The Question of Foreigners: Bai Ren’s Nanyang Piaoliuji and the Re/making of Chinese and Philippine Nationness

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“Nana.” The voice scattered her thoughts.

Whirling, she found a man standing to her left, camouflaged by forest shadows. A disquieting familiarity, as though she had seen him before, flitted through her mind. Then, she was clapping her hands in childlike delight. “A Chinaman,” she said and remembered her roses. But this was the forest and the slim youth was joined by two others, all of them mud spattered and in the last throes of exhaustion. As she led them to the camp, she was haunted by the feeling that she had something important to remember but all that came to her was the insane chattering of hens from some village below.

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Stop! Why are you doing this? Why do you do this?” She swung a hand to take in the forest, the country, the war.

The question hung in the air. The Chinese youth, for he seemed even younger in the phosphorescent glow of the forest night, shrugged.

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I would like to thank Jojo Abinales, Ben Anderson, and Robby Laurel for their extremely helpful comments, and for the gift of their friendship. All errors in this article are my responsibility alone.
“Some say because of Manchuria. Some say because any ground where our forefathers are buried is hollowed ground. Can you, with your blood, understand that? The others don’t; your people do not. So we say because of Manchuria. This country—it has no continuity. It is only a country of beginnings. No one remembers. Not the burial jars, at least.”

Ninotchka Rosca, *State of War* (1988)\(^1\)

The years that followed the death of Mao Zedong and the fall of the Gang of Four witnessed the veritable flowering of literary production in the Chinese Mainland. During the late seventies and early eighties, artists and writers drew inspiration from three main wellsprings of literary creation: the traumas inflicted by the Cultural Revolution, which produced a body of works generally known as “scar literature” (*shangheng wenxue*); the impulse to reflect on the present and the recent past, and on their problems, embodied in the so-called “literature of exposure”; and the return of the repressed personal, that is, sexual and romantic love and other concerns of the private sphere.\(^2\) Writers engaged as well in technical innovation and experimentation, deploying psychological description in their works, and paying close attention to problems of narrativity and expression.

These three wellsprings of literary creation had ideological and political significance in that they served to shore up Deng Xiaoping’s faction within the Communist Party, along with the economic and structural reforms which it espoused. The works which they helped to generate supplied not only critical perspectives on the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, but also, in consequence of the focus which they brought to bear upon subjectivity and desire, the motivation for the literary modernism which flourished, initially, during the May Fourth

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movement. Indeed, the culture debate of the 1980's hinged on both a thoroughgoing critique of Maoist cultural policy, and the effort by intellectuals to establish a semi-autonomous (relative to party control) space for literary production. The issue of subjectivity (zhuti xing) became central to the culture debate, with Chinese theorist Liu Zaifu calling for the recuperation of "humanist" values and the formulation of a "literary subjectivity" aimed specifically at challenging the dominant trend in Marxist criticism, which privileged the idea of "collective identity" at the expense of a more nuanced analytics of the human subject.

On its face, Chinese writer Bai Ren's 1983 novel, Nanyang Piaoliuj (Adrift in the Southern Ocean), appears to fit in with the general trend in post-Mao literary production. Focusing neither on the traumas of the Cultural Revolution, nor on contemporary issues of abuse and injustice, nor even on the strictly personal politics of desire, Bai Ren takes as his topic overseas Chinese (huaqiao) who, on their return to the "Motherland" during the period of the Cultural Revolution, find that, on account of their allegedly "reactionary" and "bourgeois capitalist" character, they are classified under one of the "seven categories of sinister people," alongside of landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, rightists, and enemy agents. Bai Ren had himself been a victim of the Cultural Revolution, his 1957 patriotic spoken

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6 Nanyang, translated as "Southern Ocean," refers to territories in Southeast Asia that are traversed through the South China Sea. Writes Wang Gungwu, "[A]reas of special concern of Nanyang Chinese have been key coastal strips of mainland Southeast Asia and most of the islands of the Philippines and Indonesia." Wang Gungwu, A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese," in his Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia (New South Wales: Asian Studies Association of Australia, and Allen and Unwin, 1992), p. 11.
7 Theresa Chong Carino, China and the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia (Quezon City: New Day publishers, 1985), p. 44.
drama, *Bing Lin Cheng Xia (Soldiers Facing the City Wall)*, first staged in 1962, attended three times by Premier Zhou Enlai, and as many times praised by him, being one of the works singled out for criticism by Jiang Qing and Lin Biao at the onset of the Cultural Revolution. For this he was sent to ten years of hard labor at Gansu and Hunan.8

In light of the recognition given by the Deng administration to the overseas Chinese’ potential economic contribution to the Four Modernizations program,9 Bai Ren’s10 Bai Ren’s semi-autobiographical account 11 of a young boy’s sojourn12 and adventures in the Philip-

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10Bai (White) Ren (Knife’s Edge) is the nom de plume of novelist, dramatist, and poet Wang Jisheng (who also uses the pen name Wang Song). Born Wang Nian Song in Yongningzhen, Jinjiang, Fujian on October 12, 1918, Bai Ren left for the Philippines in 1933. In the Philippines, he stayed in Iloilo (La Paz), Negros Occidental (Fábrika), Cebu, and Manila. In Manila, he studied at Tiong Se Academy and Philippine Cultural High School, and was at the latter while working part-time as a newspaper boy. Bai Ren returned to China in 1937, and continued his studies at Jimei High School in Fujian. He proceeded to Yanan after graduation and for eight years fought the Japanese at Shantung as an actual combatant. He participated in several major battles during the Civil War in the late 1940’s, including the Liaoshi-Shenyang (Mukden) campaign in 1948. His writing career, spanning the years between 1936 and 1996, has resulted in thirty books which collectively add up to four million words.

