



From Social Visibility to Political Invisibility

The School in Nationalist Taiwan as
Fulcrum for an Evolving World Ethos

Allen Chun

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Taipei, Taiwan

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PREFACE

This project began in 1991 as an ethnography of a middle school in Taiwan based on a year-long field study. It was initially intended to serve as a concrete point of departure less for understanding education in China, which was a large field of knowledge, for which there was no shortage of expert scholarship, than for exploring the nature of national identity in the postwar era, which had deeper historical, conceptual and political roots. Needless to say, I was dealing with an imagined community, but it would take me much longer to assemble the complex components of it and to systematically unmask the dynamics of fiction and fact just to make sense of the ethnographic present, which was supposed to be a primary framework for undertaking a more in-depth systemic analysis of its historical and institutional process.

Toward this end, I would not have been able to finish the research and analysis without the contribution of several student assistants over many years. Chen Mei-yan was my eyes and ears during the entirety of the fieldwork; she observed and wrote extensive notes on daily activities of the school while collecting and copying all official notices that passed her way as a teacher's volunteer assistant. Voluminous data took me several years before I was ready to begin sorting out the data. Along the way, Huang Su-ying helped me keep track of changes in education policy. I also supervised a MA thesis study by Chen You-tang on the Three Principles Institute at Academia Sinica, which was intended to be a parallel case study of academic development and the academic politics behind The

Three Principles. In later years, she stayed on to help collect historical materials pertaining to the New Life Movement during the Republican era in China. Finally, Chen Wei-syun helped research textbook materials on primary school Life and Ethics and secondary school Citizenship and Morality courses. The assorted pieces of the problem allowed me to properly recalibrate my research project as a whole and systematically splice other parts of my work, the last part of which transcended the original field study, namely connections to the present 20 years forward. Looking at the past in retrospect enabled me to view it from a perspective that was not possible at the time. There are other aspects of it that link to my recent books on Chineseness and geopragnatics.

Finally, I wish to thank the ongoing support of Bruce Kapferer and Jonathan Friedman. Their contribution is not apparent in this book but perhaps explains why I was busy during the years between the initial field study and my renewed interest in finishing this book. As always, there are many others to acknowledge, including institutional and familial support. Having finished what remained stalled for many years as an incomplete project, I can now dedicate it in memory of Huang Jinlin, a colleague, in his exploration of historical sociology, and in response to Marshall D. Sahlins, a mentor, whose historical anthropology initiated me: Captain Cook died for our sins.

Taipei, Taiwan

Allen Chun

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CHAPTER 1

Ethnography as Cultural Geography

We have had Chinese restaurants in America for over a century, and it hasn't made us Chinese. On the contrary, we obliged the Chinese to invent chop suey.

Marshall Sahlins, *Waiting for Foucault, Still*

Following James Clifford's and George Marcus' provocative volume of essays, *Writing Culture*, anthropologists have become sensitive to the role of ethnography and subjectivity of the author in representing culture. Above all, it has pointed to flaws in the methodological apparatuses that anthropologists have relied on to "objectively" describe and in the nature of social scientific interpretation, which ultimately reflects back on the author's own subjective identity. Seen in this way, ethnography has thus become in essence an act of writing, subject to the constraints of authority that define it as a literary genre. As anthropology has typically been the study of "other" cultures, this critique of anthropological objectivity has undermined at the same time the authority of anthropologists to speak for other cultures and persons. The debate over authorial subjectivity on the other hand does not question the normative reality of ethnographic inquiry that predicates all flavors of anthropology, no matter how imaginative.

This book is in short an ethnography of a middle school in Taiwan in the early 1990s. In literal terms, it describes a moment in time as well as

an institution in social space. It is less a description of a cultural institution than an attempt to understand the mechanisms of power that have inscribed the school within other overarching institutions in society, which are also moments in time and space. The school in postwar Nationalist Taiwan is on the one hand a mundane social institution among similar faceless and ubiquitous institutions, yet on the other hand it plays an important, if not indispensable, role in the production and reproduction of social persons. It is a seminal fulcrum in the state's moral regulation of society as well as an active agent in the cultivation of cultural identities and practice of political ideologies. One cannot write an ethnography of a school in Taiwan without in the first instance viewing it as a dependent variable in the maintenance of other a priori institutions in society. One can hardly understand its objective nature and subjective functions without also viewing its concrete existence in practice as the interrelated manifestation of abstract political forces and complex discursive processes. The subjectivity of the state is in this regard a multi-layered process of ideological investment and social routinization; the subjective baggage of the author pales by comparison. If anything, the school is a clear vantage point for viewing the intersection of policy and everyday praxis in the practice of culture and for understanding moral regulation in the political abstract and as a social norm. Ethnography here then relates the socially visible to the politically invisible. As a literary act, its function is really more critical than descriptive.

