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*“You Can Never Go Home Again”:
Cultural Memory and Identity
Formation in the Writing of
Southeast Asian Chinese*

JAMES ST. ANDRÉ

The persistence of memory as a trope in works by Chinese writers in Southeast Asia demonstrates that the sense of identity among Chinese in this area is constantly being interrogated and re-negotiated. This article argues that literary texts are one important constituent factor of collective cultural memory, a purposeful activity undertaken to influence social reality. Even as they foreground the issue of an individual’s memory of Chinese culture, they are themselves a type of memorializing practice which seeks to preserve certain types of cultural memory and thus shape the individual’s identity. In comparing the works of Singaporean and Malaysian writers, I find a rather stark contrast between the figures used to conceptualize China, Chinese culture, and memory. I argue that Singaporean writers use certain figures to reify Chinese culture and determine its unchanging essence, whereas Malaysian Chinese often have a more fluid view of culture. I then consider some of the ramifications for the use of natural metaphors by the Malaysian writers, which I see as participating in a type of wishful colonial mentality, quite distinct from the historical reality of indentured labor and political disempowerment of the ethnic Chinese in the modern nation state of Malaysia. I conclude by proposing the use of “trunk” as a metaphor for cultural memory and identity formation.

Introduction

MY PAPER COMES OUT OF THE EXPERIENCE of editing four volumes of translations into English of works by authors in both Singapore and Malaysia. Over the past three years, while reading, discussing, and translating a large spectrum of short

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stories and essays by Singaporean and Malaysian authors with my students, it became clear that the memory of China and of Chinese culture was an important trope in these works. What it means to be Singaporean or Malaysian Chinese depends to a great extent upon what facets of China and Chinese culture these authors choose to remember, as well as what facets they choose to forget.

I should clarify here that by “memory,” I mean two overlapping phenomena. First, there are the individual’s memories of lived experience, either of the author or of the characters in the stories. Many of the authors discussed draw upon their private memories or the memories of their parents or grandparents, who emigrated from China to Southeast Asia. The question of the sharing and retention (or discarding) of these individual memories leads to the second phenomenon, which I refer to as “cultural memory.” My understanding of this phenomenon is based mainly on Halbwachs’ notion of “collective memory” (Halbwachs 1992). For Halbwachs, there can be no individual memory without the collective, wherein individual experiences receive reinforcement and validation from peers and then later generations; these collectively cherished memories become the basis for the social identity of groups and, by extension, of the individual’s identity. Halbwachs discusses various ways in which collective memory is constituted and maintained in a society, mainly through sub-cultures within a larger society, including the family, religion, and social class. I use the term “cultural memory” rather than “collective memory” because the collective under consideration here is cultural, for that group of people living in Southeast Asia who consider themselves to belong to what Tu Wei-ming (1994) has dubbed “cultural China.”

The persistence of memory as a trope in works by Chinese writers in Southeast Asia demonstrates that the sense of identity among Chinese in this area is constantly being interrogated and re-negotiated. Moreover, the works do not simply reflect a social reality or attest to a distinct identity; rather, they must be seen as efforts to shape the social memory of their peers and descendants. In other words, I am arguing that literary texts are one important constituent factor of collective cultural memory, a purposeful activity undertaken to influence social reality. Even as they foreground the issue of an individual’s memory of Chinese culture, they are themselves a type of memorializing practice which seeks to preserve certain types of cultural memory and thus shape the individual’s identity.

As literary texts, the stories, essays, and poems often rely heavily upon figures of speech, especially metaphor and synecdoche, to drive home their point. Thus one central concern of this study is what the choice of figures tells us about the author’s approach to her or his subject.

In comparing the works of Singaporean and Malaysian writers, I find a rather stark contrast between the figures used to conceptualize China, Chinese culture, and memory. In Part One, I argue that Singaporean writers use certain figures

to reify Chinese culture and determine its unchanging essence. In Part Two, I describe how Malaysian Chinese often have a more fluid view of culture, again embodied through a specific set of figures. Then in Part Three, I consider some of the larger ramifications for the use of natural metaphors by the Malaysian writers, which I see as participating in a type of wishful colonial mentality, quite distinct from the historical reality of indentured labor and political disempowerment of ethnic Chinese in the modern nation state of Malaysia.

For all the authors discussed, I see their works as attempting to influence the social construction of reality in Southeast Asia. As an attempt to mold or influence the readers' sense of identity, they are necessarily reacting against other social forces. The history of those social forces and how they interact with the fiction is much too large a topic to deal with in any detail here. However, in all three sections I attempt at least to suggest how the discourse employed in these works is related to the discourse of state power.

Part One — Reifying Chinese Culture: The Crisis in Singaporean Chinese Identity

For the Chinese-speaking population of Singapore, two decisions by the government stand out as symptomatic of the official attitude toward Chinese language and culture from the 1970s to the 1990s: the closing of the Chinese-language-based Nanyang University in 1980, followed soon thereafter by the adoption of English as the medium of instruction for all secondary education. These two decisions, along with various other policies and public statements, led to feelings of crisis and a siege mentality among the Chinese-speaking community. Let me quote in full a short poem by Wu Mu, "The Upright Chinese Chess," to make my point:

It's time to thoroughly reform the red and black pieces' positions;
 Those flat-trodden must now stand.
 The kings must be astute,
 The ministers must be loyal,
 The rooks and cannons must be inspiring,
 And the knights must be carefully-chosen winged steeds.
 After crossing the river,
 The valiant pawns must never turn back.
 The low-spirited must be encouraged
 And all challenges of the mind
 Should always overpower the digital.

No matter how deep the river, how wide the crossing,
 How large the waves and how plentiful the sand,
 This is the final stronghold. It must not fall.

立体象棋 伍木

红黑两方的阵容确实该改良改良了
 凡扁平的都要即刻站起来
 将帅须灵秀
 士相须忠心
 车炮须砥砺
 马须是精挑细选的千里良驹
 过河兵卒须更有誓不回头的勇气
 凡失魂落魄的都要加强形象
 凡人脑战术，都应
 胜过电脑游戏

不管楚河汉界深几许宽几许波涛黄沙几许
 这是最后的据点，绝对不能失守

《十灭》，七洋出版社，1994

The sense of threat is directly expressed, and in response Wu Mu conjures up the pieces of a Chinese chess set, which represent Singaporean Chinese, to defend their Chinese culture. The relentless repetition of instructions and commands in the first 10 lines (ought, must, should [gai 该, yao 要, xu 须, ying 应]) betrays the sense of urgency, even emergency. The last line of the poem echoes, ironically, Churchill's famous directive during World War II that Singapore be held at all cost, a line that every Singaporean schoolchild learns.

