

Turning Diaspora on Its Head: Displacement and Mainlander Identity in Contemporary Taiwan

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Abstract

When Chiang Kai-shek's regime collapsed in China, one of the largest forced migrations in modern East Asia took place. A majority of this exodus landed in Taiwan with the defeated Nationalists. They and their descendants born on the island are commonly referred to as "mainlanders" (*waishengren* 外省人). In contemporary Taiwan, the study of *waishengren* grew out of the research on ethnic relations and identity politics in the midst of polarizing elections and rising trend of Taiwanization. Viewed together through the lens of social surveys and the island's postcolonial historiography, *waishengren* became a privileged minority and a pro-Nationalist/pro-China outsider group in contrast to the rest. In response, some sociologists, anthropologists, and literary scholars, many of them second generation mainlanders, proposed "diaspora" (*lisan* 離散) as a way to recover *waishengren*'s diverse histories and exilic experiences. This paper discusses theoretical issues of considering mainlanders in Taiwan as a diaspora, or as part of the Chinese diaspora. I underscore the tension in the current diaspora theory and the way in which mainlander scholars in Taiwan have appropriated the knotty concept to guide their memory projects and identity politics since the late 1990s. While displacement is central to contemporary mainlander identity formation, I argue that *waishengren*'s diasporic memories and subjectivities in contemporary Taiwan are used to articulate an autochthonous identity. This turns diaspora on its head.

Historical Background and Contemporary Context

Following immediately the carnage and devastation of World War II, civil war between China's two self-professed revolutionary forces, the Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*, KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), destroyed countless communities and displaced millions of people. When the CCP Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding the People's Republic of China (PRC) on top of Tiananmen on October 1 1949, a colossal population movement was taking place. The exodus of the Chinese civil war landed mostly in the vicinity of the mainland, such as Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Burma.¹ The largest group, approximately one million, relocated to Taiwan with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's defeated regime.² They and their descendants born on the island are commonly referred to as "mainlanders" or *waishengren*. *Waishengren* constitutes roughly 10-13% of Taiwan's population though there has been a decline in people claiming this identity according to recent surveys.³

Influenced by Cold War propaganda on both ends of the Taiwan Strait, the established view is that these people were Nationalist elites, military personnel, and diehard supporters of the Generalissimo. Research done by scholars in democratized Taiwan, mostly through reclaiming repressed popular memories, has presented a more complex picture.⁴ In the early 2010s, two monographs in English based on oral

¹ For more on the exodus to Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Burma, see Laura Madokoro, *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2016); Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, "Humanitarian Assistance and Propaganda War: Repatriation and Relief of the Nationalist Refugees in Hong Kong's Rennie's Mill Camp, 1950-1955," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 10:2 (2014): 165-196. For Vietnam and Burma, see Xun Yihui, *Jinsanjiao guojun xueleishi (1950-1980)* [The blood and tear history of the KMT army in The Golden Triangle, 1950-1981] (Taipei: Academia Sinica/Lianjing, 2009); Huang Xiangyu, "Zhiyue junmin zhi jieyun laitai (1949-1953)" [Transportation of stranded soldiers and civilians from Vietnam to Taiwan, 1949-1953], *Guoshiguan xueshu jikan* 11 (2007): 143-188.

² This exiled population included hundreds of thousands of Chinese mainlanders who were already in Taiwan before the Nationalist collapse in 1949. Scholars have put forward different estimates of the great mainland exodus to Taiwan in the past ranging from 900,000 to 3 million. A relatively trustworthy study conducted by a demographer in Taiwan in 1969 indicates that the lower end of this range would be closer to reality. See Li Dongming, "Guangfuhou Taiwan renkou shehui zengjia zhi tantao" [A study of the social increase of Taiwan's population after the retrocession], *Taipei wenxian* 9/10 (1969): 215-249.

³ Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang and Mau-kuei Chang, "Understanding the Nuances of Waishengren: History and Agency," *China Perspectives* 2010/3: 110. For a recent survey, see Fu Yangzhi et al., ed., *Taiwan shehui bianqian jiben diaocha jihua: diliuqi disici diaocha jihua zhixing baogao* [The basic investigation plan for Taiwan's social change: a report from the fourth investigation of the sixth period] (Taipei: Zhongyangyanjiuyuan shehuixue yanjiusuo, 2014), 170.