While one must rightfully problematize the authority of the anthropologist-qua-social scientist to observe, classify and define, less has been said about the power of institutions in society to imagine, order and routinize through discourse and practice. The staple function of educational institutions in the evolution of the disciplinary regime has been recognized as an obvious phenomenon of modernity ever since the publication of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. However, more than just being an unconscious moment in the passage from the spectacle of sovereignty to totalizing power and normative routine, the development of mass education has in most non-Western countries been the result of conscious and deliberate political formulation. Rarely an autonomous social entity, its evolution and functioning must be viewed as a product of institutional politics at a higher level, ultimately of state formation and national ideologies. In saying that education is a dependent variable in this larger project of nation-state formation, one cannot take for granted

the utilitarian knowledge-based goals of the system either. Education may in fact be predicated on overlapping values and priorities.

Ultimately, the ethnography of the school can function, by way of analogy, as a means of writing an anthropology of the Nationalist experience in postwar Taiwan, or at least some aspects of it. The cultural ethos of this experience that is projected throughout the broader fabric of society can certainly be articulated in terms of its political ideologies, overt policies and cultural rhetoric, but the abstract relations that constitute the visions and practices of the state in crafting and empowering something called national identity are products of complex processes that invoke more sophisticated understandings of personal subjectivity and political agency. Part of epistemologically interpreting this anthropology of power resides in the way one defines in methodological terms the act of ethnography as a language of the concrete.

While anthropological studies of culture have been attacked by literary criticism for its reifying authorial “gaze”, it is rather ironic to note at the same time that these same cultural concepts have become a source of an epistemological renaissance in fields as varied as cultural sociology and critical pedagogy. Peter McLaren (1999: 5), for example, in the first chapter of his *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures*, entitled (in Geertzian fashion) “Education as a Cultural System”, pays homage to a definition of culture “in accordance with the proponents of the ‘symbolic-system’ school of thought exemplified in the work of Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Sherry Ortner, David Schneider and others”, in effect as politically critical concepts, even though anthropologists have tended to view these particular definitions as inherently apolitical or normative at best. In acknowledging the symbolic or meaningful aspect of classroom culture and interaction, McLaren uses this symbolic “arena” to show how students and teachers are, in the context of everyday practice, engaged in “contests between ideologies and disjunctions between class, cultural and symbolic conditions”, in effect by struggling over interpretations of metaphors, icons and structures of meanings. The cultural dynamics envisaged by McLaren is succinctly characterized by the notion of ritual performance, and he aims in this regard to transcend the hegemonic patterns of classroom interaction that signify contemporary educational regimes.

Another paradigmatic exemplar in the ethnography of the school or school life is Paul Willis’ *Learning to Labour* (1977). As can be gleaned

from its subtitle, *How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, the book can be read as an extension of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in the context of school culture or as an ethnographic account of how youth counterculture cultivates and reinforces itself within and against the hegemonic confines of establishment orthodoxy. Willis' focus on strategies of life resistance accents the subjective negotiations of actors that tend to occupy the less visible underside of what McLaren characterizes as the public dimension of ritual classroom performance. It is nonetheless a mode of cultural behavior that can also be read in symbolic (linguistic) terms.

I raise the aforementioned examples, by way of contrast, to highlight here a somewhat different cultural dimension of school life. Without downplaying the importance of public ritual interaction and subjective negotiations in the practice of everyday life, which ultimately juxtapose different actors or classes of people within the system, my specific concern is in the first instance more with the construction and operation of the institutions themselves, within which people are situated and whose symbolic interactions, both conscious and unconscious, are crafted and regulated from above. People do not play a passive role within the system, but my interest is in articulating the complex interactions of meaning, discourse and practice that link various institutional agencies, where the school is a nodal microcosm within a larger social order, which then integrate, through such modalities of power, polemic prescriptions in policy terms and abstract notions of citizenship and governmentality. They translate official ideology into routines of everyday practice and transform moral-ethical values or knowledge formations into tangible patterns for social behavior. Such an ethnography entails not simply descriptions of the visible but more importantly a cultural geography that links negotiation of social spaces and bodies at the local mundane level to the abstract and physical processes of institutional regulation. If anything, these institutions are inherently active agents that are constantly linked to the ongoing polity and whose acts and intentions need to be interrogated.

In East Asia, the educational system also has roots in Confucian orthodoxy, modeled in part on the imperial examination system. This easily accounts for the standardization and bureaucratization that are staple features of the modern school system found in China, Japan and Korea. Rather than seeing modern mass education as a direct extension of a "Confucian" lineage, however, I think it is more accurate to say that the

rise of centralized nation-states in these venues and the modern appropriation of traditional pedagogy under the direct planning or monopolistic guidance of Ministries of Education as part of the nationalizing formation of the state apparatus easily explain the subsequent evolution of institutions that rely inherently on objective regimes of official ranking (which serve simultaneously as meritocratic links for recruitment into government bureaucracy), regard education primarily as a matter of public investment, place a high premium on moral conformity, and take for granted the existence of standardized definitions of knowledge. In short, nationalizing here is more than *just* a fact of being modern. There is a clear sense in which the evolution of the educational regime as an institution is on the one hand the concrete result of conscious policy and politicizing practice, yet on the other hand, this institutional evolution engenders at the same time the inculcation of values, mindsets and behaviors that go beyond its utilitarian function as a knowledge delivery system. In this regard, it is important to note that the forms that these institutions take (given their reliance on reified modes of normative evaluation, mass dissemination, standardization of knowledge, uniform moral codes, ritualized behaviors, etc.) are equally or more important to the proper function of education in the broader social field and the ongoing survivability of the institutions than their ability to simply disseminate or impose the content of knowledge.

