using English in academic publications, "what is your comparative advantage"? If I had to survive in Australia, I had to think how to make myself distinguishable, so for a long time I did not publish in the Chinese language, I did it finally when I was in University of Hong Kong in 1989. I did write in Chinese during my time in Nantah, you see my introduction to the Collection of Historical Materials on the Malaysian Fujianese History of Education, I wrote in Chinese, but after that for about twenty years I did not write in Chinese. I forgot many terms, and even afraid that I got some chengyu (four-character Chinese idioms) wrong. Not until after my retirement in early 2003, after I did not have to worry about yearly assessment, that I started writing more in Chinese.

Ling: Sir, Malaysia's China studies remain weak. What do you think?

Yen: This was related to the political environment. In the early days the government treated the Chinese schools as hotbeds of Communism, training dissidents. After China started reforms, the Chinese language became more useful. This was a huge change. In 1985 or 1986, I came back, and a Sinchew[4] journalist (and now she is the editor in chief) interviewed me. She said a lot of Chinese parents felt not sure about the future of their children who went to Chinese schools. I said that now China is opening up, and based on the trends, in the future Chinese language will be very useful. Because when Chinese becomes a commercial language, the Malaysian government will then treat Chinese education differently. When the time comes, Chinese language will enjoy the same status as Japanese language, if not number one in Asia. In the 1980s there was no prevalent "Chinese threat theory," because China was not strong then, but it affected China Studies somewhat. I remember after not long after graduating, it was still hard teaching modern Chinese history in Singapore or Malaya, a lot of materials were not allowed to be seen.

Ling: This was one consideration?

Yen: There was a personal consideration as well. In 1971, I met a Malay scholar in an academic conference in Canberra. He knew that I was a Malaysian citizen, so he asked about my work. I said I teach Chinese history at the University of Adelaide, and had completed a Ph.D. thesis on "Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution". He seemed to have been agitated. He said, "you are a Malaysian, but you think you are Overseas Chinese." I replied, "no, this is a historical study, Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution, it has nothing to do with us now." He still kept complaining about how the Chinese in Malaysia were not loyal to Malaysia and thought of themselves as Overseas Chinese, and the Malaysian (Chinese) students in Australia did not accept well the Malay students. His words influenced me in a negative way. This man was a highly educated Malay intellectual, but he held such

[4]Sinchew Daily, a popular Chinese language newspaper in Malaysia.

bias against the Chinese Malaysians. Undoubtedly his view would influence his students, and would influence future Malay leaders of this country, which will then impact on the future of myself and my children. So in early 1972, I decided to apply for Australian citizenship immediately. Also, in the 1970s Malaysian citizens could not visit China; it was inconvenient for my research. In Australia although there were things that I felt not happy with, but overall the academic environment was very good, so I did not regret giving up Malaysian citizenship.

Ling: Did anyone invite you back to Malaysia?
Yen: No. Scholarship is an international thing, not bounded by boundaries. For a scholar, if he thinks that there is a better environment for research, he would naturally go there, and would want good conditions for research. Perhaps you have heard of what Lee Kuan Yew had said before that If you want to build a first-class university, you must have first-class professors. You can't produce first-class students with second class professors. So the country must spend more on higher education, that is a simple principle.
Ling: Sometimes when good scholars go overseas, it may bring benefits for the country as well.
Yen: After they become successful overseas they can return and help. Now is a globalization era, where our visions are broadened.
Ling: Your research in history seems to focus a lot more on common people.

Yen: I did not deliberately write about so-called People's History, like Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore, by my friend James F. Warren, who is from Murdoch University, Western Australia. But I was influenced by this kind of history, and I think common people are important in history as well. In my memoirs I wrote that many people have been writing the success story and history of those successful businesspersons, in order to find a shortcut to making money. But other people are also part of history, so I urge more people to write memoirs, which would provide different perspectives to history. Professor Ho Ping-Ti's recently published Chinese memoirs is a very good example.

Ling: What is your current publication plan?

Yen: The book I am writing now is about ethnic Chinese Business in Asia, mainly to look at the relationship between culture, history, commerce, and economics. After I had taken up the History Chair of the University of Hong Kong at the end of 1988, I felt that the world was changing, and I thought business history should also deserve to be studied seriously, so while I was in Hong Kong I wrote an article on a case study of Overseas (Ethnic) Chinese business, on the Wing On Company in Hong Kong and Shanghai. It was originally written in English, and presented in Taiwan in 1991, and was part of an edited volume. I translated it back to Chinese afterwards. I treated Wing On as a commercial institution of the Overseas Chinese. You may know that Wing On was an important modern business organization during the transition between Qing and Republican eras, and their management ideas were close to the modern management. This was my first venture into

business history. Later, in 1993, I started teaching a course on Chinese business, this was inspired by Dr. Chia Ooi Peng,[5] I know her very well. In 1993 I was invited to participate in the conference commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Chinese Department of the University of Malaya, and I presented a paper on Overseas Chinese nationalism. Dr. Chia came to pick me up from airport, and while we were talking, she said that while she was in the US on her sabbatical leave, she saw the "hot" trend of Chinese business studies, so she also started a course on Chinese Business at University of Malaya, and it attracted about two hundred students, including Malay and Indian students.

At that time I told myself: this was not bad. Because the subject of modern Chinese history that I was teaching in my university increasingly had fewer and fewer students. Our university also established a Centre for Asian Studies, and a lot of China-related courses were offered there, so there was keen competition. I thought of the success of Chia Oi Peng's course, so why don't I try a course on Chinese Business. I was discussing with my department head, Dr. Roger Knight, on the name of the course. How about "Golden Dragon"? He said that people may confuse it with a Chinese restaurant. Then I thought again. Since I watched a Bruce Lee's movie, so I suggested "Enter the Dragon," and the subtitle was "Chinese Business in Asia." He agreed with me that this trendy title would attract more students to take the course. It later attracted more than a hundred students, but not the history students.

In 1995, before the course was offered, I conducted a survey among my history students, and asked whether they would be interested in a course like this. They were not enthusiastic, and said "we are not interested in making money." I originally thought that it would be nice if the course had history students as its base. But it attracted most of the students from business, economics, and law. The course offering was done through the Business School. Since not many students came from the Arts Faculty, so I invited a business professor for a lunch. I wanted him to have confidence in me [teaching the course]. I told him that I was a University of Hong Kong professor, and had published many English and Chinese books, so he was impressed and agreed. He taught a course on International Business, and made my "Enter the Dragon: Chinese Business and Asia" as part of the Marketing curricula, so I had a lot of students.

Ling: Sir, what did you emphasize in this course?

Yen: I was teaching Ethnic Chinese Business, mostly overseas outside China. I felt that business should not be just about economics and management, but also culture and history. In 2000 I was invited to deliver three public lectures at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore as the inaugural Tan Lark Sye visiting professor. They interviewed me. I said that after the independence of Singapore in August, 1965, out of survival consideration, history as a discipline was almost made

[5]Chia Ooi Peng, Associate Professor at the Chinese Studies Department of the Unviersity of Malaya.

nonexistent. They thought history could not contribute to the survival of Singapore, no influence, no impact, so there was no need to teach it. But now they took seriously in culture and history. In that interview, I said, all things should not go extreme; there should be some sort of balance. All the students you have trained only know economics and management, that was not good enough; without knowledge in culture and history, they would be at a loss when negotiate with others in business.

Ling: Sir, did you emphasize the Confucian element in this course?
Yen: Of course, this is important. I think that the Overseas Chinese who received Chinese education differed from the English educated. Those Chinese-educated who succeeded in making a lot of money, I had studied their businesses from the very beginning, and a lot of them had something to do with traditional Chinese culture, this is undeniable.
Ling: We notice that some scholars argue that the Chinese businessmen in early Malaya generally had low level of education and culture, so the reasons of their success in business, such as hardworking, integrity, honesty, etc. basically reflected their survival instincts, not because of Confucianism.

Yen: These scholars do not understand. Without a culture as a base, how do you react with instinct? Only with the influence of traditional culture, the ways one thought about things could form a pattern. If you seriously studied these people, they all had strong Confucian thought. And now the Chinese businesses still discuss Sun Tze's "Art of War" and business management. This is the influence of Chinese culture. I once watched a TV program interviewing a young Chinese businessman. He mentioned a lot of his management notions coming from Chinese culture, although he did refer to western culture as well. So, a scholar with only a background in English education will not fully understand Chinese culture. First, he could not understand Chinese language, and second, he has to use secondary materials.

For example, the Chinese traditional saying, "if you employ someone you have to trust him," this is an important value. If you do not trust someone then do not hire him, and if you have to hire him you must trust him. Take a look at the studies of Tan Kah Kee, the one authored by Dr. Yong Ching Fatt. I also wrote a piece, "Tan Kah Kee and the Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurship." Within it I mentioned how his notions of management were linked to Chinese culture. I feel that in modern management theory, especially Anglo-American management theory, emphasizes the separation of management and ownership. This one I disagree, why? In Chinese tradition, ownership is linked with management. The Western model of the separation of ownership and management has caused a big crisis, that is, it makes people only pursue short-term interests. This separation delinks ownership and management and raises the loyalty question. The manager will say "Okay, I perform well." That's it. But his "perform well" is a short-term consideration. For an enterprise, short-termism is not good, because it only solve temporary problems but not prepares the enterprises for facing long-term issues. Appointment of CEO is a

short-term thing. You give him a five-year contract, and want him to lift up performance. Within this period of time he wants to build up his reputation, but does not consider long-term interests.

Ling: Comparing Australia and Malaysia, what do you see in Malaysia?

Yen: I have emotional attachment to Malaysia, although I did not stay here for long, for 17 or 18 years (the growing up) I was in this area. Academically I maintained good ties with the colleagues at University of Malaya such as Prof. Lee Kam Hing and Prof. Khoo Kay Kim, and culturally I am still close to the Chinese society here. This is about personal. Another point is my research, and this is my base, an important base. Ethnic Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore have a high proportion rate. It is still a large community and influential. A lot of educated Chinese went to Singapore and Penang, or Kuala Lumpur. And later development of modern Chinese history was also closely linked [to the region]. Now Malaysia and Singapore treat this history as part of tourist attraction. Now tourism is a big economy. Kuala Lumpur too, but it is not as important as Penang and Singapore.

Ling: Also, about how about your experience in Hong Kong, any experience that made you feel like Hong Kong?

Yen: Nothing special about scholarship, but my personal profile was raised. I did not go to University of Hong Kong because of better pay. Actually my appointment at University of Hong Kong[6] was due to chance as well. When they called me up, I was prepared to say no actually, because I just received promotion at the University of Adelaide, and I did not want to leave. Also there was the looming 1997 problem. But my wife suggested a change of environment, and my daughter also agreed, she said she could pay us visit and also tour around Hong Kong. When I was about to apply for the post the application was about to end, I contacted Professor Mary Turnbull, a friend of mine, and asked her to send me the application as soon as possible.

Ling: When you just arrived, what did you plan to work on?

Yen: At that time I thought about two main things that could be done at University of Hong Kong. First, I thought University of Hong Kong could develop into a major center on the research of modern Chinese history, because of close geographical proximity. Actually, before I reported for duty (but was already offered the post), I went to Guangzhou and Xiamen Universities to make contacts with my academic friends there, in order to plan for a publication on the modern history of South China, and the main theme would be the relationship between South China and Hong Kong. I asked whether they would support my idea, and they said they would. Second, I thought it could develop studies of the history of Overseas Chinese. But when I arrived, it was not that easy. First, the academic staff already had their own research plans and directions, and they were very suspicious of my

[6]As a Chair Professor in History a the University of Hong Kong.

intention. They thought that I had my personal agenda, and wanted to use them to raise my own profile. So there was resistance, refusing to work with me. So later I was interviewed by a journalist of the leading Chinese newspaper, and I talked about my plans and visions. I thought that many rich Hong Kong Chinese, after learning of my plan and vision, would come out and support me. But after the interview was published, there were not much response, only one or two were willing to contribute some, just thousands of Hong Kong Dollars, not enough. So I went to see Prof. Wang Gungwu who was the Vice-Chancellor at that time for support, but was of no avail. I later realized that he had his own difficulties. Because Overseas Chinese studies were also his field, he was afraid that he would be accused of using the post of Vice-Chancellor to promote his own academic interests. I did not think about this at that time, but later I felt that this might have an influence on him. He was careful, so University of Hong Kong did not do this. So I went to see Professor Edward Chen Kwan-yiu of the Centre for Asian Studies, an economist. He said if I wanted to do research on Overseas Chinese under the Centre for Asian Studies, I would be allowed to do so, but provided I could find a sponsor who could put out a large sum of money. Then I thought, in Hong Kong I was not well-known, perhaps if I were in Singapore and Malaysia where I had some reputation, I could have raised some fund, but not in Hong Kong. So this proved that my vision could not be realized. I could not develop academically there.

Ling: You also had to spend a lot of time and energy on administration too.

Yen: Right. When I arrived, there were a lot of problems in the History Department.

Ngeow: How was your relationship between the academia in Malaysia? Especially the history academics.

Yen: It was more based on personal linkages. For example, I knew Professor Khoo Kay Kim[7] quite well. He had some [Ph.D.] students. So he once asked me if I could be the external examiner of one of his students. The dissertation was written in Malay. I said my Malay was rusty already, but if it were written in English then I would agree to do the job. Also, I was the external examiner for Tan Liok Ee's Ph.D. thesis (turned into a book). We had each other as the external examiner of our students, which was normal. Also I was close to Professor Lee Kam Hing[8] and Professor Stephen Leong[9] as well. Leong's Ph.D. thesis at UCLA was close to my topic. His dissertation had two parts, but regretfully was never published. I heard that the publisher wanted him to remove the first part. His first part seemed to have overlapped my early work on "The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution", but the second part was still excellent. He should have published it. Until today we still cite his work. Also there was this Professor Ho Peng Yoke. He was at the Chinese Studies Department at the University of Malaya, then came to Australia,

[7]Tan Sri Khoo Kay Kim, Professor of History at the University of Malaya. Now a Professor Emeritus at the University of Malaya.

[8]Lee Kam Hing, Professor of History at the University of Malaya, now a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of China Studies at the University of Malaya.

[9]Stephen Leong, Professor of History at the University of Malaya, now attached with Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

partly due to the change of language policy at University of Malaya, from English to Malay. This policy did drive out several good quality scholars. Actually University of Malaya could have been kept as an international university, to be exempted from this governmental language policy, then its standard would not have been affected. It made some good, reputable professors leave, and created a vacuum in the academia.

Ngeow: Many people are today talking about the rise of China, and some said that the twenty-first century will be the Chinese century. How do you see China's future?

Yen: This is probably a bit exaggerated. Now many foreigners also suggest that twenty-first century belongs to Asia, not just China, others such as India, South Korea are also included. I tend to agree with this Asian Century notion, a Chinese century is a bit too arrogant perhaps. In Australia they all talk about twenty-first Century as Asian Century.

Ngeow: And this is the reason Australia wants to come back to Asia?

Yen: Right.