Other writers from this time period also often use some concrete object from China to represent all of Chinese culture, or the Chinese living in Southeast Asia. If we think of Chinese culture as being a whole, then Wu Mu's use of the Chinese chess is a synecdoche. Besides Chinese chess, other synecdoches and metaphors for Chinese culture include: Chinese tea (the poems "The Story of Tea" 茶的故事 by Guo Yongxiu 郭永秀 and "The Green Tea Says" 茶如是说 by Liang Yue 梁钺), bamboo (the poem "The Story of Bamboo" 竹的故事 by Guo Yongxiu), a Chinese sword (the short story "The Rusted Sword" 宝剑生锈 by Xi Ni Er 希尼尔), terra-cotta figures from Chinese tombsites (the short story "The Terra-cotta Figures' Survival" 俑之生 by Xi Ni Er), Chinese painting (the short stories "Black Bo Le" 黑伯乐 by Xi Ni Er, "The Dragonfly in the Lotus Pond" 荷塘里的蜻蜓 by Zhang Hui 张挥, and "The Painting" 看画 by Lin Gao 林高), or Chinese calligraphy (the short story "Spring Breeze and Rain" 春风化雨 by Zhang Hui). These figures are uniformly positive. They celebrate native Chinese products which have become an important part of Chinese culture and celebrated by the Chinese for particular virtues (tea, bamboo), the Chinese martial spirit (sword),

Chinese cultural achievements (painting and calligraphy), or emphasize the extreme age of Chinese culture (the terra-cotta figures).

These objects, selected for their positive associations of the greatness of Chinese culture, need to be defended against “invasion,” as in Wu Mu’s poem. They are also necessarily cut off from interacting with other cultures, as in the poem “The Green Tea Says” by Liang Yue:

We are all cups of green tea,
Pure and light, and our lineage
Is clear for all to see in the *Book of Tea*.
It’s been so long since we were sold down to the south,
And though we mention no longer
Those fond years on the hills,
We are still green tea.

As tea, we must of course wear our most attractive brown hues,
And retain our pure and simple flavour.
Even if we are brown,
Our brown is so classical, so outstanding.
Even if we are bitter, astringent,
Our bitterness smells sweet,
Our astringency is addictive.

Let us be a cup of pure green tea.
Rather than slashing our prices, rather than being contaminated by milk,
Thereby willfully tainting ourselves,
Our pure and simple self.
Let’s purely and simply remain a cup of green tea.

茶如是说 梁铨

我们都是一杯茶
清清白白，家世自有
茶经可以翻查
买棹南下已经是很久以前的事了
虽然我们不再时时提起
茶山当年的韵事
毕竟，我们仍是茶呵

是茶，当然该肤着我们好看的茶色
当然该涵着我们清纯的茶味
这色就算是褐
也褐得十分古典十分
出色，味道就算苦涩
那也苦得芬芳
涩得过瘾

还是做一杯清纯的茶吧
 与其廉售，与其让炼乳
 如此刻意地污化我们
 清清纯纯的我们
 还是纯纯清清地做一杯茶吧

《茶如是说》，七洋出版社，1984

The insistence on purity here is absolute and uncompromising. Beginning with the second line's description of the tea as "pure and light" 清清白白, the author insists that even after several generations spent in Southeast Asia, they still remain tea ("We are still green tea." 毕竟，我们仍是茶啊). The second and third stanzas then use the adjective "pure and simple" 清纯, and after the penultimate line has expanded this into the reduplicating structure 清清纯纯, the final line reverses and repeats the adjective as 纯纯清清. Interaction with other cultures is portrayed as contamination (as a custom introduced by the British, putting milk in tea stands for Western ways) and Singaporean Chinese are called upon "purely and simply to remain a cup of green tea." Another poem on the same theme by Guo Yongxiu, "The Story of Tea," mourns the fate of their Ceylonese brothers precisely for allowing themselves to be mixed with milk, thus losing their original essence.

Alas, there are still
 ...
 Our pitiable brothers from Ceylon who,
 In vain, present their yellow hues like mellow wine,
 Perversely they are being stirred together
 With the domineering milk, to become
 Neither yellow nor white, a bastard mix.

...
 啊啊，还有这些可怜的
 来自锡兰的兄弟
 空有金黄如醇酒的色泽
 却还要让跋扈的炼乳
 捣弄成这样一种
 非黄非白的浑浊

The use of negative terms like "bastard mix" (hunzhuo 浑浊) and the construction "neither yellow nor white" clearly indicates that mixing is adulteration, not combination, with the "domineering" milk.

Even when the world is conceived as having different cultures, all of equal worth, those cultures are described as discrete entities. Lin Gao's "In My Eyes" 树的观点 equates different species of trees with different cultures, each having blossoms of different colors. The biological metaphor here militates against cross-pollination of species, or in other words, the interaction between cultures. Instead, each one grows and develops for centuries by itself.

Other works give longer lists of elements of what makes up “things Chinese” which need to be remembered and preserved. Hua Zhi Feng’s 华之风 poem, “Mid-Autumn Festival Night” 中秋夜, for example, lists lanterns, mooncakes, tea, pomelo, a poem by Su Dongpo, the poet Li Bai, and the moon. These “things Chinese” are contrasted with: the forgetting of stories about China, hamburgers, cola, ignorance of Chinese history, popular music, Orchard Road, and an ignorance of who Chang E (the Chinese goddess of the moon in the legend 嫦娥奔月) is. Note that in three cases the opposition is concerned with forgetting, and that popular music (which in Singapore is just as likely to be in Cantonese or Mandarin as in English) is associated with Western ways. “Chinese Culture” here is defined as a set of objects and practices that are imagined to have been in place since ancient times; no modern innovation is allowed.

Time and again in these works, Singaporean Chinese are chided for having “forgotten” their roots, forgotten their culture. In “The Rusted Sword,” a sword that was made for the staging of Jing Ke’s assassination attempt in a school play and then hung up as a memento is found in the trash by a former student. In “Spring Breeze and Rain,” it is a placard with the four characters “spring breeze and rain” 春风化雨 which is discarded by the new principal. In Wong Meng Voon’s 黄孟文 “The Last Grave-Sweeping” 最后一次扫墓, the mother is afraid that her daughters will forget their deceased father since they prefer going to church rather than going to his grave for the Qingming festival. Or in his “Free and Easy Tour” 逍遥游, the only student in the graduating class interested in going to China for the class trip turns out to be a Malay student; the Chinese students all want to go to English-speaking countries, be it the US, the UK, Australia or New Zealand. And in Xi Ni Er’s “Black Bo Le,” the only person interested in buying Chinese-style paintings is an Indian, whom the painter, in a nice twist, at first mistakes for one of the workmen who comes to take down the exhibit.

