

Southern Fujian

**Reproduction of Traditions in
Post-Mao China**

Edited by

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“Great Tradition” and Its Enemy: The Issue of “Chinese Culture” on the Southeastern Coast

■ Wang Mingming

Introduction

In this article, I examine some contesting ways in which “culture” is dealt with in the city of Quanzhou, Fujian province, in southeast China. In particular, I deal with, on the one hand, the work of the Bureau of Culture (Wenhua Ju) of the municipal government in the field of “tradition” (*chuantong*) and, on the other hand, the efforts made by ordinary residents to revive old small temples and their festivals. My discussion is derived from a period of fieldwork within and surrounding the spaces of the Bureau of Culture and those of small temples known as *pujing miao* (temples of wards and precincts) whose histories have been investigated elsewhere (Wang 1995).

Resurgent Traditions

First, I should explain why I have chosen to focus on the two “senses” of tradition that I have just indicated. Like many of my compatriots, I have lived in a nation that tried extremely hard to mediate between “the teleology of progress” and “the timeless discourse of irrationality” (Bhabha 1990: 294). In such a nation, I have strongly felt socially trapped into an ideal of homogenous modernity that has been pushed too far to “assume something resembling the archaic body of the despotic” (Bhabha 1990: 294). The problem of culture in relation and contrast to “superstition” (Feuchtwang 1989) is part and parcel of that “body” of ambivalence and power, and it has been what has deeply intrigued me as a native anthropologist.

From March 1990 to April 1991, I stayed in Quanzhou, conducting ethnographic fieldwork for my London-based doctoral degree research.¹ I was born and raised in Quanzhou. Before fieldwork, my memories of social life in the city carried with them the enduring tensions between what was designated as the "new" (*xin*) and the "old" (*jin*), which later intrigued me as anthropologically significant in the course of my study. When preparing for my field trip, I decided to examine such tensions.

During fieldwork, the social networks that I gradually developed through my childhood and youth made it possible for me to enter government offices and people's homes easily. I was invited through a personal contact, a former middle school teacher of mine who had become a senior official in the city, to work in the Bureau of Culture as a consultant. Through working there, I gained certain "internal (*neibu*) knowledge" of the state and the local government agencies' politics with regard to culture. Through both official introduction letters and personal contacts, I also gained good access to local historians, temple managers, donors, and ordinary worshippers, from whom I learned a great deal about different views of local tradition.

I attended many banquets. The "festival reunions" of the new and old forms of mutual entertainment took me to Deng Xiaoping's negation of "class struggle" (*jieli douzheng*) from which many people, including my family, suffered in the Mao Zedong era. However, my discussions with local people and observation of their activities somehow made me repossess my childhood memories of some domestic scenes of struggle during the Cultural Revolution. When I was small, my grandmother who lived with us was a "superstitious" person. However, she could not worship deities without shutting the front door — otherwise the Red Guards, neighborhood committee officers, and even my parents would smash the dishes that she took a long time to prepare for all kinds of divinity. During those years, "destruction" (*dapo*) was a keyword brushed all over the walls of the city. Many temples were torn down, and activities with even only a little "feudal color" (*fengjian secai*) were forbidden.

Compared with those "mad years" (*fengkuan niandai*), as many people say in Quanzhou, now the people know how to enjoy greater "freedom" (*ziyou*) or in fact know how to avoid doing what the Party-state tells them to do. Nowadays, most households in Quanzhou have re-created their domestic shrines for ancestor and deity worship. In the public places of the city's neighborhood areas, temples of different sizes, names, and deities have been rebuilt. Tales that even the local government has engaged in

"superstitious activities" have become widespread. One example of this is that since the early 1980s, the Bureau of Culture has been assigned by its superiors to protect relics of Chinese tradition that were designated as "places of superstitious activities" (*mixin huadong changsiao*) just a few years ago. To do that, some old temples have been included in the Bureau's cultural conservation projects and have been rebuilt. Local operatic and ritual performances are organized to sanctify both new and old national holidays of China.

The revival of tradition in both the domestic and public domains intrigued me,² and a "practical paradox" (*shiji maodun*) also came to my attention. "Tradition" (*chuantong*), "heritage" (*wenhua yichan*), "culture" (*wenhua*), and whatever is associated with the greatness of "being Chinese" is now highly valued by government officials. Nonetheless, the word "superstition," which Western anthropology has treated as the core aspect of the concept "culture," was still widely used in the 1990s in newspapers, on TV, and in other forms of state-owned media to describe the backwardness of the "masses" (*qunzhong*). Constant effort is still made by government agencies to prohibit popular ritual activities. Although the government has generally permitted popular worship of ancestors, the system of territorial temples, the deity cults, and festivals are still defined as "manifestations of superstition" (*mixin de biaoxian*). Annually, around popular festival times, official campaigns against them are organized. These ideological and political actions are often not effective, but they have continued to convey the message that the cultural front (*wenhua zhendi*) should still be "fought for" (*zhengduo*) in the phase of reform. They thus validate the observation that Chinese state socialism and capitalism are "modernizing forces which have brought about the radical 'eradication' or 'uprooting' of tradition" (Yang 1996: 110).

Temples, cultural halls (*wenhua gong*), and museums are "memory places," which people construct to remind themselves of their past. How and why has the Bureau of Culture on the one hand promoted tradition and on the other excluded from its projects of "cultural construction" (*wenhua jianshe*) those equally traditional and cultural practices of the ordinary people? Equally important, why, under government prohibition, do the ordinary residents of Quanzhou spend so much time and resources on reshaping the images of their deities, rebuilding temples, and celebrating festivals?

In answering my questions, historians and officials in Quanzhou often used Deng Xiaoping's conception of the "preliminary stage of socialism"

(*shehui zhuyi de chuji jieduan*) to disguise a self-contradiction. It seems to them that in the "preliminary stage of socialism," one has to allow "practical paradoxes" to exist. To the official-scholars, social progress will ultimately lead the country out of chaos, while at the current stage, the pursuit of "logic" (*luoji*) is unimportant. In others words, these scholars and officials see my questions as a manifestation of the "naïveté" (*tianzhen*), which, they say, stems from my being in the West too long.

But I have talked to many other local people who insisted on an explanation. As one of them put it, since the Liberation in 1949, the people (*baixing*) have always been said by the Party to be the masters of the country (*guojia de zhuren*). However, even today, the government still acts in an "old society manner" (*jiu shehui zuofeng*) when "allowing the officials to set [the people's houses] on fire while prohibiting the people to light their lanterns" (*zhixu guanxia fanghuo, buxu baixing dian deng*). Why can this be so?

To work out a "scholarly solution" to the "practical paradoxes," I now turn to more details of the interactive drama of official and popular traditions, which, in my view, has been essential to what has been called "the changing meaning of being Chinese today" (Tu 1991).

Historical Traces of the City

Later it will become clearer that both the official and non-official kinds of temple and festival claim to be the continuities of the "ancient dynasties" (*gudai*). The historical claims of the ancient and the authentic are representations of what is going on in social practice. However, we should not ignore the fact that the history-as-process is the realm in which artificial histories are made and the core source from which these histories absorb their vitality. To begin my explanation, I thus feel that it is important to first provide a brief overview of the regional historical process.

To take G. William Skinner's elegant outline (1985), by the 20th century, Quanzhou had experienced several phases of socioeconomic change. First, from the 3rd century onward, gradual development and commercialization enhanced the urbanization of the region. By the 10th century, the economy of the southeast coast was highly commercialized, and a supra-local network of overseas trade centered in Quanzhou, reaching as far as the Middle East, India, Africa, and Europe, was created (see also Clark 1991). Throughout most of the period between the 10th and 14th centuries, due to government's encouragement and further expansion of

merchants' power, the economy of Quanzhou developed and reached its peak. In Skinner's words, it reached such a degree that regional economy was "over-heated by foreign trade" (Skinner 1985: 276). From the establishment of the Ming Dynasty onward, coastal traders were forbidden to trade with the outside world; as a consequence, the Quanzhou-centered network declined. From the perspective of the macro-region, it was replaced in the 16th century by the newly established Port of Yuegang in the Zhangzhou area, which in turn was substituted by a Xiamen-centered network "inspired" by the coming of foreign imperialism in the mid-19th century.