⁴ See the essays in Zhang Maogui (Mau-kuei Chang) ed., *Guojia yu rentong: yixie waishengren de guandian* [Nation and identity: perspectives of some mainlanders] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2010); Zhang Hanbi ed., *Fusanghua yu jiayuan xiangxiang* [Hibiscus and imaging home] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2011); Li Guangjun (Kuang-chun Li) ed., *Li yu ku: zhanzheng de yanxu* [Sufferings of *waishengren* under the war regime] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2010).

history, Joshua Fan's *China's Homeless Generation* (2010) and Mahlon Meyer's *Remembering China from Taiwan* (2012), exemplify part of this collective effort to uncover the diversity of *waishengren* and unveil their hidden traumas.⁵ Yet, there is a need to go beyond simply using these personal recollections to construct history. As we shall see, *waishengren*'s attempt to redefine their communal history vis-à-vis the new *bentuhua*/Taiwan-centered paradigm in the wake of democratization is behind this explosion of diasporic memories.

Mainlanders hailed from different provinces and regions in China. There was a great deal of social diversity, as well as complicated relationships with the displaced Nationalist party-state. Subgroups like “old soldiers” (老兵) and “exiled students from Shandong” (山東流亡學生) were oppressed and deprived by the KMT. Residents of “military family's villages” (*juancun* 眷村) received more state benefits while being subjected to the same political surveillance and indoctrination.⁶ The mainlanders are also divided by generation. Like their displaced parents and grandparents, Taiwan-born *waishengren* search for home and belonging. However, the circumstances under which they do so and their subjects of reminiscence are different from the first generation exiles.

Like all exiled groups in world history, *waishengren* had longed to return home, reunite with family, and reclaim what was lost. They settled down in Taiwan eventually as Chiang Kai-shek's promise to retake the mainland was not realized. Yet, diasporic sentiment of uprootedness and loss has shaped their history, subjectivity, and identity formation. When Taiwan democratized in 1987, the long-awaited journey home shattered *waishengren*'s mainland nostalgia. In the meantime, the Nationalist ideology—something that the first generation exiles helped to construct and the second generation grew up with—began to crumble. The KMT legacy on the island came under increasing challenge of a revisionist perspective with a postcolonialist bend loosely described as “indigenization” (*bentuhua* 本土化).⁷ The new perspective seeks to recover the suppressed local Taiwanese history and culture. It considers the

⁵ Joshua Fan, *China's Homeless Generation: Voices from the Veterans of the Chinese Civil War, 1940s-1990s* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Mahlon Meyer, *Remembering China from Taiwan: Divided families and Bittersweet Reunions after the Chinese Civil War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

⁶ *Juancun* is usually translated as “military dependents' village.” I use “military family's village” to underscore the fact that for many Taiwan-born *waishengren*, these communities had become their homes. For subgroups in *waishengren*, see Yang and Chang, “Understanding the Nuances,” 115-118.

⁷ For more on indigenization, see the essays in John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau eds., *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Nationalist rule not as an enlightened dictatorship that paved the way for the economic miracle and democracy, but a colonial regime run by outsiders. This regime of outsiders inhibited and denigrated local languages, subjectivities, and political aspirations. Collaterally, mainlander dominance in politics, education, media, and publication came under heavy criticism. Their overrepresentation in the military and the civil service became a sign of collusion with the authoritarian party-state.

Under two Taiwanese presidents who championed *bentuhua*, Lee Teng-hui (1988-2000) and Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008), *waishengren* felt increasingly marginalized, disoriented and insecure. It was under these circumstances that they began to produce a considerable number of personal memoirs and oral history volumes collectively. This oral history enterprise focused on the dislocation, family separation, and nostalgia caused by 1949. Long Yingtai's (龍應台, 1952-) bestseller *Big River Big Sea 1949* (大江大海一九四九) published in 2009 is a prominent example of this memory boom that continues until this day.⁸ Notable publications in the same year that used the same “rivers and seas” metaphor to encapsulate the pain and floating rootlessness in displacement included Qi Bangyuan's *The River of Big Torrents*⁹ and Zhang Dianwan's *Pacific 1949*.¹⁰ In producing these diasporic memories, elderly and surviving first generation migrants acted as witnesses and narrators. The second and third generation mainlanders born in Taiwan served as recorders, curators, and publishers, that is, the custodians of their predecessors' memories. Besides oral history publications, fictional and semi-fictional works, such as novels, movies, documentaries, TV dramas, and theatrical plays have received critical acclaim and attracted enthusiastic audiences. Those portraying the lives of two particular mainlander communities of displacement and nostalgia—“old soldiers” and “military family's villages”—are especially popular.¹¹

⁸ Long Yingtai, *Dajiang dahai yijiusiji* [Big river big sea 1949] (Taipei: Tianxia zazhi, 2009).

