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LESSONS (UN)LEARNED: TEN REFLECTIONS ON TWENTY YEARS OF FIELDWORK IN THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Lessons (Un)Learned:
Ten reflections on twenty years of fieldwork in the Peoples Republic of China

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Abstract

This paper attempts to distill ten lessons learned over the last 20 years of field research in China. It highlights the particularities of doing fieldwork in the Chinese setting and addresses various issues that are special to anthropology of and in China, ranging from practical questions about doing fieldwork to disputes over the actual subject of research within Chinese studies (e.g. China/Taiwan; Han/minorities; folk religion/Islam). The author offers a critical review of studies on Chinese society, conducted both by Western and Chinese scholars and traces the changing role of anthropology over the last two decades in China. In addition, the paper challenges the idea that one should work in one site, with one people, on one problem, over a specific period of time and highlights the benefits of taking a multi-sited research approach. The essay further seeks to question the notion of Han heterogeneity and suggests instead that China studies need a re-location.

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Introduction

1. Don't do multi-sited research
2. Don't work in China
3. Don't work on minorities
4. Don't work on Muslims
5. Don't work on the Hui
6. Don't write about gender, ethnicity, or religion
7. Don't work with "development" organizations
8. Don't publish in the popular press or speak to reporters
9. Don't speak to Chinese or American government officials
10. You might speak, but absolutely do not write about any one of these lessons

Inspired by perhaps too many of David Letterman's "top-10" lists,[2] I have attempted in this paper to distill ten lessons learned over the last 20 years of field research in China. You will (almost) never find these so-called "lessons" in any anthropological text or "how-to" manual about ethnographic practice in China or anywhere else. Nevertheless, I suggest they are implicit/complicit in many of the courses, conversations, and colloquia in which I have been engaged. Spanning a rather curious transitional period between structuralist, post-structuralist, and post-post-structuralist anthropological theory, my work was influenced by many of these rather contradictory and generally un-spoken maxims. Let me now list the lessons (un)learned again, this time with some of the implicit assumptions of the maxims:

1. Don't do multi-sited research *(work "on" one village, "commune", or lineage)*
2. Don't work in China *(work in Taiwan, where you can pretty much do what you want)*
3. Don't work on minorities *(work on the Han, the "real" Chinese)*
4. Don't work on Muslims *(work on "folk religion", or at least Buddhists)*
5. Don't work on the Hui *(work on "real" Muslims, who at least have their own language)*
6. Don't write about gender, ethnicity, or religion *(work on "white male" type subjects – the "hard" subjects: economy, social structure, political formation)*
7. Don't work with "development" organizations *(maintain non-interventionism)*
8. Don't publish in the popular press or speak to reporters *(that will only get you in trouble)*
9. Don't speak to Chinese or American government officials *(they'll really get you in trouble)*
10. Don't write or speak about any one of these lessons *(these are unwritten lessons, and most "China anthropologists" will deny them or say they've never heard of such a thing)*

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[2] David Letterman, and his main competitor, Jay Leno, host the two most popular late-night talk shows on US television, usually airing at 11:30 pm, five nights a week. "The Late Show with David Letterman" which airs on NBC from New York, and vies with Leno's ABC network show which airs from Los Angeles, for most viewer ratings. Letterman is famous for including a "top ten" list on each show, a daily listing of which can be viewed at: http://www.cbs.com/latenight/lateshow/top_ten/.

I date my initial "fieldwork in China" to 1982 when I somewhat accidentally stepped into a mosque in the Haidian district near Beijing University, where I was in a Mandarin course after 5 years of formal Chinese language study in the US (I will not date the beginnings of my research on China with a 3 month stay in Hong Kong in 1974, for many of the reasons already listed above). Since 1982, I have returned to China every year, sometimes several times a year – in 2001 I visited Xinjiang 5 times and Beijing 8 times – and carried out a number of projects, both short and long-term (the longest was the 2 years between 1983-85, with a 3 week summer break, followed by 6 months in 1985-6, and successively by 1-3 month trips, with an average visit of 1 week per trip, except for last year, when I spent 2 six-week periods in China mostly in Xinjiang). I have also been able to revisit each of the initial "sites" of my 1983-85 period at least once, and carried out longer-term follow-up projects for 1-6 months in Fujian, Beijing, Gansu, and Xinjiang. Despite this frequent and long-term work in China, it has been reported to me by my some of my closer colleagues that occasionally when my name has come up, the following statements have been made: "oh, Dru, he's not a China anthropologist", "he no longer works in China", "doesn't he only work on 'minorities'?", "he doesn't really write about China", "is he an anthropologist?" – I could go on. This paper is written not out of a desire to correct those perceptions, but to try to understand them. Indeed, I take some pride in not being easily identified as a "China anthropologist". I think the origins of these kinds of characterizations have much to do with my violating many of the lessons which I have attempted to describe above – one lesson every other year.

Lesson One: Don't do multi-sited research

This maxim can be traced to the now classic field studies, best characterized by British social anthropology, that in the structuralist tradition attempted to carry out extensive analyses of one community, generally a village, that was as inclusive as possible of every possible aspect of social life. In China anthropology, this was generally translated to mean that any single village, commune, or lineage could be studied as an abstraction to the "whole" of Chinese society in general. To demonstrate how thoroughly and repeatedly I have violated this lesson, let me describe my most recent project in Western China and Central Asia. Last Spring I began the first season of a 3-year project funded mostly from the Ford Foundation, Beijing office, examining "the culture of underdevelopment" among three nomadic and formerly nomadic peoples on the borders of Western Xinjiang. The study seeks to establish a socioeconomic baseline of three groups (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik) with three modes of subsistence

(nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentarized). Coordinated by three Chinese anthropologists (a Hui scholar of the Uyghur, a Han scholar of the Kazakh, and a Kazakh scholar of nomadic pre-Islamic religious history), with myself as an "advisor", we have employed 22 undergraduate students from several different institutions in Xinjiang to carry out the initial survey. Last season they surveyed 3125 households and I was able to follow-up on sites among the Tajik in Tashkurgan (near the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan) as well as Kazakh areas near Yili in the Tianshan Mountains. Basic surveys will be completed this spring, and over the summer and fall we hope to do follow-up interviews with herders and local leaders (including Imams, teachers, and government officials) to ascertain the problems associated with a government policy that is attempting to sedentarize the nomadic and semi-nomadic groups in order to alleviate their poverty. Taking inspiration from James Scott's (1999) recent work, *Seeing Like a State*, the eventual plan of the project is to compare similar transformations among Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks in their own new nation-states across the border in Central Asia, and develop some ideas about sedentarization, the state, and "nomadology" in the globalized borderlands between China and Central Asia. This project is affiliated with a "Collaborative Research Network" under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies that has related groups working in Russia (led by Ron Suny), Southeast Asia (led by James Scott), and Europe (led by Peter Sahlins), seeking to look at ways state projects of "identification" have interacted with vernacular interpretations to produce new kinds of communal relations between hill and valley, settled and transhumant, urban and rural. The overall project is introduced on the following website: http://www.acls.org/ls-affil.htm. Each of the Chinese co-leaders of the project have been able to meet with the participants and leaders of the other projects in order to compare and contrast state and vernacular "identifications" in China, Russia, Southeast Asia, and Europe (mostly colonial France). In Scott's words, the China project is most concerned with the issue of why "certain schemes to improve the human condition" (in this case that of Muslim minorities in Western China) "have failed". Surprisingly, we found through personal communication that Chinese government officials have in general been quite interested in our findings and have been rather supportive of the project.

This project transgresses lessons 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Most violated is the idea that one should work in one site, with one people, or at least problem, over a specific period of time. By working with three peoples, the projects seeks to be less focused on the nation-state, than on the issues facing the peoples caught between two or more nation-states. Indeed, we chose these three peoples in China specifically because they are all related to the large new

nation-states and majority nationalities across the border in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).