Ngeow: Will Australians see themselves as Asians?
Yen: They do think about. But in the early period they held different views of themselves. In the 1970s a sense of superiority still prevailed, a condescending attitude. Now, through travel and other forms of contact, they gradually know more about Asia, know that Asia has Japan, South Korea, the English-speaking Singapore and Hong Kong, and these places are as good as Australia in terms of quality of life.
Ngeow: In your long academic career, were there things that you feel regretful? For instance, you had a research topic but could not do it due to various reasons.

Yen: I feel that my academic path has been quite smooth, maybe promotion-wise, I may have faced some kind of discrimination before. It made me unhappy at that time, but now, looking back to my whole career, this was just a small thing. In scholarship I feel I am fortunate. Selecting a research topic was very important. After I got my scholarship, but before I entered Australian National University, I discussed with one of my two supervisors, Dr. Lo Hui-Min, a Singaporean. At that time I was interested in another topic, that is the research into secret societies. Dr. Lo said that he supervised several students who were working on China's 1911 Revolution (Xinhai Geming), one was the "Min Bao (People's Tribune) and the 1911 Revolution", another was "Song Jiao-ren and the 1911 Revolution". If I worked on Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution, I could fit into the team. And later I thought that collecting materials about secret societies was not easy, and was dangerous; they could kill you if you exposed them. So I decided to work on the 1911 Revolution. Professor Wang Gungwu wrote an article at that time, "Reformers and Revolutionaries in Malaya," I was influenced by that article, so my thesis was based on the foundation laid by him, and fortunately I could produce

some results. That is why I said, in selecting a topic, one must have some long-term perspective, and probably some luck as well. If I had done another topic, I might have ended up pursuing a different academic path. When I published my work, it was welcomed by the academics as well as the Overseas Chinese themselves. Before that, I always thought that my topic was unpopular. In international academia, among the Chinese writers (such as Huang Fuluan), their writings on Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution were generalist writings. So in 1986, there was an international conference on Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution, jointly organized by five academic institutions in Taiwan and Singapore. Before I felt that my Ph.D. topic was an unpopular topic, but now there was an international conference devoted to it, and it attracted more people working on it.

Ling: In Malaysian politics, do you think Chinese businessmen played an important role?

Yen: Discussing politics in Malaysia is a sensitive thing, especially about racial issues. More detailed studies should come from local-based scholars. From a broad perspective, because of traditional Chinese attitude towards politics and other historical reasons, the Chinese political awakening seemed to be quite late. Furthermore, the British played the game of "divide and rule," a common colonial tactic. The British did not quite want them (the different races) to communicate much, because more communication will increase mutual understanding and reduce misunderstandings. The Chinese paid a lot more attention to China at that time, the Chinese nationalist sentiment was strong before the war, and the main conversation topic in Chinese society was how to help China defeat Japan. After the war, you had the emerging civil war in China, and that divided the local Chinese society too, so the focus was still on China. Looking back from today's vantage point, everything seemed so simple. But if you lived at that time, it was a confusing era. So when Malayan Chinese Association (MCA)[10] called on the Chinese to be loyal to the land of their residence (Malaya), it was a significant contribution, this one we cannot deny, whether you like it or not. To analyze further, those Chinese influenced by MCA tended to be English educated. The Chinese-educated Chinese were more likely influenced by people such as Lim Lian Giok.[11] If Malayan Union[12] were formed, and because the size of Chinese population was approximately the same with the size of the Malay population, Malaya could have formed a more democratic system, because the government would need the votes of the two main

[10]Malayan Chinese Association (later Malaysian Chinese Association), or MCA, is a Chinese-based Malaysian political party. It has been part of the ruling coalition of Malaysia since independence.

[11]Lim Lian Giok, a popular Chinese educationalist and a president of the United Chinese School Teachers Association in Malaysia.

[12]Malayan Union, the first constitutional framework to be considered for adoption by the newly independent Malaya.

races. But instead the Federation of Malaya[13] was formed, and it put restrictions on Chinese becoming citizens, and the number of Chinese voters reduced, so the Chinese voices became weaker.

Ling: Sir, you were working on modern Chinese history originally, and later switched to Overseas Chinese studies, so you had something to compete against others. Now in Malaysia we are doing China Studies, what kind of advices will you give us? What directions should we go? What can we do so that we can go further?

Yen: Haha, it is better for me not to misdirect you guys. Your institute is studying contemporary China, there are many similar institutes and centers in other countries too, right?

Ngeow: Yes, but in Malaysia there is only us.

Yen: Of course you must look internationally. To compete with others, you have to consider what niche you have, where did you come from. When your institute competes with other centers, you have to consider that. Let us say now Malaysia has good relations with China, and many of you can read and write in both Chinese and English, this one you must capitalize on. Many foreign scholars' Chinese reading ability is not that good. To work on contemporary topics, you must move fast, write fast. Your writings should be in Chinese and English, because you have to aim for international standard and accept review. In selections of topic, if you are going to compete against America's [China Studies] centers, you must compare and consider. You must know what they are doing too.

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[13]The Federation of Malaya, replacing Malayan Union to be the constitution adopted by the newly independent Malaya.

# Chapter 8
# A Synthetic Observer: Interview with Professor John Wong

**Chih-yu Shih, Chueiling Shin and Chang-hong Chen**

**Abstract** With his family origin rooted in Taishan, GuangDong, brought up in a typical Chinese migration background linking GuangZhou, Hong Kong, Canada and the UK, and finally settled himself down in Singapore, John Wong has traveled with different roles and changing positions alongside his career path. That experience cultivates in him a unique insight of China and allows him to skilfully look at China with different lens of focuses that suit most, as he tells in the interview.

**Keywords** John Wong · Singapore · China studies · East Asian Institute · Chinese Economy

## John Wong's Narrative

It never came crossed my mind to narrate an oral history of myself.

I have been in the academe for quite some time. I obtained my doctoral degree as early as in 1966. Currently retired from university teaching, I am now working for

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the East Asian Institute (EAI) , a quasi-think-tank research institute. The EAI was founded in 1990 by myself, as the director, and Wang Gungwu, as the research director. Both of us are considered the most senior members of the organization. It is not easy to find the right people to direct the policy-oriented think tank; [it is even] very difficult to find successors. I planned to retire this summer, but Lee Kwan-Yew insisted that I stay for one or two more years to help the new director, Yang Dali. These events occurred over a long period of time, from 1966 until now.

I have a complicated social, family, educational, and academic background.

I was born in Taishan, Guangzhou, where most Chinese in the American Chinatown are originally from. I do not speak good Cantonese. My grandfather immigrated to Canada at the age of 16. He earned a living first in a laundry and later at a restaurant. He never returned to China because of the civil war, and he died in Toronto in his 90s. My father was a medical doctor who worked at Sun Yat Sen University; he died of cancer in Guangzhou in 1949. My mother took my three younger brothers and immigrated to Canada in 1955.

Overseas, Chinese from Taishan tend to think highly of children's education. Those who studied abroad in the early days were either dispatched by the government or decedents of Chinese immigrants from Fujian or Guangdong; most majored in physics or chemistry. I once snuck back to the Mainland from Hong Kong in 1979 when China had just opened and found that I came from a village of PhD holders. I used my Hong Kong ID to enter the Mainland, was received by the Southeast Asian Research Institute of Jinan University, and enjoyed a free three-day stay under the policy of unification towards overseas Chinese. The Singapore Security Bureau later discovered that, which caused me some complications for a while.

I went to primary school in Guangzhou, and later I studied at a pro-Kuomintang (KMT) junior high in Hong Kong. There were three different school systems in Hong Kong. The government school taught in English. I transferred to the English system in 1955, for I would have had no future if I had continued my education in a Chinese school. Some of my classmates later studied for a university degree in Taiwan and obtained no job after returning to Hong Kong. I did quite well in my A-level courses and was accepted at Queen Elizabeth College, one of the best three government schools. I was further admitted to the University of Hong Kong. Many of my classmates later became elite leaders in government after 1997, one of whom was the first Chinese police superintendent. There were missionary schools and elite schools as well. Many students left high school and started their career in government; meanwhile, I chose to study at Hong Kong University. Elite education there was very difficult to obtain. Many professors did not teach well but were influential; well, they were still better than those in China. Professors in Peking University were hardly okay. Many good students ignored them.

I graduated from Hong Kong University in 1962. Most of my classmates, such as Chan Fang On Sang (we are of the same age), chose to serve in the government. Very few Chinese worked as high-level officers; only one or two of them did.

I majored in Economics at the Faculty of Humanities, Hong Kong University. Social science in the UK lagged behind that of the US. Hong Kong scholars did not

understand China. Residents in Hong Kong were either locally born or Mainland immigrants. You cannot do Chinese studies without interests in China. Mainland immigrants like me were rootless in Hong Kong and were more interested in development in China.

Hong Kong began industrialization in the 1950s, earlier than Taiwan. Hong Kong mainly focused on the handicraft industry and the developing intermediary trade, a preliminary stage of industrialization. Several business circles were developed. There you see the Shanghai clique (from Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and the North) and the Chaozhou people. Ka-shing Li started his business at the time. Shanghai people were smart and tidy. Different from other people, they mainly ran barbers, tailoring shops, and tea restaurants. Economy in Hong Kong began to develop in the 1950s. Most businesses were doing well, Cantonese or not.

Then came the refugees in the 1960s. The first refugee wave started in 1962. Those who failed to cross over the borders were repatriated. Whoever managed to make their way to Kowloon would be issued a Hong Kong ID; or they otherwise turned into mobsters.

I started teaching in Hong Kong University, returning from the UK in 1966, when the Cultural Revolution started. I moved to Singapore in 1971.

Graduates from Hong Kong University would either teach Chinese or serve as high-level officials in the government if they graduated with first class honors or second upper class honors. That I chose to work as a teaching assistant after graduation changed my future. I was sent to the University of London from the summer of 1963 until the end of 1966, which had profound impact on my conceptualization of research and methodology. I began my five-year teaching stint in Hong Kong University as a lecturer in 1966, but I was not happy there. I was the first PhD in Economics among the staff. Most teaching staff were Westerners, even in the departments of Math or Chinese. Local staff had no housing benefits. The head of department was an overseas Chinese from the US, who majored in Economic History but with relatively poor academic performance and was looked down upon. I was on bad terms with him; I am my independent mind. I went to Australia for a conference in 1971, through Singapore, and was very impressed. Later I decided to immigrate to Singapore.

I have been interested in Chinese studies since university days. I began to read the newspaper at primary school and was very interested in current affairs. However, most Hong Kong students were only concerned about local news and were not interested in China or the Communist Party. The British colonization education paid no attention to—in fact did not encourage—teaching contemporary history. I was curious about the early history of the KMT, Huaihai Battle, stories of Wang Jingwei, and so on, and began my research on China with professors while working as a teaching assistant. China Watches also did their research in Hong Kong in the 1960s, as well as researchers of the previous generation, such as Dwight Perkins. My masters and doctoral research were about Chinese land reform, taken as a discipline of economic development. The US Lincoln Center was

important. I studied agricultural economy as well and so had contact with Lee Teng-Hui, whose thesis was also about economic development and agricultural economy.

My first book was published in New York in 1973. I spent six months at the US Lincoln Center to modify my manuscript, which was first submitted to Berkeley but was rejected because only two of the three reviewers approved it for publication. I resubmitted to Praeger and quickly obtained a permit to publish, with Perkins's recommendation and Ishikawa's positive reviews.

I have diversified learning experience in China, the UK, and the US. The British elite education values extensive reading rather than conducting research. Comparatively, the Americans were practical and asked for publications. I started as a senior lecturer in Singapore, when Singapore was newly independent and had few PhD holders in universities. The situation was similar in the UK: when the British government began to construct new universities in 1965 only few lecturers had PhD degrees. Many of my classmates in London obtained offers as assistant lecturers before completing their doctoral degrees. My career would be very different if I stayed and worked in the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Hong Kong was under British rule then. The Chinese University was newly established. Hong Kong University remained the most important university in the colony. There you would have had no pressure to publish; two to three articles would do. There academic life was mainly about reading and debating, drinking and discussion in the senior common room.

[Studying at] the London School of Economics enlightened me a lot. I was not hard-working, but I had good memory. It was an eye-opening experience that I had in London. We had public lectures during noon hours then and heard of all the different viewpoints. London was international; some points were actually completely unacceptable, but I learnt hypothesis testing from them. Popper was a big influence. He was very rigorous and was worshipped by many of us. Popper was anti-communist. He emphasized the importance of hypothesis and questions as well as clear thought and argument. By contrast, the Mainland scholars nowadays have no arguments, despite being eloquent and persuasive. It is not proper to make normative and positive comments in the same statement. I told the Mainland scholars that social science research is not about an absolute right or wrong, but always a matter of degree. Positions and conclusions are claimed, with no hypothesis in Chinese-styled academic writing. The way the Chinese argue is problematic. Comparatively, academic writing in the West starts with conceptualization. Economics is not used to supporting recommendations.

That is how I review papers now. I have to deliver three or four reports to the government every month. I greatly learned from my ex-boss, Goh Keng Swee. I admire Lee Kuan Yew, too; though many young people observing him from a distance criticized him harshly, I do admire him.

Our Institute focuses on China, Japan, and Taiwan. We provide informative reports to the government, telling them what is happening in China but never making recommendations. Thus, the same report would not be suitable for Zhu Rongji or Wen Jiabao.

Two of my younger brothers further immigrated to the US from Canada. One of them also obtained a PhD degree. I still have one older sister and one younger brother in Toronto, where my grandparents had been buried. We go to Toronto for tomb sweeping. My father's ashes were shipped to Canada as well.

Both Singapore University and Hong Kong University were founded in the early days of the colonization period; thus, they had similar institutions and qualities. I arrived in Singapore in 1971, a time when many Western professors felt forced to leave following the anti-colonization movement. Chinese professors were more welcome. My wife even got her job without an interview. There were no females PhD degree holders in sociology then. She studied in Berkley and was better than me academically. We met as students in Hong Kong University and got married in 1967. She followed Lee Kuan Yew's advice to enter politics and later became one of the first three female members of the Singapore parliament in 1985.

To sum up, my career turning points are: London, Singapore, and EAI.

My wife was appointed as a Minister of Health, the first female mister in 1990. She also worked for the Education Ministry and retired five years ago. I had good relations with the government, partly because of her and partly because of Goh Keng Swee.

Goh was the second leading figure in Singapore, next to Lee. He had a PhD from LSE but still admired Lee a lot. He was straightforward and would take good care of you if he approved of you. He maintained good relations with the Chinese official. Zhao Ziyang's son and secretary were both in EAI.

If I had not left Hong Kong for Singapore, I would not have had much to expect, even though salaries in Singapore were less than those in Hong Kong at the time. However, I had a good career and life in Singapore, where my wife was also allowed to develop her potential.

I was pushed by my wife and felt that I was looked down upon if I had no publication, so I always tried to update my works. The British were milder and more undisciplined. If I were a young man today, I would go to America, where the elite of the whole world gathered. If I had graduated from National Taiwan University, I would go to work at Peking University, as the British would choose if graduating from Oxford or Cambridge.

Many people conducted Soviet economic research in the US. Chinese economic research was dominated by Liu Dazhong. Liu was a good theorist. He once worked on GDP research in Beijing University and was anticommunist all the time because his family fortune was forfeited. In the US, one had to excel at theory in order to conduct research on China. Modern economic research has been obsessed with math. Social science research in Singaporean universities nowadays is too Americanized. Book publication gets no credit; only academic papers published in the US are appreciated.