Thus, it is essentially in reference to the institutionalized nature of the school system and the nature of education's link to a broader process of socialization, conformity to uniform standards, and abstract processes of national identification (through moral education, systems of impersonal testing/ranking and ubiquitous supervision, and the cultivation of citizenship) that one can discern certain cultural peculiarities of Asian education, in which Taiwan can be seen as a particular development of policies and practices originating in the Republican era China then transplanted to Taiwan, as implemented by the Nationalist (Party) regime. This is the general sense in which one can associate Taiwan comparatively to other Asian examples.

The social scientific (especially anthropological) literature on the school (in contrast to education generally) has been relatively rich and lively in Japanese studies. Early monographs by Beauchamp (1978), Rohlen (1983), Duke (1986) and White (1987), among others, have focused on the role of Japan's educational system in its modernizing process, with

a tendency to accent cultural factors as markers of its uniqueness vis-à-vis the West. While pedagogical scholars of various persuasions have noted the efficiency of Japanese education in the face of such modernizing imperatives and attempted to explain the source of its rationality in various regards, this is not the concern of the present study. It is interesting to note, however, that in many of such studies recourse is made to institutional and normative practices as though they epitomize aspects of a unique Japanese cultural approach to education. In fact, many of these distinctive cultural features, which almost always include conformity to authoritarian systems of uniform values, emphasis on moral education in addition to strict learning, intensity of a competitive regime of ubiquitous testing, and finally the priority of collective obedience over individual expression, of mass education over the actual needs of specialized instruction, and of memorization of factual knowledge over interpretive skills, are not, in strict terms, features of *culture*, but rather marked differences as viewed by the subject position of another culture (the West). Moreover, rather than attributing these differences in institutional and normative practice to distinctive cultural features, as though they are products of inherently different cultural ideologies and routines, I would argue that many of these institutional and normative practices are the modern confluence of traditional forms of pedagogical and social regulation within the context of the standardizing, disciplinary formation of the nation-state. The fact that many of these features of Japanese education, as noted in the scholarly literature, can be seen coincidentally in other modern Asian venues, such as China, Korea and Taiwan, should not be understood as a reflection of an inherent Asian culture or the simplistic diffusion of a Confucian model. What has been viewed in the West as the relatively autonomous evolution of a disciplinary regime, at least in Foucault's narrative of an ongoing or largely unconscious modernity, has in East Asia been heavily orchestrated as part of a broader process of nation-state formation. This should have important ramifications for how one understands the nature of *political* in the process. If anything, the institutional dynamics that buttress the existence and drive the functioning of such "cultural" practices and routines point to the peculiar facets of this political regime as an ongoing and systematic process of culturalizing and socializing.

In other words, while it is clear that various staple features of modern Asian education regimes are, at least in content, a continuation of Confucian pedagogical orthodoxy, I would argue that the way in which such

practices have been formalized and implemented as part of a system of public education, standardized as curriculum and within a disciplinary apparatus then are linked with other socializing regimes, such as the family, military and workplace, at the level of public moral regulation, all reflect emergent phenomena that did not exist in a traditional past. More importantly, the degree to which these processes that took shape in the context of the educational regime overlapped and were regulated at a higher social level was a direct function of central state formation and political control in ways that were construed as being essentially matters of national interest. Thus, in order to write an ethnography of the school in Nationalist Taiwan, it is necessary ultimately to undertake the anthropology of the state and its nation-building process. The “cultural” is in turn a function of the “political”, but the political is at the same time a process that deserves rethinking and reinterpretation. It appears evident and obvious, but only if read superficially as representations and discourses. Its apparent existence as texts, practices and behaviors at one level obscures and sublimates the actual nature of its political functioning as culturalizing and socializing at another level. “Education” in Taiwan, as in other places, is thus not simply the product of modernizing and nationalizing, as though of universal global forces, but rather a result of active appropriation at a local level, in terms of culture, and through centralized state intervention of a domain of life routines that becomes transformed ultimately into a particularistic totalizing institution.