⁹ Qi Bangyuan, *Juliuhe* [The river of big torrents] (Taipei: Tianxia yuanjian, 2009).

¹⁰ Zhang Dianwan *Tai ping lun 1949: hangxiang Taiwan de gushi* [*Pacific 1949: the stories of the journey to Taiwan*] (Taipei: Shangzhou chuban, 2009).

¹¹ Some of *laobing* stories have been translated in English, see Chi Pang-yuan (Qi Bangyuan) and David Der-wei Wang eds., *The Last of the Whampoa Breed: Stories of Chinese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). One of the best known semi-fictional writing on *juancun* is “Thinking about My Brothers in the Military Family's Village” by Zhu Tianxin in the early 1990s. *Juancun* were residential communities constructed by the KMT state to house military personnel and their families. A majority of *juancun* residents were mainlanders. Two television soap operas—*Goodbye, Loyalty Village Number Two* (再見, 忠貞二村, 2005) and *Story of Time* (光陰的故事, 2008-2009)—gained a wide following in Taiwan during the 2000s. The latter was the brainchild of famed television producer Wang Weizhong (1957-). *Story of Time* not only achieved great ratings, but also led to a surge of *juancun* nostalgia. In late 2008, Wang teamed up with acclaimed playwright Stan

Contested Interpretations: Diaspora versus Colonizers

In Taiwan's academia "mainlander studies" have emerged in recent decades, assisted by a torrent of private memories. Most of these are in unpublished graduate student theses and in disciplines like anthropology, sociology, literature, history, political science, and media studies.¹² They are mainly produced by second and third generation mainlanders. A majority of these are based on personal interviews.¹³ This body of works arguably influenced English scholarship on the subject, such as the aforementioned monographs by Joshua Fan and Mahlon Meyer. In the light of personal testimonies offered by these, a number of scholars, namely, Zhang Maogui, Antonia Chao (Zhao Yanning), Scott Simon and Joshua Fan, propose that we should consider *waishengren* as a type of diaspora. They thought the mainlanders, especially the first generation civil war exiles, had more in common with other known diasporic communities in world history, like the Jews and the Armenians, than the Chinese overseas, whom the term is usually applied to.¹⁴ This idea resonates with efforts by literary scholars to (re)discover and appraise "diasporic narratives" (離散/流離敘事) of distinguished mainlander authors for which David Der-wei Wang has coined the term "loyalist/post-loyalist writing" (遺民/後遺民書寫).¹⁵ Collectively, they argue that *waishengren*'s mentality and lived experiences have epitomized what James Clifford depicts as a diasporic condition, "living here and remembering/desiring another place."¹⁶

Lai (1954-) to create a play called *Formosa Village Number One* (寶島一村).

¹² For a survey of mainlander studies in Taiwan, see Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang and Mau-kuei Chang, "Understanding the Nuances of Waishengren: History and Agency," *China Perspectives* 2010/3 (2010): 108-122.

¹³ Some of the best graduate student research is published in Zhang Maogui (Chang Mau-kuei) ed., *Guojia yu rentong: yixie waishengren de guandian* [Nation and identity: perspectives of some mainlanders] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2010); Zhang Hanbi ed., *Fusanghua yu jiayuan xiangxiang* [Hibiscus and imaging home]. (Taipei: Qunxue, 2011); Li Guangjun ed., *Li yu ku: zhanzheng de yanxu* [Sufferings of *waishengren* under the war regime] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2010).