In the early days, the best place for Western researchers to do China research was in Hong Kong, not Taiwan. Taiwan was the only place outside the US to collect the most comprehensive information about China. However, the source was not available to the public.

The relations between China and Southeast Asia were once frozen in the 1950s when most South Asian countries were anticommunist. The pro-China Leftists in Singapore were arrested by Lee Kuan Yew soon after the country was established. Lee was, at first, anticommunist and banned newspapers from China, but later on he tried to normalize relations with China in the 1970s. Malaysia normalized its relations with China in 1974; the Philippines did the same in 1975. Then it was Thailand. Singapore was the last.

However, Singapore was more advanced in its research on China, compared with Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, where governments had even tried to exclude Chinese for their fear of the Chinese communists even though they did not fully understand the Chinese. The Singaporeans learned the Chinese language, felt more goodwill towards China, and would cheer for visiting Chinese players, which once irritated Lee. Goh Keng Swee felt it was not right to be overly anti-China. You must know what Marxism is.

In fact Lee Kuan Yew understood that there must be something good in Chinese culture. The fact that Japan and the four Asian tigers were the only non-Western countries that enjoyed economic leaps forward since the 1970s, each of which had populations of less than 50 million but occupied more than 60% of exports in the total trade volume of the non-Western world. Confucian culture, with its emphasis on education and frugality, matters. The EAI was thus established. Goh retired in 1986 and was invited by China to become an economic advisor in 1989. Goh was a good friend of Gu Mu. He found that Singapore should enhance its knowledge of China and that we must look at China from its own perspective. This was the reason why the EAI switched from cultural studies to an institute that studied China after the Tiananmen Event. We had a sufficient budget to buy books and thus collected the complete series of China's statistical yearbooks.

Both Lee and Goh were English gentlemen. Politicians would become philosophical as they aged, and they found there must be something good about Chinese culture, with its history spanning 5000 years.

Our institute was not part of the research centers in the universities. We are independent, and full time. There are other similar institutes. The first is the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), founded by Goh Keng Swee in 1969. All the most important institutes were founded by Goh. In comparison, Lee would not show himself in business like this. ISEAS was first used to train diplomats and later developed into a research institute on regional issues under the leadership of an Indian scholar. It is under the administration of the Education Ministry, with worldwide recognition, and the only and best such institute in the region.

We are the second such independent institute. Our predecessor, the Institute of East Asian Philosophies (IEAP) , was established in 1973, aiming to study Confucian culture, when the Singaporean society was nevertheless under direct exposure of Western culture. IEAP was not an official institute, and was funded by a three million seed money donated by Hong Kong businessmen. It was renamed the Institute of East Asian political economy (IEAPE) in 1990 and readjusted to focus on studying China. The official explanation was that Singapore was too small to conduct research on Confucian culture. Many people objected to the idea of

adding Confucian studies into the curriculum, partly because many Singaporeans lacked Chinese language comprehension, and partly because some were worried that highlighting Confucian studies may harm the stability of its multi-ethnical society. On the other hand, the behind-the-scenes reason was that Goh found Chinese research done by the West useless when he was invited to work as an advisor to the Chinese government in 1986. Singapore needed to build up knowledge about China with a Singaporean perspective, more neutral, neither following the Chinese nor the Western perspectives. We had researchers from the Mainland. I encouraged them to abandon the Chinese or American mental burden. We only need American methodology.

The third independent research institute is the Institute of Policy Studies, founded by Goh Chok Tong, focusing on Singapore itself.

The IEAP was a privately constituted public institution, a unique system. Both of the two former vice premiers, Goh Keng Swee and Ong Teng Cheong, had one-dollar shares, with Goh being the nominal chairman and Ong the vice chairman. Later, Ong became the President of Singapore.

There is one other independent institute: the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies (IDSS), founded in 1996 by S.R. Nathan, a former ambassador to the US and incumbent president of Singapore who was under the administration of the Defense Ministry. IDSS is the only one directly funded by the government, while others depend on project money, endowment, and foundations. I do not think the university is capable of running those institutes. There is too much academic politics in the university. Besides, the university has been too Americanized and cannot accommodate policy studies. Thus, it proved difficult to obtain a promotion with policy research.

I was teaching at the Department of Economics of the National University of Singapore when Goh approached me and asked me to conduct social science-based research on China through the IEAPE. Goh retired as vice premier but was still vice president of the Central Bank. The Singaporeans were in awe of Lee and Goh, who supervised government officials strictly. He knew my background and told me, "We are not part of the university, you have to resign. I will give you a five-year contract, renewable." I was only 50 years old and was advised by many people not to take the offer, saying that Goh was hard to please and that the failure rate was over 50%. But I thought I could. Later I found that, although Goh was fiercely demanding, he was a scholar himself. Once you pass his test, you are safe.

Goh was very sharp. He insisted on using original material for research and preferred Chinese scholars from the Mainland. However, the Chinese scholars may have understood China but were not qualified in academic research and the English language. I was good at methodology but had to update my understanding of China. So I began to work on Chinese studies, starting from research studies on Chinese reform, step by step, and began to deliver Chinese news analysis for the government's reference since 1991. We also wrote discussion papers for internal studies. One of the only two researchers who could write English papers at the time was Eu Chooi Yip, a former Communist leader in Singapore who later fled to Indonesia and the Chinese Mainland before returning to Singapore in 1992. Lee approved of him

as he was a good friend of Goh. Eu taught English in Hunan in 1990, where the Malaysian communist radio station was based. Eu died in 1995. He was originally from Xinhui, Guangdong Province, and wrote a lot about the Mainland.

We had the security bureau check whomever we were interested to employ. Many were brought in by Goh and granted PR once landed if they had no passports. The IEAPE was restructured again in 1996. We had difficulties with hiring people. Goh was in poor health and so Wang Gungwu retired from Hong Kong University to chair the institute, and Goh became the Deputy Chairman. A think-tank has to affiliate with academic institutes; otherwise scholars would not come. Researchers at the think-tank were autonomous; you think and you ask. Goh was strict. You had to respond immediately to all his demands. One scholar did very good research but did not write. I write very well. Goh was very nice to scholars from the Mainland, but strict to Singaporeans. He was a quick reader, very good at English. Many people approached him. So we helped to host a Gu-Wang talk. We do not usually make our research paper public, not even to the libraries.

Our institute was renamed the EAI in 1997, under the dual leadership led by myself and Wang. I was the research director. China changed a lot by then. After Deng Xiaoping's visit to the South in 1992, Singapore started its Suzhou plan in 1993 and 1994. Our institute began to use Chinese scholars with PhDs from the UK or US. Goh advised me to affiliate the EAI with universities. The IEAPE as a juristic entity had to be winded up to restart the EAI, which was running on the strength of a 50- to 60-million fund raised by Goh himself.

Wang and I complemented each other very well. His international reputation helped the EAI gain recognition and become more open to the outside world. Unlike in the past, we now also encourage publication and academic papers. Zheng Yongnian was the most successful among those who worked under me. But then, the British came to poach my staff. Zheng Yongnian left, Lai Hongyi did, too. We were like the British training school.

We continued our focus on policy studies, which I once argued with Wang, although he eventually accepted my viewpoint. Still, scholarship is an essential base. Executive summary was important with policy papers. The ministers would usually take 3–5 min to read a summary and 5–10 more minutes to further browse through the paper if interested. Goh did not care about scholarship. American methodology was problematic too. Some argue for argument sake; many are right in their hypotheses but wrong in their policy studies. Eventually, we wanted all scholars to write a policy paper prior to writing an academic paper. A policy paper is more general, informative, or reactive, and must be accurate, updated, and concise. The quicker the better. Best that the paper comes out the second day. Economic analysis has to be updated every three months.

I assigned research topics for the researchers. For 20 years I would read through People's Daily to find topics. Once, Lee's secretary rang to ask for information. All of us searched for that immediately. We skipped our lunch and found the answer in two hours. Lee wanted to verify whether Deng Xiaoping had actually said "allow some people to get rich first."

Many scholars from academic institutes had narrow minds and had no overview of the big picture. I planned to have Zheng Yongnian succeed me. He had worked with me for 11 years. I also invited Yang Dali to come and work with Zheng. National University was very fond of him because he was from Chicago University. We delivered three reports each month and presented background briefings to the government. Lee would ask about the background of the researchers. The EAI does not offer tenure but provides a renewable contract of 3–5 years. Only Zheng has tenure now.

We work on the Chinese domestic economic or social development issues, not international relations or strategic research, which the Defense Ministry would take care of. We have about 12 full-time staff. Young PhD holders may not be able to write, so we would offer visiting fellowships first and then renewable contracts for a two-year stay. We also offered short-term visits; for instance, American scholars on holiday here could apply to write a paper or give a seminar with a grant of 5000 US dollars.

Lee attached great importance to China, partly because of the rise of China and also because of the strategic position of Singapore. Foreign leaders come to Singapore to learn about China, not Singapore, because we are friendly and neutral, unlike Hong Kong or Taiwan.

Our recruitment is an ongoing process. Unlike the university, we have no summer vacation but provide a holiday of 3–4 weeks. We have been entrusted some big projects by the government, such as the democratization of Hong Kong and the assessment of the Suzhou industrial park projects. Reports, however, were for publication. We also developed contacts with China, like the National Bureau of Statistics, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Party School of the Central Committee of CPC, and the Development Research Center under the State Council. We also established links with Chinese universities. The Chinese universities did not conduct much research in the past. The younger generation now has better academic potential. Our policy papers must be readable and have something to say. Now we also publish. We organize academic conferences for the sake of publication to meet the requirement of the university; the EAI is part of National University now. We offer visiting appointments and regular appointments. Mainland scholars are given visiting appointments; those with PhDs from the US and the UK are better at English and social science methodology, and so they get regular appointments.

Hong Kong is a Chinese city. Comparatively, Singapore is multiethnic, with 73–75% of its population being Chinese. Few people in Hong Kong speak Mandarin, but Lee once promoted the "speak Mandarin movement" in the 1970s in Singapore. Hong Kong knows the Chinese culture better, while 75% of Singaporean are educated in English and do not have much knowledge about Chinese customs. The general public in Hong Kong are anticommunist. The Singaporean government was anticommunist before the Chinese opened door. But most Singaporeans are pro-China, the overseas Chinese mentality. Singapore accepted simplified characters early but censored the coverage of China strictly and used the term Red China.

News about China would not be shown at the front page in the Chinese newspaper before 1990. The Strait Times would only print bad news about China.

Japan and Korea differ in terms of the purpose of their research on China. South Korea is a small country, like Singapore. It is concerned more about how to adopt benefits from China's rise, while Japan tends to focus on how to benefit itself and understand China as its potential economy, as does Taiwan. There is always a potential enemy.

Research methodologies also varied. The US judged China from a capitalist perspective and labeled China as a centrally planned, non-free society. Japan usually brings cultural perspectives into its Chinese studies and looks at China differently than the US because of its shared cultural background with China. There are no cultural perspectives in American's China studies.

We also study elite politics. The Chinese Communist Party like the Qing Emperors. Those in Beijing control foreign relations and military affairs but possess no legal power locally. Thus, visible and invisible powers exist within Chinese politics. The central government would have selective interventions into local affairs, whereas the local officer offers their selective compliance to the Central governments. China is open now. New information would flood in. Research has to been done differently; it must be changed.

# Chapter 9
# An Interrogator of Identity: Interview with Professor Leo Suryadinata

**Chuiling Shin and Yuan-ning Yang**

**Abstract** Leo Suryadinata's academic journey is in fact a journey of identity search, with his ethnic background as Indonesian Chinese growing up in the 1960s when the country was caught in political turmoil caused by ideological and ethnical confrontations. Leo Suryadinata has been using, questioning, examining, researching, and recording the meaning and question of Chinese identity in his academic life. He explores the issue with very diversified approaches, ranging from literature, history, political science, and international relations studies, etc. In this interview, he narrates this decades-long searching experience.

**Keywords** Leo Suryadinata · Indonesian Chinese · Chinese studies · Chinese overseas · Chinese identities · Intellectual history

## Enlighten Education

I was born on February 21, 1941 in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. My father was a businessman who sold building materials and owned a tile factory, a second-generation Chinese born in Indonesia. He studied at the Teacher's school in Cheep Bee (JiMei), Fujian, China. My mother was an Indonesian Peranakan who

*Interviewers* Chuiling Shin and Yuan-ning Yang
*Time* Frequent meeting from 2010 through 2016
*Places* Singapore, Kaohsiung, Taipei, and Internet

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studied for two years in a school affiliated with a local Chinese association called Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan. I never met my grandparents. My father never mentioned my grandfather but only said that he was brought up by his uncle in Indonesia. However, I and that granduncle were not close. I lived with my grandmother from my mother's side. She was also a Peranakan and an illiterate.

I have five brothers and two sisters; I am the third child of the family. We used to speak Indonesian and the local Jakata dialect at home. Although my father could speak fluent Hokkian and Hakka, he never talked to us in these two Chinese dialects. I was sent to a Chinese-medium primary school and high school and had a good Chinese education. My parents also engaged private tutors of Chinese and some other subjects for us because they worried that we might not be able to catch up with the Chinese course at school.

Two kinds of Chinese-medium schools existed in Indonesia at the time: pro-Taiwan versus pro-Beijing schools. Pah Tsung High School, the one I went to, was pro-Beijing. I was an Indonesian national but could still study at a Chinese-medium school then. However, later in 1957, half-a-one year before I graduated, the Indonesian Education Ministry issued the decree to ban Indonesian nationals studying in Chinese-medium schools. Only the final-year students were allowed to stay at the Chinese school, and so I managed to finish my high school education there in June 1958. Regardless of their choice of being pro-Taiwan or pro-Beijing, students from Chinese-medium schools tended to identify with China and regarded China as their motherland. In comparison, Peranakan educated in either Indonesian schools, Dutch schools, or English schools had a rather strong Indonesian identity.

## Nanyang University and Indonesian University

In 1958, all the pro-Taiwan Chinese schools were closed down because Taiwan was allegedly found to have been involved in regional rebellion in Indonesia. Only pro-Beijing schools were left. That same year was when I graduated from Pah Tsung high school and left for Singapore to take the entrance exam of Nanyang University. Nanyang University was founded in 1955 and officially commenced in 1956. I was admitted to the Department of Chinese in January 1959.

Nanyang University was named from the Chinese perspective. The word "Nanyang" was invented in China to refer to Southeast Asia and was further acquired by the Chinese people living in Southeast Asia. Later, after the Federation of Malaya was established without Singapore being part of it, the Chinese in Singapore, especially Singapore's students from Nanyang University, still considered themselves as Malayan.

I wrote frequently when I was at Nanyang University (also known as Nantah) and most of my writings were about Southeast Asia. I was also involved in the Nanyang University Students' Union (NUSU) which published the *University Tribune* in three languages, namely Chinese, English and Malay. I was later in charge of its Malay version, *Mimbar Universiti*. In 1960, Nantah students who were

deeply interested in the Malay language got together and published a self-funded, semi-academic journal *Budaya* (Culture), but it only lasted for three issues. I was made its editor-in-chief.