Erving Goffman famously termed the asylum a “totalizing institution”, which can also be viewed in proto-Foucaultian terms as an extreme exemplar of what Foucault viewed as the general structure of modern disciplinary institutions. There is no shortage of works that cite reference to the competitive pressure of “examination hell”, which seems to drive educational systems in most East Asian countries. The rigid enforcement and intense secrecy that govern the operation of the examination system from the top down resemble matters of national security. The effects of achievement motivation and achievement anxiety (derived from the pressure of being subject to a dehumanizing environment of continual testing and ranking) on mindsets and lifestyles, in general, is well-known. Yet the authoritarian, conformist or dogmatic nature of this examination-based education system is less a product of its inherent objectification, as though constituting a cultural attribute, than the product of a political system that consciously chooses to foster a monolithic system of meritocratic achievement or social mobility based on uniform and standardized

criteria, which then relies on the use of education as an impersonal mode of assessment. Thus, it is no coincidence that, as opposed to politically multivalent and weaker state apparatuses, where education is not necessarily seen as the sole route to success, performance is funneled into educational achievement, where national schools or universities also represent a privileged avenue toward attaining such goals. The totalizing nature of these institutions is in this regard, not unlike Goffman's asylum, a function, strictly speaking, of the politics and culture of control. Bureaucracies (or ministries) also play an all-important role.

The asylum-like nature of the school has been richly described in the literature on Japan. Shoko Yoneyama's (1999) monograph, *The Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance*, was written partly in reaction to scholars who have underscored the functional success of modern Japanese education. Her depiction of the Japanese school, prompted most recently by the phenomena of student bullying, truancy and violence, is a direct attack on the excesses of an overly authoritarian, alienating, punitive, regimented and ritually regulated pedagogical system. As she put it, the school has become a "battlefield". If anything, the phenomena of bullying and truancy mirror the intrinsic violence of the system as a whole and shed light on the dysfunctional aspects, if not the inevitable underside, of such a regime of objectification. What Durkheim sees as the ethical imperative of education is also the source of its violence. From her critical account of the school, especially in light of repeated comparisons with the West (primarily Australia), there is a sense in which the objectifying regime itself represents a problematic issue, but this is tempered by a more specific conclusion that, in past decades, this objectifying regime has apparently become more extreme, if not militant, in driving the system as a whole, to the point of potential breakdown and overt irrationality. In the final analysis, Yoneyama (1999: 150) sees the alienating nature of the school system as a product of collusion between three elements of Japanese society, namely nationalism, corporatism and consumerism. The hegemonic authority of the Ministry of Education determines in large part the content of the curriculum, which emphasizes the packaging of prescribed knowledge over all else. It in turn uses the school to train and discipline students for entry into the future workforce. The monolithic character of education as a mode of vocational recruitment and social mobility then becomes a commoditizing industry in itself that spawns the proliferation of cram schools and other supporting institutions geared to guaranteeing examination success.

In retrospect, one should note that Yoneyama defines education here in literal terms, namely as a specific regime of knowledge dissemination, with linkages to institutions of state and society. Despite the title of her book, she focuses less on the nature of the school itself, which as a totalizing institution regulates not only the packaging of knowledge but all aspects of personal conduct and social routine as well. Aside from the overt regimentation of school life, she also appears to be less concerned with the diverse manifestations of culture that serve to maintain the stratified hierarchies and mundane relations of power that drive the system.

By contrast, Brian McVeigh (2000), in a cultural analysis of school uniforms, entitled *Wearing Ideology: State, Schooling and Self-Presentation in Japan*, highlights the culture of uniforms as a site of intersection between what he calls the “statism” that is inculcated in the school in the process of socialization and replicated in many other domains of social life on the one hand and consumer culture on the other. In the long run, according to McVeigh, the culture of uniforms becomes a symbolic platform on which complex presentations of person and gender take place. In the end, the “cult of cuteness” may be seen as a counterpractice to school uniformity, but it nonetheless underscores the importance of certain kinds of symbolic representations that serve to sublimate unconscious patterns of social order that reinforce the need for ritual solidarity and the desirability of maintaining a proper face or public etiquette. Such symbolic aspects of behavior and other manifestations of cultural space, social routine and disciplinary control are hardly trivial to the basic operation of the school, even as a site of knowledge dissemination. They are integral aspects of the school as a totalizing institution.

In short, I submit that the school, as a thing in itself, can be seen as an important site for the interaction of abstract forces that ultimately transcend education, strictly speaking, and relate directly to the functioning of many other supporting institutions. As a seemingly self-regulating phenomenon, it presents itself as a ubiquitous and omnipresent institution. Yet on the other hand, as an agent of uniformity, it is really a faceless institution in the sense that one can expect all schools to be governed by a similar set of standards, policies and practices. In this sense, the active subjects that drive the school are not really the people and principles that physically man and operationalize it in actual, everyday practice but rather (in large part) the organizations (from above) that demarcate its domain of activity, stipulate its curricular standards, regulate its temporal structures, mandate norms of propriety, and most importantly

guarantee conformity to these basic rules of the game in respect to all of the above. Such a subject is not really a concrete “author” but rather a complex thinking and institutionalizing agency. One can not only see this in policies put into practice in an instrumental sense. These policies and underlying discourses are in effect a complex product of ideological vision, political will, legal codification, technical translatability and organizational management as an ongoing or continually renegotiated historical process. There are permutations not only through time but also between various linkages. To write such an ethnography, it takes more than just seeing.