Elsewhere I have described in detail how religion, cosmology, and ritual formed an essential part of the regional history of Quanzhou that Skinner ignores (Wang 1999). If what I have said is right, for the city of Quanzhou the most critical transitional phase is the establishment of the Ming Dynasty in 1368. The walled city of Quanzhou constructed in the Tang Dynasty mainly enclosed an administrative core and residential neighborhoods. On the basis of the old city, later an outer wall (*luoqiang*) was built to extend the city from its administrative core to include the commercial area and its attached religious sites in the south. The government headquarters of the prefecture (*zhou*) and the county were planned on the north-central axial line; on the two portions beside the line, state cult temples, including a "literati temple" (*wenmiao*) and a "martial temple" (*wumiao*), were located and were accompanied by official Buddhist and Taoist temples (see details in So 1991).

Urban planning in ancient Quanzhou represented a local projection of the central order, and this projection remained unchanged even after the Mongol Yuan Dynasty's takeover. However, before the Ming Dynasty, the city of Quanzhou may well be described as a special kind of "multiculturalism." Between the Tang and Yuan Dynasties, Quanzhou's regional system of "world trade" facilitated profound cultural contact between local Chinese cultural forms and religious traditions brought by foreign merchants, settlers, and religious specialists (including missionaries).

Buddhism was the earliest foreign religion accepted by local people. In the Tang Dynasty, Hinduism came to Quanzhou with Indian merchants. Between the 12th and the early 14th centuries, there were also European religious influences in Quanzhou. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, trade with the Arab world via the Maritime Silk Road was important to local economy and the government's tax income (in the name of tribute). In the Northern Song, Southern Song, and Yuan Dynasties, many West Asian and

possibly Southeast Asian Muslim merchants were allowed to build as many as six mosques in Quanzhou (Zhuang and Chen 1980). Even Manichaeism had a place in the suburb of the city (a Manichaest temple dated to the 15th century still exists).

Currently, there is a great number of local historians who are keen to re-visit the multiculturalism of ancient Quanzhou. To me, this is important, but attention should also be paid to the end of commercial prosperity and cultural diversity and to the emergence of a new kind of cultural politics in the Ming Dynasty. The prominent Chinese thinker, Qian Mu (1939: 663–703), observed that the establishment of the Ming Dynasty signaled a drastic change in the elite view of cultural values. Qian Mu describes this change by the transformation of Confucian philosophical politics from “kingly Confucianism” (*wangdao zhi ru*) to “civilizing Confucianism” (*jiaohua zhi ru*). The substitute of “civilizing Confucianism” for “kingly Confucianism” implicated a new dynastic concern with education and culture, or with creating dynastic order, through what we may call the body politics of Confucian “text/performance” (Zito 1997). Its overall historical consequence is the emergence of “Chinese nativism” as briefly discussed by the anthropologist Eric R. Wolf in his masterpiece *Europe and the People without History* (1982). In my view, this historical change in turn led to several cultural and political inventions in the late imperial dynasties of the Ming and Qing (1368–1911).

After having been ruled by the Mongols, the Han Chinese Ming Dynasty had come to view foreigners as devils and treated Han Chinese trade with them as morally incorrect. Along the coast of southern Fujian, more than 20 garrison towns were built to protect the “Divine Prefecture” (*shenzhou*; an intellectual and official name for what is known in English as China) from piracy, invasion, and illegal trade from the sea. In the sphere of public sacred land in Quanzhou, for example, the portions of Chinese government buildings, temples (*miao*), altars (*tan*), city gates (*men*), and walls (*qiang*) were emphasized. Seven Guandi Miao, temples of the Military God, were constructed in the early Ming to represent the authority and protectiveness of the Chinese state (Wang 1994). Within the city, a network of place administration called “*pujing*” (administrative wards and precincts) was created to function like the *li* (township) and *she* (community) systems in the countryside (Wang 1995). In these *pujing* neighborhoods, temples and memorial halls (*ci*) of war heroes who died in action against “short pirates” (*wokou*; Japanese) and model Confucianist disciples were constructed.

The “maritime prohibition policy” (*haijin zhengce*) that the Ming Dynasty adopted was evidently contested. One indication is the expansion of the smuggling business near the garrison towns on the coast of Fujian, which eventually led to the government’s ironic recognition of the Port of Yuegang in Zhangzhou. The second aspect of popular resistance to the maritime prohibition policy was the development of illegal immigration to Southeast Asia. Along with the growth of the merchants’ resistance, by the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, local residents had turned the ward administration system (*pujing*) into territorial deity cult areas. Images and documents originally kept in the community hall, the memorial halls of model Confucian disciples, and the official temples of war heroes were removed and replaced by statues of popular deity cults such as Wangye (Marshal Lords). By the late Qing Dynasty, the *pujing* system had already regrouped into two rival factions, the East and West cult organizations (*dongxi fo*), and had become a system of territorial feuds that created many troubles for the government.

From around 1840 to the Republican era (ending in the mainland in 1949), Quanzhou seemed to have gained a new opportunity to re-create its multiculturalism. Skinner (1985: 279) suggests that the years around 1840s signaled “the end of the dark age of the Southeast.” Indeed, from the perspective of the southeastern macro-region, it was a time when Fuzhou and Xiamen in the same macro-region were opened as treaty ports and when such ports began to “inspire the return of overseas trade and the reconstruction of urban systems” (Skinner 1985: 279). However, Skinner is perhaps too concerned with the southeast coast as a macro-region to treat the city of Quanzhou as a center of his regional economic geographic history. If we localize our perspective a little, it should be clear that for Fuzhou and Xiamen, where treaty ports were located, the fortune of economy and urbanism was a great deal better than in the old abandoned harbor of Quanzhou.

More importantly, by the 19th century, local Chinese contacts with foreign cultures had somehow lost their open characteristics. Admittedly, some Chinese intellectuals and officials had by the late 19th century adopted modern social theories of capitalism and socialism as the cure for China’s ills. This may serve as an indication of the resurgence of cultural openness in the new age. However, such a culturally open attitude was for a whole century coupled by extremist intellectual-political nationalism and popular moral-cultural panic toward “foreign devils” (*waiquo guizi*). Consequently, on the one hand, as Myron Cohen (1993: 151) brilliantly

puts it, in order to create a new society and to justify its creation, "it also required that the 'old' society be defined in such a way as to provide the basis for its thorough rejection." On the other hand, a sense of Chinese cultural essence was re-envisioned as the opposite of foreign imperialism.

Overseas Chinese sojourners (*huagiao*), who left their homelands in the Ming and Qing Dynasties as a consequence of what Skinner (1985) terms "dramatic centrifugal effects" of the contradiction between economic decline and population growth, became the link between the old and the new, the foreign and the Chinese. In Quanzhou, *huagiao* were the first generation of Republican revolutionaries and the first to invest in the destruction of the imperial city walls and in the remaking of the city as something entirely "modern and commercial." Meanwhile, *huagiao* also ironically served to protect and rebuild the public temples of their native places.

Another stream of new social forces was the Republican army from Guangdong and students in the new schools set up either by overseas Chinese or foreign missionaries. According to Su Tao (1982), in 1923, 1926, and 1932, these new social forces respectively organized three major campaigns against superstition in the city. The first campaign was organized by the Eastern Army from Guangdong to revolutionize the city. The second was organized by students in Liming College to destroy religion (*fan zongjiao*). The third was organized by anti-Japanese military organizations to stop a religious parade organized by several popular religious temples aimed at eliminating life-threatening epidemics (Su 1982; Wang 1999: 389-93).