Finally, many of the stories and poems center around the Chinese language, naturally enough, since the crisis in Chinese culture in Singapore was experienced mainly through changes in education policy regarding language. Again, there are many tales of Singaporeans throwing away or forgetting their language. Wong Meng Voon’s “Burning Books” 焚书 tells the story of an elderly Chinese man whose children do not want to take over his Chinese books; when he discovers that no library will take them either, he burns them in his backyard before moving in with his son, making an explicit comparison to the burning of the books by the first Qin emperor. The list of titles begins with the classics, history, and linguistics, moves on to philosophy, literary criticism and novels, and winds up with Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese works. Their inclusion at the end of the list signifies that the preceding titles of Chinese works (roughly chronological) constitutes a genealogy for them and affirms their place in Chinese literature. There is no hint that they or any other writers in the list (which includes several

figures from the May Fourth movement) might have been influenced by other cultures or traditions.

Zhang Hui's essay, "The Books in the Cold Palace" 冷宫中的藏书, likewise concerns the fate of Chinese books in a school library, none of which has been checked out since 1984, the year in which all schools switched to English-language instruction. Similarly, his short story, "Emigration" 移民, concerns a boy who can speak Mandarin fairly fluently but cannot read the script; he is indifferent to failing Chinese, however, because his family is emigrating to Australia, where he feels Chinese will be useless. In "Preliminary Study on the Evolution of Marital Relations" 姻亲关系演变初探, Xi Ni Er pokes fun at Singaporeans for no longer using or understanding Chinese kinship terms. In Wong Meng Voon's story, "Michael 'Yang'" 迈克杨, Michael is incapable of writing even his own name, substituting rice "mi" 米 for wood "mu" 木 in his surname. The character for rice alludes to the motif of the cross in the Union Jack, while his surname is a homonym for "yang" 洋 or "foreign/western."

In sum, these works have a tendency to reify a timeless "Chinese culture" which Singaporean Chinese are exhorted to remember and admonished not to forget. This Chinese culture is premodern in nature, celebrated for its antiquity and achievements, and composed of fixed and timeless elements which can be listed, and which must be kept pure like the tea. Finally, the Chinese language is seen as the most basic tool for the preservation of this culture both in memory and in writing; its disappearance signals the end of all Chinese culture in Singapore. In "Spring Breeze and Rain" and "The Rusted Sword," the placard and the sword are discarded under the aegis of new principals who do not speak Chinese; the books are burned or consigned to the "Cold Palace" because today's youths are no longer interested in reading Chinese. For all of these writers, Chinese culture is a "package deal" which you either accept or reject.

Part Two — Reinventing Chinese Culture: Malaysian Writers in Malaysia

To facilitate the comparison of Malaysian authors with their Singaporean counterparts, and at the same time to remind ourselves that the division between the two countries is recent, I would like to begin by discussing an essay by Wong Yoon Wah 王润华, "On the West Coast of the Rubber Kingdom" 在橡胶王国的西岸. Wong was born in what is now part of Malaysia but moved to Singapore, where he taught in the Department of Chinese Studies for many years before moving to Taiwan. He can thus be considered both a Malaysian and a Singaporean author and, like so many other writers from these two countries, he has deep and long lasting ties with Taiwan, where he studied before going to the United States for graduate school.

“On the West Coast of the Rubber Kingdom” was written after Wong had moved to Singapore, and is a quest narrative: because he misses the sound of rubber trees dropping their seeds (a childhood memory), he and his wife decide to journey back to Malaysia in search of the few remaining specimens of the first rubber trees planted in Southeast Asia. Thus the essay is interwoven with ruminations on his memories of childhood and a sense of loss, which sense he shares with the Singaporean authors discussed above; but those memories and that loss have nothing to do directly with China. Rather, Wong compares the rubber trees, imported from Brazil via Ceylon, to the immigrant Chinese of Nanyang. He is not, in other words, interested in the cultural memories of China or the Chinese; he is interested in the cultural memories and experiences of the Chinese who moved to Malaysia and Singapore. Thus the tropical rubber tree, completely unknown in China, “is the most familiar to me and the closest to my heart” 橡胶树是最熟悉最感到亲切的热带树木 (p. 5). He then goes on to commemorate the role which rubber trees and Chinese immigrants (who established the first commercial rubber plantation and often worked as rubber tappers) played in the development of Malaysia and Singapore. “Like the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, rubber trees are foreign immigrants and they, too, feel a deep love for this land, relying closely on it for survival” 像新马的华人橡胶树也是外来的移民, 都同样热爱这土地, 而且相依为命的生活着 (p. 7). His drive up the coast is also, in some sense, a trip back through time, from the ultra-modern Singapore, where rubber trees have long since vanished, to a small town where a 105-year-old rubber tree provides a living “memory” of the past.

What he mourns especially is the fact that, their work accomplished, the rubber trees have disappeared from Singapore and are in danger of being forgotten. It is the absence of rubber trees in Singapore, even on the campus of his university, which used to be a rubber plantation, that started him off on this journey. Yet we cannot draw the analogy that he is worried about the disappearance of the Chinese from Singapore, where they still constitute 78 percent of the population, and he has not equated rubber trees or rubber-tapping with Chinese culture, so he is not mourning the disappearance of Chinese culture in Singapore either. We are thus forced to either relinquish the analogy between rubber trees and Chinese immigrants, in which case his nostalgia for rubber trees becomes purely a personal longing for his lost childhood, or re-imagine that analogy, not along ethnic lines, but upon class and economic ones. The rubber trees and their tappers then become the poor working immigrants, upon whose backs the modern prosperity of Singapore and Malaysia has been built. This shift to class and economics, however, ultimately undermines the analogy between rubber trees and the Chinese, because of course other ethnic groups, including Indians, also tapped rubber trees, as he acknowledges briefly on p. 8.

The essay “Yap Ah Loy” 叶亚来 by Choong Yee Voon 钟怡雯 contains a similar theme. Yap Ah Loy was a 19th-century immigrant who eventually rose to be kapitan (“boss” or “strongman”) and helped to found Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the modern nation-state of Malaysia. Yap Ah Loy is a cultural hero for the Chinese of Malaysia; Choong is careful to point out that even her illiterate grandmother knew of and was proud of him, putting him on a par with the Malay cultural hero Hang Tuah. Like Wong’s work on the rubber tree, therefore, through processes of memory, Choong’s essay makes the argument that the Chinese played a vital role in the development of Malaysia.