Clifford Geertz famously calls his approach to anthropology “thick description”. I call mine a “cultural geography”. Its function is not just interpretive but also critical, and its goal is one first of mapping the visible spaces of the social in the texts, practices, and behaviors of everyday life then of relating these structures, routines and interactions to processes of bodily regulation as well as the cultivation of a cultural identity and ethos. These latter processes of socializing and culturalizing are in actuality not specific to education but should be general to broader patterns of doing or thinking, which are crucial to other domains of moral regulation that ultimately reflect the Nationalist experience or its implementation in practice of specific political ideals and ideological values. These ideals and values should not be mistaken for the way in which the government, Party or any regime represents itself in principle or through its rhetoric of discourse, read at face value, which can include the construction of knowledge in various forms. They refer instead to the underlying values that can be seen (interpreted) as driving texts or statements, organizational routines and ritual behavior in the routine *practice* of institutions and persons, which are permutations of commonly recognized official policies, dogmatic truths, legal codifications and narrative myths, even imaginative meta-constructions or deliberate perversions of all the above.

One should view culture here as a space or series of spaces. Whether defined literally or abstractly, space constitutes in simplest terms a plane of representation or field of interaction. For lack of a more precise term, Foucault (1991) refers to discourse as a “field of dispersion”, and in a similar vein texts, architectures, organizations, temporal regimes, practical routines, sensory experiences and thoughts or behaviors can all be regarded primordially as spaces. In essence, they all represent different modalities through which the authority to define, classify, regulate and evaluate is exercised. They are not politically neutral or disinterested

spaces, far from it. Public culture as the space of national identity is a peculiarly bounded and stratified domain that mirrors in many respects the political cosmology and imagined community that it engenders and endeavors to reproduce in the minds of persons-qua-citizens. On the one hand, it may be represented in terms of an imagined polity, prescribed in terms of its ritual orthodoxy, constructed on the basis of ideological discourses, and maintained by claims of proprietorship or authority over the sacred property (e.g. territory, artifacts, language, historicity, myth, habits and customs). On the other hand, these concrete manifestations of culture (and the authority embodied within it) inevitably become transformed at the level of everyday institutional life and social practice. Metaphors of this public culture can be stamped onto and diffused across diverse domains of the political and social terrain, from the naming and structuring of geographical places to issuing of identity cards and countless other examples of what Billig (1995) has called “banal nationalism”. In the context of the school and conduct of school life, these abstract notions and sacred symbols of culture in the above senses are intricately inscribed onto the physical spaces of the school, transformed into concrete codes for social conduct, and diffused into the structure and content of the curriculum. Education in postwar Taiwan is thus synonymous with the notion of “national education” (*guomin jiaoyu*); in Nationalist (Party) terms, it refers to “Three Principles Education” (*sanmin zhuyi jiaoyu*), following Sun Yat-sen’s founding doctrine of the Republic, “Three Principles of the People” (*sanmin zhuyi*). Education in this sense is more than just a process of utilitarian learning; it includes what has in other venues been called “moral education”. To say the least, the direct relationship between knowledge and the cultivation of a national ideology makes the school an obvious agent of socialization, but socialization here is perhaps an inappropriate term too, if it is interpreted in a literal sense as the process of conformity or assimilation to the social order. Socialization here cannot be separated from its process of culturalization; the efficacy of this process relies on culture in its various manifestations within the totalizing institution.

It is no doubt more difficult to articulate the nature of Nationalist “culture” in postwar Taiwan than to show how the various spaces of this nationalist imagination are transformed through political discourse and cultural policy then used to structure the nature of mandatory education, which includes the rewriting of history and thought. What has been referred to as “Three Principles Education” is not simply the teaching of

Sun Yat-sen's thought as a form of political indoctrination and socialization; it really refers to the entire process of education, in the way the curriculum is structured to reflect the teaching of moral behavior and thought as a process of human development and in the practice of everyday etiquette and ritualized behavior. Strictly speaking, however, what is ideologically disseminated in Three Principles Education was not Sun Yat-sen's thought per se, whose meaning has been the object of both intellectual debate and political revision, but the way his ideas have been filtered and put into practice during Chiang Kai-shek's "New Life Movement", which had roots in the Republican Nanjing era and evolved following revisions of Ministry of Education policy in later decades. This transformation in discourse and practice has also been directly related to the systematic crafting of Nationalist "identity" as a particular definition of public culture and personhood. On the surface, one has taken for granted that the Republic of China (in Taiwan) represents an archetypal model of a cultural nationalist state, one in which Chineseness serves as a real manifestation of national unity and state legitimation. To the contrary, the Republic of China is very much *fiction*. It is the epitome of what Abrams (1988: 76) has termed "a third-order project, an ideological project". Above all, it is an *exercise* in legitimation. What requires explanation in this sense is why the state has invested so much ideological energy into trying to establish a relationship between national ideology and cultural identity as the basis of its political legitimation. In the historical long run, this has involved first of all the redefinition and reshaping of Sun Yat-sen's political thought (or certain aspects of it) as the framework of a national(ist) ideology and secondly the articulation of a cultural discourse that reflects or is inextricably embedded within this notion of nationality or citizenship. This cultural discourse is precisely an imagination or systematic construction insofar as it is a selective definition of Chineseness on the part of the state. The Kuomintang (KMT) regime's construction of the Republic of China as a cultural nationalist state is one where its political legitimacy relies ultimately on the *perception* of cultural unity and ideological rationality of various sorts. The efficacy of both culture and ideology is in the final analysis the product of how both become discursively transformed over time and put into practice within the process of "education" as part of its project of (military, work, family) socialization. This is the focus of Chapter 2.