¹⁴ Zhao Yanning (Antonia Chao), "Daizhe caomao dao chu luxing—shilun zhongguo liuwang、nuxing zhuti、yu jiyi jian de jiangou guanxi" [A forever banished uterus: Chinese diaspora, fertility, and the politics of suffering], *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* 41 (2001): 53-97; Zhao Maogui, "Waishengren: Exploring Diaspora Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan" (paper presented at the inauguration address for the Series on Identities in East Asia, Stanford University, Asia-Pacific Research Center, April 6, 2005); Scott Simon, "Taiwan's Mainlanders: A Diasporic Identity in Construction." *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 22:1 (2006): 87-106; Joshua Fan, *China's Homeless Generation: Voices from the Veterans of the Chinese Civil War, 1940s-1990s* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5-7.

¹⁵ For examples, see David Der-wei Wang, *Yijiu siji: shanghen shuxie yu guojia wenxue* [1949: Scar narratives and national literature] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2008); *Hou yimin shuxie* [Post-loyalist writing] (Taipei: Maitien, 2007); Hou Ruqi, *Shuangxiang zhijian: Taiwan sheng xiaoshuojia de lisan yu xushi(1950-1987)* [Between two homes: diasporic narratives of mainlander novelists in Taiwan, 1950-1987] (Taipei: Lianjing, 2014).

¹⁶ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA:

Yet, whether any communities that live in this kind of “condition” or possess any sort of exilic sentiment could be considered a diaspora is an issue that needs to involve more careful historical research and more elaborate theoretical discussion beyond self-identity, group agency, and collective memory. For the mainlanders, the claim to diaspora in the midst of Taiwan’s democratization and the rising trend of indigenization (Taiwanization) has larger political and social implications. Essentially, it is their collectively response to being denounced as “outsiders” and “colonizers” affiliated with Chiang Kai-shek’s oppressive exiled regime. Since the early 1990s, there has been a politically and emotionally-charged battle over the historical interpretation of *waishengren*. As the late Alan Wachman has shown, Taiwan’s political liberalization went hand in hand with the clash between a minority of mainlander elites who dominated politics and the native Taiwanese majority, many of whom supported the political opposition movement that later coalesced into the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).¹⁷

Knowing that the tensions among different social groups—especially between the mainlanders and the Taiwanese—could become a major problem, local intellectuals working for the government think tanks developed a new way to conceptualize communal differences in Taiwan in the 1990s. The new concept was based on the multiculturalist approach in Western liberal democracies.¹⁸ Under this new concept called “four major ethnic groups” (四大族群), *waishengren* became one of the main “ethnic groups” in Taiwan. The other three are Hoklo, Hakka, and the aborigines.¹⁹ The first two are often lumped together and called the “native Taiwanese” because of their shared history and memory living under the Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945), their traumatic encountered with the “motherland” and the mainlanders after 1945, and their autochthonous claim to identity. This new taxonomy of social communities based on ethnicity is part of the island’s new *bentü* or “indigenized” nationalist ideology and historiography. A corollary of the “four major ethnic groups” is that Taiwan is no longer part of a divided state with the PRC or an appendage to mainland China. Rather, it is an independent political entity formed by different ethnic groups.

Harvard University Press, 1997), 255.

¹⁷ Alan M. Wachman, *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).

¹⁸ For more, see Zhang Maogui ed., *Zuqun guanxi yu guojia rentong* [Ethnic relations and national identity] (Taipei: Yeqiang, 1993).

¹⁹ For the historical development of “four major ethnic groups,” see Wang Fuchang, *Dangdai Taiwan shehui de zuqun xiangxiang* [Ethnic imagination in contemporary Taiwan] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2003).

Each group has their own unique history and culture.

Unfortunately, this multiculturalist approach did not ease communal tension in the newly democratized Taiwan. Politically, the formation of the New Party (*Xindang* 新黨) in 1993 illustrated the mainlander-Taiwanese divide in the KMT, as well as the larger society. When the shift from provincial difference to ethnic difference was completed with the abolishment of “native place registration” (*jiguan* 籍貫), social scientists in Taiwan started to explore issues that gave rise to what they termed “ethnic conflict” (族群衝突) between the native Taiwanese and the mainlander, which was once misunderstood and dismissed as unhealthy “provincialism” (省籍情結) under the Nationalist dictatorship.²⁰ What came out of this research under the rubric of “ethnic relations” (族群關係) were a large body of works mostly based on social surveys. These studies separated *waishengren* from the rest of Taiwan statistically in the context of rising Taiwanese identity and nationalism. Collectively, the surveys show higher percentages of mainlanders living in cities, working for the government and the military, having better education, and identifying more with the KMT and China compared to three other ethnic groups.²¹ These results became an indictment against mainlander privilege and their close association with the exiled Nationalist regime historically. The differences between *waishengren* and the rest of Taiwan in national identity and willingness to accept unification with China later expanded into both quantitative (questionnaires/surveys) and qualitative studies (personal interviews) looking into the nature and transformation of mainlander identity dilemma.