Lesson Two: Don't work in China

This lesson derives from well-meaning advice given to me when I was first starting out as an anthropology graduate student in 1981 when it was thought to be quite difficult if not impossible to carry out "successful" field research in the People's Republic of China. Instead, I was encouraged to work in Taiwan. Here, it was thought, one could work in a "traditional Chinese village" and draw conclusions that could be abstracted to Chinese society "as a whole". This rather Durkheimian notion is related, I believe, to the elementalist belief that classical long-term fieldwork should be modeled on those situations where the ethnographer is able to exercise maximum possible control over lifestyle and environment in order to get to the very basic structures of society without outside interference. Geertz reminded us that "Being There" for the anthropologist in the past involved

> "at the minimum hardly more than a travel booking and permission to land; a willingness to endure a certain amount of loneliness, invasions of privacy, and physical discomfort; a relaxed way with odd growths and unexplained fevers; a capacity to stand still for artistic insults, and the sort of patience that can support an endless search for invisible needles in infinite haystacks." (Geertz 1988: 23-4)

Having endured these "minimal" difficulties, the anthropologist was ideally left to do what he or she wanted. The thought of government employees looking over one's shoulder, living in state-owned institutions or hotels, restricted access to one's informants, and having to obtain multiple bureaucratic applications and approvals (such as I had to go through numerous times in China, and especially in Xinjiang), is distasteful, if not completely unacceptable, to most anthropologists. As a result, modern ethnographers have tended to avoid those places where such restrictions apply, favoring fieldwork where they could for the most part pitch their tent with impunity. It is no surprise that many of these field sites are in countries closely tied to Western economic and political interests (see Gough 1967: 12-27; Wax 1983).

Western field research in China basically ground to a halt at the end of the Second World War with the decline of the notion of Western "extra-territoriality" – a right to immunity from Chinese prosecution that foreigners generally possessed to one degree or another since the Unequal Treaties were signed in the mid-nineteenth century. It became illegal to conduct field research in China without specific permission from the People's Republic, and for the most part few Westerners were granted it. Those that were allowed to conduct fieldwork were so

circumscribed and sympathetic to State policy that their works generally lacked the dispassionate stance thought necessary for ethnographic credibility (see Crook 1974).

Since 1949, field research (by Americans, not to the same extent of course for Canadians, Australians, and of course, Chinese) on Chinese communities was carried out primarily in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. There, due to international economic and power alliances, fieldwork could be conducted with the degree of autonomy deemed necessary by Western anthropologists. When I first proposed to conduct fieldwork in the PRC in 1981, it was feared that in China I might waste my time and then never be able to get a job. After writing a "solid" dissertation in Taiwan and obtaining an academic position, I was advised, I could afford to risk some short stints in China. I distinctly recall debating this issue with Joseph Bosco on a train from Beijing to Xi'an in 1982. We were arguing so heatedly that, when we had to raise our voices even higher due to passing through a tunnel, two of our teachers assisted by a few train employees (who could not understand a word of what we were saying) intervened to "break up the fight". They were shocked when we told them we were merely debating an intellectual argument about whether to do fieldwork in China or Taiwan. In the end, Joe went to Taiwan and I to China – I'm not sure either of us have come to any conclusions about who learned more about "Chinese society". Certainly the rise of Taiwanese scholarship would challenge notions that the essence of Chinese-ness can be found through studying Taiwan (see Rigger 2001, Hsieh 1998).

Lesson Three: Don't work on minorities

Related to lesson two, it was thought that if you could do work in China, you should spend time studying those who where thought to be "really Chinese", or at least, go somewhere like Taiwan or Hong Kong where you could study Chinese society "abroad". When I considered working on minorities, several warned that I would be putting my career in jeopardy. I was constantly reminded that since there were so few minorities in China ("less than seven percent of the population"), it would not be of any long term value to our understanding of Chinese society to do research on them. The head of a major Chinese studies center once said to me, "Why study the minorities? We still do not know enough about the Han." One of my students at the time mentioned that they were warned by a senior American sino-anthropologist in the spring of 1989 that one would never find a job if they studied minorities in China. Interestingly, this person switched to political science and is now a leading scholar on Taiwan. Even more interesting, since I received my Ph.D. in 1987, a large number of students and scholars

have devoted themselves to the study of "minorities" in China and have been very successful on the job market.

The issue of anthropological careers and the limitations placed on anthropological research by the academic industry is of paramount concern when we consider contemporary research in complex nations (Marcus 1986: 262-7). I discovered in China, however, what few sinologists could have predicted: it was precisely the work on the Han that was most restricted, and minority research was perhaps more possible, if not encouraged. Traditionally, it was Chinese anthropologists who, influenced by the British Social Anthropological tradition, worked mainly on minorities. In a classic division of labor, sociologists devoted themselves to the Han (see Guldin 1994). When Western anthropologists attempt to study the Han in China, it is not only bureaucratically awkward, I have also noticed a tangible resentment and conviction that anthropologists should study only "backward peoples". The Han, as the "vanguard of the proletariat", do not wish to be regarded or studied as such. Anthropology (*ren lei xue*) in China, until very recently has been almost exclusively limited to physical anthropology. Ethnography (*minzu xue*) was devoted to the study of minorities and it was generally carried out in the nationalities institutes and nationalities research centers for the Chinese Academy for Social Science (CASS), rather than in the universities. Yet, Western anthropologists who moved into the "minorities" studies field in China with such alacrity in many ways become complicit in this dichotomization.

Recently, this has changed dramatically in China as a result of a whole group of young Chinese anthropologists who have begun to push the bounds of traditional "ethnology" (*minzu xue*) and "anthropology". In his two-volume work, Professor Wang Jianmin (1997, 2000 with Zhang and Hu) at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing has attempted to outline this major paradigm shift. There has been an important effort to re-define the meaning of "*minzu*" (glossed generally in English as "nationality") from minority studies where the term formerly resided, to be extended to general anthropology. Most notably, Naran Bilik, an Inner Mongolian who was trained at the Nationalities University but who later worked under Caroline Humphrey at Cambridge University, has helped to transform the CASS Nationalities Institute (*Minzu yanjiu suo*) into the "Institute for Anthropology and Ethnology" (*Renleixue yu Minzu yanjiusuo*) and received a six-figure Ford Foundation grant to do it! Partly as a result of this new thinking, in the late 1990s, the "*Guojia Minzu Shiwu Weiyuanhui*" changed the English translation of its name from "State Commission for Nationality Affairs" to the "State Commission for Ethnic Affairs". Interestingly, Bulag Erdyn (personal communication 6 October 2003, Washington, DC), the Cambridge University-trained Inner Mongolian anthro-

pologist now teaching at Hunter College, City University of New York, has argued that se-mantic shift from the English translation of *minzu* from "nationality" to "ethnicity" indicates an effort by Chinese social scientists working for the state to divest minority nationalities from their claims to land and "autonomous" status. Conversely, Dr. Yang Shengmin, the Hui Muslim anthropologist and Dean of the School of Ethnology at the Central Nationalities University in Beijing, has argued that this is merely a reflection of the influence of American English and Social Anthropology on Chinese translations of *minzu*, and indicates a recognition of the broader meaning of the term (personal communication, 19 December 2003, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale). He indicated that there were no plans to re-translate the English title of the Central University of Nationalities to the Central Univeristy of Ethnic Groups (Chinese: *Zhongyang Minzu Daxue*). Importantly, in his recent edited collection, *An Ethnography of China*, Yang includes an important section on "Nationalities Still Unidentified", in which several short chapters discuss as yet unrecognized "*minzu*" such as the Sherpa, Khmer, Deng, and Baima (Yang and Ding, 2002: 435-38). I believe this is the first time that these "unidentified" groups have been referred to officially as *minzu*, though it is well-known that groups such as the Kucong in Yunnan, who have been trying to receive recognition for some years on their own as a separate *minzu* instead of being grouped as a member of the official Yellow Lahu *minzu*, merely take on the unofficial title of *minzu* and even open "Kucong Minzu Yuan" ("Kucong Ethnic Theme Parks", see Gladney 2004: 9-10, 39-47).

As David Arkush has so clearly documented in the life of China's senior social anthropologist, Fei Xiaotong,[3] it was sociology that in the late 1950s received the full brunt of the Maoist critique:

> It was said that bourgeois sociology had been progressive at first, when subverting feudalism, but had lost its revolutionary nature when the bourgeoisie became the ruling class. It had consistently supported the bourgeois capitalist order by justifying its social division, extolling social harmony, and generally depicting capitalist society as just and the highest stage of social development (Arkush 1981: 268).