One cannot meaningfully ruminate about The Three Principles of the People in the abstract. Due to the premature death of Dr. Sun Yat-sen,

the founding President of the Republic, his writings remained incomplete. What became known as The Three Principles of the People was later compiled and edited posthumously into several volumes of essays, and his ideas then became the object of intellectual scrutiny and embellishment by scholars of his time, which continued in both mainland China and Taiwan well after the split between the People's Republic (PRC) and Nationalist Republic (ROC). Post-hoc scholarship probably did less to discover the "true" meaning of Sun's thought than to give relevance to his thinking in line with shifting political currents. Revisions of Sun's political thought in Taiwan became the basis of its transformation into textbook knowledge. The Three Principles courses were diffused throughout the entire curriculum, but Chiang Kai-shek's interpretation of it as part of The New Life Movement (*xin shenghuo yundong*) was the basis of its particular redefinition in the structure of education. Within the pedagogical order of things, Confucianism and The Three Principles play mutually supporting roles as culturalist ideology. What one sees here is an abstract construction of Chinese identity or Nationalist discourse of the moral person. As in Jameson's (1981) terms, (textbook) narrative is "a socially symbolic act", where the entire curriculum can be viewed as a complex ideological investment that produces a multi-layered and peculiarly bounded notion of identity, which infuses notions of the social body, ethical actor and political citizen, culminating in the concept of *zuoren*. This is the focus of Chapter 3.

Zuoren literally means to "act as a person". Semantically, it is not very revealing. In fact, it could mean anything. Yet, the use of such a term more often than not indicates that its meaning and the kind of normative behavior it implies are understood or taken for granted as such. The same sense of naturalness or understanding might be invoked, if one was exhorted to behave like a person. However, the very ubiquity of the term to characterize a whole range of expected behavior or ritualized etiquette and its explicit importance of moral cultivation in both (neo-)Confucianism and Three Principles Education (at various levels) suggest that its importance in the long run and its relevance to ideas of citizenship cannot be underestimated. Its efficacy in the mind of the person is a literal indicator of the efficacy of the socializing or culturalizing process that education endeavors to inculcate and maintain. In practice, this idea or process of being and becoming that it engenders must be interpreted in relation to the entire spatial, temporal and disciplinary regime that the school actively institutionalizes in the routine order of things. Spatial and

social hierarchies, calendrical rhythms or structures, and the flow of texts in the administration of power all constitute different modalities that serve to maintain the proper etiquette of people within the system. They not only regulate relations between people within the school but more importantly as a function of their direct, ongoing supervision by a bureaucracy of hegemonic institutions. This is the focus of Chapter 4.

The direct intervention of the state in all aspects of the educational regime is the point of departure not only for understanding the school as a totalizing institution and its underlying process of culturalizing but also for understanding how this mode of bureaucratic integration forms the disciplinary framework for other socializing institutions. Such processes are really general to what Philip Corrigan (1981) has called the “moral regulation” of the modern state. Seen from the framework of the individual, they constitute stages in a life history of routine disciplining. Like rites of passage, military conscription and promotional transitions in the workplace can be explicitly understood as rites of training (*shouxun*), professional and moral. Identity formation is the cumulative effect of diverse stages of training. In the long run, these regimes of practice reiterate and reinforce the same bounded world view and ritualized codes of conduct that articulate the nature of cultural identity. This is the focus of Chapter 5.

This systematic focus on institutional practices should in effect shed a different light on the nature of ideology and culture (as policy, cosmology and their complex interrelatedness) in Nationalist Taiwan. The later demise of Three Principles Education was the consequence, to be sure, of a process of “indigenization” (*bentubua*) that witnessed turnover of Nationalist (KMT) Party policy by that of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Educational reforms invoke in this regard obvious questions in relation to changes of substance and form, not only of education but also in cultural identity and world ethos. This is the focus of Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 will be an attempt to generalize the relationship between the construction of national identity in the abstract and the practice of various acculturating institutions from the school up to the state and to reiterate the critical role of such an ethnography in this endeavor. Viewed in the long run, the cultural geography of education is situated historically vis-à-vis the imagination of state and policy regulation, which gives meaning to our local ethnography of a middle school in 1991–92. In this presentist documentary, my research assistant, who worked and was trained as a secondary teacher prior to pursuing a graduate degree,

spent the entire calendar year as a volunteer teaching assistant at a public secondary school, where she objectively documented the daily routines of school life, observing activities and classes, while analyzing interrelationships between its teachers, students and administrative staff. In addition to seeing and listening, the volume of official notices circulating in relation to all aspects not only within the school but also from the Bureau of Education was overwhelming. This objective record became the basis not only for tracing its roots in policy and ideological discourse but also for articulating deeper links to public culture, ultimately national identity.