The "Culture" of the Bureau of Culture

When Chinese Communists were still underground in the city of Quanzhou (in the 1930s and 1940s), they were engaged in military and political struggles against the KMT (Kuomintang), the Nationalist Party. Among them were schoolteachers and modern theater performers who were mostly involved in transmitting new ideas and advocating "class-consciousness" (*jiejī yishi*). During the anti-Japanese war (1937-45), the force of the CCP's (Chinese Communist Party) underground members in Quanzhou expanded through the patriotic modern theater movement (*huaju yundong*). This was supposed to replace local traditional operas with a new performing art in service of propaganda against the Japanese and the KMT. Later, in 1949, they joined the People's Liberation Army to take control of the city

soon after the Liberation.³ A small group of men and women who led the anti-Japanese modern theater movement were selected to work with a "sent-south cadre" (*nanzia ganbu*) to form "a team of cultural workers" (*wenhua gongzuo xiaozu*), which in 1952 was formally announced to be the Bureau of Culture of Quanzhou (Quanzhou Wenhua Ju 1990).

Because of the interruption of "total destruction" in the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the Bureau of Culture worked toward transforming old traditions into a new culture. Other governmental organizations such as the Public Security Bureau (Gong'an Ju) and its affiliates worked in a more violent manner to eliminate what the Party had decided to destroy. In comparison, the Bureau of Culture has played a relatively "soft" role by insisting on the enhancement of culture. It has led to the invention of some new spaces for mass cultural activities. These include modern theaters, theatrical troupes, cinemas, dance halls, radio stations, and now TV stations and cable networks (together with the new Bureau of Broadcasting and Television (Guangdian Ju), which was not set up until 1988). It has also worked to protect local traditional "cultural properties" (*wenwu*). The latter aspect of its work in turn involves the reorganization of traditional operatic troupes, the managing of performances and art festivals, and the protection of officially recognized "cultural properties" such as archaeological findings and sites, museums, and great ancient temples.

In any Chinese work unit (*danwei*), internal factionalism has not only created personal or small group divisions among officials but also has influenced the formation of the officials' reading of national policy. For example, during my fieldwork, Director Chen, with a native background, and his newly arrived rival, an ex-army officer who was sent to work with him as a joint director in 1991, quarreled over what kind of "culture" the Bureau should develop. Director Chen was more inclined to promote local traditional culture, whereas the outsider-cadre was much more interested in gaining profit from managing the new cultural forms such as dance halls, cinemas, and sports centers.

There has been some tension and conflict of opinion between the officials of the Bureau of Culture and the subcommittees. For instance, the head of the Cultural Property Management Committee (Wenguanhui) under the Bureau was not obedient to his superiors, the directors of the Bureau of Culture. He demanded greater support for more and more historical cultural properties, of which the directors of the Bureau of Culture would be willing to cover only a small part. A separate analysis of diverse readings of

cultural policy within officialdom would reveal the "practical paradoxes" within the government. However, here, while noting its importance, I would concentrate on some more institutionalized spaces and cultural rhythms that have served to signify "tradition" for the state apparatuses of politics and ideology since the 1980s.

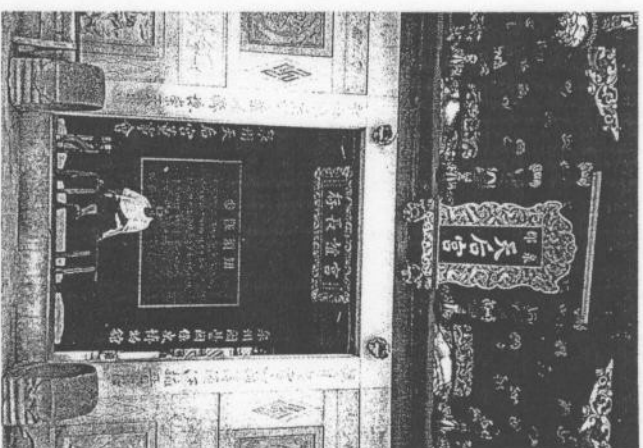
A slogan that has been the guideline for cultural work in Quanzhou since the 1980s states: "Let the world come to Quanzhou, let Quanzhou go to the world" (*rang shijie zouxiang Quanzhou, rang Quanzhou zouxiang shijie*). This call for cultural openness is derived from the national open-door policy. However, it has somehow led to a closer link to the city's commercial prosperity and cultural diversity in ancient times. What has excited the officials and many local residents has been the Song junk excavated in the later years of the Cultural Revolution (Zhuang 1991). In 1974, when the junk was being unearthed, a thread of light penetrated the dark age of commerce, the Cultural Revolution, to remind local historians and common residents of Quanzhou's historic prosperity that had been forgotten during class struggle. Recently, a prominent local historian suggested to the municipal government that a large boat-like building should be constructed on the Jinjiang River, the gateway to Quanzhou. He said that within this building, all authentic cultural properties of the city could be displayed and they should serve to inform tourists from other parts of China and foreign countries of the openness of ancient Quanzhou.⁴

The Bureau of Culture, together with its subcommittees, currently manages two categories of building. The first category consists of museums, such as the Quanzhou Maritime Museum, the Museum of Overseas Chinese History in the eastern part of the city, and the Museum of Fujian and Taiwan Relations at the Temple of Tianhou (Heavenly Queen Temple). The second category consists of the nationally and provincially listed important religious temples, such as the Buddhist temples of Kaiyuansi and Chengtiansi; the remaining mosque (Qingzhensi); the Manichaest temple of Cao'an; the Taoist temples of Tonghuai Street, Guandi Miao, and the newly rebuilt and refurbished temple of Yuanmiao Guan; and the state cults temple of Confucius and of the Heavenly Queen (which also serves as a museum).⁵ All of these museums and historic buildings have been listed in the national, provincial, and municipal plans of cultural properties. They are officially recognized places where the historical and cultural characteristics of the city are exhibited.

To be more specific, the first category of buildings contains mainly items of material culture and photographic representations of people,

costumes, and ritual. These serve to forge a history of Quanzhou's historical relationships with different zones of the "overseas," such as the non-Chinese world, the overseas Chinese communities, and Taiwan. Such museum displays reflect long-term archaeological and archival studies and to a great extent also reflect available historical facts. By visiting these museums, one indeed learns a lot about Quanzhou's important position in world trade in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, its waves of emigration in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and its people's settlement in Taiwan from the early Qing.

For the cultural workers and historians who work in the museums, the exhibition of their discovered material cultural remains of the past may be their prime concern. However, to the Bureau of Culture, the exhibitions are meaningless without reference to contemporary practice. Quanzhou is the homeland of Taiwanese and overseas Chinese — this is emphasized in the guidelines for museum display. As Director Chen explained, these temples "symbolize the advance (*xiantjin*) of Quanzhou people in ancient



1. The Museum of Fujian and Taiwan Relations at the Temple of Tianhou in Quanzhou (photograph by Tan C. B., 1998).

times," and equally important, they "symbolize the predestined ties (*luan*) between Quanzhou and the three Chinese siblings (*sanbao*).² By the "three Chinese siblings," he means the "overseas" Chinese siblings of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