I wrote poems; I am fanatical about poetry. I often read Tang Poetry and Patun (quatrain in Indonesian or Malay) in high school and was deeply influenced by Indonesian and Malay poets such as Chairil Anwar and Usman Awang. Indonesian poets of early days, such as Muhammad Yamin and Sanusi Pane, had a great influence on my work as well. I also enjoyed reading poems written by the English poets such as George Byron and Robert Burns and by the Hungarian poet Petőfi Sándor. I loved Rabindranath Tagore's poetry and appreciated Xu Zhimo, the German poet Heinrich Heine, and the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. I had very diversified reading interests such as those from academia to social issues and literature.

I was in Singapore for more than four years (from August 1958 to December 1962). After graduation from Nantah, I applied for a Master's course at the Department of History, the University of Indonesia, Jakarta. One senior lecturer, Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo, was probably the reason for my development of a research interest in the Indonesian nationalist movement. It was the history of the thought of the movement instead of the ideas of a particular person that attracted me the most. I also paid special attention to the role of the Chinese in the Indonesian nationalist movement and the relationships between China and the Indonesian nationalist movement. My thesis was about the Indonesian Peranakan newspapers and the Indonesian nationalist movement, under the supervision of Abdurrachman. My thesis progressed well, and I was awarded the degree of Sarjana Sastra or Doctorandus (abbreviated. Drs.) by the University of Indonesia.

I graduated at the end of September 1965, three days immediately before the G-30-S coup was staged. Suharto took power and recklessly suppressed whoever connected with the left. Indonesian Chinese society was also adversely affected. Baperki, the largest Indonesian Peranakan Association established in 1954, was first prohibited to organize activities, and was later forcibly disbanded. Baperki was at odds with its political rival, Lembaga Pembina Kesatuan Bangsa (LPKB) on national policy, with the former claiming that the Chinese was a component part of the Indonesian people and standing for multicultural policy and the latter supporting the assimilation approach. Although the Sukarno regime shared the same view with Baperki, the debate and conflict between the two organizations never ceased. After the downfall of Sukarno, the succeeding Suharto military regime intimidatingly pursued the policy of assimilation. Although the Chinese were not forced to change names, they tended to be suspected to be pro-Communist or disloyal to Indonesia if they continued to use Chinese names. Under such circumstances, most Chinese chose to change names for safety reason. I was in Australia at the time, soon to graduate. Following my parents' decision to change to their surname to Suryadinata, I became Leo Suryadinata.

## Studying in Australia and the US

Prior to my stay in the US, I studied at Monash University, Australia for two and a half years as a post-graduate student, working on the history of the Western colonialization of Asia and Africa as well as the nationalist movements in these two

continents. I submitted a thesis titled "Three Major Streams in Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java, (1917–1942)" at the end of 1969 and obtained a Master's degree in the following year, when I began to consider further studies in the US. I was offered a fellowship by Ohio University, a medium-sized American university where several professors had research interests in Southeast Asia and were experts on Malaya and Indonesia. I returned to Indonesia for the Second National Conference of historians before departing for the US. The first conference was held in the 1950s, and 1970 was the second convention when Suharto was in power. I was deeply impressed by the conference because I was the only non-indigenous participant. I was invited by my former thesis supervisor, Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo, who was the one who studied Taman Siswa.

The paper that I published in that conference was "The Unique Characteristics of pre-war Indonesian nationalist movement." I used Western methodology and theories especially those about the nationalist movements in developing countries. The argument was that the formation of many Southeast Asian nations was a historical accident. The colonizers came to Southeast Asia; ruled these places; arbitrarily drew boundaries; pushed their educational, administrative, and financial institutions; and integrated separate areas to a single unit, where the inhabitants of different races found that they were tied to the boundaries defined by colonizers and began to crave for their own nation states. Karl Deutsch, one of the most noted theorists on nationalism, suggested the social communication theory. I adopted this research approach as well as the research findings of Harry Benda and Ruth McVey, arguing that the birth of Indonesia as a state was a historical accident or a product of colonization, and denied Sukarno and Muhammad Yamin's views that Indonesia was the continuation of Sri Vijaya and Majapahit empire. These are my views regarding the national formation of Indonesia. In fact, the theory began to be discussed in the West in the 1960s, but it was yet to be discussed in Indonesia.

I spent two years at Ohio University and obtained another Master's degree there in addition to publishing some occasional papers. Therefore, I have two Master's degrees; I actually have three M.A. degrees if the one in Indonesia can be counted, in which I was not sure of myself. Each of my Master's degrees varied significantly in terms of research focus and methodology. In Indonesia, I mainly studied Indonesian history with very traditional methods. At Monash, my study was more advanced but had the same main research focus on history. At Ohio, my study was interdisciplinary, including history, political science, and anthropology. I was a teaching assistant to Paul Van der Veur's course on nationalism and political changes. Van der Veur himself is a political scientist, receiving his doctoral degree at Cornell University. He did not follow the typical formal methodology of American political science; instead, his approach was more of political history.

I applied for two to three scholarships after graduating from Ohio University. The earliest reply came from the American University, which is located in the capital city of the US. I spent my next three years studying and teaching there,

where I finally began to learn and use methodologies of international relations and political science.

I enjoyed life there. I had many friends: American and Malaysians. Southeast Asian students such as us liked to gather, exchanging views and opinions. The university was a neutral setting where we felt freer to discuss ethnic issues, especially about Southeast Asian problems. Talking about your own country in a neutral foreign country was significantly more convenient. My time in the US allowed me to relearn and think.

Although our thought of America could be perfect, but after living there for a period of time, one would realize in reality that it was not perfect. Tensions between the black and white were intense. Many black students were very sensitive about ethnic/racial relations and the manner in which they were called. I realized that it was far from easy to deal with the problems of ethnic/racial relations.

Life in Singapore

After my graduation from the American University, the director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), a Malaysian of Indian descent, invited me for an interview and was offered a position, and I decided to work for ISEAS. In 1975, I still had an Indonesian citizenship. I acquired a Singaporean citizenship in 1985, when I was teaching at the Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore. I also settled with my family here.

The ISEAS was in fact a very good place for research. I worked there as a researcher for six and a half years, responsible for research and administration and for tasks such as organizing seminars, editing publications, and others. I edited the early annual of *Southeast Asian Affairs*. I also began to incubate on the book "*China and the ASEAN States: The Ethnic Chinese Dimensio*n." Thereafter, I explored the relations between China, Southeast Asia, and the Chinese community. I did not link the three elements when I was in the US, and I only gradually developed the theory systematically when I was working in ISEAS and published a paper *Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and China's Foreign Policy: An Interpretive Essay* (Research Notes and Discussion Paper, Singapore: ISEAS, 1978), which was later developed into a book: *China and the ASEAN States: The Ethnic Chinese Dimension*.

I worked at the ISEAS from January 1976 to June 1982. I also taught part-time at the university in the first year when I began to work at the ISEAS, but about a year later, I was not allowed by the director to continue teaching there. I began to realize soon that it was because many research fellows from ISEAS would consider leaving the institute when they started teaching at the university. The ISEAS offered no tenure, infrequent promotion, and contract-based employment. Job security there was not sufficient. The salary was also non-comparable with that at the university.

In 1980, the University of Singapore and Nanyang University were merged as National University of Singapore (NUS) and recruited new staff. Dr. Tony Tan,

who was Minister of Education overseeing both NUS and ISEAS came to ISEAS in 1981. He noted that ISEAS is not a place for a scholar to stay for a long period of time, he advised us to apply to NUS if we have relevant skills needed by the university. In June 1982, I left ISEAS for NUS. I was a senior researcher at ISEAS and became a senior lecturer in NUS.

I taught at NUS for a full twenty years until my retirement in June 2002. For quite a long time, these twenty years in my life were filled with joy and sorrow. I basically regarded myself as an academic explorer when I was in NUS, roaming freely in the academic world and longing to find answers to questions of academics or life, in particular issues relating to society, politics, and ethnic relations. I taught courses on Southeast Asian politics, international relations theory, diplomacy of major powers, as well as Singapore–Malaysia politics, and ethnic and racial politics. I was also Editor, later Co-editor (1993–2002) of the Asian Journal of Political Science published by the Department of Political Science at NUS.

I was active outside the campus and had been the editor-in-chief of Journal of Asia Culture since 1990. Prior to 1990, I helped with the editing. In addition, I became deputy president and president of the Association of Asian Study in Singapore.

I did not know the number of years that I would need to be promoted to associate professor because of the complicated interpersonal relations and the evaluation system that varied from time to time in NUS. External evaluation was needed to obtain full professorship. However, my application for associate professorship was already evaluated externally by two external assessors; five external assessors were needed for the promotion to full professorship. I was only promoted to full professor two years before my retirement.

I retired in June 2002, when I returned to the ISEAS because it was looking for people to guide research projects there. I also edited *Contemporary Southeast Asia* as deputy editor-in-chief but stopped later because of disagreement with the editor-in-chief.

The Indonesian national census in 2000 included data on ethnic groups for the first time, unlike the several previous censuses conducted in 1950 and 1990. Democracy was restored in 1998 after Suharto stepped down, and thus the compilation of the ethnic data began to be allowed. I then organized a team, used many first-hand information including 31 volumes of published data and the new original sources purchased from Indonesia, and published *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape*,[1] the first ever publication that systematically recorded the population numbers and geographical locations of different ethnic groups. The English version of the book attracted a great deal of attention. My research team continued to write two more books, one was *Indonesian Electoral Behavior: A Statistical Perspective* (Singapore: ISEAS,

[1]Singapore: ISEAS, 2003.

2004), a quantitative research. The other one was *Emerging Democracy in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), an analysis of Indonesian elections. Besides working on Indonesia, I also organized workshops on current issues. The papers were later revised and published as a book, one of them was *Southeast Asia's Chinese Businesses in An Era of Globalization: Coping with the Rise of China* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2006).

In mid-2005, the board chairman of the Chinese Heritage Centre (CHC) invited me to work there. I pondered over the offer and decided to accept this new challenge in January 2006. The CHC was established in May 1995; I was the fourth director. I proposed a three-year project, including a compilation of famous and influential Southeast Asian Chinese in four volumes that contained about 1000 names. (It was later scaled down to two volumes that contained more than 620 personalities and published in 2012.)

## My Thoughts, Reading, and Writing

One has to be rational and not sentimental to perform social science research. Be academic, and be as objective as you can, although absolute objectivity is not possible because human beings are creatures of souls and hearts and are edified by time, individual background, ideologies, and so on. However, a scholar should try his best to be unbiased and honest and fairly review all the different viewpoints despite personal sympathies to work with objectivity. A biased research can be easily detected and does no good to its readers. I would not dare say that my writings are unbiased at all, but I do remind myself all the time to be fair with different arguments. However, it is easier said than done; nevertheless, it still needs to be done.

I was once affected by the leftist political economy concept in my socio-cultural and political analyses but began to realize better until I saw and read more that one-factor analysis was not enough. Economics is undeniably a very important factor and cannot be ignored in developing a thorough understanding of social and political problems. Even if you tend to highlight the influence of economics, don't assume yourself a Marxist too soon unless you believe in economic determinism or class struggle. In addition, the Marxist school later developed into various thoughts and traditions. New Left is different from Neo-Marxism, for example. The diversified schools of thoughts allow us broader perspectives. We need to be discreet and to be aware of the versatility of problems, especially when confronting scholars or students of different ideological systems. Otherwise, we would be easily confuted and inconvincible.

My study background is a combination of literature, history, anthropology, political science, and international relations. Some say that I am a perplexingly complex and cannot be easily identified by my academic background. Basically, I would add historical development into discussion when writing papers on politics. Your understanding of politics would be incomplete without knowledge of history. The major difference between history and political science is that history tends to overemphasize on continuity, whereas political science highlights change.

I often look back into history because of my history study background. History would not necessarily repeat itself, but we could see many current developments duplicating history, and we would then understand that this is not a new lesson. I found that perhaps because of their bias or generation gap, young scholars tend to easily forget or misjudge the importance of previous studies, which though may not be perfect are not worthless. Younger scholars nowadays tended to read less of the works by previous generation scholars.

Many of my publications are China-related studies, but I have never focused my research on Chinese history or Chinese politics in particular. My research specialty is Southeast Asia. I do not think that I would perform good research on China; an excessive number of researchers with better resources are experts on this topic.

The other reason is that I want to focus on Southeast Asia, where most of the countries are developing. I should contribute more here and understand more of the region and its history, culture, and politics because I was born and brought up in this region. I do not have a strong China "baggage," but as a Southeast Asian of Chinese descent, I could not ignore the China issue, and everything about China influences ethnic Chinese people everywhere. Therefore, of course, I am concerned about China.

## Core Interests

I want to talk about the book I wrote in 1985, *China and the ASEAN States: The Ethnic Chinese Dimension.*[2] The mainstream viewpoint in the US was that China had close relations with overseas Chinese such that it would even engage in war to protect these people's interests when necessary. I challenged such argument following the approaches of foreign policy analysis and realism, which is a school of thought assuming that national interest decides foreign policy behavior. I also employed the concept of linkage politics developed by James Rosenau, who maintained that foreign policy serves domestic political interests. My thesis was that the foreign policy of China was no different from that of the US and other countries that used foreign policy for the benefit of national interests decided by its political leaders. In the Chinese case, national interests are various and are mainly about national security, territorial integrity, economic development, ideology, and somewhere in the bottom, Chinese overseas. These interests, in particular territorial integrity, have high priority. The protection of the interests of overseas Chinese would be the least important on the list. Foreign policy analysis suggests that the national interests of lower priority tend to be sacrificed for those of higher priority, which is the case of Chinese foreign policy toward Southeast Asian countries. China's engagement in war with several of its neighboring Southeast Asian countries, such as the Korean War in 1950, Sino-India war in 1962, and Sino-Vietnam war in 1978, has no direct link to problems with overseas Chinese but is completely about national security and territorial integrity.

[2]Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985.

The same thesis can be used to explain China's foreign policy behavior today; so China only ignored the Indonesian anti-Chinese riots in 1998 because Indonesia played a crucial part in the Chinese security deployment. My view is that China has two defense lines. The first includes Vietnam and the Indo-China Peninsula, and the second is the outer-ring of the Indo-China Peninsula. That is why China reacts differently to Vietnam and countries on the second line. This is a geopolitical issue. I used this approach to analyze China's relations with other Asian countries.

Perception Study

The book I published in 1978, *Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China: A Study of Perceptions and Policies,*[3] was based on my doctoral thesis, which is also related to China. I used theories of international relations, perception, and communication to write the book. My hypothesis was that Indonesia's policy toward China was based on its national interest. However, a question is raised. What was the national interest of Indonesia? National security or ideology? The problem was that Indonesia and China were actually geographically distant from each other, and there was no actual contact. Therefore, its foreign policy was mainly based on Indonesia's perception of China. It often regarded the ethnic Chinese as an extension of China, and hence projected its policy toward the ethnic Chinese on its China policy. Apart from this, I also discovered that Indonesia had strong nationalism and indigenism, this often constrained its foreign policy significantly. However, when perception contradicted reality, reality prevailed.