Anthropology, on the other hand, was generally given approval due to its practical usefulness in understanding and incorporating the minorities:

> As for anthropology, it had served imperialism by providing information on primitive colonial peoples, that was used in controlling them. Firth's *Human Types*, which Fei had translated, was quoted to show that anthropologists provide this service knowingly: "Modern anthropology is practical (...). Colonial governments have known it is

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[3] In the contemporary PRC standard orthography, Fei's personal name is rendered "Xiaotong", but his earlier works were published when the Wade-Giles system still predominated, thus his name appeared as Fei Hsiao-tung.

important to use anthropology in dealing with aborigines" [Hu 1958]. Functionalism, it was said, had not been concerned with explaining origins or the history of systems but with pointing out functions, in order that colonial administrators could handle peoples more effectively (Arkush 1981: 269).

Ethnography and anthropology, though later criticized, were in general more protected than sociology as a tool of the State in dominating the minorities. In China, anthropology became the "people's anthropology" (Fei 1981), because it concerned itself exclusively with the cultural study of the minority peoples in order to assist their "development", generally ignoring such issues as political economy, social structure, religious authority and socioeconomic change. Western anthropologists often criticized Chinese anthropology for its attempts to use applied anthropological methods to transform and "develop" society (see Lesson 7 below).

As a result, in China when I introduced myself as an ethnographer studying minorities I generally was better received than when I said I was an anthropologist. Often, practicing a not-so-subtle art of deception, I would say that I was studying "nationality history" (*minzu lishi*) which was thought to be less nettlesome and political than contemporary ethnic studies (*minzu xue*). Since Western sociologists have been allowed back into China, they are expected to work among the Han, but many have found that, surprisingly enough, fieldwork among "minorities" may often be somewhat more feasible. My application to study "minorities" appeared to follow the contours of power within the Chinese social science tradition, and though still difficult, it met with less resistance.

I embed the term "minorities" in quotation marks here because I am still uncomfortable with the growing popularity of "minority" studies in China anthropology. Since my dissertation in 1987, a rash of publications, conferences, and research projects have indicated growing interest in ethnicity and minorities in China. However, I am still concerned that there is a general tendency in much of this scholarship to replicate the very portrayals of "minority" society that they seek to critique. Indeed, the very term, "minority peoples" and "periphery" studies suggest that understanding in China continues to accept the same dichotomies of majority/minority, center/periphery, civilized/uncivilized, and modern/primitive that I have in the past sought to question. This essay seeks to displace that dominant view, to suggest that China and China studies need serious dislocation. Drawing parallels to subaltern studies in South Asian scholarship and studies in cultural criticism, this essay seeks to ask why we have yet to accept studies of identity, ethnicity, and nationality as mainstream to our understanding of what defines Chinese society in general, not just China's "periphery" or minority peoples.

Another impetus for this review of lessons unlearned stems from a rather heated conversation over dinner during a Friday evening "China anthropologist" informal gathering at an an-

nual Association for Asian Studies meeting a few years back. I found myself sitting among some of the leading senior China anthropologists in academia when the discussion turned to the Han as a nationality, a *minzu*. I suggested that while I believed Chinese culture and civilization had a long history and many kinds of continuities (as well as serious discontinuities and ruptures), the Han as a "nationality" was a construct of twentieth century discourses of nationalism that had entered China via Japan in the late 19th century (see Hsieh 1998). Not only were these foreign "derivative discourses", but they displaced and intermingled with other more indigenous Chinese notions of identity like person (*ren*), people (*renmin*), place (*tudi*), family (*jia*), clan (*zu*), and locality *(ben di)*.

One anthropologist became so incensed at this idea that the volume of his disagreement actually caused one of the others present to relocate their seat to the other end of the table. I shall never forget his shouting in my ear: "The Han certainly are a *minzu*, a juggernaut, rolling over everyone in their path!" Another more senior scholar strenuously agreed, though less noisily, pointing out that China was a structurally and socially integrated society, with a long history of cultural and social unity. A group of younger anthropologists recently returned from their field research in China sat mute at the other end of table. Later, one of them came up to me and said, "I would have helped you out but there was no way to get a word in edgewise."

What would cause such vehemence from a semantic disagreement over the question of the Han as a "nationality" (*minzu*)? I was treated to yet another display of the importance of this issue when I presented a paper at a UNESCO-sponsored conference on the Maritime Silk Route in Quanzhou in February 1992. I once observed in a public gathering of Chinese and foreign scholars that Quanzhou was an extremely multi-cultural harbor city, known to Ibn Battutah as Zaytun and described in Polo's writings as the largest harbor in the world, maintaining a genealogical record of a large foreign presence in the region since the Southern Song (10th century), including a Muslim harbormaster Pu Shougeng under the Mongolian Yuan dynasty (12th to 13th centuries, see Fan Ke's 2001 excellent recent essay). This suggested that the people known today as Han (a category instituted by the Mongol Yuan administration, that included all northerners, even Koreans, but specifically excluded southerners, or *nanren*), who were thought to have been engaged in running Quanzhou city, should be considered as indicative of state categories of citizenship or residence in China, not cultural or ethnic uniformity. As Ong (1999) has indicated, these categories of citizenship in contemporary nation-states have become more flexible, and challenged by growing diasporic communities that maintain close ties to their imagined homelands. After I presented these more flexible

ideas of Han citizenship, one woman, a social scientist, stood up and, with tears literally streaming down her face, declared: "I am a Han nationality, I am nothing but a Han nationality" (*Wo shige Hanzu, wo jiu shige Han minzu*)! This vehemence was matched by a Hakka school teacher I once met on the streets of Fuzhou who shouted at me: "Even though we call ourselves in Hakka 'Tang people' (*Tang ren*), we are members of the Han nationality. Hakka are not members of the minority backward peoples!" (*luohou de shaoshu minzu*).

Clearly, being a minority in China is not something many Han wish to admit to, despite the fact that there have been a record number of reclassifications in recent years. But why should Western scholars become so worked up about this as well? Perhaps their own sense of China would be displaced, dislocated, or called into question by such an idea. It is difficult to imagine South Asian scholars becoming so committed to notions of Indian homogeneity (despite strong commitments to core philosophical and textual traditions), or discounting studies of Muslims, Christians, or other marginals as somehow less relevant to an understanding of Indian society. Perhaps it is the recognition of and tolerance for heterogeneity that has led to the influential impact of subaltern scholars in India (see Duara 1995: 6), and yet leading to almost no similar movement in China. The subaltern studies movement has drawn together a diverse group of South Asian scholars, including Giyatry Chakrovorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Homi Bhabha, Gyanandra Pandey, Shaid Amin, and Akhil Gupta, to name just a few, who share a common commitment to write post-colonialist studies of Indian society. In his introduction to the now classic 1988 Guha and Spivak collection, edited by Ranajit Guha, the first volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Edward Said noted: "hitherto Indian history had been written from a colonialist and elitist point of view, whereas a large part of Indian history had been made by the subaltern classes, and hence the need for a new historiography" (in Guha and Spivak 1988: v). Said continues:

> As an alternative discourse then, the work of the Subaltern scholars can be seen as an analogue of all those recent attempts in the West and throughout the rest of the world to articulate the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous groups – women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles, etc. (in Guha and Spivak 1988: vi).

In China, a full-fledged "subaltern scholarship" has yet to emerge. While there is a growing dissident and women's literature, particularly from Chinese intellectuals living abroad, clearly there is very little written from the perspective of minorities or other disadvantaged and dispossessed groups. Women's studies and the study of women in Chinese society began in the late 1980s to give voice to a wide range of opinion heretofore rarely heard (see Honig and

Hershatter 1988). These studies began to look at Chinese society through a multitude of voices, many of which have been suppressed or ignored. Recent works by the Inner Mongol anthropologist, Bulag Buradyn (1998), have begun to indicate a serious effort at understanding the historiography of ethnic identifications across nation-state boundaries. The Gilmartin, Hershatter, Rofel and White (1994) collection, *Engendering China*, was one of the earliest to open up a wide variety of perspectives on Chinese society, demonstrating that cultural constructions of gender influence not only how engendered subjects act in that society, but also how it is we see them. Rey Chow (1990) has argued that China itself becomes the gendered feminine other for the West, leading to a lack of interest in the workings of gender difference and articulations within that society, which I sought to examine in relation to Chinese film in an earlier essay (Gladney 1995). Again, homogenization of China, either as "woman" or as "mono-culturally Han" has led to the silencing of a wide variety of subaltern voices.