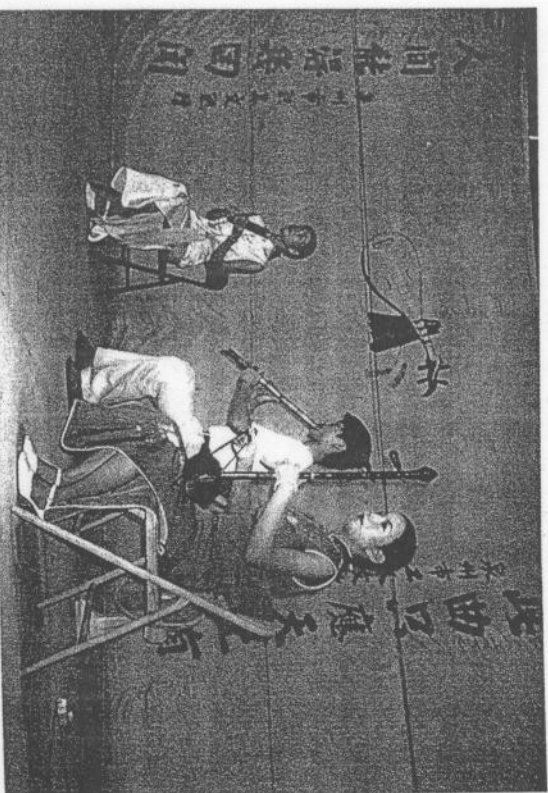
The "institutionalized religious temples," to use C. K. Yang's (1961) terminology, included in the cultural property lists of the Bureau of Culture are museums of such "progressiveness" and "predestined ties." Since the 1980s, it has been widely believed among the "cultural cadres" and local historians that the whole world has recognized Quanzhou as "the museum of world religions" (*shijie zongjiao bowuguan*). It is true that in the past two decades, many foreign scholars have visited Quanzhou and are intrigued by its wealth of religious traditions. However, "the museum of world religions" is a label that the official scholars of the city have promoted. To shape Quanzhou into such a "museum," the Bureau of Culture and its museum workers and historians have mobilized many resources from the Ministry of Culture, the provincial government, and the municipal finance department.

Meanwhile, the "predestined ties" between Quanzhou and Taiwanese as well as overseas Chinese have proven to be useful. For example, the reconstruction of the Heavenly Queen Temple was made possible by donations from its two main branch temples in Taiwan, and Chengtiansi was rebuilt thanks to the joint donations of a number of Southeast Asian Chinese Buddhist masters originally from Quanzhou.

"The cultural work directed by the Bureau of Culture has not stopped at the level of maintaining some exhibitions of materials or dead data," said Director Chen, "it should shape Quanzhou into a lively city and should fill its streets with cultural activities." For this purpose, every year, the Bureau of Culture organizes several art festivals. In 1991, the Grand Concert of Southern Music (Nanyin Dahuichang) around the traditional Lantern Festival (on the 15th day of the 1st lunar month), the Summer of Weiyuanlou Building (Operatic Performances Festival) around the Universal Salvation Festival (on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month), and the International Puppet Festival around the Mid-Autumn Festival (on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month) were organized (Wang 1993: 164-96). The sites of these performing art festivals were chosen to be cinemas, courtyards of museum-temples, and imperial government gate-buildings. However, the performances were distributed throughout the main streets and religious buildings. Each festival also involved a kind of "cultural and art parades" (*wenyi caijie*) which resembled either the marches of imperial spring celebration or popular territorial procession rituals (*yingshen saihui*) in ancient times.

If the rhythmic tradition of performing art festivals was entirely invented by the Bureau of Culture, then why should such a new tradition relate itself to popular religious festivals? The "flavor" of tradition that popular religious festivals provides is of course one ingredient considered by the Bureau of Culture. "More subtly than this," Director Chen told me, "our choosing such dates is based upon the consideration that there is a return of superstitious activities in these years." He continued, "many Quanzhou people love festivity (*re'nao*); so by way of creating festive events, we can reduce the opportunity for their superstitious practices — this is more effective than forcing them to stop their old habits." This explanation conveys several messages that are significant to our understanding of the official discourse of culture. The willingness of a post-Mao government agency to accommodate itself to local popular cultural practices is of course one message. However, using popular skills of mobilization to serve the government purpose of cultural renewal is one more important message.

A middle-aged man with a rather strong spirit of social critique once told me, "The government is wasting our money." Why? "The government's festivals only entertain foreigners and overseas Chinese and have nothing to do with our lives. We ordinary people are still quite poor.



2. A Nanyin performance in Quanzhou (photograph by Tan C. B., 2002).

However, the officials (*dangguan de*) are not concerned with this. They are more concerned with the face (*mianzi*) of the state." I could agree with this critique, but it seems to be untrue that the officials in the Bureau of Culture are spending money in vain. In the past two decades, one important guideline for the work of the Bureau of Culture has been to "let culture set up a stage on which economy can perform the opera" (*wenhua datai jingji changxi*). It is true that the official performing art festivals are mainly designed for foreign tourists and returned overseas and Taiwanese Chinese, but the organizers do not intend to waste money. The development of tourism and the enhancement of overseas investment are other two explicitly expressed purposes of the cultural activities (besides reducing the frequency of superstitious practices).

In Quanzhou, when we observe the keen interest on the part of the Bureau of Culture in creating a local "museum" or a "theater" for the reunion of cultures in plural, we are observing a neat convergence of China's open-door policy and Quanzhou's local elite view of their own history. The symbolic resources that the Bureau of Culture and its officials and committees mobilize to mark the greatness of Quanzhou varied considerably in form and historical origin. Whether a newly established museum or an old temple, whether the new theaters or the old Song Dynasty operatic arts (the Liyuan Opera, for instance), cultural forms serve in their joint force to make a history. This is a history of overseas trade, emigration, and expansion through "ungrounded empires" (Ong and Nonini 1997), which were for centuries ignored but which are by now part of a national politics of cultural revitalization. This particular politics of culture can of course be reviewed as an effort to imagine out of the ruins of history a "community" (Anderson 1983). However, it is a particular kind of "imagined community." It is envisioned on the southeastern coastal margin of Chinese culture with "extraterritorial narratives" of race and culture, or the loyalties of deracinated "transnational communities" (Duara 1997) that contain certain raw materials that may also be interpreted into a rival view.

Small Places, Big Problems: Popular Territorial Temples and Their Festivals

One day in October 1991, I chatted with Director Chen and an American academic, Kenneth Dean, who was also conducting research in the southern Fujian region. We watched a performing art event together, and Director Chen asked for our opinions. Kenneth Dean had spent years in the area and

keenly observed the reviving religious traditions. He said that it seemed to him that the performance was "not quite the same as its original traditional form." It was over-reformed, he meant, and was more modern than those "real traditional forms" which he saw in the popular temples. (He had told me that he treated these temples as "real cultural centers.") Director Chen showed a gesture of respect to the foreign sinologist, but he disagreed with him. He said that those small temples that the foreign scholar had regarded as "real traditional forms" did not have sufficient "historical depth" (*lishi shendui*), and as such they did not deserve serious attention. "Most of these temples are only 100 years old, having been built in the late Qing," he said, "but the operas and large temples that we protect are around 1000 years old, mostly." He asked, "Why, then, should we drop the more valuable for the trivial?"

This conversation reveals an important difference between an outsider who has studied and become sympathetic to the long repressed popular religious traditions and an official who has served in his office for years to *only selectively* enhance tradition. I should say that Director Chen's view is only a soft line of official negation of unofficial cultures. In Quanzhou, most officials, local historians, and museum specialists are ready to draw a demarcation line between old cultural forms with "historical depth" and those without it. In most cases, the latter, that is the traditional cultural forms without "historical depth," are simply not treated as "culture" but as "superstitious manifestations." "Superstitious manifestations" are to a great extent defined as "misguided beliefs," "wastefulness," "chaos," and "backwardness" which set up certain counter-versions of what the state seeks to establish (Anagnost 1987; Feuchtwang 1989).