Political Culture

I was interested in culture, politics, and political culture. My understanding of the theory of political culture was greatly improved when I worked at ISEAS and re-read the book, *The Religion of Java*, written by Clifford Geertz, who is an anthropologist. Geertz classified the Javanese religion into three categories: Abangan, Santri, and Prijaji, which in sequence represent pious/rigid Muslim, liberal Muslim, and Indianized Muslim (or Hindunized Muslim). He applied the categorization to study the Indonesian political parties. Basing on his work, I conceptualized his theory further and categorized the Indonesian Muslims into two groups: the fundamentalist and the liberals, which is also the in-power group. Accordingly, although Indonesia has never been a Muslim State, 87% of its population is Muslim. By contrast, Malaysia, where only 50–60% of the population is Muslim, declares Islam as its state religion or "The Religion of the Federation" in its constitution. This type of country is not an Islamic State but a Muslim State. According to the theory of political science, three types of Muslim countries exist. The first is the Secular State, where no state religion exists, such as Indonesia and Turkey. The second is the Muslim State, which preserves religious freedom but considers Islam as the state religion; Malaysia is such case. The third type is the Islamic State, which refers to those Muslim countries that adopt Islamic

[3]K.L. and Singapore: Heinemann, 1978.

Sharia Law as their national law; examples of these states are Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. Indonesia holds the principle of Pancasila and supports religious freedom and the equal status of all the religions, but the power and influence of Muslims is growing. In the book of *Military Ascendancy and Political Culture: A Study of Golkar,*[4] I combined the political culture and praetorian state concepts to analyze the Indonesian ruling party during Suharto's era.

I applied the same concept to study Indonesian foreign policy in *Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Suharto: Aspiring to International Leadership* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1996), which I believe is the only book on the Indonesian foreign policy of the Suharto Government. I answered the question on why the Indonesian foreign policy was not Islamic-based despite its Muslim majority and did not even have a touch of Islam. I further brought political culture, foreign policy analysis and linkage politics analysis (introduced by James Rosenau) into the research to develop a theoretical understanding of a national policy.

Nation Building

My other research area was about the relations between ethnic Chinese and China. I organized a panel in an international conference in 1986 to discuss the studies on ASEAN Chinese, inviting five scholars to focus on one country each, and published *The Ethnic Chinese in the ASEAN State: Bibliography Essays* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1989), which is a comparative study. I also began to widen my views from the national perspectives of Indonesia and Malaysia to those of the whole of Southeast Asia.

I published an edited book *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asian*s in 1997, regarding the theme of the Chinese in Southeast Asia and national building. The book was based on the papers of a major conference that I organized in 1996. The title of the conference, which is also later adopted as the book title *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians* caused significant debate because there were no "Southeast Asians". However, I was of the view that the official Southeast Asian community did not exist yet, but the concept of the Southeast Asian region was there. At that moment there were no "Southeast Asians", but at least there were Indonesians, Malaysians, and Singaporeans etc., who together constituted Southeast Asians. The Chinese in Southeast Asia were no longer "overseas Chinese."

My book on *Chinese and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia*[5] provided an in-depth discussion of the role of the Chinese in the nation-building or state-building of Southeast Asian countries. It is very complicated, as 9 among the 10 Southeast Asian countries are so-called indigenous states, with only Singapore being the migrant or immigrant state. An indigenous state tends to develop its national identity based on its indigenous culture, in which immigrants have to adapt and give up their original culture and languages to immerse into the society. This act is very difficult for the Chinese. This book is a collection of papers on

[4]Athens: Ohio University Press for Center for International Studies, 1989.

[5]Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 1997.

indigenism, the problems of the Southeast Asian Chinese, as well as globalization issues. Globalization was only beginning then. In particular, globalization started in 1990, but people began to feel the irresistible effect of globalization until the mid-1990s.

Why does each country develop different policies towards the Chinese? Is it because of political system, demography, history, economy, or geographical location? As every country is affected differently by diversified factors, each has its individual policy and has been responded differently by the Chinese in different countries. However, most Chinese have to continuously adjust themselves to meet the challenges. I discussed the Chinese adaptation process in *Chinese Adaptation and Diversity: Essays on Society and Literature in Indonesia*, *Malaysia and Singapore*[6] to explore the cultural changes of the Chinese society in these three countries and the way they reacted to the national policy. In summary, Southeast Asian countries usually have a strong government. To a great extent, the state shapes the Chinese society, culture, politics, and behavior. I used the Indonesian Chinese as an example and published a book entitled *The Culture of the Chinese Minority in Indonesia.*[7]

National Policy

Political scientists once suspected the importance of state, but later, in particular the new school (some said the left) proposed to bring back the state, which is a heated debated topic in the 1990s. *Negara dan Etnis Tionghoa: Kasus Indonesia*[8] is a book I wrote in Indonesian to analyze in depth the religion, economy, Chinese appellations, literature, politics, and commercial activities. My conclusion was that the state was everywhere. However, the state Indonesianized the Chinese only culturally and not emotionally. One obvious example is the use of the two terms Tionghoa and Tiongkok, which were widely used to name the Chinese and China in Indonesian. When the Suharto military regime took power, all the media, newspapers, magazines, and national publications were ordered to replace Tionghoa and Tiongkok with Cina to humiliate the Chinese and to obliterate the Chinese collective memory. Tionghoa and Tiongkok also disappeared from the officially edited dictionary. Therefore, the younger generation only knows Cina; they have no idea about other Chinese terms and history.

A strong China with rising economic, hard, and soft power has certain effects on Southeast Asian countries and especially the Southeast Asian Chinese in the era of globalization. Assimilation policy is becoming more difficult to implement because of the rise of China, globalization, and democratization. Uniculturalism is not acceptable to most people, the Chinese in particular. Multiculturalism and multinationalism became the mainstream nowadays. My opinion is that globalization, an emerging China, and democratization allow the Chinese to be freer to not only

[6]Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1993.

[7]Singapore: Times Book International, 1997, Reissued in 2004 by Marshall Cavendish.

[8]Jakarta: LP3ES, 2002.

preserve and develop their own culture but also do business with less interruption. Although the middle and commercial classes of the indigenous people also began to grow, their economic development probably will still lag behind the Chinese. If the unequal development continues, the Chinese may become a scapegoat again in future economic crises or political chaos.

The political foundation of many countries was based on ethnicity. A political structure based on ethnicity is difficult to have a full integration. In addition, with the Chinese continuing to "re-sinicize" themselves, the Chinese in Southeast Asian countries could easily become targets of attack for their apparent differences in social position, status, and identity. The other equally important factor is whether the local indigenous people could really and sincerely accept the Chinese as an inseparable part of their nations and countries. Education is very important. Long-term education and efforts of both sides are required to form a harmonious society. The potentiality of problems with racialism lies within many Southeast Asian Chinese societies. Religious issues, especially the rise of Islam, adding to the discussion would make things more complicated.

## Overseas Chinese

We talk about the studies on the terms of overseas Chinese, ethnic Chinese (hua ren), Chinese citizens abroad (hua qiao), and of Chinese descent (hua yi), which are all about identity. In the earlier days, hua qiao was translated into "overseas Chinese" in English. Southeast Asian Chinese called themselves hua qiao because the Chinese nationality law at the time recognized dual nationality. For instance, a Chinese citizen would be still subject to Chinese law, even when this person immigrated to Britain and was naturalized as a British national.

However, with the independence of the colonies after the Second World War, China began to be aware of the loyalty problems caused by dual nationality and would state in the communiques made to establish diplomatic relations that China recognized single citizenship only and that overseas Chinese citizens have to decide and abide by the law of the citizenship they choose. Researchers then began to use the term of ethnic Chinese (hua ren) instead of Chinese citizens abroad (hua qiao). We in Singapore and Malaya were the first to apply the term hua ren here, especially when the Federation of Malaya was newly established after the Second World War. We were the new host here, no longer overseas Chinese, so we called ourselves hua ren. The English equivalent is ethnic Chinese. But the term overseas Chinese is still widely used.

Professor Wang Gungwu once suggested replacing "Overseas Chinese" with "Chinese overseas," with the same translation in Chinese. This is because "overseas Chinese" has often been used to mean hua qiao, while "Chinese overseas" does not have such connotation. Nevertheless, both are still China-centric.

Taiwan has treated the Chinese living abroad as Chinese people, regardless of nationality or generations of the emigrants. However, Taiwan only issues passports to those who are rich and useful for its national interest. Therefore, national interest

speaks for all, and the state decides the qualification of its citizenship. A similar case is seen in China.

Chinese diaspora is in fact only an extension of overseas Chinese or Chinese overseas. Diaspora means that the center is still in China, but from that location, you disperse. However, settlement can also happen after dispersion. You would need to remember that the center is somewhere else (China). However, the term is very useful in referring to new immigrants. Many diaspora studies are about new immigrants. Unfortunately, researchers studying immigrant issues tend to be blamed for mixing the identity of hua ren and that of hua qiao.

I think that the reason for the constant preference of the English terms for overseas Chinese or Chinese overseas is the short time that the country has been built. Half a century or six decades is not long enough. People's Republic of China only remade its nationality law in 1980 to deal with the problem of the overseas Chinese nationality. The nationality law that the PRC used prior to the current law was inherited from that of the Kuomintang government of the ROC, which however adopted its nationality law from the version of the Qing dynasty in 1909. Therefore, it has only been 27 years from 1980. The state would not disappear in the globalization era, at least not for the short term. The term of ethnic Chinese is also used in English and is occasionally taken as synonym for overseas Chinese and Chinese overseas, but this adoption makes the whole concept confusing again.

One scholar once asked why we would not simply use one single word "hua" (Hoa) as the Vietnamese do. Using hua is acceptable, but that word is similar to huaxia (a nation of ancient China). Overseas Chinese study is quite a new research topic and requires significant exploration and development. China and Taiwan have studied overseas Chinese since the republican days, that is, the so-called Nanyang study, part of which was about overseas Chinese.

China began to show great research interests on Southeast Asia and overseas Chinese after Deng's open door policy. I reviewed the development of Southeast Asian study in China in the paper titled "Southeast Asianists in China: The Last Thirty Years" and found that overseas Chinese study was part of the research concerns. Many Chinese scholars nowadays have studied abroad and are good at foreign languages and social science methodology. I mentioned several names and publications in my paper. China has rich human, financial, and intellectual resources and could expect a promising future if it continues to reform and democratized; otherwise, it could regress.

## Research Reflection

Western officials and scholars connected to the colonial governments first conducted real academic studies on overseas Chinese. To a certain extent, these studies lay the foundation for overseas Chinese research but from the Western perspectives. China also performed research on the overseas Chinese problem, especially on Chinese citizens abroad. The Chinese started studying earlier than us Southeast Asians but later than the Westerners. These Chinese researchers mainly came from the South and not the North. Jinan University and Xiamen University were once the

centers of overseas Chinese research. Yet, they looked at the overseas Chinese problem from the Chinese perspective, understood Southeast Asia with bias and prejudice, and thought of the overseas Chinese as part of the Chinese in mainland China.

Southeast Asians would study the overseas Chinese problem from local perspectives, with focus on domestic ethnic relations and early immigration. Some studies assumed the end of Chinese immigration but did not expect the rapid change of the world. Globalization drove the new wave of Chinese immigrants since the 1980s. All of a sudden, many scholars had interests in new immigrants and immigration issues, and so many immigration studies were conducted.

I have not reviewed Taiwan's overseas Chinese study in detail, but my understanding is that it had political purpose in the earlier days and was usually done by researchers affiliated with the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee and with strong party characteristics. These publications would be very useful for studying the history of political parties but not for understanding the overseas Chinese society. However, some scholars such as the anthropologist Professor Li Yiyuan conducted significant research on the Chinese community in Peninsular Malaya which was well-received. Later, other younger scholars went abroad to study and were better equipped with methodology and English language ability. They too, have produced some good works. However, I always think that it is not enough to know either Chinese or English because many data were written in local languages. Outstanding Western researchers are different. They would master the local languages and research methods. Western scholars could be crazily devoted to academic studies, although some are very radical, and may live the indigenous life to obtain the real experience. This method is not good because a scholar loses objectivity. However, I was deeply impressed by the rare devotion of some such young American scholars who take academic research as their lives. I am not sure whether such people exist in Southeast Asia or in Taiwan because studies on literature, humanities, and social science are sometimes not rewarded enough and because it demands a lot of time and sacrifices. Academic research is like a marathon; you race alone in the long, dark night. The solitude and loneliness are beyond outsiders' imaginations.

# Chapter 10
# The Founder of a Discipline: A Project Note on the Intellectual Growth of Professor Nguyen Huy Quy

**Chih-yu Shih and Thi Hue Phung**

**Abstract** Having received his education in China, Professor Nguyen felt the strong spirit of Chinese society when he was a student. Above all, he felt a strong Chinese national sentiment everywhere. He reflects on the changes in the Chinese society, particularly with regard to its academic development. Back in the day, social sciences in China were usually a field of studies that served politics. Everything existed for political reasons. This statement was especially true with history studies and historians. He urges people to look at how Confucius was judged before and after the Cultural Revolution to gain a better idea of this statement. Nevertheless, numerous changes have taken place since the end of the Cultural Revolution. He finds that the field of social sciences at present is more objective and less dominated by political ideologies. In that sense, he believes China has done a better job than Vietnam in liberalizing and democratizing academic studies. According to him, the most important development of Vietnamese Sinology has been the founding of the Center for Chinese Studies at the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences in 1993. In 1995, a journal of Chinese studies was established.

**Keywords** Vietnamese sinology · Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences · Nguyen Huy Quy · Vietnam–China relations

We are very pleased to have been accorded the opportunity to converse with Professor Nguyen Huy Quy on his intellectual growth. The visit took place in May 2010. The following report is based on our notes. For the interview script in Vietnamese or Chinese, please refer to http://politics.ntu.edu.tw/RAEC/act02.php (Access February 28, 2016).

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Before studying in China, Professor Nguyen has already learned English and French in high school. He also enrolled in several Russian classes at the university. When he first went to school in 1944, teachers taught French ahead of the scheduled curriculum. At the time, the high school curriculum arranged French classes for sophomore and senior students. Professor Nguyen met a teacher who was optimistic of the future of the students. He remembered students hiding their French textbooks under their desks when the school inspector came to observe the class. His English learning, however, started as officially scheduled. He recalled his English teacher reading English novels to students. However, as much as he enjoyed listening to stories, Professor Nguyen did not get much out of this activity. In 1952, both English and French classes were officially dropped from the school curriculum and were replaced with Russian classes. He went on to learn Russian at the university as well.

Professor Nguyen first traveled to China in 1956 to study Chinese. He returned to Vietnam in 1962. Similar to other Sinologists from Hanoi who initially learned Chinese in Guangxi, Professor Nguyen likewise spent a year in Guilin, Guangxi learning Chinese from 1956 to mid-1957, and after which he studied at Peking University. He had no Chinese language preparations before traveling to China. He only began learning Chinese at a language school in Guilin. The school was a specialized language institute for high school graduates from Vietnam who were attending a Chinese university. He stayed there for one year to improve his Chinese.

Professor Nguyen entered Peking University as a history major, but he had always been interested in social sciences. Back then, the authorities gathered a group of selected students in Hanoi who would be given government sponsorship to study abroad. The students were given a list of schools, as well as a list of majors to aid in their choice. Each student was directed to prioritize his or her preferences. Many students wanted to go to Europe, but Professor Nguyen was not one of them because European institutes did not offer substantial social science programs for incoming Vietnamese students. Universities in the Soviet Union did not offer history programs either. Thus, he decided to choose China to study history. In his first three years at Peking University, the curriculum covered both Chinese and world history, which was then divided into more focused tracks. He decided to concentrate on modern history.