In their collection, *China Deconstructs*, Goodman and Segal (1994) sought to show how monolithic models of Chinese society are crumbling. Yet few of their chapters give voice to the peoples and subaltern subjects caught in the middle of that fragmentation. By employing the concept of "regionalism", this and other earlier studies continue to rely upon center-periphery models that downplay China's long-term social, cultural, and political diversity. There have been few studies giving voice to those subalterns who have independent histories and cultural memories that cry out for understanding on their own terms, rather than placed in a peripheral, sub-regional, or "sub-ethnic" position. Indeed, it was the notion of "regionalism" that led China scholars to dismiss studies of variety within the so-called Han population as "ethnicity" studies, but only regarded them as regional varieties on a greater Han Chinese theme.

Of course, due to political realities, critical scholarship still is produced largely from outside China, and this has yet to produce such a subaltern movement within China. In addition, it must be noted that few of the so-called "Subalterns" in South Asian scholarship themselves come from these classes, having benefited from a largely colonialist, Western, and elitist educational system. Nevertheless, by writing about such subjects and subjectivities (including minority groups, under-classes, and other marginalized communities), this group of scholars has forced a re-thinking of Indian studies, initiating a post-colonialist and post-orientalist scholarship. Similarly, it is hoped by focusing on these groups and the questions they raise, a subaltern critique might be furthered in China studies. For this paper, "subaltern subjects" are the very groups, individuals, and subjectivities that continue to be regarded as somehow less authentic, more peripheral, and farther removed from an accepted "core" Chinese tradition.

Perhaps more to the point, reluctance to advance the notion of Han heterogeneity might even call into question the generalizability of field studies conducted among Hakka in Taiwan or Fujianese in Southeast Asia (see Gladney 1996: 107-111). For the most part, Western scholarship on Chinese society until the 1980s had been conducted in regions under Western colonial and post-colonial influence or domination (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong, and parts of Southeast Asia). Indeed, most of the China anthropologists who confronted me at the Asian Studies conference dinner table had built their anthropological careers upon studies of "Chinese culture" from such places outside of "China proper". It behooved these studies, and their largely American and British funding agencies, to demonstrate that research on the "Chinese culture" in Thailand and Taiwan was just as relevant to understanding Chinese culture in mainland China as studies "in China" since *the Chinese were all the same*. Once China became more accessible to Western anthropologists, many scrambled to prove that what they had observed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia was just as "Chinese" as what they had found in China, or at least, was beginning to "re-emerge". Rarely did these studies pause to ask the question of what is meant by "China" and why people outside of China proper could be equally considered Chinese, just as those on its so-called peripheries, without reference to any essential qualities. Maurice Freedman in his 1969 address, "Why China?" (in Skinner 1979: 407-24), was one of the few China anthropologists to raise this question, but unfortunately subsequent scholars attempted to locate the essence of "Chinese-ness" in some reified trait or quality, such as lineage, locality, family, or religion, rather than seeing these practices in their great variety and localized contexts, both inside and outside of "China".

On the political front, the myth of Han cultural and racial homogeneity has been advanced by at least one leading China economist to explain why China will never break apart, unlike the former U.S.S.R. Nicholas R. Lardy, China economist at the Brookings Institute, has argued:

> While one can not rule out the possibility of China fragmenting into autonomous or quasi-autonomous regions, for several reasons the prospects for such disintegration seem low. Above all, China is not divided by historical, religious, racial, and other cleavages that have been so important in the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. China is populated overwhelmingly by those of the Han race (Lardy 1994: 25).

While Lardy does go on to stress the long-term contributions of central planning toward economic integration in China, I find it remarkable that an economist would offer such a cultural and even racist explanation for contemporary and future geo-political realities. Certainly "racial" similarity, if one admits to such a thing, has not helped Korea and Yemen get together, nor has it kept much of Eastern Europe from falling apart. Lardy's emphasis upon racial ho-

mogeneity, in the end, is not that different from Huntington's (1993) "civilizational" homogeneity. What is it that drives contemporary social theorists to posit homogeneity – cultural, civilizational, racial, or otherwise – as necessary to continuity? Is it perhaps due to the influence of the modern bounded nation-state in determining how scholars *and* politicians think about history, culture, and social organization? We must also remember that Sovietologists were equally pessimistic about the "Great Russian Empire" (Huntington's "Slavic-Orthodox civilization") from ever disbanding, but few offered such racialist explanations. Most "Sinologists" are equally skeptical that "Chinese civilization" could ever break apart in a similar process as the former Soviet Union.

Lessons Four and Five: Don't work on Muslims, and if so, don't work on the Hui

Since my book *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* appeared in 1991, I have begun to reflect on how much I have learned about Chinese society by a rather accidental encounter with a Hui Muslim in the small mosque in Haidian district in 1982. In *Muslim Chinese*, as Prasenjit Duara (1993: 644) noted in his review, I sought to "restructure the study of China inwards from the margins". The real issue now, it seems to me, is why Duara considered the Hui to be on the "margins"? Ostensibly about the people known as Hui, the book sought to challenge the way in which China and Chinese-ness were generally understood, privileged on a central tradition, a "core" culture, that tended to marginalize or peripheralize anything or anyone who did not fit that essential core. The Hui Muslim Chinese suggested that one could be an integral part of Chinese society and yet challenge many of our assumptions about that society itself. For that reason they and other so-called "minority" ethnics had generally been ignored by Western scholarship.

   My reflections on the question of ethnic identity in China were guided by a similar feeling of ambiguity as Michael Moerman experienced when he was confronted with the question: "Whom did you study in the field?" (Moerman 1965: 1215). After almost three years of field work in China when I worked on the Hui project, I experienced great difficulty in attempting to adequately answer this question. I went to China in the fall of 1983 to begin my formal study of the Hui, one of the 55 officially identified minority nationalities who are portrayed clearly in the government nationality publications as one nationality with a long and uninterrupted history in China. Unlike many of the other minority nationalities of China, the Hui are distinguished negatively: they generally do not have their own language, peculiar dress, literature, music, or the other cultural inventories by which more "colorful" minorities are por-

trayed. As one Hui ethnologist put it to me, "We Hui don't sing, we don't dance, but we're still ethnic!" How was I to find, let alone describe in classical ethnographic fashion, this people who supposedly lacked any special cultural characteristics?

When I arrived in Beijing I set out to carry out my rather narrowly defined original proposal: an in-depth social study of an urban Muslim community concentrated mainly in one neighborhood, with a city-wide population of over 200,000 Hui. Through the auspices of the Central Institute for Nationalities (now recognized and restructured as a University), as a visiting graduate student I was assigned a supervisoral committee with two Hui professors to oversee my research in Beijing and study at the Institute. It was not long, however, before my advisors and other Hui classmates at the Institute said that if I wanted to *really* understand the Hui I would have to travel to where they are "typical", such as, I was told, the Northwest. During my year of fieldwork on the Hui workers in Beijing city, I went on two trips through the Northwest and the Southeast. On a one-month research trip to Northwest China I followed the historic 1936 northwestern route of the Chinese ethnographer Fan Changjiang, recorded in his book *China's Northwest Corner* (*Zhongguode Xibeijiao*), and visited Hui communities in Inner Mongolia (Huhehot); Ningxia (Yinchuan, Wuzhong); Gansu (Lanzhou) and Shaanxi (Xi'an). In the Spring, I made a six week escorted trip to dispersed Hui communities in Southern and Southeastern China, including Shanghai, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing, Zhenjiang, Yangzhou, Jiaxing, Fuzhou, Quanzhou, Xiamen, and Guangzhou. The problem was that in all of these trips, as I traveled further, I found less and less that tied all of these diverse people's together into one ethnic group. With Moerman, the more I learned about them the less sure I became of who they *really* were.

I was allowed to renew another year, and through delicate and protracted bureaucratic negotiations managed to move to Ningxia, the Hui Autonomous Region in the rural Northwest. After ten months in Ningxia, I returned to the United States to begin the process affectionately known as "writing up". As this endeavor raised more questions than it answered, in the summer of 1986, I went back to China to do some follow-up and carry out further research on the Southeast Coast.