She begins her essay with the official historical narrative concerning Yap Ah Loy: “Kapitan Yap Ah Loy: Major contributor in the building of Kuala Lumpur,” and discusses how this image of Yap has been fixed in the minds of all Malaysian Chinese through textbooks. But before she even gives us this description of him she challenges it by questioning the reliability and usefulness of textbook accounts which she equates with “History.” An over-reliance on and unquestioning attitude toward such accounts, she says, leads to an unchanging image of the past.

Her vision of the past, then, turns out to be quite radical. Unlike the Singaporean writers, for whom Chinese culture is something of the past that is fixed and timeless, for her, it is how we in the present perceive the past that is important, and she posits that our perception of, and remembrance of the past will change over time. Her essay, then, is concerned with how Yap Ah Loy himself was a changing and contradictory figure, and how later Chinese looking back have remembered him.

Unlike Wong’s rubber tree analogy which, like Lin Gao’s essay, discourages us from thinking of the Chinese and their culture mixing or blending with other ethnic groups, Choong Yee Voon turns out to be fascinated by the hybrid and indeterminate nature of Yap Ah Loy’s identity. This indeterminacy is first broached in a discussion of his photograph in the textbook: he is dressed in a replica of Qing official robes, but holds an “English” title (kapitan) in a tropical Malay state. The rest of her essay is a meditation on the confluence of these three factors in the body of this one Chinese man.

She sets the scene with a short description of a rainy night in the tropics:

It was midnight before I finally got to bed. But while still lost in sleep, I heard the howling of the wind growing stronger, accompanied by the roaring of thunder and the hiss of rain. In the midst of all this was the frenzied flapping of the banana leaves being blown about by the roaring wind. I sat up immediately, stretching out my hand to close the window. Next to my house, the coconut tree leaves danced crazily in the storm, as if possessed. The rain was too heavy, too sudden; the textbook that I had left open on the table was already wet. It just happened that the portion that was wet was Yap Ah Loy’s official robe, its grayish black even darker and deeper than the night outside.

夜来方眠，迷顿之中，听得风声骤戏，伴随着雨啸雷号，间狭着香蕉叶片被风掌刮，劈里啪啦的乱响。我立即坐起，伸手关窗，屋旁几棵椰子树的乱发如狂魔在风雨里疾舞。雨势太猛太突然，早已溅湿桌上未阖的课本，且不偏不倚打湿叶亚来的官袍，它那灰黑色泽遂比窗外漫漫的暗夜更深、更沉。(p. 152)

Readers unfamiliar with Southeast Asia may be puzzled by this opening paragraph. A Malaysian Chinese, however, would immediately interpret this paragraph as an expansion of the expression “Wind and rain in the banana and coconut trees” 蕉风椰雨, which is used to describe a tropical setting. The phrase is very commonly used in Malaysia, and Malaysia’s longest-running literary magazine takes its name from the first half of the expression, “Wind in the Bananas” 蕉风. The essay about Yap, therefore, insists upon the locality first and foremost; and it is the (now correctly identified) tropical rain which has stained the Qing robes — which, we are told, are not authentic, but replicas. In other words, the opening paragraph already hints at the main topic of the entire essay: that the Yap Ah Loy in the picture is not the same Yap Ah Loy who left China as a teenager. The physical environment has left its mark on him and, as an overseas Chinese, he can never wear an authentic Qing official robe, only a replica. Furthermore, as the opening and then again the closing paragraph insists, the story of Yap Ah Loy must always be reconstructed in the present by the author: “This was what I thought, in this dark night as the wind and rain gradually died down” 我这么寻思，在风雨渐偃的暗夜 (p. 166).

Choong’s re-telling of Yap Ah Loy’s life emphasizes the following points:

1. He was a reluctant immigrant who wished to go home but remained in Malaya.
2. He did not show much promise as a young man, but later succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.
3. His remaining in Malaya is polyvalent: to him it seemed a misfortune, but for later generations of Chinese it was a great boon.

As Choong herself makes no effort to hide the constructed nature of this “unofficial history” 野史, it should come as no surprise to learn that her account differs from others, such as Carstens’ (2005) on at least three points. According to Carstens, Yap did not quit his first job at the tin mines because he could not handle the work; the mine was closed down and all the workers let go. Secondly, Yap’s cousin did not remain neutral in the face of Yap’s decision to go home; in fact, it was the cousin who suggested this course of action and helped him to raise the money. Finally, the title of kapitan was first given to Yap by a Malay prince; the term does not come from the British, but rather from the Portuguese into both Malay and English.

I do not list these discrepancies to “correct” Choong’s account; Carstens (2005: 39–41) herself notes that there are many contradictory stories surrounding Yap.

Rather, I wish to highlight how memorializing the past is always more about the needs of the present. Choong herself says she wishes to create an account with strong contradictions in order to pique her students' interest in this "Chinese mummy" from the textbook, to make him more human. She humanizes him through the emphasis on contradictory traits such as the three listed above.

Choong uses one main figure to show how Yap gradually adapted to life in Nanyang: food. On p. 158, she details an incident of Yap, dejected by the loss of his money and unable to return home, kicking angrily at a durian husk and wondering how anyone could eat such a foul-smelling fruit. A few pages later (161–62), after Yap has been in Malaya for several years and started to succeed in business, he is described as growing to like Malay-style hot and spicy food, coconut water, and even durians. Instead of making him want to vomit, the smell of durians now gives him cravings, and he learns to eat it the local way (本土化的吃法). Neither of these passages is based on historical documents; Choong adds these details as a way of making Yap's adaptation more accessible to her readers.

Choong leaves us finally with the indecipherability of Yap's identity by posing a question which she believes he would not have been able to answer: why was an official of a British colony in Malaya wearing a Qing robe and keeping his queue, resulting in an image that was neither Malay, nor Chinese, nor Western (p. 165)? The answer, of course, which we are supposed to supply, is that he is a hybrid of all of these and more. This conclusion is in sharp contrast to the earlier "mythic" accounts of the man in both China and Malaysia which Carstens describes, which tended to couch the history of this period in terms of conflicts between British, Chinese, and Malay interests, each of these being discrete and independent groups (Carstens 2004: 46). The mixing that she describes, therefore, is Choong's "spin" on the story.

Likewise, Lim Kim Cherg's 林金城 "Becoming Baba After Three Generations" 三代成岬 also takes up the theme of cultural mixing. The essay describes the author's visit to Bukit Cina in Melaka, the hill which has been used as a burying ground for Chinese immigrants since the Ming dynasty. In the 1980s, the city government proposed razing Bukit Cina to make way for the expansion of the city. An intense campaign to save Bukit Cina from development was launched by the local Chinese, and the cause attracted the support of ethnic Chinese from all over Malaysia, since Bukit Cina was perceived as an important historic landmark for them. The Chinese community won the fight, and visitors today can read contemporary newspaper accounts at the temple at the foot of the hill, where the fight to save Bukit Cina is now in turn memorialized.