In sum, one might ask, what can a descriptive ethnography of the school tell us about society-at-large, history in the making and the role of culture in both? In order to explain the ethnographic present, I had to unpack the historical sociology of the institutions and policies that gave birth to it. This was in short a complex interaction between discourse and practices, viewed both as explicit politicization and implicit regulation. It had ramifications not only for the nature of education but more importantly the subtle construction of cultural identity that is glossed over simply as nationalizing. It may seem rooted in ethnicity, customs and traits, but it inculcates a deeper structural mindset.

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CHAPTER 2

The Spaces of Nationalist Culture in Taiwan

You must not listen to a political speaker who speaks *in the name of* ...; as soon as he has uttered these words, he is fooling us or himself, little matter. More than anyone else the political figure and the political thinker speak in their own name and assume what they say as their own responsibility. This is, to be sure, the ultimate modesty.

—Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN “NATIONALIST” TAIWAN

What is a Nationalist ideology? If anything, the writing of political discourse reflects upon the role of the state as a thinking, acting and practicing subject. In postwar Taiwan, the KMT regime took an unusually active role in invoking icons of traditional authority, writing myths of historical unity, advocating the legitimacy of certain shared values and establishing the orthodoxy of founding political principles, but primarily through the mediation of culture. Within this process of cultural reconstruction, the constant metamorphosis of Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People typified the KMT’s attempt to impose its political utopianism not just in accordance with changing times but by reference to the authority of texts that could not change. This was the basic paradox of the KMT’s peculiar Orientalism: it was by nature a modern project

of state formation that aimed to mold the polity as an object of disinterested domination, but in the service of newly emerging discourses of Chineseness that constructed their legitimacy on the basis of its roots to a traditional past and proprietorship of this legacy.

The crisis of culture is really endemic to the rise of the modern nation-state. This was perhaps most clearly articulated by Ernest Gellner (1983), who argued that the modern nation was founded on an a priori will, as though politically and spiritually invoked but which relied inevitably on the successful inculcation of a shared civilization or culture in the minds of its citizens as a condition for its continued survival. Without elaborating on the specific nature of what might constitute a national culture, Gellner underscored the seminal role of education and the need for universal literacy as major prerequisites for the realization of such a national culture. Gellner's view of mass education as a vehicle for the broad dissemination of shared social values of a common culture paralleled Benedict Anderson's (1983) focus on the role of print capitalism in making possible the emergence of "imagined communities" through the medium of popular literature, based on a common colloquial language.¹ The kind of national culture presaged by Gellner crudely resembled the empty, homogenous nature of Anderson's imagined community in the sense that both presupposed a horizontal solidarity between equal and unfamiliar persons (citizens) that transcended real or tangible ties of locality and kinship. Any notion of culture associated with this newly emerging nationalism had to be *constructed* and *forward looking*, despite appearances to the contrary, as it had to be able to transcend what Clifford Geertz (1963) aptly termed "the primordial sentiments" of a traditional culture.

This was not to say that tradition could not be invoked or that there was little or any recourse to the past (more often than not, there is) but rather that the basic imperatives of such a national culture reflected less on the content of culture than on the peculiar nature of nation-states. That is to say, one was dealing here less with a new *ideology* of boundedness than a new kind of *boundedness*. The kind of boundedness that was reflective of the nation-state and its concurrent notion of citizenship was in many senses incompatible with the elite culture of traditional societies. While high civilizations of ancient empires had been able to transcend political boundaries by embracing the totality of a broader cosmological vision, as in a kingdom of God or the sinocentric empire, the boundedness of the nation-state required a different kind of totality,

and this was what national culture reflected in fact. The geopolitical reality of the nation-state necessitated to some extent the assumption of a common identity or existence of shared values, even though they were abstractly conceived and putative rather than concretely demonstrated. This assumed commonality and abstract sense of sharedness underlay the imagined national communities of both Gellner and Anderson. In Taiwan, this common consciousness involved a perceived allegiance or feeling of commitment to a higher-level collectivity, where territorial boundedness was itself a fiction prompted by an attempted claim to legitimacy (i.e. the Republic of China) and where the fiction of the nation was rooted in the synonymy of one people, one culture, one language, one family and one history.

Anthropologists on the whole have been quick to point out that the crisis of culture was most acute in those nations emerging out of multi-ethnic settings or local traditions. One had to either compromise ethnic divisiveness by appealing to cultural ideals based on pan-ethnic values or evade ethnicity altogether by adopting political neutral values or utopian ideologies. I suggest instead that the crisis of nationalism and of national culture transcended ethnicity simply because in principle it endeavored to construct a radically different genre of bounded community called the nation-state. It should not be endemic solely to multiethnic nations struggling to define a new basis of common identity; by virtue of its forward-looking nature, it should also be endemic to ethnically homogeneous nations striving to replace a pre-existing cosmological totality with a sense of totality and structure that did not exist previously.