Just a decade before I started to conduct fieldwork, any such manifestations were treated as reactionary to the new society and were eliminated the moment they appeared. Since the 1980s, the government has adopted a relatively softened policy, allowing some of the so-called normal and useful practices to exist or even to be absorbed in its cultural schemes. However, a category of ritual practices and places of commemoration are still prohibited (though often not at all effectively). As I mentioned earlier, this category of popular religious practices is organized within the framework of the *pujing* system, and *pujing* is associated with the popular cults locally classified roughly as Wangye (Marshal Lords) as well as with the Universal Salvation Festival that takes place every year from the 6th to the 8th months in the lunar calendar.

According to the Qianlong Reign edition of *Quanzhou Prefecture*

Gazetteer, *pujing* consists of 36 *pu* (wards) and each *pu* is further divided into two or more *jing* (precincts) (the total number of *jing* recorded is 94) (Wang 1999: 179–243). I visited most of the *pujing* temples and found them to be focal points of popular public ceremonies. Presently, precise statistics have not been kept of the numbers of *pu* (wards) and *jing* (precincts). *Pujing* rituals are practiced today in accordance to the spatial divisions memorialized by the elderly and enhanced by keenly interested people who checked the *Gazetteer*. The oldest *pujing* temples could only be dated to the early Ming, despite the fact that some of these had derived from reconstruction or substantial amendments in the early Qing. The deity cults of *pujing* temples have been known as the Lords of Pu or Jing (Puzhu or Jingzhu) since mid-Qing. These deity cults consist of the following categories:

- (1) Regional cults such as Xianggong Ye (Opera God), Baosheng Dadi (the Great Emperor Who Protects Life), and so on;
- (2) Popular Taoist cults such as San Qing (Three Purities), San Guan (Three Officials), Immortal Lü Dongbin, and various Xingjun (Star Messengers);
- (3) Patriotic heroes who were endorsed as official cults in the Ming and Qing Dynasties;
- (4) Historical figures such as Guangong, Wu Zixu, and Generals of the Yang Family; and
- (5) Marshal Lords with various surnames.

Some of the deity cults whose origins could well be dated to as far as the Tang and Song Dynasties, and many of the temple managers whom I interviewed, had a common tendency to insist on the ancientness and authenticity of their cults and temples without concrete evidence. However, available data indicate that the temples and their cults were in fact invented through the years between the late Ming and early Qing, and they had experienced changes in the Qing Dynasty and the Republican era (Wang 1995).

Pujing as a systematic order was invented in the early Ming as a semi-governmental organization. For the government, its intended function in the Ming and Qing was household registration, neighborhood watch, and maintenance of “civilization” (*jiaohua*). *Pujing* was thus a regional version of *li* and *she* systems, practiced in other parts of China, mainly in the rural areas. What we now know as *lishe zhidu* (the system of *li* and *she*) was a Song invention of rural social control (McKnight 1971). In the early Ming,

it was adopted as part of the imperial state’s scheme of *jiaohua*. It is evident that in the early Ming, *pujing* halls had already been built to keep household registration records, hold community meetings, punish misconduct, worship the official cult of the locality, and resolve local disputes. Gazetteer materials also indicate that some of the *pujing* cults were listed in the official local state cults. The cults of the war heroes and civilian models were the core content of this official *pujing* worship system.

From the late Ming Dynasty onward, such a semi-governmental system of place administration and *jiaohua* had begun to be contested. An interesting phenomenon in this local process of resistance is the fact that instead of destroying the official *pujing* system, the local people somehow transformed it into an order of territorial deity cults. This cult order, on the one hand, claimed itself an origin in the official *jiaohua* project and, on the other hand, differed greatly from this specific official scheme in its operations and meaning. The transformed *pujing* system as we now observe in Quanzhou has been a temporal and spatial order of festivals instead of being a strategy for surveillance. The compilers of the Qianlong Reign edition of *Quanzhou Prefecture Gazetteer* were still viewing *pujing* as a local version of *li* and *she*. However, their edited materials show us that they were clearly aware of some unofficial currents surrounding the *pujing* public halls. Popular festivals that often created “chaos” (*luan*) among *pujing*-divided neighborhoods formed one of the main concerns of the imperial scholar-officials. “Madness” (*kuang*) was thus used in their description of them.

Pujing festivals from the Qing to the Republican era occurred at three different kinds of annual event. First, each temple of *pu* or *jing* had one or more “lords” who had birth and death (rebirth) anniversaries. These anniversaries served as neighborhood public events of festivity. At these events, offerings to gods were made in front of *pu* or *jing* temples; the gods’ images were carried out of the temple to “survey” the neighborhood territories, and operas were sung day and night at the temple stage.

Second, during the annual celebrations at the major Taoist or regional cult temples, *pu* or *jing* neighborhoods would go on collective pilgrimages to these great temples. They did this in order for their local cults to return to their root temples or to be recharged with new efficacy in larger temples. The key ritual of pilgrimage was procession, whereby selected local young men carried the images of local gods on the streets and marched together with all household representatives toward the great regional religious temples.

Third, between the 6th and 8th months, or more precisely the three full

months around the 15th day of the 7th month, *pudu*, or the Universal Salvation Festival, took place. The three months were treated as three phases of rotation, and each phase was divided into 30 units (days). The three phases were known as "setting up the banner" (*shuqi*), "universal salvation" (*pudu*), and "re-salvation" (*chongpu*). During each of the three phases, *pujing* was redivided into 30 temporal units, which formed a monthly cycle of rotation for *pujing* units to take turns to offer meals to ghosts outside *pu* or *jing* temples and in front of household front gates.

Stephan Feuchtwang, who has worked in the same cultural area, has provided a useful conceptual framework with which Chinese gods and ghosts could be analyzed as two mutually constructive cosmologies of community. Gods define the public face of community from the inside, whereas offerings to ghosts serve to shape the same imagery of community from the outside (Feuchtwang 1974). Popular religious practices surrounding the *pujing* system as I briefly outlined above could be analyzed with the same framework as deity-ritual definitions of social space and communal identity. However, the imperial *Gazetteer* compilers add to our analysis a right observation; that is, *pujing* festivals were "chaotic" and their participants were "mad." In other words, it seems to be true that after having been turned into a popular religious system, *pujing* represented something that comprised more than cosmological orders of place. To me, it has been a system of place-centered deity cults that also transcended neighborhood identity and contested the imperial top-down mode of civilization.

In a brilliant historical discussion on Marshal Wen and other deity cults in late imperial China, Paul Katz argues for the presence of "civil society" in popular religious temples. As he suggests:

In considering the public nature of rituals performed at temples or during festivals, it might be helpful to treat these events as performances that brought differing representations and conflicting ideologies into public space where they could be examined critically. Such performances had the potential to shape speech, influence behavior, and generally contribute to the construction and assumption of social power (Katz 1995: 185).

Following Prasenjit Duara's "genealogy of feudalism" (*fengjian*), one may also look into the public nature of territorial festivals to find their "autonomous societal initiative" which was absorbed in early modern state-building "New Policy" reform (Xinzheng) (1902-08), and in a failed intellectual "civil society" projection (Duara 1995: 147-75). Duara also indicates that "the accommodationist language of the *fengjian*" which was

projected at the turn of the 20th century was "soon eclipsed by that of a highly interventionist state" (Duara 1995: 170).

In the late Qing, a handful of local officials did try to find some useful aspects in *pujing* divisions in Quanzhou, and these officials proposed to the emperor that *pujing* should be used as an instrument of "rule by division" (*fen er zhi zhi*) (Fu 1992: 149-55). Nonetheless, what Duara has seen as the "feudalist" and "accommodationist school" of modern state-builders did not really have a major influence upon the political transformation of the city. Instead, there were constant government and intellectual efforts in denouncing and abolishing the "segmentary characteristic" of popular religious cults and their rituals throughout the 20th century.