Professor Nguyen recalls the difficulty that he experienced in his first year, particularly in the first semester. However, things got better for him during the second year, and he was even able to take notes during class lectures in his third year. A special tutoring program was offered to first-year foreign students at Peking University. If someone could not understand the teacher or could not keep up with the pace of the class, a local Chinese student was assigned to tutor that student. Given that his major was modern history, Chinese was comparable to a language tool for him instead of a professional skill. He learned the basics of ancient languages because of his studies, but had no opportunity to acquire other dialects such as Cantonese or Taiwanese. He did not do well in Russian classes because learning Chinese was hard enough for him. English was also required. Thus, he only managed to bring his Russian up to a level where he could barely pass the exams.

Technically, in terms of reading comprehension, he can manage a little of Russian, English, and French but could not speak these languages.

Professor Nguyen felt the strong spirit of Chinese society when he was a student. Above all, he felt a strong Chinese national sentiment everywhere he went, and everybody respected the government and even worshipped the leader. This case was particularly true during the Cultural Revolution, when Chairman Mao obtained thousands of the so-called Red Guards as his young followers. Those times presented a different mindset for the Vietnamese, one that could be experienced only in a huge country such as China, where people took ultimate pride in their country, their identity as Chinese, and their centuries-long civilization. Professor Nguyen remembered visiting the Yuanming Yuan (Old Summer Palace) in Beijing, where he met a group of seven- and eight-year-olds on an excursion. The teacher asked them, "Do you know why the Yuanming Yuan was damaged so badly?" Without hesitation, the children answered in a loud voice: "Those Western imperialists bullied us!" He recalled how strongly they felt about their country and their identity, and how united they were as a nation. It was something out of the ordinary.

Before graduation in Beijing, Professor Nguyen had a choice between the two career options given by the government: to teach in a university or to conduct research in a history institute. He did not choose the research institute because he had the impression that staff members at a research institute were unanimously from older generations, and that people would be devoted primarily to research in the office. His impression came from his experiences in Beijing, and he thought that a similar case would occur in Vietnam. Therefore, he decided to return to the university and be surrounded by the energy of young students.

After graduation in 1962, he received an assignment from the government to teach history at a university. As one of the first groups of outgoing students returning to Vietnam, he remembers receiving good treatment from the government. The first cohort was even allowed to choose the institute they wanted to go to after graduation, which was six months before their return. He was busy preparing teaching materials during those six months. He bought many history books. Unlike other returning students, books were all he brought with him on the train back home, no TV, refrigerator, or other daily necessities. Teaching was all that mattered to him at the time. The long journey took more than three days of travel by train and he was seated on a hard bench seat throughout the trip.

In 1962 in Vietnam, colleges had not established any curriculum on modern world history. Professor Nguyen was the first one who took charge of designing the curriculum. His first work on the Great October Revolution was published in 1980. In 1983, he compiled a series of modern world history books. Even though Professor Nguyen himself specialized in Chinese history, he had little room to elaborate on China in the curriculum design according to his own preference. The reason he gave was political. Back then, the world was divided into three blocs, namely, the socialist states, capitalist states, and states with national liberation and independence movements, such as in Africa, Latin America, and Southern Asia. He asked himself where one could include China. He believed it was not proper to group China into any of the officially specified blocs in the curriculum. Teaching

against this background was not easy. He found that his work was shelved after he left the teaching post.

Professor Nguyen felt that there was something seriously wrong with the entire system. The government did not put enough effort or investment into setting up a well-structured curriculum. Very little pay or reward was offered for one's hard work. Thus, even if the university had excellent faculty members, no one was willing to take up the task of designing the curriculum. Incoming teachers, such as Professor Nguyen, took charge. Inexperienced teachers were also made responsible for teaching first-year students in the university, whereas the experienced ones taught more advanced courses. Overall, Professor  believes that the entire history education system in the university was on the very wrong track.

Eventually, Professor Nguyen shifted his focus from teaching to research. The critical year was 1993 when the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences established the first center of Chinese studies. This development marked the origin of the Institute of Chinese Studies, where Professor Nguyen served as founding director. At the time, many scholars were studying in China. However, they later changed their research focuses to other fields because of the tension between Vietnam and China. For example, a few students who were specializing in the Chinese literature went on to study Russian literature, and those studying Chinese history switched to Vietnamese history. However, Professor Nguyen continued with his research on China. He was one of the very few scholars at a national institute who continued to conduct intensive research on China.

In 1993, Professor Nguyen decided that he had to contribute to the field. His memories at the Institute were very good indeed. The experience was almost like a dream coming true for him. He was happy that he could start something truly meaningful. After the normalization of the bilateral relationship between Beijing and Hanoi in 1990, China studies returned and reached its peak 20 years after. During the first two decades of its establishment, Vietnamese China studies witnessed the restoration and fast growth of the Institute of Chinese Studies, establishment of the Department of Chinese Literature in colleges, and the textbooks and pedagogical curricula. Studies on Chinese philosophy begin to substitute the once popular studies of Western philosophy. The most important development has been the founding of the Center for Chinese Studies at the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences. In 1995, a journal of Chinese studies was established. The institute and its journal have been the two most significant developments, indicating that at present, Chinese studies in Vietnam is more analytical than political compared with that in the past.

A Chinese Studies Center was also established under the former Saigon National Pedagogical University, which was founded after the Institute of Chinese Studies. However, the Chinese Studies Center was not an official organizational entity at the time. The center was more of an informal team of researchers. In addition to the Pedagogical University, the former University of Hanoi established a similar center focusing on Asia-Pacific topics, but, again, it was not a formal organizational body. This center remained unofficial even after the University of Hanoi became Vietnam National University because the number of faculty members specializing in Chinese studies at the University of Hanoi was small and had limited research output.

However, the problem with the Pedagogical University back then was different. The center had a number of specialists, but the research focus was predominantly on Chinese ancient philosophy, religions, and literature, rather than on modern history. In the technical and substantive sense, the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences was the very first formal research center in Vietnam focusing on China.

In the beginning, the Institute was highly understaffed. Given the severe shortage of research fellows and supporting staff members, Professor Nguyen divided work quite strictly regardless of one's research interests to ensure that one person was in-charge of topics on Taiwan, one on modern China, and one on post-nineteenth century China. He virtually built the Institute from the ground up. This situation happened during the time of the normalization of relations between China and Vietnam. Thus, many things had to be studied, particularly economic issues. Professor Nguyen published a considerable number of essays and articles in academic journals. A good proportion of his publications were on the Chinese Communist Party.

Another important focus of the Institute was on Taiwan. In 1995, Professor Nguyen published a book with emphasis on Taiwan's role as an economy. Later, he also wrote on Hong Kong's return to the Chinese government. His first trip to Taiwan took place in 1994 for a symposium on the sovereignty and reunification issues of divided nations, including Vietnam, China, and Korea. Professor Nguyen was the only Vietnamese scholar invited. In 1995, he visited Taiwan again for research purposes. In 2001, he embarked on a third trip when pro-independence President Chen Shui-Bian was already in office. His first trip to Hong Kong happened in 1997, one month after its handover to the Chinese government. He visited Hong Kong again in 1998 and 2001. He actually turned down many other invitations because he was too busy. Notably, back then, it was extremely difficult for Mainland Chinese to visit Taiwan. The act was forbidden, especially if a person was a Communist Party member. However, Professor Nguyen has always been impressed with Taiwan's political and economic development, not to mention its democracy.

Acknowledging the difficulty of comparing Hong Kong society in 1997 and in 2001, Professor Nguyen observed the growing Chinese influence. He remembers asking one professor in October 1997, three months after the handover, if he noticed any changes in Hong Kong society. The answer, as he recalled, was "absolutely not," at least not on the streets or in their everyday lives. However, when Professor Nguyen returned to Hong Kong in 2001, he noticed that a significant portion of ordinary products had been labeled "Made in China." By contrast, very few were labeled "Made in Hong Kong." Another change he noticed was the growing prevalence of Mandarin Chinese. Before the handover, less than one-third of students in Hong Kong spoke Mandarin, and English was their first language. When Professor Nguyen delivered a speech in a Hong Kong University in Mandarin during his first trip, only one-third of the students understood. In the end, he had no choice but to ask another professor to translate his speech into English so the audience could understand him. Cantonese did not seem to be an option to him either because few people spoke it on campus. English seemed the only way. In

retrospect, it was quite an interesting phenomenon for him four years after his first visit. He observed that life on the university campus in Hong Kong was becoming similar to that on the Mainland. In any case, his observation indicated that academic and press freedom was largely retained in Hong Kong in the early twenty-first century.

Most of Professor Nguyen's trips were to China. He frequently visited China, especially from the years 2003 through 2005, mostly to attend seminars and academic conferences. However, his capacity as a visitor has been changing, first as a student traveler, and then as a Sinologist. He has traveled to different places in China, in the north, south, and the east. However, he has not yet visited Tibet because of extreme inconveniences of transportation. Professor Nguyen considers it a bit ironic that he has been to more places in China than he has been in Vietnam.

All Chinese and Vietnamese societies were heavily influenced by Western cultures, and now by the Japanese culture. In general, according to Professor Nguyen's assessment, Hong Kong is more westernized than Taiwan. In Taiwan, people make a distinction between "Chinese" and the "PRC." Hence, finding someone who says, "I'm Chinese, but not PRC-Chinese" is easy in Taiwan. The Taiwanese also distinguish between Islander-Chinese and Mainlander-Chinese. In contrast, in Hong Kong, few people identify themselves as "Chinese," especially if they are intellectuals or economically advantaged. These people refer to the people in Mainland China as "the Chinese," whereas people in Taiwan would call them "the Mainlanders." Mostly, the Chinese national identity and attachment remain in the mind of many people in Taiwan, but not so much for those in Hong Kong. In terms of culture, Taiwan has retained many of its Oriental features and roots, but, politically, it has been heavily influenced by the West.

Professor Nguyen compared Vietnam with Taiwan and according to his reflection, Vietnam belonged to China and was under Chinese administrative jurisdiction for a thousand years. Thus, for the longest time, Chinese and Vietnamese cultures have converged into one despite Vietnam being politically independent. This relationship remains intimate, although few confrontations have occurred. The exchange relations between China and Vietnam started in the early times such that the Vietnamese today can write Tang-styled [618–907] poetry in Han characters. Koreans and Japanese have adopted a different tonality, which resulted in their inability to write Tang-styled poems. For example, one kind of Tang-style poem is the eight-line poem, which the Vietnamese can write. Vietnamese write beautiful Han characters, and they proudly announce that Vietnam's China scholarship ranks number one in the world.

Professor Nguyen has maintained his friendship with the Chinese because of study and research experiences in China. He has made acquaintance with many Chinese colleagues, and the friendships he cultivated since his time as a student in China have remained. His Chinese friends teach at various academic institutes, particularly in the field of social sciences, and many of them are heads or directors of those institutes. He never runs out of friends to visit whenever he travels to the different provinces in China.

In his capacity as a veteran Sinologist, Professor Nguyen reflects on the changes in the Chinese society, particularly with regard to its academic development. Back in the day, social sciences in China were usually a field of studies that served politics. Everything existed for political reasons. This statement was especially true with history studies and historians. He urges people to look at how Confucius was judged before and after the Cultural Revolution to gain a better idea of this statement. Nevertheless, numerous changes have taken place since the end of the Cultural Revolution. He finds that the field of social sciences at present is more objective and less dominated by political ideologies. In that sense, he believes China has done a better job than Vietnam in liberalizing and democratizing academic studies. Generations after generations have emerged with newer ideas and broader perspectives. Another Cultural Revolution or a similar major movement would have difficulty taking place in modern China. China has entered a different era.

Another impressive change Professor Nguyen has noticed is that independent and critical thinking is becoming the new norm. To an increasing extent, people can now voice out their dissents with government policies and practices, and have even had their views published in magazines or journals. This movement includes some senior government officials commenting and making suggestions as to the Party's policies. Even more noteworthy is perhaps the increasing tolerance of such remarks by the Communist Party. People's freedom of speech and expression are respected if they do not go overboard and make anti-government remarks. Professor Nguyen does not intend to claim that China is a modern, well-developed country, but he is of the opinion that, in comparison to China, Vietnam still has a long way to go.

# Chapter 11
# A Self-learner of Chinese Poetry: A Project Note on the Intellectual Growth of Professor Phan Van Coc

**Chih-yu Shih and Thi Hue Phung**

**Abstract** Throughout Professor Phan's entire career, his favorite subject was Chinese poetry. He believed that Chinese poems should not be restricted to his personal liking. They should be shared with the world. He thought that Chinese people should also appreciate Chinese poems. He considered Tang-style poems as human treasure. Professor Phan had become fascinated with Chinese literature because of his father's influence since he was a child. His father was a Confucian. He taught young Phan phonetic Chinese words in Vietnamese. Professor Phan believes that the common sense among educated Vietnamese continuously nurtured the extreme popularity of Confucianism in the feudal times of Vietnam. Confucianism is part of Vietnam's history. Professor Phan and colleagues revealed that Vietnamese Confucianism has changed and developed, despite its roots in Chinese Confucianism. He felt that he does not have options other than the family tradition that influences his choice of Chinese poems. His further learning Chinese, studying in China, and teaching Chinese in Vietnam were all assignments required by the government.

**Keywords** Vietnamese sinology · Phan Van Coc · Tang poets · Confucianism · Intellectual history

We are very pleased to have the opportunity to converse with Professor Phan Van Coc about his intellectual growth. We visited him on May 17, 2010. The following report is based on our notes. For the interview transcript in Vietnamese or Chinese, please refer to http://politics.ntu.edu.tw/ (Access February 28, 2016).

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Professor Phan went to China in October 1954. He studied Chinese in Nanning (南寧). He initially had no idea if it was a high school or a college. It was earlier called the Chinese Normal High School, and the name was later changed to Normal High School. Consequently, he was encouraged to study longer to gain a certification of graduation. After completing high school in 1954, he studied Chinese and initially focused on modern Chinese. He later developed a growing interest for Chinese literature; he then studied Chinese literature. In 1957, he began translating a number of Chinese literatures.

His translation of Guo Mo Ruo's work, a collection of selected poems, was published in 1959.

Professor Phan went to Nanjing University in 1976. He later transferred to Beijing Language Institute and studied there for half a year. He returned to Nanjing University and took ancient Chinese course. The course was similar to current graduate programs, a type of ancient Chinese Master's Degree certification.

Professor Phan received trainings in many different languages. He can speak and read English, France, and Russian as part of his job requirement. His first job was teaching Chinese at Nong Lam University after he returned to Vietnam. (Agriculture and Woods University) Chinese has been taught as a second language at Nong Lam University. Professor Phan was one of the pioneering teachers of Nong Lam University. At that time, Chinese and Russian were the two languages taught in school. Two teachers were assigned for each language. Furthermore, the school hired over ten teachers who taught other subjects, such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, to name a few. These ten teachers were also pioneering teachers of Nong Lam University.