Given the maxim to avoid speaking with government officials, on formal research forays, I was often surprised to find that local authorities were sometimes quite helpful in allowing me to interview both well known "model" households as well as worker and farming households of average income. In addition to an occasional Hui scholar accompanying me on arranged visits to mosques and households, I was often accompanied by one, and once as many as five, cadres from the local Commission for Nationality Affairs (CNA), the United Front Bureau

(*Tongzhanbu*), or the Chinese Islamic Society (*Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Xiehui*). While these cadres were sometimes a hindrance to more casual unrestricted conversation, they often proved to be extremely knowledgeable and forthcoming about local conditions and policies, as well as helpful in providing the official stamp of approval on my research. I often revisited households alone on later occasions, sometimes several times. As far as I can tell, there was no "fall-out" or adverse consequences from any of these meetings.

As I did not have much control over whom I was able to interview during the more structured arranged meetings, I do not regard my earlier surveys as statistically significant or reliable for comparative analysis. However, the interview schedule informed many of the issues that I addressed at the time with regard to the diversity and unity of ethnoreligious identity among the Hui. It provided a useful framework on which to hang many of my questions regarding overriding issues with which Hui themselves are concerned: personal ethnohistory, changing socioeconomic conditions, religious knowledge and differentiation, and government policy.

Finally, and most importantly, in addition to these more formal, arranged interviews and research trips, I engaged wherever possible in informal "participant observation" in which I talked with local Hui regarding their ethnic background on an individual basis without accompaniment by any local officials or scholars. As I lived continuously in China for two years as a "foreign student", it was not difficult to spend almost all of my time with Hui. This, of course, was much easier when living in Beijing and Yinchuan than on the more intensive escorted survey trips. I was able, however, to make several individual trips without escort to various Hui centers, including Tibet, Yunnan and Hainan Island.

As most academics are fully aware, travel in China is generally tedious, troublesome and time consuming. The innumerable hours I spent on trains and buses – or waiting to buy tickets for them – provided ample opportunity to discuss Hui identity with fellow Han and Hui travelers. For this reason and personal preference, I always traveled in hard berth or seat (third and fourth class) and ate exclusively in Hui *qing zhen* restaurants. This last requirement became most difficult when traveling in southern China where Hui restaurants are less numerous, but it gave me an insider's view of the hardships imposed on a *qing zhen* lifestyle.

In Ningxia, I negotiated a research contract that guaranteed unrestricted and unescorted individual informal access to Hui households in Yinchuan city and two nearby Hui villages (Luojiazhuang and Najiahu). This was cleared with city and village officials – at one point while riding through the countryside on my bicycle I even heard an official open air radio broadcast on the local loudspeaker system explaining my research project and purpose to

workers busy with the fall harvest. My presence as among the only Americans to live long term in Ningxia since 1949 was a source of interest and concern to residents and officials throughout the Region. Due to restrictions on foreign researchers in China, I never lived independently in a peasant home, though I stayed at length in the village retirement unit in Na Homestead. In Ningxia, residence was in the Chinese faculty building of Ningxia Educational College (*Ningxia Jiaoyu Xueyuan*). Fortunately, the college itself was located on the land of the Luo Family Village (Luojiazhuang). I only had to walk out of the front gate to be in the village and look out my back window to see Hui villagers in their fields. Interestingly, since I cannot claim to have really "lived" in a "traditional Chinese village" my fieldwork has been called into doubt by those searching for the elemental forms that are thought to be located therein.

Language was often, but not always a problem. In the north, I was able to rely on the so-called "standard language" (*putong hua*) of Mandarin based on the Beijing dialect. In the Northwest I had to cope with Ningxia, Gansu, and Shaanxi dialects, and by the end of my stay was able to understand general conversation without too much repetition. Familiarity with these dialects became useful when visiting with Soviet Central Asian Dungans in Alma Alta, who maintained their Gansu dialect. In this case, my limited Turkish was helpful, but in Xinjiang at that time I relied primarily on Mandarin (these early encounters led to the desire later to study Turkish more seriously and attempt to learn Uyghur). Only in Quanzhou did it become necessary to work through a research colleague, who was a Hui from the area and spoke Southern Min (Hokkien). In Tibet, Yunnan, Guangdong, Hainan and Sichuan, most of the younger Hui spoke Mandarin or interpreted their elder's speech into something understandable to me.

Given the well-known restrictions placed on foreign social science researchers in China, by now one must be wondering how in the early 1980s I was seemingly able to so easily "waddle in" (Geertz 1988: 143n). More importantly, once there, why did I keep moving? This is a fundamental issue for my research on the Hui in the Chinese nation-state, and relates to the discussion above about multi-sited field research. It certainly departs from the traditional Malinowski-style ethnography where an anthropologist attempts to "squat" in one community for an extended period of time. Not only was I urged to visit as many Hui communities as possible by my Hui colleagues, but I was confronted by the realization that a book on the Hui that was based solely on one community would mislead rather than inform readers about their identity. I certainly did not want my readers to think all Hui were secularized Marxist workers, as I encountered in Beijing and Shanghai, nor to think that they were all devout Sufi Mus-

lims whom I lived with in Ningxia. Unlike Raymond Firth's classic ethnography, *We, the Tikopia*, there was no single voice which spoke for the Hui. For the Hui, there is no "We". There is no community or individual who even begins to represent all the Hui of China. This challenged, for me, accepted notions of representation and homogeneity that permeated China anthropology – which in many ways, has sought to understand "the Chinese" through microcosmic studies that shed light on the macrocosm.

Certainly the voice of the State in its numerous nationality publications could not be taken for granted in understanding the Hui, nor the view of the Imam, the worker, the villager or the entrepreneur. Instead we find a polyphony of voices, from urban to rural, religious to secular, elite to commoner, modernist to "traditionalist" – each contradicting the other, sharing different visions of Hui-ness, and subscribing to separate imagined communities (Anderson 1983). Of course, I could have remained in Beijing and spent all of my 27 months among the Oxen Street Hui community. An urban ethnography of the Hui in Beijing would reveal much about Hui identity in the city – and this very much still needs to be done – but it would reveal very little about the vast majority of agriculturalist Hui.

At an even more fundamental level, the basic nature of nationality identity in the nation-state is diffused – it depends on the local juxtapositions of power, constantly in flux, interacting dialogically with the significant others in socially specific contexts as well as the local State apparati. Central nationality policy, as the *Muslim Chinese* study attempted to show, often bears little relation to what happens at the local level. The problem that my earlier study sought to address, however, is one of national identity: what it means to be Hui in the Chinese nation-state. To address this question, I realized that no single perspective would be adequate – no unified theory advanced.

There were, of course, practical considerations. Field research when I was in China was still formally limited to a two-week stay in any one village. I was able to get around some limitations by returning often to certain villages and by living long-term as a foreign graduate student in Chinese institutional housing, with other Chinese, including Hui. Bus and bicycle carried me to most outlying households and communities, such as Na Homestead, Changying, and Niujie. However, there were frustrating times when I was restricted and denied access to Hui communities for various reasons. Once, after traveling in southern Ningxia for four days by Beijing jeep on dirt roads across a good chunk of the Gobi desert and over the Liu Pan mountains, I finally arrived late one evening in Xiji, a Hui Sufi Naqshbandiyya center and one of the poorest towns in China, only to be told by the local County Chairman that it would be inconvenient (*bu fangbian*) for me to stay beyond the next morning. Out of respect for

China's national sovereignty and laws, I never transgressed these boundaries by entering off-limit areas (*fei kaifang diqu*) without permission or passing as a local – which would have been easy to do in the Northwest where I was often mistaken for another minority (on the ethics of deception, see Lesson 13 below). I doubt too that I would have been given the same kind of access if I were a visiting foreign scholar, who is generally watched much more closely in China. Students, then as now, seem to have free roam of the country, whereas "*xue zhe*" (scholars) are much more threatening.

The State could keep me from going to the Hui, but it could not always keep them from coming to me. On my first trip to Quanzhou on the southeast coast, I was particularly interested in visiting the Ding lineage who had only recently been recognized in 1979 as members of the Hui nationality. The Chinese Islamic Society in Beijing told me about this interesting community and I made a specific request of the Fujian Provincial Commission for Nationality Affairs and the Fujian Chinese Islamic Society for permission to visit them. I also had special approval and travel documents issued by the State Commission for Nationality Affairs in Beijing to conduct research on Hui communities during this trip. Once again, it turned out that it was "inconvenient" for me to go to the village, only 20 minutes from the city center and part of the city district administration. When the Hui in the village heard of my interest, however, ten of them rented a bus and met with me the entire day in the local mosque – a case of the followers of Muhammad coming to the interviewer. I was able to eventually travel to the village in 1986 and carry out further study, and in 1992 was welcomed with open arms as part of a UNESCO conference.