In imperial times, prior to the advent of nation-states, China resembled more a cultural state of mind.² The middle kingdom (*zhongguo*), which is China's famous rendition of itself, was not a territorially bound nation-state epitomized by rights of citizenship, a standardized colloquial language and a uniform educational system, but more precisely a set of core values that linked persons in time and place to an all-encompassing cosmological hierarchy.³ The terms *zhongguo* and *huaxia* (Chinese cultural order attributable to the mythical Xia dynasty), which are the terms most widely used to denote China and Chineseness, actually have origins in the feudal past characterized by a confederation of states, all claiming to share a common culture or civilization.⁴ The sense of unity engendered by this kind of cultural order explains in part the Chinese perception of an unbroken historical continuity despite the rise and fall of dynasties, both indigenous and barbarian, the myth of a shared

ethnic identity stemming from the Yellow River valley and the orthodoxy of rites and values rooted in a literary tradition.

The modern phenomenon of nationhood necessitated new notions of Chineseness in many respects, and the Kuomintang felt compelled to invoke, resuscitate and invent tradition as the basis of defining national identity and for the purpose of legitimizing its own vision of modern society. The radical vision of a modern (Nationalist) society can be traced back to the 1911 Revolution that overthrew the Manchu Qing dynasty and installed the Republic. Before the Republic, there was no cognate notion in Chinese of the nation or society as a territorially discrete, politically bounded and ethnically identifiable group of people. Many terms had to be borrowed from the Japanese.⁵ Up until the mid-nineteenth century, it was unusual for Chinese to call non-Chinese peoples “ethnic groups”, referring to them instead as barbarians. Only during the early years of the Republic did intellectuals begin to associate *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese as an ethnic group) with *zhongguo ren* (citizens of China), thus making the ethnic population of China synonymous with the concept of a national polity.⁶ Moreover, Chineseness in terms of material culture, ethnic traits or residence was never clearly defined (Wu 1991: 162). Thus, the Republican rendition of nationalism (*minzu zhuyi*) as “principle of a common people” underscored the notion of a bounded citizenry as the distinctive feature of nationhood (in contrast, for example, to the purely institutional characteristics of the nation-state).⁷ This point was reiterated first by Sun Yat-sen, who in a famous phrase criticized the traditional Chinese polity as being “a dish of loose sand” (*yi pan san sha*). This explains why the raising of “societal consciousness” (*minzu yishi*) and promotion of ethics have often been viewed in Nationalist Taiwan as the primary means for bringing about national solidarity, not only in the face of Communist aggression but also in confrontation with global imperialism.

In the historical long term, one cannot underestimate recourse to a heightened societal consciousness as a reaction to the effects of Western imperialism and the prolonged sense of political humiliation and cultural degradation that led ultimately to the collapse of the empire. Consciously or unconsciously, the use of culture in self-strengthening movements (*zhiqiang yundong*) to promote societal esteem as a kind of political resistance has been an overt feature of nationalist discourse and cultural policy on both the sides of China straits long before and well after 1949. As a specific response to the threat of communism posed by the PRC, it is also no coincidence that the invoking of tradition represented

an ideologically conservative defense of its own political system. In this regard, the construction of tradition had from the beginning an explicitly political agenda. However, more importantly, the usages to which tradition was put and the diverse meanings invoked by culture were always changing. These changes reflected strategic positionings within a changing political order, but as meaningful responses these changing constructions throughout the postwar period reflected the gradual evolution and maturation of newly emerging visions of a modern Nationalist polity.

In sum, a nationalizing as politicizing process covered a wide range of phenomena from overt strategic uses as a mode of resistance in the ongoing struggle against imperialism and communism to its functioning in a more abstract process of modern nation building. Within these two poles, the mutual shaping of both ideology and culture in its diverse manifestations constituted a complex process that unfolded in the course of historical transition. Despite the specific impact of imperialism and the Cold War, the emergence of national cultures through the evoking or invention of traditions, discovery of customs and the objectification of culture represents in fact a general phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ Recourse to tradition, custom and culture, insofar as they came to be politically contested, mythologized in ideology and ritualized in practice, were all local responses to changing global situations.⁹

In this respect, it is important to note where culture has been invoked, what rhetorical forms it has taken and how the collusion between the state, party, media, schools, family and local community in the promotion of national consciousness has worked to provide a certain coherence or systematicity to the concept of traditional Chinese culture. The interrelationship of these different institutional agents suggests first of all that culture operates at many levels of public discourse—for example, as a mandate of history, feelings of national consciousness, shared political ideology, conceptual worldview, values of civilization and habits of custom. The way in which these various levels of discourse fit together to project a certain coherence must also be viewed as a consequence of a larger political vision reflective of the KMT ethos.

As part of the KMT's effort to continue the legacy of the Republic in its retreat from the mainland and in the process nationalize Taiwan, the government embarked on a program to resuscitate traditional Chinese culture. By invoking tradition, the government appeared to resuscitate