Professor Phan had to study Chinese when Professor Phan started teaching Chinese. Soon, he conducted research and taught at the same time, but teaching remained his primary assignment. The government instructed him to focus on teaching. However, conducting research was his personal choice and interest. He recalled that his entire career was divided into two aspects: teaching at school and conducting research. He spent his time studying and translating Chinese literature when he was not teaching. He particularly enjoyed translating poems, especially Guo Mo Ruo's poems.

Throughout his entire career, his favorite subject was Chinese poetry. He believed that Chinese poems should not be restricted to his personal liking. They should be shared with the world. He thought that Chinese people should also appreciate Chinese poems. He considered Tang-style poems as human treasure. Professor Phan was born to a Confucian family. His father taught him to write Han characters when he was five or six years old. He heard him chant poems. As a child, he was imperceptibly, powerfully influenced, and attracted to Tang-style poems. As an adult, he went to China to master his Chinese language skills. He remembered that his only goal at the time was to teach Chinese at home one day. As his study progressed, he immersed himself in Chinese literature. On those early days, he spent all his leisure time in a library reading Chinese fictions. He remembered reading the famous "A Dream of Red Chamber" and the original copy of Lu Xun's work, although his favorite Chinese literary genre is still poetry.

We gain the impression that Professor Phan had become fascinated with Chinese literature because of his father's influence since he was a child. His father was a Confucian, although he did not earn any degree and certification. Nevertheless, he taught Chinese to children in their neighborhood. Impressively, he applied his unique teaching skills. In contrast to most fathers, he did not teach his child to learn Chinese by starting with the "Three Character Classic." Instead, he taught young Phan phonetic Chinese words in Vietnamese. He chose a set of words, which are pronounced similarly but are written differently. He then used words to create a phrase. For example, the word "tian" (天) can be used to create phrases, such as "tian ran" (天然), "tien wen" (天文), and "bian tien" (變天). The word "qian" (千) can be used to create phrases, such as "qian qiu" (千秋), "qian wan" (千萬), and "qian nian" (千年), and its Heterography, such as "qian yi" (遷移) and "pian cha" (偏差). Then, his father taught him how to pronounce the word "tian" (天) in Vietnamese. His father further taught him Chinese using Heterography as a teaching method. Professor Phan found this method very helpful for his teaching techniques when he started teaching Chinese. Although Professor Phan went to Normal University, he appreciated his father's teaching method. He thought that his father's influence was natural. Furthermore, attending school in Nanning (南寧) prompted him to gain further knowledge regarding China.

Professor Phan went to different countries during his entire teaching career. He had gone to China for many times and stayed there for 2 years in each visit. He studied at the Chinese Normal School from 1954 to 1956. Furthermore, he studied at Nanjing University and Beijing Language and Culture University from 1976 to 1978. He went to China to attend seminars on Confucianism and teaching. He lost count on the exact number of times he visited China. His estimate was about twenty visits. He once stayed in Taipei for six months. He studied the subject entitled, "Understanding Social Scientist Hu Shi" (了解社會科學家-胡適). He later wrote some short reports on Hu Shi (胡適). He went to Hong Kong once. The administrators of Confucius Institute of Hong Kong invited him to stay in Hong Kong for a week as a visiting scholar. During his stay there, he attended the memorial of Confucius' birthday. He had never been to Macau. His last trip abroad was a visit in China in April 2008.

Since he started teaching, Professor Phan had primarily visited China for academic meetings. In fact, the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies and Confucius Research Institute of Renmin University of China collaborated in a joint program; in this program, Professor Phan acted as a liaison. This joint project aimed to study the history and literature of Vietnamese Confucianism and Sinology. The joint project has produced many books on this subject. Many people in Vietnam studied Confucianism, but they lacked opportunities to publish their works. They could write their ideas through handwriting. Thus far, Chinese scholars have decided to gather and collaborate with foreign scholars with intensive background in Chinese Confucianism from other countries, such as South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. A large project called the "Confucian Canon" is underway. "Confucian Canon" aims to compile Confucianism-related literature. This project includes the "Chinese Buddhist Canon" or the "Taoist Canon." Furthermore, Chinese scholars invited

scholars from the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies to join the project as a co-sponsor. Together, they plan to collect and publish the ancient literature of Vietnamese Confucianism, which was mainly written in Chinese. The project intends to include over 100 Vietnamese Confucianism writing.

Professor Phan finds the joint project such a huge endeavor in the history of thoughts. The project enables future generations to see the development of Vietnamese Confucianism. Professor Phan believes that the common sense among educated Vietnamese continuously nurtured the extreme popularity of Confucianism in the feudal times of Vietnam. Confucianism is part of Vietnam's history. Some people think Vietnam is the tail of China, a place where Chinese Confucianism continues to live on. However, Professor Phan and colleagues revealed that Vietnamese Confucianism has changed and developed, despite its roots in Chinese Confucianism.

Professor Phan gained many good friends in China. He first made several good friends during his school days as a student in China. Those friends have become experts in Chinese Studies. Professor Phan has personally met many people in China, and among them was Professor Ma Ko Cheng (馬克承), whom he considered his closest friend. Professor Ma taught about Vietnam and its history at Peking University. Professor He Cheng Xuan (何成軒), from the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, studied Confucianism and published books regarding Vietnamese Confucianism. Professor Phan has been keeping in touch with those two professors. They meet up in China or Vietnam whenever they have the opportunity to visit there.

Although Professor Phan made friends with Chinese, he recalled that no one in his family married Chinese.

Professor Phan is not used to working under commissioned projects or in collaboration with others. In fact, he has not collaborated with anyone in terms of writing and research during his entire career. Those two professors have joined the same project on Chinese Studies. Professor Phan asked Professor He Cheng Xuan (何成軒) for assistance regarding documents or other aspects. They sometimes collaborated with each other to manage the business of the International Confucian Association. They regularly meet during seminars hosted by this association.

Working with Chinese scholars is not something particularly easy due to the difference in the methodological preparation. Professor Phan thinks Chinese scholars work extremely hard. They work on a type of traditional scientific research in Vietnamese academic undertaking called, "Textology," without a strong influence in Vietnam. Professor Phan was impressed with these scholars on Confucian texts because they actually devoted significant efforts on studying textual analysis. Their tradition aims to preserve books. They continue to refine works on ancient books made in earlier times. They perform a highly nuanced textual analysis of ancient books. Professor Phan was profoundly impressed with young researchers who seem to be comfortable with details. He once met a few Chinese graduate students and young professors who recently graduated from school; they are well trained in Textology. They are extremely careful and nuanced when they deal with ancient materials. Professor Phan hopes that Vietnamese sinologists can and should learn this skill.

Professor Phan explains the sophisticated methodology. He emphasized that one should preserve ancient materials and ancient Chinese books well to pass them down to the next generation. The methodology is related to the features of Chinese characters. Written Chinese characters do not belong to the alphabetic writing system. Most countries of the Western civilization use the alphabetic language similar to Latin. The advantage of the alphabetic language is that it carries pronunciation of that time. It is not difficult to write what you speak. Written Chinese is different. Chinese characters are typically ideograph. Initially, they were carved on turtle shells and animal bones a few thousands of years ago. Written Chinese is completely different from the alphabetic character. Furthermore, those who come from the latter tradition experience extreme difficulty in figuring out the unconnected speech, writing, and reading. This difficulty explains the weakness of Chinese. People nowadays can easily read ancient Chinese characters because written Chinese does not adopt an alphabetic character. Therefore, an invisible lineage of history connects the past and the present. As such, communication between people with different accents becomes convenient. Considering that Chinese characters remain in the same form throughout history, Chinese scholars can use the Textology method to cope with ancient documents. In fact, textology is an appropriate method to read early publications.

According to Professor Phan, a few Vietnamese researchers are capable of nuanced textual analysis. However, textology has not become a tradition in Vietnam. Professor Phan believes that a long time, even generations, is necessary before textology becomes a tradition.

Professor Phan felt that he does not have options other than the family tradition that influences his choice of Chinese poems. His further learning Chinese, studying in China, and teaching Chinese in Vietnam were all assignments required by the government. He obeyed what has been expected of him. After he completed middle school, he could not proceed to high school because his family could not afford it. At that time, his peers who came from well-off families could afford to attend preparatory school and thus anticipated a college education. After they graduated from preparatory school, they were enrolled in a university department. At that time, Natural Science departments consisted of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. Furthermore, the Social Science departments included Literature, History, and so on. Professor Phan's family could not support him to attend school anymore. As a consequence, he was compelled to accept jobs assigned by the Social Bureau. In turn, he worked as a social worker at home, cram school teacher, and assistant for farming revenue. He could not refuse any of the tasks assigned by the Social Bureau.

The government began sending students to China for training in 1954 because China could assist Vietnam in nation building, which was the top priority after the revolutionary war. The government came up with an educational policy, and one of its components was sending students to China. Students had to attend schools assigned by the government. Therefore, his only option was to join the Chinese Normal University. Students could decide on which path to take after graduation. Some of his peers became Chinese teachers; others worked as librarians and then

later turned to other jobs. He continued to study in China because of his family background and his interests. He could understand modern Chinese, and this skill helped him learn ancient Chinese more easily. By learning ancient Chinese, he stood a better chance to know the ancient Vietnamese culture. All of these related materials have been kept well in the Hán-Nôm Library (漢喃書庫). As such, Professor Phan could carry on his studies. After he returned from China, he has never stopped studying Chinese. He learned spoken Chinese vernacular, as well as ancient Chinese and Hán-Nôm. Professor Phan considers himself a very lucky person with his access to additional insights into his ancestor's culture and the relationship between Chinese culture and Vietnamese culture.

Professor Phan is devoted to rediscovering in history the cultural relationship between Chinese and Vietnamese. He particularly tackles Chinese poetry because of its close relation to the Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese poetry is also considered Chinese poetry. This consideration is common sense in Vietnam and thus explains Professor Phan's keen interest to gain additional knowledge regarding the topic. He finds the cultural bond between the two peoples genuinely interesting.

At school, Professor Phan regularly teaches two subjects. He has been teaching modern Chinese throughout his career. He used to offer courses to senior students of the foreign language college. He taught courses on Phonetics and Rhetoric. The second subject he used to teach was classic or ancient Chinese. He uses the Chinese classics as teaching materials and offers courses to senior students from the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies, which is also known as Hanoi People's Social Science College. Regarding his research agenda, he used to devote significant efforts on investigating two topics. The first topic is on modern Chinese. He spent a portion of his career editing dictionaries, such as the "Vietnamese-Chinese Dictionary," "Chinese-Vietnamese Lexical Dictionary," "Chinese in Vietnamese," and so on. The second topic includes cultural relationship. The latter is part of his major project entitled, "The Relationship between Traditional Vietnamese Culture and Chinese Culture" (越南傳統文化與中華文化的關係). This latter topic has been his life-long agenda. He has been studying "The Four Books" (四書), "The Five Classics" (五經), and other works. These topics have helped connect his research with teaching.

Professor Phan aims to learn those classics and to understand how China has influenced Vietnam. He likewise read Confucian classics of Vietnam to know how Chinese Confucianism has adapted to Vietnam's conditions and how it has evolved in Vietnam. The translation version of "Confucian Analects" (論語) is a good example of Vietnamese Confucianism. He first noticed the translation version of "Confucian Analects" (論語) in other Chinese classics, which contained the notion of "Confucian Analects" (論語). Later, he selected a few other works, such as "My Foolish Comment on The Analects of Confucius" (愚俺論語) by Fan Ruan You (范阮游), who was one of the people with critical thinking in the nineteenth century. He had his own methodology. According to Professor Phan, Ruan You considered Chinese "Confucian Analects" (論語) not orderly arranged in any scientific way. It is poorly organized, and the context usually irrelevant to the title. Thus, he reorganized Chinese "Confucian Analects" (論語) from his perspectives.

He did not change a sentence of Chinese "Confucian Analects" (論語) but simply reordered it systematically to make its philosophical reflections more accessible for readers. He added his own analysis and comments. His version explains his book entitled, "My Foolish Comment on The Analects of Confucius" (愚俺論語). It literally means "my foolish explanation of Chinese Confucian Analects." The reading has been one of Professor Phan's most precious findings in his entire career.

Many books in Vietnam reflect a similar type of sophistication. These authors compared and studied the original materials to create their works. Thus, their works are not simply Chinese classics anymore. One of those authors is Li Gui Dun (黎貴敦) from Vietnam. In his works, Li analyzed and criticized Chinese classics. Wu Shi Ren's (吳時任) "To See Spring and Autumn Annals through a Tube" (春秋管見) is one of the works of this type. "To See Spring and Autumn Annals through a Tube" (春秋管見) means "to read Spring and Autumn Annals by my shallow vision." "Guan Jian" (管見) literally means "to observe the sky through a tube." Professor Phan likes metaphor. This sentence means that one cannot see the entire sky through a tube and allows people to tell only what one sees through the tube.

Professor Phan has paid significant attention to the discovery of the contribution of the Vietnamese Confucianism to those Chinese classics familiar to him. He has planned to publish a series of books entitled, "The Relationship between Traditional Vietnamese Culture and Chinese Culture" (越南傳統文化與中華文化的關係). These books describe how Confucian classics, such as "The Four Books" (四書), "The Five Classics" (五經), and other works from the Hundred Schools of Thoughts during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period (諸子百家), have been introduced in Vietnam. These books also discuss the processes by which Vietnamese Confucians have learned and used Confucian classics from one generation to another. These initiatives are a huge task according to Professor Phan, who has considered a possible collection of over ten manuscripts in the series at its end. He has previously completed a section of "The Four Books" (四書). In 2011, he moved on to the section of "The Five Classics" (五經).

Although Professor Phan has been working on this topic for a long time, the actual publication requires good timing to gain approval from many involved agencies. Successful publication of these Sinological books depends on a large context. For example, he completed the "The Four Books" (四書) section, which has been approved for publication. However, this work has yet to be published because the cost of publication comes from the publisher. One major constraint is the market limited by economic situations. The market has also been a major concern for this type of work. For instance, the books edited and translated by Professor Phan are in a very limited market. Consequently, even the manuscripts completed earlier must yield to those upcoming manuscripts that promise revenues.

Professor Phan has a habit of working independently. He considers that collaborating with others could create some problems. Many of his outstanding students develop a similar style, and they devote time to a particularly important research to the extent that cooperation becomes difficult. With aging, Professor Phan finds himself slowly moving physically, forcing him to work from home. If any detail is necessary to continue research, he will have to ask his students to come

to his house, and this situation may be inconvenient for them. Consequently, he opted to work alone most of the time. For example, a publication as difficult as the "Vietnamese-Chinese Dictionary" (越-漢字典) is his exclusive work.

Students have expressed their appreciation for having Professor Phan publishing important research that preserves the wisdom of the ancient times for younger generations. Professor Phan is self-conscious of his endeavors to pass on the cultural tradition to future generations. He declares his life goal to be passing down additional knowledge to future generations. He encourages his colleagues and students to do the same. The point is to save as much time as possible for future researchers to avoid wasting time through trial and error, which Professor Phan remembers himself to have suffered.