In the late imperial times, territorial cults and festivals were treated as relatively minor problems in local society by the officialdom. Comparatively, from the "dawn" of the 20th century until the 1990s, similar problems have been viewed as serious. Not long after the city was "liberated" in 1949, systematic inquiries were conducted under the leadership of the Party commission and the newly established municipal government. In the reports of investigation, the "chaotic" and "mad" aspects of *pujing* are emphasized to an extreme extent; the social roots of *pujing* problems were highlighted for purposes of their elimination (e.g., Wu 1985 [reprint]; Ke 1985 [reprint]). A report carried in the *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) on 13 December 1989 summarizes for us the 20th-century Chinese state's views for abolishing "superstition":

The government in the city of Quanzhou, Fujian province, has tightly controlled the out-of-date harmful customs of *pudu* festivals and gained the achievement of saving RMB300 million in the past three years.

Pudu is an old and feudal kind of custom popular in southern Fujian ... Every year, in the high summer, local households used to engage themselves in preparing rich feasts to offer to ghosts ... The custom was once eliminated in the earlier phase of New China. However, recently, it was revived and the revival has become more and more dramatic. Festivals induced expenditures to cover feasts and firecrackers. The annual total expenditure on *pudu* reaches as much as RMB100 million. Accompanying the festivals, there are phenomena of alcoholism, violence, and gambling, which have harmful effects on societal stability ...

Since 1986, to implement the central committee's policy of socialist spiritual civilization, the Quanzhou municipal government has carried out measures to prevent *pudu* activities from taking place. It has organized propaganda and

inspection teams that have been actively involved in advocating policy and educating the masses in all streets and villages before the beginning of each festival.

[My translation]

Obviously, here "wastefulness" of *pudu* as depicted in the report in a persuasive tone has to do with "societal stability" (*shehui wending*), which is the main issue that the state is really concerned with. The report also describes several forms of the harm of *pudu* to public order — alcoholism, violence, and gambling. I can agree with the argument that *pudu* and other *pujing*-centered festivals are like "carnivals" (*kuanghuan*) that wound the state-projected social order.⁶ However, the reason why such "carnivals" have been constantly "nationalized" by the Party-state's "throat and tongue" (*houshe*) as serious problems can be better explained by the failure of the anti-superstitious campaigns conducted by the teams of propaganda, persuasion, and inspection.

The *Remmin Ribao* report is right in saying that "the custom was once eliminated in the earlier phase of New China," and recently it was "revived and the revival has become more and more dramatic." In the past two decades, I have personally witnessed the gradual process of "superstitious" revival in Quanzhou. From the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s, I noticed the quiet return of many popular religious practices. In the early 1980s, *pudu* festivals had not yet gone public. They were celebrated at home with rotational feasts among relatives and friends, which conformed to the rhythms of territorial rotations in the late Qing and the Republican era. Although hardly any *pujing* temples were reconstructed, I sometimes saw individuals burning incense at the ruins of temple sites.⁷

By the time of my return in 1990, most *pujing* temples had been rebuilt. Public festivals at these temples had also been fully revived. Operatic and Taoist ritual performances which I did not see occurring at temples in the early 1980s had, by the late 1980s, turned out to be a major part of the cultural landscape of the city. The amount of money donated to temple festivals had increased to such a scale that even the formal theatrical troupes controlled, but poorly financed, by the Bureau of Culture had become interested in making money from "superstitious activities."

From 1994 to 1999, I visited Quanzhou several times. Each time, I saw an increase of festivities in the city. Now, firecrackers have been banned and the Party boss of the city, who has been aptly called a "Doctor of Architectural Destruction" (Pohuai Jianzhu Boshi) by disoriented "masses"

(*qunzhong*), has implemented an urban reform project. The old houses along the main streets have been torn down and new buildings with a pretentious traditional look have been constructed. Many old *pujing* temples are destroyed in the course of the government's planned urban reform process. However, we now see most *pujing* have new temples that are larger and better looking. They are the fruit of successful negotiations between *pujing* neighborhood residents and real estate developers who were contracted to build the new street blocks. A friend, the president of a construction group, told me, "to do this kind of business [street block rebuilding] is naturally profitable, but it is also rather difficult." Not only does he have to give the government officials bribes, but he also has to compromise to *pujing* groups who normally would demand the return of their local temples, which to him, means spending some extra money.

In part of his wonderful work on cultural heritage, David Lowenthal (1998) critiques "heritage apes scholarship" for seeking to persuade people to believe in the legacy that they have created and "proved." He argues that this special kind of scholarship has done this "all in vain" for a number of reasons. One of these reasons, he points out, is the fact that "adherents of rival heritages simultaneously construct versions that are equally well-grounded (and equally spurious)" (Lowenthal 1998: 249–55). What Lowenthal argues is also true of Quanzhou.

In the course of reconstructing their *pujing* heritages, "superstitious activists" in the city have resorted to the method of "imitation." The "heritage apes scholarship" in the Bureau of Culture has applied "factoids and footnotes" — to use Lowenthal's words again — to prove the authenticity of its re-enhanced tradition. Here, historic relations with the outside world and the nation are emphasized. Once such a tactic of discourse has been invented, it is available to the "broad masses" (*guangda qunzhong*). "Superstitious masses" that belong to the rebuilt *pujing* temples often claim that their temples are as old as the grand temples that the government protects.⁸ So, "Why couldn't we rebuild them?" The question was most frequently posed to those who doubt the authenticity of what the Bureau of Culture and other government agencies have called the "places of superstitious activities" (*mixin huodong changsuo*).

Apart from authentication, connection between *pujing* temples and overseas Chinese community has been one other major excuse that "adherents of rival heritages" have often used to persuade officials to recognize the historic values of their heritages. For example, the Huangqiao Ciji Gong (Huangqiao Temple of the God Who Protects Life) has now gained

official recognition as a historically valuable territorial temple, thanks to its connection with a charitable overseas Chinese family. Like many other *pu*ing temples, Huagiao Ciji Gong was established on the basis of a Ming Dynasty official community hall. In the late Qing, an emigrant who belonged to the *pu* returned home and established a charitable medical service within the temple. In the late 1980s, her descendants who still live in Singapore expressed the strong hope to revive their family tradition of medical charity. They gained support from the United Front Department of the Party Commission that authorized the refurbishment of the temple and its medical service. The temple now serves as a joint-venture charity organization and a *pu* territorial cult temple. This model was, however, imitated by another Baosheng Dadi temple in the northern part of the city, which could not actually find a strong overseas Chinese connection but insisted that it had one.⁹

Conclusion: "Great Tradition" and Its Enemy

In Quanzhou, what may be called "identity politics" is deeply embedded in a complex process of modern civilization that paradoxically entertains, to use Jenner's (1994) words, the "tyranny of history." The new notion of culture that the Bureau of Culture seeks to designate and promote stems from the project that is aimed at "letting Quanzhou go to the world." However, by also trying to "let the world come to Quanzhou," the government agency creates a mode of cultural production that resembles that of the late imperial civilization (*jiaohua*) in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The observation that "many other forces for backwardness in the culture have been strengthened" (Jenner 1994: 263) could be explained within this same frame of the irony of modern civilization.

In the social anthropological studies of Chinese culture that I myself undertake, efforts have been made to accommodate fieldwork and archival findings in local cultural settings to the "great tradition" of Chinese civilization. In the late 1930s and 1940s, when the first generation of native Chinese anthropologists went to the West to write up their "community studies," Robert Redfield's distinction between "great" and "little traditions" was not yet fully developed. Nonetheless, as Edmund Leach (1982: 27) notes in his *Social Anthropology*, four core members of this group were already thinking of representing China by doing fieldwork in small places and about "little traditions."