Notwithstanding the earlier “ethnic relations” studies, research done by Stéphane Corcuff, Li Kuang-chun, and Shen Shiau-chi/Wu Nai-teh has actually shattered the myth of mainlanders favoring unification despite a higher identification with China

²⁰ For more on this paradigm shift, see Wang Fu-chang, “You Zhongguo shengji dao Taiwan zuqun: hukou pucha jibei leishu zhuanbian zhi fenxi” [From Chinese original domicile to Taiwanese ethnicity: an analysis of census category transformation in Taiwan], *Taiwan shehuixue* 9 (2005): 59-117.

²¹ For examples, see Tsai Shu-ling, “Shehui diwei qude: shandi 、 minke 、 ji waisheng zhi bijiao” [The attainment of social status: the comparison among aborigines, Hoklo, Hakka, and Mainlanders], in *Bianqian zhong de Taiwan shehui (shangce)* [Taiwanese society in transition, Vol. I], eds. Yang Kuo-shu and Chu Hai-yuan (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1987), 1-44; Lin Chia-lung, “Weiquan shicong zhengti xia de Taiwan fandui yundong—minjin dang shehui jichu de zhengzhi jieshi” [The opposition movement in Taiwan under a patron-client regime—political explanation for the social base of the DPP], *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* 2:1 (1989): 117-143; Wu Nai-the, “Guojia rentong he zhengdang zhichi: Taiwan zhengdang jingzheng de shehui jichu” [Party support and national identities: social cleavages and party competition in Taiwan], *Minzuxue yanjiusuo jikan* 74 (1992): 33-61. Also see the essays contained in Chang Mau-kuei ed., *Zuqun guanxi yu guojia rentong* [Ethnic relations and national identity] (Taipei: Yeqiang, 1993).

and the KMT. Their research illustrates a long-term trend of *waishengren* both adapting to and accepting indigenization/Taiwanization from the 1990s to the late 2000s.²² Yet, many *waishengren*, especially the second and the third generations born in Taiwan, continue to feel that they are vilified unjustly as perpetual outsiders or children of KMT colonizers. These sentiments often spike during the island's polarizing elections and public debates on textbook revisions.²³ The denigration and negation of a history that was part of their upbringing and communal memory have perturbed and alienated many *waishengren* to the mainstream Taiwanese political and intellectual agendas. It has also prompted their collective articulation of diasporic memories. Working together, mainlanders of different generations find meanings in connecting present insult and marginalization with past experiences of victimization, exile, and nostalgia. Ironically, though many mainlanders reject the idea of being put in an "ethnic group box," which for them means collective stigmatization, they are actively producing communal memories that provide them with a sense of identity and belonging.

Turning Diaspora on Its Head: *Waishengren's* Autochthonous Claim to Identity

The diasporic memories and narratives of the mainlanders began to surface in the early 1990s. It is said that every *waisheng* family had a refugee story. However, it was not until four decades later after the initial exodus that the surviving exiled generation and the Taiwan-born generation began to talk about these family stories publically and published a large number of personal memoirs and oral history books. After their heart-breaking journeys home to China and Taiwan's move toward indigenization, a majority of *waishengren* became keenly aware of their non-belonging on both ends of the Taiwan Strait and their minority position in the newly democratized Taiwan. The reverse culture shock of return crystalized and solidified mainlanders' already existing

²² Kao Ko-fu (Stéphane Corcuff), *Fenghe rinuan: Taiwan waishengren yu guojia rentong de zhuanbian* [Gentle breeze and warm sunshine: the transformation of mainlanders' national identity in Taiwan] (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2004); Li Kuang-chun, "Mirror and Masks: An Interpretative Study of Mainlanders' Identity Dilemma," in Stéphane Corcuff ed., *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan* (Armonk, New York: M E Sharpe, 2002), 102-122; Shen Shiao-Chi and Nai-teh Wu "Ethnic and Civil Nationalisms: Two Roads to the Formation of a Taiwanese Nation," in Peter C.Y. Chow ed., *The "One China" Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 117-143.