The goal of passing culture to the future motivates Professor Phan to gather additional extensive knowledge and develop a better method. He feels that he has been lagging, with constant anxiety for not having enough knowledge. At times, he feels frustrated at not having enough knowledge. Furthermore, he relies on the work of earlier generations to carry on. He expresses his conviction in all of the students of Confucianism and Chinese culture by specifically acknowledging that everyone has his or her limitations and wisdom. Confucian scholars rely on other people's work and contribute to other people's work.

Professor Phan recollects his limitation, growth, and contribution. His range of scholarship includes ancient Chinese through modern Chinese and covers Chinese culture to history. His scholarship is broad but complex. Considering his simultaneous practice of conducting research and teaching, he significantly relates his assigned subject matter to his research. As a result of this intensive interaction between teaching and learning, his curricula on language have produced a few sets of dictionary. His curricula on literature have included translations from many Chinese works. He translated the poems composed by Mo Ruo Guo (郭沫若) and Lu Xun. (魯迅), Mr. Nan Zhen (南珍), a researcher of earlier generation, participated in the translation of Guo Mo Ruo's (郭沫若) poems, but Professor Phan completed most of it. He translated Chinese works from ancient times to modern times. Zhang Xian Liang's (張賢量) novel is one of his translation works. His novel, "Half of Man is Woman" (男人的另一半是女人) describes the life of Chinese scholars during the Cultural Revolution. Overall, Professor Phan rarely limits himself to research related to discipline and subdiscipline. He also covers a wide range of subjects.

His favorite part is the ancient Chinese culture because it largely influences Vietnam and relates to his Hán-Nôm study. Teaching Chinese in Vietnam was discouraged because of the history of China-Vietnam relations. Professor Phan has taught Chinese at the Department of Chinese of the University of Languages and International Studies for 20 years, but the Department of Chinese was shut down after China attacked Vietnam's borders in 1979. "My job as a Chinese teacher abruptly ended because the department was forced to shut down. I turned to study Mr. Ho Chi Minh and his ideas for a period. I began writing the biography of Mr. Ho Chi Minh. I acquired Chinese materials from the Museum of Mr. Ho Chi Minh to complete the book. I have published a translated poetry of Ho Chi Minh's

Chinese poems. My translation works have become people's reference sources when they study Ho Chi Minh. I consider it a blessing in disguise. The Department of Chinese was forcibly terminated; thus, I had the opportunity to study Mr. Ho Chi Minh. I consider this incident as my little contribution to Ho Chi Minh study, and it sustained my research motivations and studies at the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies."

The influence of China and Vietnam's 1979 break up on researchers in Vietnam was relatively apparent. Chinese was no longer to be taught at schools from elementary school throughout college. Scholars working on Chinese-related subjects lost their jobs or forcibly changed their occupations. Even those who wished to continue their study could not find any materials. For a long time, Vietnam could not find any materials related to China. Researchers studying China continued to decrease in number. They were forced to hide books regarding China and thus read them in private.

Against the political tide, Professor Phan believed that studying China is necessary regardless of the outcome of the relationship between China and Vietnam. He discovered that Vietnamese ancestors shared the same judgment. He reminded his students that their ancestors were similar to PhD programs of China studies, and one of their significant achievements was to ascertain that Vietnam continued to exist. In fact, Vietnam continues to progress, along with the Greater China. Any people who can survive over thousands of years of interaction with China, according to Professor Phan, proved that they understand China and know how to interact with it wisely and properly. Although Vietnam is influenced profoundly by Chinese culture, the former is still Vietnamese. As time progresses, Professor Phan becomes aware of the survival strategy of his predecessors in many generations.

As he engages with foreign Sinologists, Professor Phan stresses to those from other countries that have been influenced by the unique and tenacious identities of Vietnam. China, Korea, and Japan usually work together in science seminars. However, Professor Phan contends that the Chinese culture has influenced Vietnam more than it influenced Korea or Japan. For example, he used to tell Korean or Japanese Sinologists that writing Korean or Japanese poems in the style of Tang Poetry is no longer possible. One can see Korean and Japanese poetry in Tang Poetry form being translated into Chinese. Conversely, the Tang Poetry form has been adapted well to Vietnam. The Vietnamese write Tang Poetry in Vietnamese. Furthermore, writing Tang Poetry is a current trend in Vietnam. Tang Poetry clubs exist in many provinces. They write poems in Vietnamese using the Tang Poetry form. This phenomenon demonstrates the significant influence of Chinese culture on Vietnam. Chinese people can certainly write poems using the Tang Poetry form in Chinese, but Korean and Japanese cannot use their languages to write a couplet. Using Hán-Nôm to compose a couplet is a skill only Vietnamese can do because Vietnamese and Chinese both belong to the single-syllable system. Though the Korean and Japanese have been influenced by Chinese culture, they both belong to a multi-syllable system. Both languages cannot rhyme; as such, they cannot be used to compose a couplet or poem in the Lüshi (律詩) form. Vietnamese has level and oblique tones; for this reason, it cannot be used to compose a couplet and poem in Lüshi form similar to Chinese. Other genre of Chinese literature, such as "Fu" (賦),

can be easily adapted to the Vietnamese literature. They all profoundly reinforce the influence of Chinese culture on Vietnamese culture.

Vietnam has not achieved a position in the world as apparent as China. This phenomenon should be explained because of the similarity between Chinese and Vietnamese cultures, which even preserve more variety and indigeneity. Professor Phan offers explanations. First, the stage of economic development places Vietnam in a disadvantaged role. Those countries can afford to hold international scientific events. Thus, they can collaborate with each other extensively and equally. Vietnamese scholars are poor and hence cannot afford to join international gatherings and participate in research projects.

Second, unsupported and unrealistic thinking has existed in Vietnam regarding its cultural independence. For example, some individuals maintain that Vietnam has already separated itself from the Chinese culture. They could say this because they only considered Vietnamese culture. They thought that we have been using Latin characters in Vietnamese, and this condition benefits Vietnam from its Westernization. Furthermore, one cannot find Chinese characters in Vietnamese books. Chinese characters are only used in Korean and Japanese. This assessment is inaccurate according to Professor Phan. One should be aware that the Chinese culture is not the only culture that has an influence on another language. For example, Vietnam literature has been influenced by Chinese culture in many ways, including genre and allusion. Vietnamese culture is more related to Chinese culture than to Korean and Japanese cultures. He argues this point on international gatherings and receives positive feedback. Hence, he carries his scientific analysis with pride.

During the break up of Vietnam and China, Sinological students were compelled to quit learning Chinese; instead, they learned English or Russian. Professor Phan attempted to encourage them to pursue learning Chinese. At a farewell party for the closure of the Department of Chinese at the University of Languages and International Studies office, Professor Phan gained the opportunity to meet the Minister and Vice-minister of Education. This meeting happened before the party started. He expressed his view to the superior that the University should continue teaching Chinese in Vietnam. He even further requested a new research team familiar with Chinese to substitute the retiring generation. His commitment to retirement was his way of convincing the Minister that he had no personal interest in promoting Chinese studies. In fact, Professor Phan specifically clarified his concern for the future of the Vietnamese people. However, Minister was honest regarding the situation; he also informed the petitioner that he had already signed the document, ensuring the closure of the Department of Chinese. During the farewell party, Professor Phan attempted to inspire the students by emphasizing that every language is equally important. Anyone should learn as many languages as possible. He focused on this actual subject and pointed out that one could certainly learn either English or French but did not have to quit learning Chinese. Professor Phan perceives it as a loss if those who have learned the basic of Chinese language give up only because of a contemporary conditional change. He believes that the Chinese will assist those who hold on to the learning of the language. In fact, those

students who positively considered his advice have now played a major role in Chinese teaching in Vietnam. They frequently revisit their mentor and tell him how much they have appreciated his earlier advice on the continued learning of Chinese.

Thousands of students have attended Professor Phan's classes. He has lost track of his students because of their vast number. He still has with him a dozen of graduate students under his advice at the time of this report. Some advisees are affiliated with Chinese studies, while others are involved in Hán-Nôm studies. He further advises some to conduct their doctoral dissertations on Hán-Nôm. He has not actively participated in advising students because official symposiums are held for seniors and graduate students to assist them with their dissertations.

Professor Phan considers a peculiar perspective on the Western Philosophy practices in Vietnam. He believes that Western Philosophy in Vietnam does not acquaint students with studies on Chinese scholarship in the West. Western studies on Chinese scholarship are strong in terms of methodology, especially in Linguistics and Chinese studies in Russia. Overall, he does not have the opportunity to familiarize himself with Chinese studies conducted by Western researchers. Nevertheless, it does not bother him because he is confident that China and Chinese studies are actually Vietnam's strength. Furthermore, Chinese literature and scholarship significantly influence Vietnam's Sinology more than research in the West does.

The main difference between Chinese studies in the West and those in Vietnam is their corresponding perspectives. Western scholars study China by considering China as a foreign culture. They can easily find the difference between Western and Chinese cultures. Vietnam has always been influenced by Chinese culture. Vietnam engages in objective comparison with China, but this action is unnatural. Westerners observe from the outside. Vietnamese researchers, embedded in the Chinese culture, must be self-conscious of their being Vietnamese. Otherwise, they could commit inaccurate judgment for mistaking that Chinese people think in the same way that Vietnamese people do. Thus, Professor Phan finds Chinese studies in the West as useful references. After reading the Chinese Studies of Russia, Professor Phan thinks we can actually engage in Chinese studies without following Chinese methodological traditions and position Vietnam outside of China.

In terms of his career, Professor Phan believes the most important decisions on his assignments are consistently made by the government. He went to a Chinese school to study Chinese because the decision was almost an order of the government. The government was responsible for assigning new graduates to a work post after returning from China. Later, with the closure of the Department of Chinese, he transferred to the Institute of Ho Chi Minh Studies and then to the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies in compliance with government orders. Professor Phan has worked so hard and achieved so much on each of his assignment, consequently winning him endless recognition of the government and new assignments. He is proud of his capacity to combine research interests and work assignments. His career has evolved in this hard-won style.

Despite the financial support offered by his department and the government to conduct research before retirement, he turned primarily to the graduate institutes

and schools for support. Professor Phan thinks that the administration thinks that he is still useful; thus, he could receive the request from the administration to work together with the other colleagues. He collaborated with the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies, the Institute of Chinese Academy, and other colleges, such as the University of Social Sciences and Humanities and University of Foreign Language. However, their funding is limited.

The challenge confronting Chinese studies in Vietnam, according to Professor Phan, is the students' lack of solid training. This limitation is observed in the Institute of Chinese Studies and the Institute of Hán-Nôm Studies. Professor Phan is particularly sensitive to the lag in fundamental skills, especially at the level of graduate studies. He is surprised to see that many people who have completed college are still studying subjects for college seniors. The key to the problem is the overemphasis on the text; thus, they neglected the need to develop their linguistic capacity first. For example, if one wishes to study Chinese or Hán-Nôm, he or she should at least know how to use Chinese reference books, such as dictionaries or lexicons. However, most of the students panic when they have to use Chinese dictionaries. Consulting a dictionary is a basic skill. One should be able to do it quickly. If one cannot do so, one will be muddled through it and eventually look into Vietnamese-China dictionaries or Chinese-Vietnamese for references. In the end, one will be lost in confusion and will be helpless. Professor Phan insists that one should find the original Chinese culture reference books, such as "Shuowen Jiezi" (說文解字) by Xu Shen (許慎) and "Kangxi Dictionary"(康熙字典). Any expert must know how to use these references. Doing so is the only way to enhance their language skills, despite the risk of not understanding the dictionary explanation. Professor Phan emphasizes that researchers of Chinese and Hán-Nôm studies should take this advice seriously.

For those who are only interested in Chinese economy or politics, Professor Phan would agree that the ability to manage spoken Chinese and modern Chinese is adequate. However, if one desires to gain further knowledge regarding Chinese culture and language, one has to be familiar with classic Chinese. Moreover, those who study Hán-Nôm should learn modern spoken Chinese to be able to use Chinese materials and books. China is such a data bank without a substitute. One can only give up if one lacks the skill to find materials from the data bank.

Professor Phan has yet to learn how Vietnamese scholars assess his work. He does not gather this type of information. After all, in his eyes, qualified Sinologists in Vietnam are very few. Overall, he thinks that Chinese studies in Vietnam are weak. He agrees that both quality and quantity are necessary to develop Chinese Studies. He even agrees that the improvement of quality depends on the increase in quantity. In other words, a certain number should be reached to achieve better quality. He suspects an elite program could yield any long-term effect. Giving all recourses to ten outstanding experts is not effective. Professor Phan suggests that researchers should begin with a broad platform that includes schools of all levels. This platform would be functional to the formation of a nationwide expert team.

In the West, the institutional and financial foundations of Chinese studies are solid and the methodology is well established. They could enlist advanced tools or

conduct field studies. With institutional support, they have a much easier way to arrange field studies. Vietnamese scholars rely on the secondary literature. Most of the academic and analytical literatures come from China or the West. A field study in China is uncommon and unlikely in Vietnam. Professor Phan believes that this drawback explains why Vietnamese Sinology can seldom produce fresh knowledge.

Although disadvantaged institutionally and financially, Professor Phan urges his colleagues to be aware that China is making a subject that will attract the world's attention in the future. China will affect all aspects of Vietnam's development. Professor Phan recalls that he has thought of this in the past and continues to believe in it until now. He hopes that the Chinese studies in Vietnam remain abreast and grow. The range of Chinese studies is very wide that Vietnam will require a large number of researchers, each specializing in a specific area, to proceed effectively. The development in terms of quantity and quality of China studies compels the government to invest intensively on the said program.

He is nonetheless proud of his long-time reminder that Vietnam should develop highly effective Chinese studies. He claims that he sensed the urgency better than anyone did; as such, Vietnam requires further research regarding China. This condition is not merely an academic issue but a matter of national survival. The innovative issue is on national development. The agenda begins with politics and culture but slowly covers economics and technology. Professor Phan expresses his "being mostly proud of himself having adhered to Chinese studies."

For the plan ahead, Professor Phan wishes to publish the project entitled, "The Relationship between Traditional Vietnamese Culture and Chinese Culture." Furthermore, he intends to use ancient Chinese and modern Chinese for transcoding to translate works on Chinese culture and literature. He assigns himself the mission of translating the most important works of China into Vietnamese for people to study, especially literature. This initiative involved the translation of Chinese poems from the past to the present and the publication of a collection of selected poems. However, he is impeded by the limited time given to him. The other challenge is that he has not yet convinced a commercial publisher to support him because of the difficulty in marketing poetry. The current stage of the project has already accumulated about 4000–5000 pages of a collection of selected poems. This project would help future generations understand the foundation of Chinese poetry. Professor Phan's dreams include translating a collection of poems, including the very early "Book of Songs" (詩經) and the late modern poetry of May Fourth Movement.

Professor Phan further plans to write "Selected Translation of Ancient Fu" (中華古賦選譯), and "Selected Translation of Chinese Words" (中華字選譯). "Shi" (詩) and "Ci" (詞) are two forms of Chinese poetry. "Ci" (詞) further influenced Vietnam's literature. Its additional difficulty lies in its relation to "Yue" (樂). Therefore, he wishes to publish the "Collection of Selected Ancient Ci and Fu" (中華古詞賦選集) and "Collection of Selected Poems" (詩選集) first and then compile his works to complete the "Selected Works of Chinese Literature" (中國文學選集).

# Index





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