Deriving his observation from a Kaixiangong village, Fei Xiaotong

(1939) was treating the place as a typical example of how "peasant life in China" changed. Writing in the style of the experimental ethnographic novel, Lin Yueh-hwa (1947) sought to deploy Chinese lives in a culturally peculiar world of geomancy and lineage. Treating a Chinese place like an African tribe, Martin Yang (1945) demonstrated a total surrender of China to the ethnology of archaic social mode. Turning a Bai ethnic minority township into a typical place of Chinese ancestral worship, Francis L. K. Hsu (1949) placed his image of China under "the ancestral shadow." Exemplifying Fei Xiaotong a little from his criticism in consideration of his loyalty to the functionalist school of anthropology, Leach (1982: 122-48) denounces such efforts, of their failures to decipher a place as a holistic cosmology, and/or a "functionally related whole (and 'in its own right')." "

However, 20 years before Leach, Maurice Freedman (1963) had written of a "Chinese phase in social anthropology." Trying to escape from the trap of the "bifurcated histories" (Duara 1995) of both sinological great traditions of "oriental despotism" and the African model of segmentation (Wang 1997: 65-111), Freedman was able to become self-reflexive of his life work about "Chinese religion." Past ethnographies of China, as Freedman saw it, were full of pitfalls and weaknesses when concerning themselves only with small places and not being enlightened by classic traditions of the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Rites*. By way of a mutation of J. J. M. de Groot's top-down model of the *Book of Rites* and Marcel Granet's bottom-up model of the *Book of Odes*, Freedman (1974) was looking at something that he thought would allow an anthropology of civilization to emerge in the theoretical frontiers of anthropology.

Political scientists included in their ethnographic descriptions their concerns about political change (e.g., Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1992; Madsen 1984). Social anthropologists working in the field in the 1970s and 1980s engaged themselves somewhat differently in an ambitious effort to discover what Freedman saw as the "Chinese essence" from the bottom up again. The diversity of peasant cultures in different localities was described in accordance with Freedman's A-Z model of variation of the lineage (Pasternak 1972) or in accordance with hermeneutics through and about social stratification (Weller 1987). Nonetheless, the ambition to discover a peculiarly Chinese cultural logic of gods, ancestors, and ghosts dominated many of the works of anthropologists (e.g., Wolf 1974; Ahern 1981; Sangren 1984, 1987).

As one of the fruits of this ambitious effort, the project of Robert Redfield (1941), which had rarely been mentioned before the 1970s in

Chinese anthropology, had become by the 1980s a prime object of critique. Writing in the new phase of Chinese anthropology, Catherine Bell and P. Steven Sangren have applied the outcomes of Chinese anthropology to work out a reflection on the notorious dichotomy of great/little traditions. They have done so paradoxically with reference to the conjunction of the Chinese elite (Bell 1989) and to place-linking pilgrimages (Sangren 1984). Meanwhile, as we should also note, the Gramscian idea of hegemony had caught a great deal of attention among the core researchers of "Chinese folk religion [or religions, as it is sometimes called]" (Gates and Weller 1987).

A notion of a unified religion in China implicates, though in various ways, a notion of unified ethnicity (Feuchtwang 1991), which ironically only exists as an "imperial metaphor" (Feuchtwang 1992). This much said, the enemy of a "great tradition" is simply within this great tradition itself. Heterodox derivatives of a supposed singular "historical metaphor" are always possible, and such heterodox versions could convey an alternative order by turning the kingly to the demonic and vice versa (Feuchtwang 1992).

It is in the quest for an alternative culture that recently Myron Cohen (1991) has called for "the peripheralization of traditional [Chinese] identity," whereby we are somehow pushed toward a recognition of the heterodoxy as the center of the Chinese nation and culture. Nonetheless, to me, this could hardly mean that anthropologists who work in small communities should entirely follow Leach's suggestion that their places should be constructed into cosmological or political system models to become sufficiently anthropological or representative. Dynastic projects of absorbing heritages either from local popular culture (Watson 1985) or from a ready-made model of the middle-realm of philosophical elitism (Zito 1997) have formed an important part of the "imperial metaphor" which is equally productive in the making of heterodoxies.

However, social anthropologists do not live in the world of the "late imperial China," despite the fact that studies of such a world may shed light on our conceptions of what is called "the new" by the new state. Extending our scope to include a "world system," the transmission of modernity and its consequential "globalization" has been a broadcast epoch. Studies, the number of which is too large to be indicated here, have shown that such a world system of modernity is not quite complete. As a consequence of modernity, a historicity that entirely breaks with history has come about in human "universal knowledge" and practice (Giddens 1990). Ironically,

talks of devils, that could only be rediscovered in "traditional societies" as anthropologists used to think, have returned to Anglo-American societies, the centers of modernity's cultural diffusion (La Fontaine 1998). Communication technology has facilitated the expansion of folk culture across the horizons of temporality and space (Bausinger 1990). While linear historians of all kinds are struggling to trace the historical trajectory of cultural breakthroughs, they are ironically also inventing everything from Disneyland to the Holocaust Museum, which highlights the value of our "heritages" (Lowenthal 1998).

Scholars of Chinese culture have for long blamed post-May Fourth Movement Chinese intellectuals and the political mainstream for their peculiar minds of forgetting. "The Chinese had a traditional system" that "was a total configuration that linked the people to the nation ... linked the people to the elite." Myron Cohen thus continues in his informal remarks to the conference on the "Meaning of Being Chinese Today," "this was destroyed by the same individuals who created modern Chinese nationalism, which has had the ironic effect of not providing a replacement" (cited in Tu 1991: 63). It seems important for Chinese intellectuals to be self-reflexive, because it sounds true that they are responsible for introducing a radical enlightenment after having been converted to the religion of modernity. Ironic as it is, anthropological investigations carried out in the 1990s have demonstrated the usefulness of the conception of persisting culture. Observations of the flow of gifts and the art of *guanxi* (human relations) lead us to believe in the vitality of traditional sociality or what we call "culture of the people" in the new age of socialist state capitalism (Yang 1994; Yan 1996). Meanwhile, Jing Jun, an anthropologist who has focused on the effect of the state-built and state-owned hydroelectric dams in the northwestern China, has not seen the triumph of the project. He thus shifted his attention to the villagers' memorial movement of "locality repossession," which during his fieldwork turned out to be more elaborate than the hydroelectric projection of the future (Jing 1999).

Looking "up" to the mainstream, both the official discourse of culture and the scholarly Chinese cultural studies would highly value the spirituality of foreign sinologists (including the anthropologist Maurice Freedman) who have taught how to discover a Chinese cultural essence. Studies of Chinese culture within China have only been allowed after the collapse of the "Gang of Four"; but they have by now developed significant arguments that would have shocked Mao Zedong if he were to hear them. Confucius as sage-kingship and neo-Confucianism form the core pursuits of a young

generation of liberal intellectuals who seek to find capitalist spirit and democratic culture in native Chinese "high" religious philosophy (but not popular religion).¹⁰

To a great extent, what I have learned from studying Quanzhou has its links to the grand scenarios of culture. The two or more versions of heritage that I presented in the bulk of this article are not intended to revitalize the distinction between "great and little traditions." It admits the distinction only when it helps us illuminate a contesting confusion of histories. By looking at the scales of architecture and at the spectacles of performances, we find official symbols to be greater than what may be termed "folk culture" ("superstitious festivals" in this case). The history that the Bureau of Culture is trying to make also resembles the "great tradition" that Redfield was advocating. Being aimed at driving local society toward a linear history of regional and, ultimately, national as well as transnational progress (now viewed as economic development in China), such a "great tradition" does look a lot more cosmopolitan than the local celebrations. However, it is "sadly," as some officials say, not the only tradition, and the cultures (or perhaps the "lesser cultures" or "non-cultures") of superstition "dirty the face of socialism" by setting up obstacles to its realization of the intended break-with-history history.