Written several years after this struggle, Lim's essay begins by laying out very expeditiously the major themes involved in that struggle and the meaning that Bukit Cina holds for Malaysian Chinese:

Besides clearly proving that by the time of Portuguese rule in Melaka, Chinese had already settled down in this land, it can also be used as a basis to search for our identity and as solid proof to testify to the contributions that our ancestors once made in this land. That I would instinctively think of all this is a result of the mass media reports of the ten-year campaign to conserve the hill and the opinion of the Chinese community. It is as if this hill undisputedly and undeniably contains in miniature the entire immigrant history of the Malaysian Chinese.

虽然可以明确的证实了至少在葡萄牙人统治马六甲的时代，华人已经在这片土地上落地生根，更可以一再地被引用来作为寻求认同的依据，及支持老祖宗们曾在这土地上做出贡献的铁证。而这一切一切，都很直觉联想地被十年保山运动中的传播媒体，及华社舆论所牵动着，仿佛这座义山就是整个马华移民史的缩影，不容辩证，不容置疑。

However, these reasons for memorializing Bukit Cina are quickly left behind as he climbs up the hill, following his friend's advice to keep an open mind as to what he might find there.

This admonition to resist the accepted, stereotypical "meaning" of Bukit Cina parallels Choong's suspicion of received historical accounts of Yap Ah Loy, and indeed the rest of the essay moves in quite a different direction. Lim never finds the earliest grave (from 1622) he was seeking, although he does find three Ming tombs and numerous Qing ones.

Besides the expected old tombstones documenting the early arrival and contributions of Chinese immigrants to the community, Lim makes several "discoveries." The first of these is that many of the tombs have fallen into disrepair, some so badly as to be almost unrecognizable. Thus, although Bukit Cina is perceived as an important "monument" for the Chinese community, one which they fought 10 years to preserve from the bulldozers, no one seems to be interested in maintaining the site.

The second "discovery" is actually the memory of a remark made by a friend; this memory is activated upon seeing the grandeur of some of the tombs, which was the subject of a lecture on tomb architecture that concluded with the image of some foreign workers seated before one of the tombs. Lim equates these foreign workers with the dead Chinese buried at Bukit Cina, based not on ethnicity, but rather on their status as immigrant labor. Here we see Lim going one step further than Wong and consciously trying to think about identity in terms of social class as a way of crossing ethnic boundaries.

Lim's third major discovery is that many of the tombs use the term "niang" and are therefore tombs of Chinese-Malay Nonyas and Babas (the local label for people of Malay-speaking Chinese). This allows him to see Bukit Cina as a memorial to "the historical basis for the friendship and culture shared between the two ethnic groups."

This discovery then leads him to meditate on the identity of the Melaka Babas through the introduction of two anecdotes which he remembers concerning local

Baba and local Chinese related to language. Both anecdotes involve his superior at work, who is Japanese but who also speaks Mandarin. When he sees a Melakan Baba communicating with Lim in Malay, he is surprised, because in his perception the Baba is Chinese, and therefore “should” speak Mandarin. In the second instance at a karaoke bar, the Japanese supervisor is shocked to learn that even some Malaysian Chinese who speak Mandarin fairly well cannot read the lyrics of Chinese songs and so choose to sing English songs instead.

The Japanese superior, in other words, holds the kind of attitude toward unity of ethnicity, culture, and language which the Singaporean writers also share. Lim, however, refrains from passing judgment on these “illiterate” Malaysian Chinese. In fact, Lim goes out of his way to make it clear that he opposes any form of cultural essentialism based on race, criticizing Chinese audiences in Malaysia who applaud scenes in plays where Chinese teach their culture to the Malays, but do not applaud scenes where Malays teach their culture to the Chinese. He also denounces the snobbery of people who criticize Malaysian Chinese for their lack of understanding of Chinese culture, but who themselves know nothing concerning Malaysian history and culture.

All three writers that I have discussed here, then, share one point in common: they are not interested in remembering China or “Chinese culture.” Rather, they are interested in remembering the Chinese in Nanyang/Malaya/Malaysia. These memories revolve principally around the act of immigration, and subsequent attempts to survive and assimilate. In doing so, they move away from the idea of “Chinese Culture” propounded by Singaporean authors, toward a notion of culture as changing and polyvalent, with one’s identity not necessarily linked to ethnicity primarily.

Part Three — Creating a New Idiom

If Malaysian Chinese authors generally reject a static model of cultural memory, then what kinds of new memories have they constructed for themselves? Below I will discuss three broad categories: memories of events (historical memory), memories of places (geographical memory), and memories of things.

As we have seen above in the works by Wong, Choong and Lim, the history of Chinese immigration to Malaysia is one important topic, especially from earliest times up until the early 20th century. Another large topic is the Japanese occupation and its impact on the Chinese population, about which Ng Kim Chew 黄锦树, among others, has written several pieces. His collection, *Dark Night* 乌暗暝, contains three stories which revolve around that time period, two of which in particular are related to questions of memory.

In “The Storyteller” 说故事者, a Chinese woman tells a story to pass the time while a group of people rest under a durian tree one afternoon, having just finished

gorging themselves on the ripe fruit. The story that she tells turns out to concern her mother, a rubber tapper, whose husband was killed by the Japanese while she was raped and later gave birth to the storyteller. The story is recorded by a youth sitting near her, presumably the narrator. Near the end of the story some of the Japanese soldiers return furtively to the area and wind up standing under a durian tree, and we are left wondering what kinds of memories they have of these events.

The second story, “Hot-blooded” 血崩, involves a group of teenaged students sent to investigate the history of a secret brotherhood of Chinese youths in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when inter-racial tensions were high, and the police did little to stop a wave of killings of the Chinese. The students conclude that the group being hunted was finally trapped in a shed on a durian plantation at night, but it seems that one member escaped with a newborn baby by hiding out high in one of the durian trees. They arrive at this conclusion after interviewing elderly members of the village (one man in particular, who seems to have been a close relative of one of the members of the society), and enlisting the help of a medium in summoning the souls of two of the members of the organization. They also borrow from a superstition that one should never climb up a durian tree, or the tree will refuse to drop its fruit ever after, letting them open and rot on the tree (there is such a tree near the shack). After drawing strident criticism of the class project from the parents and relatives of the students, who fear that digging out secrets from that time period is dangerous, the students are told to cease their investigation. But they only leave off searching for the names of members of the secret brotherhood when they realize that one of them might still be alive and, out of fear of exposure, attempt to kill them.