One unexpected side-benefit of this kind of what Tom Gold (1988) terms "guerilla interviewing" was that some people were often more willing to tell me things about themselves (and their neighbors) if they thought I was not too tightly woven into the web of their immediate social relations. In a politically-permeated society such as China at that time, a foreigner staying in one place for a very long time tended to focus and intensify attention on that place and those individuals, whereas the multi-sited approach may have diffused some of that exposure.

I am also not able to point to any one community as "my village", as other "lone stranger" anthropologists have traditionally claimed with exclusivity and pride (Salzman 1989: 44). I not only have difficulty in briefly answering the question, "whom did you study?" but also, "where did you study them?" The claim of exclusivity may become more difficult to make as fieldwork continues to become more public and publicized in complex societies, occuring, as Elizabeth Pratt (1986) has noted, in less exotic "common places". This is particularly true

when the actions of the fieldworker become interesting, or even perhaps threatening, to the regimes where s/he works. As Marcus argues (1986: 166), no longer can the world of larger systems be "seen as externally impinging on and bounding little worlds, but not as integral to them". Smaller ethnic communities are tied into the larger nationality to which they belong and may be assigned by the State, and these are influenced by international events and relations.

Lesson Six: Don't write about gender, ethnicity, or religion

"Serious" white male anthropologists of my generation (and I'm not really sure which generation I cross) were generally encouraged to steer clear of such "soft" subjects as gender, ethnicity, or religion. Marxist-influenced scholarship relegated much that was in these areas to "super-structuralist" claptrap, while empiricism preferred the crystalline clarity of statistical numerology to the incalculable aspects of identity and morality. "Political correctness" also deemed it unwise for one of my gender to study that of the other (and since I spent most of my time among Muslims, it made sense to a certain degree). One could study gender, ethnicity, and religion if the focus was on the economic sub-structures and political implications of these aspects of social super-structure, but they should not be taken seriously in and of themselves. Interestingly, the post-structuralist move away from ethnographic writing and the "essentialized" notion of culture meant that it was also deemed rather anachronistic and orientalist to take seriously "other" ethnic groups, nationalisms, or religious ideologies. As a result, the study of "tribes", "ethnicities", and "religious fundamentalism" was relegated to such "less theoretical" fields of sociology, political science, and psychology.

Yet, the notion "tribe", despite being discarded by anthropologists and relegated to the waste bin of anthropological history, has been dominated by both popular and even scholarly depictions to account for the resurgence of ethnic nationalisms and communal identities around the globe. Clearly, it was (and is) the most frequently used rationale in all of the repeatedly-aired CNN analyses as the primary motivating factor behind internal conflicts in the recent Afghan war (which featured few anthropologists among their many "expert" talking heads). The most notorious example of the resurgence of popular interest in tribalism is Leo Kotkin's (1993) *Tribes: How Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy*, in which he argues that "tribal identities" (in this case, the Jews, Chinese, Japanese, British, and Indians) are at the basis of transnational business success. Published by Random House, the author is said to be an "internationally recognized authority on global,

economic, political and social trends" who invokes, in Arjun Appadurai's (1993: 423) critique, the "trope of the tribe" to explain the coupling of "race, religion, and identity" in the modern world order. Although Kotkin's is clearly a popular articulation, it is mirrored in a growing scholarly literature that seeks to locate resurgent nationalisms in core, primordial essentialized identities, now portrayed as "tribes with flags" (Glass 1990). By contrast, my work in China, and later Central Asia and Turkey, sought to argue that people *subscribe* to certain identities, under certain highly contextualized moments of social relation. Not unlike contemporary cable channels, these identities are often regulated by nation-states, and limited to certain lines of stereotypical representation.

Though anthropologists discarded the notion of "tribe" over two decades ago, since it was felt that "tribe" was often only applied to less developed, non-Western societies (viz., "they are tribal; we are ethnic"), the idea of tribalism has resurfaced to explain the recent reassertions of identity politics as distant and diverse as Afghanistan, the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and Africa.[4] Central Asia, given its historic connection to nomadic and pastoralist societies, is most vulnerable to suggestions that it is "tribalism" that is at the core of the new Central Asian identities (see Garthwaite 1993: 142). One of the reasons I was attracted to the study of Central Asia was not only the Central Asian origins of many of the peoples I had studied in China, but also the dramatic transformation in the early 1990s of these states from "internal colonies" to independent nation-states. Yet, as an anthropologist trained in the sino-anthropological tradition, I had little preparation to examine these phenomena.

Benedict Anderson (1983 [1991]) led the way for a host of theorists in suggesting that national identity is best understood as historically contextualized, a socially constituted and constitutive process of imbuing "imagined communities" with the belief that they are somehow naturally linked by common identities. Post-structuralist approaches conceptualized identities as highly contested, multiple, constructed and negotiated within and between the power relations of the nation-state, rather than naturalized and primordial (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992). Nationalist ideologies become cultural productions (Befu 1993; Fox 1990), legitimized as inventions of tradition and narrated as social histories (Hobsbawm 1983; Tonkin, McDonald and Chapman 1989). Yet, these constructivist approaches were rarely ap-

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[4] The debate over the inappropriateness of the term tribe for group identity in anthropology is best summarized in the collections by Gulliver (1969) and Helm (1968). For later references to ethnicity as tribal, see Isaacs' (1975) classic, *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity*, and the more recent work by Glass (1990), *Tribes With Flags: A Dangerous Passage through the Chaos of the Middle East*. It is interesting that in the current ethnic national conflicts in Eastern Europe, rarely is the term tribal used, but it is frequently used to describe communal violence in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, perhaps indicating a racist and developmental connotation in the term.

plied to the Chinese nation-state or Chinese society in general. Through examining their relevance to Central Asia, I began to think about China's constructed nationalist history as well, helped considerably by Prasenjit Duara's (1995) work.

While it has perhaps become axiomatic that ideas of identity, ethnicity, and nationality are socially constructed, the problem with suggesting that these identities are generally "imagined" is that Anderson is often taken too literally (in ways *he* might never have imagined), as if ethnic and national identities were completely "invented" (to use Hobsbawm's and Ranger's formulation which can be, and is just as often as Anderson, completely misconstrued) out of thin air, a fiction of the collective imaginaire, or an idea which arose in the smoke-filled drawing rooms of a few nouveau British aristocrats (as Liah Greenfeld 1992 seems to suggest). As a corrective, my studies of the Uyghur (Gladney 1990) were written out of a desire to locate the rise of ethnic nationalism (and its contemporary challenges) in particular moments of history, coterminous but not synonymous with the end of empire, the rise of colonialism, the expansion of global capital, and the domination of groups gradually classified and taxonomized as subject peoples, ethnicities, and eventually nations. A related subtext of this paper is the attempt to inject social theoretical issues into the current writing on Central and Inner Asia, which was assisted by comparative work in Turkey and Central Asia (see Gladney 1996). Long closed to non-Soviet scholars and non-Russian speakers, Central Asia is now open to a wide range of travelers, writers, developers, and investigators who are beginning to have a better idea of what is going on, but have rarely seriously theorized or problematized why we see Central Asia in certain ways, and how Central Asians might see each other.[5]

This is why I take issue with Appadurai's (1993) rather idealistic urging to begin "thinking beyond the nation" to a time (stardate 3005?) when the nation-state is no longer. In light of recent events in South Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, this must be called "wishful thinking beyond the nation". Similarly, Hobsbawm (1991: 9) has theorized that "nations exist (...) in the context of a particular stage of technological and economic development." He apparently believes that stage is nearly past. Nations and ethnic or linguistic groups are "retreating before, resisting, adapting to, and being absorbed or dislocated by, the new supranational restructuring of the globe" to the extent that nationalism "is no longer a major

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[5] That we see Central Asia as somehow "Central" (to what?) or "Inner" (as opposed to outer?) is theorized in a recent unpublished paper (Gladney, forthcoming). The region's centrality is taken for granted and vehemently argued by most Central Asianists (see Frank 1992).

vector of historical development" (Hobsbawm 1991: 182).[6] This idea would certainly not account for the struggles for nationhood and cultural survival in Chechnya, Albania, Bosnia, Rwanda, Tibet, much of contemporary Central Asia, and even Quebec (Handler 1988) and Hawai'i (Okamura 1998). These trends indicate that the current constructions of identity politics in the form of ethnic nationalisms represent something more than the reemergence of tribalism, nor are they confined to the so-called "Third World". Interestingly, while anthropologists have increasingly examined "minorities" in China, few have addressed the larger issue of Chinese nationalism and the nation-state (once again, a subject left to political scientists and perhaps psychologists).