²³ For the textbook controversy in 1997, see Wang Fuchang, "Minzu xiangxiang zuqun yishi yu lishi: renshi Taiwan jiaokeshu zhengyi fengbo de neirong yu mailuo fenxi" [National imagination, ethnic consciousness, and history: Content and context analyses of the "Getting to Know Taiwan" textbook disputes], *Taiwan shi yanjiu* 8:2 (2001): 145-208.

attachments to Taiwan while severing their mainland-centered nostalgia.²⁴ The memory boom concentrated on the stories of 1949 should be understood in this context.

What is really interesting and unusual about the displacement narratives of the mainlanders is that in articulating these diasporic memories, *waishengren* were actually constructing an identity based in Taiwan. The history of the mainlander community begins with the common experience of loss and suffering as a result of the Chinese civil war and the great exodus in 1949. Thus, while on the level of public discourse, it seems that they are self-identifying as a diasporic population. However, if one looks more closely, he or she would see that the mainlanders are engaging in a conversation with the rest of Taiwan and re-positioning themselves as “mainlander Taiwanese.” They think they have as much claim to being the island’s native sons and daughters as the native Taiwanese and the aboriginal communities for they are ordinary migrants and victims of war and political persecution who have contributed to Taiwan’s development.

In the study of Chinese population movement, the theoretical discussion of diaspora has focused on what I call the “displacement/essentialism versus diversity/hybridity paradigm” that privileges the “Chinese overseas.”²⁵ “Chinese diaspora” is now used interchangeably with “Chinese overseas.” However, when the term was first introduced in the 1990s, scholars of Chinese migration fretted over the political, social, and cultural implications of the term in suggesting essentialist and timeless nostalgic connections of the diverse and multi-generational Chinese immigrants around the world to China.²⁶ One strand of diasporic scholarship associated with the postmodernist/postcolonialist deconstruction of colonial and hegemonic concepts of culture and globalization, as well as Adam McKeown’s call to conceptualize Chinese diaspora, or rather, “diasporic Chinese,” in terms of transnational-local connections beyond nation-based histories, has eased the tension

²⁴ A very small percentage of mainlanders actually moved back to China and lived with their relatives there.

²⁵ For more on “Chinese overseas,” see Huang Jianli, “Conceptualizing Chinese Migration and Chinese Overseas: The Contribution of Wang Gungwu,” *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 6 (2010): 1-21.

²⁶ This is best illustrated by reactions to Tu Wei-ming’s concept of “Cultural China.” See Tu Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” *Daedalus* 120:2 (1991): 1-32, Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *boundary 2* 23:2 (1996): 111-138; Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of Diasporic Paradigm,” *boundary 2* 25:3 (1998): 223-242.

somewhat and made the term more acceptable.²⁷ Still, the flexibility, adaptability and vagueness of diaspora as a theoretical concept lead to problems.²⁸ What we often see are ahistorical grouping and cross-referencing of diverse migrant situations, transnational connections, cultural movements, and identifications under the timeless rubrics of “diaspora” or “Chinese diaspora.” The Sinophone Studies proposed recently by literary scholars to account for the vastly different identities and historical experiences among Chinese-speaking and writing communities in the world is a reaction against the current diasporic framework.²⁹