In these two tales and a third one, “Mountain Sacrifice” 山殂, which involves a couple’s two resistance-fighter sons who were killed during World War II, we as readers learn about the peculiar situation in which the Chinese population of Malaysia faced during and after the war. First, many Chinese joined the resistance movement, not so much because Malaya had been occupied by the Japanese, but because the Japanese had invaded China. This led to ties between the resistance and the CCP, and at the end of the war British and Malay fears of the (Chinese) (communist) resistance army taking over in Malaysia led to the suppression and slaughter of many villagers.

These facts, however, were largely glossed over in the 1950s and 1960s in official histories. Ng thus shares with Choong and Lim a distrust of “official” history, and seeks to construct an alternative version of the past based on other voices, including private memories. These individual memories and other sources are then given order by the narrator, who records them; but that narrative is often not chronological. Rather, the logic they follow is association, often based on places or objects.

Chan Tah Wei is another writer who uses objects (in this case, two buildings) to construct a narrative history of the Chinese in Malaysia. In his two essays “Days of a Teahouse” 茶楼消瘦 and “The Clan Association” 会馆, he traces the establishment, glory days, and contemporary decline of two “Chinese” institutions.

“The Clan Association” is particularly interesting because, in its earliest incarnation, we see Chinese immigrants thinking of themselves not as “Chinese,” but as natives of Guilin in Guangxi, and distinct from Teochew, Hokkien, Hainanese, and even Cantonese. The clan associations were just as concerned with maintaining barriers and creating rivalries with other clans as they were with maintaining distinctions with the Malays, Indians, and British. Gradually these distinctions are dropped, the “pure native accents of Guilin” 纯正的桂林乡音 spoken by the new arrivals are contrasted instead with those “which have been modified by Nanyang’s environment” 一大群经南洋水土修订过的乡音 (p. 69). By the end of the story, the great-grandson of one of the earliest members (who arrived in 1897) can no longer even speak the dialect, answering the head of the clan association in Cantonese. The story begins with the grandfather, drunk, telling stories of his own father’s arrival in Nanyang and the efforts made by the family and clan associations, mainly in the economic arena. What he remembers, we are told, is not China (he was born in Malaya), but Nanyang (p. 64). Again, this sort of “history” is associated with personal memories; it is as if, not concerned with national affairs, it does not merit, or is not accorded a place in official history, only remaining alive in the grandfather’s memory and in the grandson’s pen.

“Days of a Teahouse” traces the history of a teahouse from 1909 to the 1990s, concentrating on successive generations of customers. Chan notes the homesickness of the first generation of immigrants, sipping their tea “as if they were really able to taste China” 好像真的可以饮到唐山的滋味 (p. 78). All the talk is about corruption in the Manchu court in China, “Nanyang is merely their rice-bowl: sitting here for the entire morning, you have not heard one word about Malaya” 坐了一整个清晨竟然听不到半句有关马来亚的对话 (p. 80). For the next generation, post 1949, the victory of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) results in “a completely unfamiliar communist China,” and interest has shifted to Malayan and Singaporean politics and independence; Sun Yat-sen has been replaced by Tunku Abdul Rahman as “father of the nation” 国父. The second important topic in the postwar period is the establishment of Chinese-language schools through charitable donations, which constitutes “a page in the glorious past of the history of Chinese education in Malaya” 马来亚半岛的华文教育史上书写一页辉煌. The final generation, in the 1990s, has deserted the teahouse for Western fast food and Coca-cola.

Both essays, then, associate the decline of “Chinese” institutions with the gradual adaptation of the Malaysian Chinese to the local environment (南洋水土); moreover, the nostalgia felt in these pieces is for the glorious history of

Chinese in Southeast Asia, not for China. This is, in effect, what the Singaporean writers fear and resist; Chan obviously feels nostalgia for the glory days of these buildings, but does not suggest that there is anything he can do about it.

Many Malaysian Chinese writers celebrate geographic places; often, the places are no longer their “hometowns” in China, but rather their hometowns in Malaysia. Lim Choon Bee’s essay, “My Deep Attachment to Penang” 我的檳城情意结, for example, focuses on the street she grew up on, the newspaper stalls, rickshaws, religious festivals, and above all the food. She even has a whole section dedicated to the garbage. Other writers miss the quiet village life of their childhood, such as Wan Ran 莞然 (“A Mud Path” 一条泥路), Fan Pik Wah (“Old Temple” 旧庙), and Ng Kim Chew (*Dark Night*). In all of these stories, the family home is surrounded by oil palm plantations, rubber trees, or forest. In fact, besides “My Deep Attachment to Penang,” no one seems interested in celebrating cities, and even in that essay, the author emphasizes the almost village-like atmosphere when she was growing up on her particular street, which was mainly Chinese. In “Old Temple,” Fan writes appreciatively of the continued existence of old temples in the hustle and bustle of Kuala Lumpur, and contrasts the soullessness of a recently-built temple with the spiritual feeling that old temples evoke in one.

Perhaps the most interesting piece I have read that celebrates the geography of Malaysia is “Burial” 葬 by Lim Choon Bee, who in her essay chooses five locations for her ashes to be scattered: three in West Malaysia, and one in East Malaysia (she leaves the last location unspecified), to remind the inhabitants there that they are part of the larger country called “Malaysia.” This is easily the most overtly nationalistic of all the pieces I have discussed.

Rubber, oil palm, durians, kampong life, old temples, Bukit Cina; the list of objects and places written about begins to look pre-modern. However, if we look carefully at the list of objects celebrated as “Malaysian” by these writers, we discover that, besides those things associated with Chinese culture (Bukit Cina, the tea-house, the clan association building, mahjong, lion-dancing etc.), all of the objects which are specific to Malaysia seem to be “natural” objects, i.e. plants and animals. Thus, despite the fact that the three essays I mentioned in part two applaud the fluid nature of cultural memory and identity, and talk about how other cultures have influenced Chinese culture in Malaysia, we are hard-pressed to find anything “cultural” in these stories that can be linked to Malays or Indians. Rubber trees, oil palm trees, and especially durians are everywhere, but Malay cultural activities are absent. These writers are interested in the history of Chinese in Malaysia, but not in the history of the Malaysian peninsula before the arrival of the Chinese, or what the other ethnic groups in the peninsula are doing. The places they remember are those where they have left their mark, and the things that they remember are either natural objects devoid of cultural associations or items linked to Chinese culture.