Here I think Greenfeld (1992: 491) is correct in suggesting that as long as nationalism is *perceived* as the "constitutive principle of modernity" (with the term "perceived" most operative here), post-nationalism will only arise with a realized post-modernity, and for that we have a long ways to go. The newly appointed leaders of Afghanistan, the somewhat now entrenched leaders of the 15 nations of the former USSR, and other would-be national leaders in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Somalia are busily making more nations, and firming up their bounded states, not thinking beyond them. Gobal actors like Osama bin Laden or Bill Gates (rarely have the two appeared in one sentence) work within and against the boundaries of the nation-state, even when trying hardest to escape or transgress them.

My recent work among cross-border groups on the Sino-Central Asian frontier attempts to place official and local identifications in a field of contemporary and historical social relations, particularly with regard to interacting social groups and newly invented nations in Central Asia, Turkey, and China. Given the long history of interactions with powerful others and colonizing empires on the Eurasian steppe, a purely relativist or, at the other extreme, a dehistoricized essentialized position with regard to identity formation is particularly questionable. Both extremes ignore issues of power, hegemony, "internal" colonialism, and cultural economy which have long dominated the region. These communities were clearly not imagined overnight, at least, not in their own imaginations. By placing China in the context of larger trans-Eurasian and global processes, I believe we learn even more about the history of what is now called China itself.

It is often the articulation of the multiplicities of identities in exile within the context of where these identities have been expressed, engaging in the "borderline work of culture" (Bhaba 1994: 7) generally in and around the modern nation-state, that these identifications

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[6] See also Julia Kristeva's (1993) rather idealistic, even utopian description of "nations without nationalisms" in which patriotism and civic pride is to exist in a vacuum of self-discovery abstracted from the realpolitik of social oppositions and resource competition.

become salient. Through examining these peoples portrayed as, and who now speak of themselves as "nations", I have sought to widen the debate beyond "ethnic minority" status to the larger project of what Lloyd Fallers (1974) once termed, "the social anthropology of the nation-state". I argue that nationalism itself is not just an imagined idea, but represents certain styles of imagined representation, a mode of representation that contributes to a grammar of action now most often defined by interactions within or resistance to the nation-state. As Hobsbawm (1992: 4) argues, "Nationalism is a political programme (...). Without this programme, realized or not, 'nationalism' is a meaningless term". Nationalism is not arbitrary, but neither is there any core content to it, no essential essence that is not shifted and redefined in internal and external, often dialogical, opposition, using powerful symbols that John Comaroff (1987) has accurately described as defined by "totemic" relationality. And, as Duara (1995) has noted, all nationalisms and ethnicities are not necessarily by-products of or contained within the nation-state construction.

It was through interviews with many of the people I spent time with in China whom I met again as exiles, or the better term, *émigrés* in Turkey, that I began to think much more about deploying the notion of relational alterity (Gladney 1996) for understanding what Rey Chow (1993) calls the diasporic condition, and its destabilizing challenge to the contemporary nation-state. As a Fulbright Research Scholar in Istanbul (1992-93) I followed up on interviews I had conducted in 1988 with refugees who had come to Turkey from China in the 1940s. Spending most of my time moving between the boundaries of nation-states among the peoples that cross them, rather than "squatting" (Geertz 1989: 23) in one "timeless, self-contained" village, neighborhood, town, or state (the preferred hierarchy of structural anthropologists) follows Richard Fox's (1991: 1) maxim to "work in the present", or Bhabha's call, among the "interstices", across the boundaries by which the groups I am interested in most define themselves.

The spate of what might be termed "Soviet nostalgia" in *Foreign Affairs* and other policy manuals which complain of the re-emergence of "tribalisms" in Central Asia and Eastern Europe now that the "peace-keeping" hand of the Soviets has been withdrawn, is misplaced, if not dangerously wrong.[7] These peoples were profoundly different than they had been before their domination by the centralizing states of Soviet and Chinese Central Asia, and their multi-faceted identities are anything but tribal. The fact that outside actors like Osama bin

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[7] In an interesting paper, David Prochalska (1995) has suggested that a kind of "imperialist nostalgia" helps to account for the popularity in France of Algerian Orientalist post-cards (then and now). The rise of nationalist and essentializing projects today might reflect a "primordialist nostalgia" for purist communal origins that helps to explain the resurfacing of the term "tribe."

Laden can (temporarily) unite rivalrous groups suggests that these "tribal" identities can be collapsed or essentialized in an instant. Those suggesting pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism as an explanatory panacea for recent events in these regions have equally failed to note expressions of Turkic or Islamic solidarity are often only one aspect of these complex identities in certain circumstances. In fact, the outcome of the desiccation of post-Soviet Central Asia and the rise of Islamic extremism has been most profoundly disappointing to the pan-Turkists and pan-Islamicists. The welcome recent translation of Olivier Roy's (1994) *The Failure of Political Islam* demonstrates that for Afghanistan, as well as much of Central Asia, the "perception of Islam and Muslim societies as one, timeless cultural system" does violence to both contemporary social movements sweeping these regions, as well as the nature of Islam itself.

In order to understand these seemingly chaotic but unarbitrary shifting selves, I have turned to the analogy of the scrambled cable channel on television tuners as a heuristic way of looking at the current shifting "montage" (Marcus 1994: 45) of Inner Asian identities in China and post-Soviet Central Asia. In many areas of the United States, cable companies "scramble" the transmission of certain pay-channels for which subscribers must pay an increased charge to watch "un-scrambled" programs in their homes, often involving an additional cable box and remote. Once a fee is paid, those channels can be "de-scrambled", a process that is often activated at viewer request. At the same time, certain channels can be permanently blocked in order to prevent viewing (perhaps by children, since many of these channels are sexually explicit or feature violent programming). Those "scrambled" channels often appear blurred and haphazardly jammed together, preventing only glimpses and snatches of sound from what is "really" out there.

Like the cable companies themselves, without the arbitrary and often artificial policies of intervening nation-states (the "de-scrambler" black box controlled by a distantly held "remote"), one would not be able to "see" or describe the blurred and shifting identities being represented. And, like scrambled or censored channels, only discourses are detectable, narratives and dislocated shapes that give the briefest glimpse of particular styles of identity or channels being aired (though for cable channels, these glimpses are still clear enough to have parents complain about the "pornographic pieces" visible and audible enough to entertain attentive juveniles). Similar to linguistic code-switching in social speech forms, encoded identities are often switched depending on contexts, moving up and down stereotypical scales, or perhaps discarded altogether.

An important component of this metaphor is that of subscription: groups often are enlisted by states or elites to subscribe to certain kinds of identifications (ethnic, national, racial, reli-

gious, class, ranked, etc.), but in many cases they might not choose to do so. In others, subscription is mandatory, as in government-controlled cable channels and legislated national identity cards. Anthropologists might have their own schemes, diagrams, and maps of identity; in most cases, people ignore them, or may even contest them (particularly if they discredit certain cherished and widely accepted social identities, such as ethnicity, gender, or class). On the other hand, not infrequently, anthropological ethnographies (and kinship diagrams) also become the accepted charters of social history – they are even used in law courts to settle inheritance and land-rights disputes, and evaluate claims for ethnic nationality status. It is the modern nation-state, however, with its regulatory powers over not only cable channels, but citizenship, ethnic national identities, and census categories (see Cohn 1987), which exerts a privileged role in defining the most accessible national channels, and provides the means to unscramble them.

Like so many blended, scrambled channels, my moving "out of China" and into Central Asia has attempted to describe (to unscramble?) the context of "both/and" identities: how it is, say, a person who calls himself a "Turkestani" can be both Kashgari and Uyghur, Muslim and Turk, Chinese and Central Asian. In China, all of these groups are Chinese citizens, and travel on a Chinese passport, whether they like it or not. The project then becomes not any essentialized attempt at a final definition of the meanings of these representations (i.e., ***what*** is a Uyghur), but an examination of the conditions of relationality (i.e., ***when*** is a Uyghur). As I discovered, being Uyghur is not as meaningful for younger *émigrés* in Istanbul, nor was it between the 15th and early 20th centuries, but it certainly has become relevant for the 8-9 million Oasis-dwelling Turkic people who have been labeled "Uyghur" since 1934 as a result of nation-state incorporation, great game rivalries, and Sino-Soviet nationality policies.