Whether the mainlanders in Taiwan are or had been a diaspora or a colonizer group is a moot point, depending on one’s politics, subject positions, and how one defines diaspora and colonialism. Though a majority of the civil war exiles in Taiwan arrived with only the clothes on their backs and they had been plagued by a deep sense of displacement and nostalgia, they migrated with a military and authoritarian regime that exercised effective control over the island. It was the native Taiwanese and the aborigines who needed to learn and adapt to the mainland language and culture brought by *waishengren*, not the other way around. In fact, one has to be mindful of the fact that for the young mainlanders, claiming diaspora is an effective way to deflect Taiwanese criticism of their parents’ and grandparents’ historical role in Chiang Kai-shek’s repressive regimes. On the other hand, colonialism also could not do full justice to mainlander history. While one could argue what the Taiwanese experienced in the political and cultural realms under the KMT martial law period can be described as a colonial or semi-colonial experience, the colonialism argument distorts mainlander subjectivities and lived experiences historically. The civil war migrants were political exiles and refugees, not colonists. Their sinocentric arrogance and feeling of superiority over the local peoples in Taiwan were real. Yet, it should be more fairly interpreted as part of a traumatic symptom and overcompensation for their painful losses instead of a colonizing venture and a civilizing mission. Most imperialists and colonizers in world history had the choice of wrapping up and returning home if their ventures failed. Depending

²⁷ For both, see Adam McKeown, “Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842 to 1949,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58:2 (1999): 306~337.

²⁸ For a good critique, see Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*. Trans. William Dodarmo, Foreword by Roger Waldinger (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

²⁹ Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards eds. *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

on social class, they usually had the freedom to travel in the imperial realm and visit the metropolitan center occasionally. Exiles such as the mainlanders did not have this mobility. They were prevented from going home.

As for diaspora, I consider any attempts to suggest certain migrant groups and their descendants as a “diaspora” in accordance to taxonomical definitions put forward by pioneers of diaspora studies like Gabriel Sheffer and William Safran (based mostly on Jewish and Armenian experiences) problematic.³⁰ I would argue that it is much more meaningful intellectually to explore the political and social meanings behind the welling of *waishengren*’s diasporic memories in the wake of Taiwan’s democratization. Notice that I use the adjective “diasporic” instead of “diaspora,” which is also preferred by Adam McKeown.³¹ The distinction between diaspora and diasporic is important in the conceptualization of contemporary *waishengren* identity formation. Without it, we misconstrue the true meaning behind the production of traumatic and diasporic memories by mainlanders in contemporary Taiwan. Saying that nowadays, *waishengren* remain a diaspora of China (i.e. the PRC) or the KMT authoritarian legacy misses the point of why they have constructed an entire memory regime centered on the great exodus.

Again, what is most interesting about the present-day mainlander diasporic memories/narratives or *liuli* is that contrary to diaspora’s original meaning, which entails perpetual alienation and non-belonging, in the context of contemporary Taiwan, *liuli* became a major rallying point for a localized mainlander identity. In the 1950s, China was home that all civil war exiles hoped to return to one day. Hometowns and ancestral villages in the mainland were the “imagined centers” where everything emanated. In the 2000s, home is Taiwan, especially for the younger generations. The history for mainlander communities on the island did not start in the Qing Dynasty, the Anti-Japanese War or originated from different provincial localities in China. Rather, it began and evolved with the mass departure from the mainland, a common denominator for all descendants of the civil war exiles. The great exodus was the genesis. A common lived experience in displacement because of

³⁰ Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London/Sidney: Croom Helm, 1986), 9-10; William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1:1 (1991): 83-84.

³¹ McKeown states, “When used in a more adjectival sense, the idea of diaspora can move away from identifying a bounded group, and instead focus on geographically dispersed connections, institutions, and discourses that cannot be readily accounted for from purely local or national frameworks.” McKeown, “Conceptualizing,” 311

the unfinished civil war (and the Cold War) is what makes “mainlander Taiwanese” different from other Taiwanese. I tell this story in full in my book manuscript in process *The Great Exodus: Cultural Trauma, Diasporic Memories, and the Mainlander Identity in Taiwan*.

My main argument for the entire book consists of two related points. The first is that contemporary recollections of *waishengren* associated with the great exodus of 1949, including those of *laobing* and *juancun*, have become what sociologist Jeffrey Alexander terms “cultural trauma”³² in the still ongoing process of mainlander identity formation vis-à-vis the other major “ethnic groups” on the island, in particular the native Taiwanese. The second point is that the cultural trauma of the mainlanders should not be only be understood as a utilitarian response to present circumstances, but a result of the transformation of diasporic memory regimes described chronologically by the main five chapters of the book. In this particular aspect, my conceptualization of *waishengren* identity resonates with anthropologist Melissa Brown’s argument that national and ethnic identity formation is a product of historically-grounded “social experience.”³³

³² See Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-30.

³³ Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).