In other words, these stories exhibit a colonizing mentality, whereby the land of Malaysia is depicted as devoid of culture before the arrival of the Chinese, who then proceed to “civilize” the exotic landscape. This is perhaps most obvious in Wong Yoon Wah’s essay: he has one paragraph where he describes how the rubber trees, planted by Chinese immigrant labor, pushed back the jungle with its poisonous snakes and wild beasts, bringing order, prosperity, and modernity to Singapore and Malaysia (p. 6):

The rubber tree is the incarnation of the hardworking Chinese who journeyed to Nanyang many years ago and opened up the wilderness. Only after the verdant rubber tree was transplanted here from Brazil, and relying upon the perseverance and diligence of the Chinese immigrants, were the desolate wilderness, primitive forests, poisonous snakes and ferocious beasts driven back to the most precipitous parts of the main mountain range in the Malay Peninsula. Therefore the rubber tree symbolized the pioneers of Singapore and Malaysia and, at the same time, was the lifeblood of the economy. Right up until 1970, the rubber plantation workers in Malaysia still constituted seventy per cent of the country’s overall employment force.

橡胶树是早年开拓南洋勤劳的华侨之化身。绿色的橡胶树从巴西移植过来后，再依靠华人移民的刻苦耐劳，才把南洋时代的蛮荒，毒蛇猛兽，原始森林，通通驱逐到马来半岛最险峻的主干山脉上。所以橡胶树象征新加坡和马来西亚早年的拓荒者，同时也是经济的生命线。一直到一九七零年以前，马来西亚橡胶园的职工人数，还占全国的百分之七十左右。

It is hard to imagine a more perfect example of the colonist fantasy of the “virgin territory” to be opened up and made to yield riches (i.e. to be impregnated by the colonizer).

In the context of colonialism, the fixation on durians as the metaphor for Yap Ah Loy’s assimilation (but also in many other pieces) allows Lim Choon Bee and other writers a completely natural, culture-free metaphor for their assimilation to Malaysia, which can then be perceived as having nothing to do with getting accustomed to living with Malays and Indians. Unlike the figures for Chinese culture, which are unfailingly positive, the durian fruit projects a decidedly mixed image. Covered in sharp spines on the outside and exuding a smell that many people characterize as putrid, a taste for durian is something that a significant number of people never acquire.

The colonial reading also explains why, after bringing up Indian immigrants once, Wong drops them and continues thinking only in terms of Chinese achievements in this land. It is this slippage (all rubber tappers are Chinese) that maintains the fantasy. Finally, Lim Kim Cherng is the exception that proves the rule: his protest against the cultural chauvinism of his fellow Malaysian Chinese indicates that such an attitude is widespread among that population.

But what does this colonial fantasy have to do with memory? First of all, the colonial fantasy is constructed out of selected memories of the past in these essays

and stories. The focus on the past allows them free range to imagine the scene of colonization in the past; this is necessary because, of course, the present situation of the Chinese in Malaysia is far from being that of the colonist. The less appealing the present political situation is, the more attractive the glorious past of their forebears becomes.

Second, the overwhelming majority of these works are written by Malaysian Chinese who no longer live in Malaysia; most of these people now live and work in Taiwan. They are writing, therefore, from their memories of Malaysia. Moreover, those writers still living in Malaysia also seek to have their works published in Taiwan. The effect of this is the creation in the Taiwanese literary field of a fantasy of Chinese emigration and expansion in an exotic locale. Chang Kuei-hsin, perhaps now the best known of this group, and whose works I have not had space to discuss, has lived in Taiwan for almost 20 years, but all of his fiction is set in Sabah and Sarawak where he grew up. Part of the appeal of such works in Taiwan, then, I would argue, is that these narratives glorify an expansionist Chinese past which precedes the CCP victory of 1949 and hints at a “might have been” overseas Chinese state in Malaya. The role of Malaysian Chinese writers on the Taiwanese literary stage, is, however, too large a topic for the present discussion.

One question that I have been asked by several people who read or heard early drafts of this paper is: “why are the writers in Singapore and Malaysia responding to what, on the surface, looks like a very similar situation in the two countries in such different ways?” I can think of at least three possible explanations. First, I wish to point out that there may in fact be writers in Malaysia who share the same view of Chinese culture as those writers in Singapore whom I discuss, just as there may be writers in Singapore who share the Malaysians writers’ point of view. I do not pretend to have read every important writer in the two countries. Second, the two different views may be the result of a generational effect: the Singaporean writers discussed here are mainly from an older generation, and their works were published in the 1980s and early 1990s, whereas the Malaysian writers discussed here tend to be younger, and their works were published more recently. I see these two possibilities as inter-related. Third, I think the political situations in the two countries are different. Although one could argue that in both countries Chinese culture faces real challenges, in Malaysia the Chinese are a minority, whereas in Singapore they are the majority. The fact that the majority of Singaporeans are ethnic Chinese may have led Chinese writers there to feel more strongly that, as a “Chinese” society, Singapore *should* maintain its Chinese cultural identity. In Malaysia, on the other hand, Malaysian Chinese as a minority may feel that they need to meet other cultures halfway, although I would suggest that, perhaps for the same reason, their situation engenders the colonial fantasy: because they are a minority in the country (as, indeed, most colonial powers are), they wish that the other cultures were not there.

In the end, however, it might be more helpful to think of these two attitudes in more general terms: it is not so much whether Singaporeans seek to preserve Chinese culture in Southeast Asia from change, or Malaysian Chinese adopt a more flexible attitude. Rather, these are two basic, possible reactions to cultural change that people from any culture, faced with the possibility of change, might adopt, as I hope the last section of my paper will show.

Conclusion — My Grandfather’s Trunk: A Physical and Spatial Metaphor for Cultural Memory

To tie some of the threads of this essay together, I would like to conclude with a discussion of Hoo Joo Chuan’s 许裕全 “I dreamt of Flying Fish” (梦过飞鱼). The story revolves around the figure of the narrator’s grandfather, an immigrant from China to Malaysia, who has just died at the beginning of the story. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that the grandfather, separated from his brother at the dock when he left China, dreamt continually of returning to his hometown, a dream he never realized. Instead he lived more than 50 years as a farmer and later a fisherman in Malaysia; after retirement he took up drinking and gambling to pass the time, eventually dying of a heart attack at the mahjong table after drawing a winning tile.

In the story there are two things which stimulate the grandfather’s memories of home: Teochew opera, performed annually at the local temple, and a rattan trunk containing some yellowed clothes which he had brought with him from China. The role of opera in the cultural memory of Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore is well documented, especially in conjunction with religious festivals (see DeBernardi 2004 for a recent example discussing Penang). For now, I would like to focus on the rattan trunk, and play a bit with some synonyms for the word “trunk” in English.