These identities are particularly called into question once people move across national borders and become members of the transnational diaspora (see Chow 1994: 99-105). The goal then becomes not any essentialized attempt at a final definition of the meanings of these representations, but an examination of *when* they come to the fore, and with whom they are asserted.

This project also calls into question the nature of majority national identities in Turkey, the former Soviet Union, and China. Recent studies of the Marxist influence on national identity construction in these regions have often ignored the process by which majority groups get constructed: the Turk, the Russian, and the Han Chinese. The "Turk" in Ottoman history, was the tent-dwelling nomad, and not held up as the admirable essence of Turkish nationhood until the rush from empire to nation associated with Ataturk. A similar transition from empire to

nation led the early Chinese nationalists to appropriate a Japanese-derived term for nation (*minzoku*) and label initially five under the nationalists and later 56 groups under the communists as "nations" (*minzu*). The notion of the Han as a *minzu* (nationality) is a quite recent phenomenon, popularized by Sun Yat-sen in relational opposition to Tibetans, Mongols, Manchu, and Hui, in his five peoples policy, and more importantly, to the foreign imperialists, all of whom were perceived as "nations" (Gladney 1994). The category of "Han" as a people was actually first formally institute in China by the Mongols, who included all northern peoples as Han (including the Koreans), as distinguished from southerners (*nan ren*), Central Asians (*semu ren*), Hui (Muslims), and the Mongols as part of their colonial categories. Now that post-imperial, and then cold war, oppositions have subsided, China may find itself moving down the established hierarchies into serious "sub-Han" ethnic and national rivalries, particularly with the economic rise of the south – Tang person nationalism instead of the northern Hans.

It is clear that we must attend to the nature of shifting national identities in these regions, and the impact of changing international geo-politics. But geo-politics are not enough, as these processes of identity formation and re-formation cannot be understood without attention to historiography and cultural studies. It is even more apparent that relations between Turkey, Russia, and China will hinge on the shifting identities of the mainly Turkic, mainly Muslim peoples in the region. Identities are not easily united across pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic lines, or even across "Greater Culture China" as Tu Weiming (1991) has suggested might arise for Chinese in the diaspora.

In China, recognition of official national identities has empowered these groups in their claims against the nation, particularly for the Hui and Uyghur, to a crystallization and ethnogenesis of identities – identities that have now moved above and beyond the bounds of the Chinese nation-state, encouraging other unrecognized groups to push for recognition and political power. And lest one think that these so-called "marginal" unrecognized peoples are irrelevant to Chinese history and society, we must remember that the Taipings had their origins in the southwestern corner of the country, in Guangxi among the Hakka and Yao, splitting and nearly toppling the Qing empire (perhaps one reason the current regime finds the Falungong so threatening). The person who helped bring the Qing finally to an end was Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a true member of the modern transnational diaspora, Cantonese-born, raised in Hawai'i, educated in Honolulu's Iolani School and later in Japan. Nevertheless, Dr. Sun was effective in mobilizing China's internal others against the foreign others, Manchu and Western imperialists, creating a new Chinese national identity, that may be just as fragile as the old.

This "marginal" nationalist leader is not unlike many other national leaders that have been effective in mobilizing large populations, including Milosevic, Lenin, Mao, and even Wuer-kaixi.

Lessons Seven, Eight, and Nine: Don't work with "development" organizations, don't speak to Chinese and American government officials, and don't speak to reporters

These three maxims are all related to the central dogma of "non-interventionism" that was pervasive among my generation of anthropologists. Related to the notion of "objective" distance, it also contributes to the "new ethnography" which suggested that anthropologists could only truly write about their "own" cultures, lest they risk, at the minimum, "orientalizing" the non-native cultures they describe, or causing irreparable harm to them with their Western intrusiveness. For anthropologists working in China, there was also often the rather political concern that any intervention or critique of the political process would prevent all further entré into the country. I must confess that one of the reasons I began to search for opportunities to work outside of China in places like Turkey and Central Asia was concern that some of my statements to the popular press or advocacy work with certain groups would lead to travel restrictions and visa denials (see Gladney 2002). As yet, it has not happened. Clearly, this is one of the risks of working in a sovereign nation-state, and as I have argued above, engagement in the political process is unavoidable, even in the most isolated of circumstances. As Heisenberg's uncertainty principle has taught us, the presence of an analyst, always influences the subject under study, something that is as true for social science as it is for quantum mechanics. Indeed, Heisenberg's maxim, "The more precisely a position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known", suggests that positionality of all scientists, social or natural, implicate the social or political direction of their subjects.[8]

On the issue of "applied" or "action" anthropology, as opposed to non-interventionist, "ivory tower" anthropology, it is interesting to note Bronislaw Malinowski's comment on precisely this issue in his celebrated introduction to Fei Xiaotong's 1939 *Peasant Life in China*. In the first paragraph of his laudatory preface of the volume, Malinowski exudes:

> I venture to foretell that *Peasant Life in China* by Dr. Hsiao-Tung Fei will be counted as a landmark in the development of anthropological field-work and theory. The book has a number of outstanding merits, each of them marking a new departure. Our attention is here directed not to a small, insignificant tribe, but to the greatest nation in the world. The book is not written by an outsider looking out for exotic impressions in a

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[8] Heisenberg's maxim and a synopsis of his many contributions to quantum theory, can be found at http://www.aip.org/history/heisenberg/.

strange land; it contains observations carried on by a citizen upon his own people. It is the result of work done by a native among natives. If it be true that self-knowledge is the most difficult to gain, then undoubtedly an anthropology of one's own people is the most arduous, but also the most valuable achievement of a field-worker…. The write is courageous enough to cast away all academic pretences at scientific detachment. Dr. Fei fully realizes that knowledge is indispensable to the right solution of practical difficulties. He sees that science, in rendering real service to mankind, is not degraded…. Science becomes only prostituted when the scholar is forced, as in some countries of Europe, to adapt his facts and his convictions to the demands of a dictated doctrine (Malinowski in Fei 1939: xix).[9]

It is not surprising that writing on the eve of the second world war, Malinowski would be critical of the many ways "science" was being deployed in service to the state in Europe, but what he did not know was the pressure that would later be brought to bear upon social scientists in China such as Fei, especially those trained in the West, to use their "scientific" knowledge as a means to bolster the huge developmentalist transformations of Chinese society under the Maoist state, as was documented so clearly in Arkush's treatment of Fei's own personal transformation under the Maoist purge of intellectuals, particularly during the earlier Anti-rightest campaigns and later Cultural Revolution (Arkush 1981: 239-74). Interestingly, as Gary Hamilton (in Fei 1992: 2-3) records in his introduction to the 1992 translation of Fei's 1947 lectures, *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (*From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*), while Fei's developmentalist suggests were bitterly criticized by the early Chinese Marxists, they were largely adapted in by the Nationalists under Guomindang Taiwan, though rarely credited to Fei. Fei's suggested sequence of rural development, including land reform, development of public industries with focused sectors of capital investment, and the encouragement of family-owned enterprises, contributed to Taiwan's early success, and was largely positively reappraised during Fei's rehabilitation under Deng Xiaoping's reform period. One of the many lessons to be drawn from Fei's and countless other experiences of engagement in the anthropology in the study of China, whether carried out by "natives" or outsiders, is that refusal to work with developmental organizations, or speak with agents of the state or media, never means that one's work will not have an influence, or that good intentions will always involve unintended consequences.

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[9] I am grateful to Chris Hann for reminding me of this important preface to Fei's work by Malinowski, who supervised Fei's dissertation, when he attended the London School of Economics in 1936 on a Boxer Indemnity Fund scholarship.

Lesson Ten: Absolutely do not write about any of these lessons

Many of my colleagues complain that few non-China specialists read what China anthropologists write, and with only a few notable exceptions, like China, China anthropology is a world unto itself. Some have suggested that this is due to the fact that "China is so big", or "Chinese is such a difficult language", or "Chinese society is so homogeneous and different than other societies". These are a few more lessons I believe we need to un-learn.

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