Robert Redfield (1941: 360) was looking forward to seeing "the extension of modern Euro-American ways into old societies." In contrast, ambivalence has been widely felt among the cultural cadres in Quanzhou. While being glorified by the tradition that they invented, officials in the Bureau of Culture also have a feeling of "sadness" (*bei'ai*). As one of them said, "after more than 40 years of cultural reconstruction, we still see backward masses who tie themselves to superstition and by so doing become indifferent to the real culture of the Bureau of Culture." As I have tried to point out here, such a sense of "sadness" has sprung less from "social reality" itself than from the official ignorance of the fact that both "great and little traditions" are based upon a "time-before."

Anthropological researchers of culture are indeed enabled by our discipline to look at the peripheries of societies and nations as their cores. Living and working with local persons and materials, I have, to use a Chinese concept, "sensed" (*tihui*) the centrality of the natives' points of view of ordinary people and the micro-cosmology of work units of the state apparatus. However, the sense of centrality on the margin does not induce a requirement to find a unitary essence in the cultures that we study; nor does it require us to adopt the tactic of treating popular little tradition as the

great one (and attempting to centralize it). What I have found to be a demand is not to pose the natives' points of view against foreign imperialism but is the necessity to "articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs modernity" (Bhabha 1990: 294) within my home country.

Almost a century ago, the first generation of modern Chinese nationalists engaged themselves in searching for a modern state for the old "central kingdom" (*zhongguo*). Then, these ancestors of revolution were faced with a dilemma. Most of them chose to become Republicans instead of adopting a constitutional monarchist line of reform like Yuan Shikai did. To build a republic, emperors were forced to leave the Forbidden City. Unlike the old peasant rebels, the new Chinese politicians refused (most of the time pretentiously) to become new emperors, perhaps because they held the revolutionary faith that "the people" (*renmin*) should be the collective master of the country. Yet, it was the large group that was called *renmin* that induced a great suspicion among the nationalists. "The people" were like "a dish of loose sand" (*yipan sansha*). There was a long tradition of familism among them. Belonging to the family, the extended family, the lineage, and native place was the sense of identity prevalent among ordinary people. Such kind of identity represented not simply a difficulty for national mobilization; it was in addition an ideological obstacle or an imagined enemy to the new project of state-builders and to the formation of "state-national race" (*guozu*), to use Sun Yat-sen's term.¹¹

For the entire 20th century, mass mobilization campaigns known as *yundong* have dominated the national politics of China. Each campaign has its distinctive call and mode of motion. However, the campaigns have a common target, which is the people or the masses. The people are like the uncooked barbarians of the imperial phase. Moved by the callings of campaigns, they may become, like cooked barbarians, the dynamics of civilization. Remaining as uncookable "hard rocks" (*shitou*) or "uncraftable rotten trees" (*xiumu*) to the progressive cultural apparatus of the state, they may just push the present into the past and reproduce the "tyranny of history" in China. So, what we have observed on the economically advanced coastal region is in fact two or more manifestations of the "tyranny of history." The *yundong* culture of 20th-century China resembles that of the late imperial Chinese civilizing (*jiaohua*) project, despite the fact that it has always been described as a historical breakthrough.¹² The enemy — whether imagined or real — of the "great tradition" invented by the Bureau of Culture of Quanzhou is the uncookable "hard rocks" of local bonds, which form an order of chaos and endanger the delocalizing nation-state.

What has just been said does not lead to the argument that the particular historical heritages of Quanzhou can easily be distinguished into localist and supra-localist traditions. In fact, throughout the imperial dynasties until the late 20th century, local bonds in this area have not simply meant territorially confined relationships. Demographic and cultural mobility within and beyond the confines of China have been demonstrated to be one of their core aspects. To a great extent, the open-door policy in the last two decades has relied heavily on the overseas Chinese communities, whose "predestined ties" in history have been initially reconnected to China through the prohibited lineage and territorial bonds and their folklore. The despotic character of the "great tradition" is thus manifested in the way in which it refuses to render recognition to what it has treated as its own "cultural capital."

Notes

1. Much of the materials amassed during the period are included in my thesis (Wang 1993) and two articles (Wang 1994, 1995). With regard to the history and cultural change of Quanzhou, I have published a book (Wang 1999). My fieldwork was made possible by the British Council, London University Central Research Fund, and a Postgraduate Research Award from SOAS. I am grateful to these institutions as well as to those who helped with my studies in London and with my fieldwork in Quanzhou. I am grateful to Mr. Chen, the former Director of the Bureau of Culture of Quanzhou, who offered his help. Nevertheless, my view of culture is quite different from his.
2. Field researchers in other parts of southeast China have observed similar phenomenon. For example, see Dean (1993) and Yang (1996).
3. I interviewed the leader of the movement Mr. Lu, who was still alive in 1991.
4. This is from a personal communication.
5. Richard Pearson, Li Min, and Li Guo (1999) have furnished a comprehensive survey of these temple relics.
6. In fact, Duara (1995: 236) has argued that Chinese carnivals such as that of *gelaohui* are the "signs of the dispersed real" which fail the national narrative of linear history.
7. It was widely known that these sites were deserted. Private households, including those of the officials, were too scared of the spirits of gods and demons to occupy the places. Thus, only a handful of small factories dared to take these places for their use. Tales were also widespread about the revenge that gods might impose upon those who transgressed or "wounded" (*shang*) the walls and floors of the temples. For example, a local leader in a *pu* in south

- Quanzhou was said to have died of cancer after having torn down a wall of a small temple.
8. In the interesting article "Villagers and Popular Resistance in Contemporary China," Li Lianjiang and Kevin J. O'Brien (1996) examine three possible groupings of popular attitudes toward policy in the countryside. These include "complain villagers" (*shunmin*), "recalcitrants" (*din gzhiu*), and "policy-based resisters" (*diamin*) who have reacted quite differently in their encounters with policy implementation teams. In the local resistance to government's urban reform project, these three groupings of ordinary residents can also be found. However, I have found that the difference between popular compliance and opposition has not influenced the general outcome, the revival of "superstition."
 9. In addition to the problem of popular "imitation," today, officials working in the sphere of culture in Quanzhou are faced with several other difficult problems. It seems to be a tendency for the *pujing* system to merge with the semi-government organization of residents' committees (*jiweihui*). Originally, *pujing* spatial divisions corresponded with those of *jiweihui*, which were in effect invented in the early 1950s as replacements of the Republican place organization system, modeled on the Ming and Qing *pujing* system. Since the establishment of *jiweihui* in the 1950s (once renamed rural communes and brigade in Mao's time), *pujing* has been defined and treated in official discourse and political practice as something reactionary to the new local administration system. However, nowadays, those who work in the *jiweihui* are normally those who notify local households about the happenings of *pujing* temples and dates of *pu du* territorial rotation. Furthermore, temple areas with better economic conditions tend to attract local historians and archaeologists to write historical records for their temples and deities. In fact, the Quanzhou Taoist Culture Research Society has accepted several such requests, and its informal journal *Taoist Culture in Quanzhou* has published a number of articles based on privately funded projects. Moreover, the official opera troupes under the control and finance of the Bureau of Culture are now benefiting financially by performing for "places of superstitious activities."
 10. I have critically outlined schools of Chinese cultural studies that have developed since the late 1990s (Wang 2000).
 11. The concept "the people" has been treated in Chinese studies mainly as "peasantry," and in recent discussions, we see interesting differences between two ways of treating the people's conception of emperorship. Faure (1999) seems to argue that a concept of the emperor exists in the peasant Chinese conception of society. Anagnost (1987) in her earlier discussion describes instead a dramatic performance of the emperor as opposition to the contemporary state politics of culture.
 12. Of course we should try to suggest that *jiaohua* was a kind of nativist

movement aimed at creating a modern Chinese national citizenship; but it was obviously intended as a project of "universal knowledge" (Gellner 1983) that inspired modern Chinese self-consciousness of a "universal Chinese culture."

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