The definition of trunk in Webster’s that concerns us here is “a large rigid piece of luggage used usually for transporting clothing and personal effects.” In true circular form, Webster defines luggage as “something that is lugged; esp: suitcases or traveling bags for a traveler’s belongings: baggage,” and then defines baggage as “1: traveling bags and personal belongings of travelers: luggage.” However, baggage has at least one additional meaning that is relevant here: “3: a: superfluous or intrusive things or circumstances b: outmoded theories or practices.” (The second definition is not relevant in the present context.)

In English it is common to speak of “emotional baggage” and “intellectual baggage;” such phrases have almost universally negative connotations, and we are advised to empty our minds of these useless items, to “lose” both of them in order to be happy. It is this sense of “baggage” that started me thinking about the status of the rattan trunk in this story.

If we look carefully, I think we can see that the rattan trunk is perceived variously as luggage or baggage by different characters; but in either case, the trunk is linked to questions of culture, memory, and identity. The history of the rattan trunk can in effect be read as a shortened and simplified history of evolving cultural identity among the Chinese of Singapore and Malaysia, tracing a struggle to define the trunk as luggage or baggage in the theatre of social memory.

For the grandfather starting out from China, the trunk is simply luggage, the container which holds all of his worldly effects upon setting out to Nanyang 南洋. After his separation from his brother, however, the trunk takes on a symbolic status as the only tangible reminder of his family: it becomes a memento. Unlike the physical objects listed by Singaporean writers, however, the trunk is clearly not a synecdoche for Chinese culture; rather it is more important as a receptacle that both literally and figuratively contains all that he brought with him from China. When he takes the clothes out of his trunk and fingers them, he is reminded of his relatives and his hometown. As time goes by and he is unable to return home (his request for a visa is denied after Malaysian independence), he becomes more and more attached to the trunk, and becomes more and more invested in it emotionally as a site of memory of home. Home means family, and the grandfather talks about leaves from a tree falling back to their roots (*luoye guigen* 落叶归根), a common saying indicating that one should ideally return home, if only to die. After his retirement, he becomes more and more frustrated, and turns to gambling and drinking.

At the same time, however, other characters in the story clearly perceive the trunk to be baggage. His wife, for example, has no interest in returning to China, and urges him to settle down in the new home he has built in Malaysia. His son, who is a bureaucrat in the new state, also has no desire to “return” to China, a country he has never visited, although he dutifully helps his father to apply (unsuccessfully) for a visa. For these two characters, cultural memories of China are not useful for fitting into Malaysian society; furthermore, since the grandfather’s homesickness has led to drinking and gambling, these memories are actually harmful. The son is even forced to go around the village paying off his father’s gambling debts periodically and apologizing for his behavior.

Perhaps most interesting is the grandson’s relation to his grandfather and the trunk. Paul Connerton (1989: 39) argues that in premodern societies, the rearing and education of children was often left to the grandparents, while the parents were out tilling the land. This contact between the oldest and youngest generations helped ensure continuity of social memory. In “Flying Fish,” the grandfather, although he is certainly not in charge of his grandson’s formal education, does take it upon himself to try and pass on his longing for his homeland to his grandson, perhaps out of frustration with the indifference of his son. He speaks to his grandson of China and asks him to return there with him. Ironically,

however, it is the story of the flying fish (which symbolizes vitality and a refusal to give up) which makes the deepest impression on the grandchild. This experience is manifestly a Southeast Asian one; the tropical flying fish inspires the grandfather with the will to live during a storm at sea off the coast of Malaysia, when he is in danger of giving up and drowning. This spirit of never giving up, embodied in the flying fish, becomes the principal memory which he passes to his grandson. Stories of his grandfather's hometown, his relatives, and what it means to be Chinese, all recede in comparison; after his grandfather's death the boy imagines his grandfather transformed into a flying fish, swimming out to sea away from him.

At the same time, however, it is the grandson who comes closest to realizing his grandfather's dream of returning home, and it is to the grandson that the trunk is passed, not the son. At the end of the story, many years after the grandfather's death, the narrator takes the trunk to Taiwan when he goes there to study. In choosing to go to Taiwan for college education, the grandson re-affirms his identity as Chinese. We are told, however, that his journey to Taiwan is not a return to his grandfather's homeland; instead he could only "gaze at Grandfather's homeland from across a black stretch of water." This was a historical reality for Malaysian Chinese until well into the 1980s, due to the Malaysian government's attitude toward China as an instigator of communist insurgents in the jungles of Malaysia. So his return to "a" China is not a return to "the" China of his grandfather's memories, but rather a journey toward what is for him a new society and culture.

Presumably the grandson has emptied out the grandfather's old clothes and filled the trunk with his own, new clothes from Malaysia. Thus although he uses the same container as the grandfather, what he puts into it is very different. Whether we interpret that container to be a metaphor for the Chinese language (the form which he uses to communicate the content of the story to us) or as a figure of memory (and we can imagine the grandson fingering the contents of the trunk when he is feeling homesick for Malaysia), or as a figure of every person's tendency to carry some emotional and cultural baggage to a new land, it is clearly important to the grandson that he succeeds in bringing his grandfather's trunk, at least this close, to his homeland, just across the Straits of Taiwan. And indeed, if we look at the literary works of Malaysian Chinese writers who have moved to Taiwan to study, we can see that the baggage that they carry with them is often not from China, but from Malaysia, despite the fact that they continue to write in Chinese.

Thus the tale of the trunk can, in the final analysis, be used to help us think about the other writers discussed above, by asking what Singaporean and Malaysian writers pack into the baggage which they themselves carry around with them. For Singaporean Chinese, clothes make the man. The contents of the trunk

are carefully packed with precious items to be handed down from generation to generation; any change in contents would be an unacceptable betrayal. Like the grandfather, Singaporean writers have kept the trunk neatly packed with their cultural baggage. In Malaysia, cultural memory is portrayed as changing over time due to the adjustment to a new physical environment. The heavy winter clothes are discarded, some of the lighter summer ones are kept, and some new ones made for the Malaysian climate are added. We might note at this juncture, however, that in none of the stories discussed is there any mention of Chinese wearing that most typical of Malay clothes, the sarong, which might symbolize Malay culture. Finally, when moving to Taiwan, the trunk is filled with (perhaps deliberately) shockingly colorful batik shirts and pants which will be taken out and worn when the author wishes to draw attention to the exotic land from which she or he hails.

No matter how much the contents may be changed, however, the trunk itself remains. This metaphor finally suggests, then, that one can change various elements of one's cultural memory while keeping intact a sense of one's identity, perhaps through the sense of agency involved in deciding what to include and what to discard.

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