11The autobiographical elements of *Nanyang* are summarized in detail in Sun Ailing, “Huaqiao Ticai Xiaoshuo de Wenzuoteshe” [Characteristics of the Huaqiao Novel], *Lun Guiqiao Zuojia Xiaoshuo* [On the Novels of Returned Overseas Chinese] (Singapore: Xinjiapo Yunnan Yuanyashe, 1996), pp. 231-38; and in Wei Jun, “Zai Manchang de Daoluishang Qianjin: Ji Juzuojia Bai Ren” [Moving Ahead in the Long Journey: On Bai Ren the Dramatist], Photostat copy, n.d., pp. 86-87. See the Afterword of *Nanyang Piaoliuju*, p. 292, for Bai Ren’s brief discussion of his use of the first-person narrative. Like his protagonist, Bai Ren had worked as an apprentice in a dry-goods store, and after a period of wandering, during which he was rescued from drowning by a Filipina, he became a working student involved in the anti-Japanese movement.
pines during the mid-1930's may be read as an attempt to redress the negative image of, and discrimination against, overseas Chinese during the Maoist years. Bai's novel reinforces leading Chinese Communist Party official Hua Guofeng's official rehabilitation of the huaqiao beginning with his affirmation at the Fifth National People's Congress (February 1978), of the positive role played by returned huaqiao in "building the Motherland." In *Nanyang Piaoliuji*, Bai Ren speaks of the need to correct the Mainland Chinese' erroneous conceptions regarding overseas Chinese:

Many of our compatriots in the Mainland believe that the huaqiao\(^{14}\) are all capitalists. Even the relatives in our hometown [Tangshan; Tengsua in Hokkien] look upon the fanke [the Hokkien term denoting lannang, "our people," who had left China to make a living in a foreign land; literally, visitors or guests in a foreign land\(^{15}\)] as landlords and feel that going abroad is the path to pros-


\(^{13}\) *China and the Overseas Chinese*, p. 53.

\(^{14}\)For an account of the etymology and usage of the term huaqiao, see Wang Gungwu, "The Origins of Hua-Ch'iao," *Community and Nation*, pp. 1-10. *Huaqiao* for the most part of its hundred-year history connoted enforced migration or exile, with semantic overlays of official protection extended to Chinese abroad as well as self-conscious patriotism among the Chinese abroad, expressed as a "cultural" commitment to "remaining Chinese or restoring one's 'Chineseness'" (p. 7). Wang, though, notes that "[w]hile the term retains the surface meaning of 'sojourner', its extended use had created a serious ambiguity, by covering as it did settlers who were foreign subjects" (p. 9).

\(^{15}\)The historian William Henry Scott, citing the Boxer Codex (1590), has argued that sangley, the term by which the Spaniards called the "Chinese" from the 16th to the early 19th centuries before it was replaced by chino in the late nineteenth century, derives from the Chinese words changlai (shonglai in Hokkien), meaning "regularly come". "Frequently coming" sangleyes were called langlang, probably derived from lannang, but also meaning pirate or corsair. William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), pp. 190, 279.
perity. They do not understand the truth about the huaqiao. Of course, there are huaqiao capitalists, but they are few in number. Eighty to ninety percent of the huaqiao are laborers, and a majority of them are small-time vendors, storekeepers, workers, and peasants. They scrimp on food and other necessities in order to save money and return home and support their families.¹⁶

But while Deng’s reformist platform placed a premium on the technical and economic prowess of overseas Chinese,¹⁷ that is, on the very "reactionary," "capitalist" attributes that hitherto had been the cause of their branding as sinister characters in the eyes of the Chinese state, their rehabilitation on the ideological plane has proceeded along a markedly distinct, if not actually opposed, line of argument, insofar as it has tended to elide their identification with bourgeois capitalism, by calling attention to the hard "realities" of overseas Chinese labor. Numerous articles which have appeared in the Chinese media, including the influential Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily), for example, have sought to correct the "erroneous" conceptions which have developed of the huaqiao as capitalists, by running features on them underscoring the point that the majority of them are in fact laborers similarly oppressed by "imperialists, colonialists, and monopoly capitalists."¹⁸

¹⁶Bai Ren, Nanyang Piaoliju (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1983), p. 112. All quotations in this essay are from this edition. The novel was first serialized in Hong Kong’s Wenhui Bao in 1983 and was shortly thereafter published under the title Nanyang Liulanger [Orphan Wanderer of the Southern Ocean] (Hong Kong: South China Press, 1983). The novel was also serialized in the Manila-based newspaper, Shijie Ribao from 25 December 1983 to, roughly, the summer of 1984. Unfortunately, the Shijie Ribao publishers began microfilming their newspaper issues for archival purposes only in the mid-1990’s; consequently, with very few exceptions, the issues prior to 1990 are now unavailable and I have been unable to verify the exact date of the newspaper issue containing the final installment of the novel. The 1984 estimate was provided by Bai Ren in his letter to me dated December 30, 2000.


This seemingly countervailing impulse to valorize the contribution of overseas Chinese capital investment to national development while stressing the constitutive role of Chinese labor in the making of the Chinese national community deeply informs Bai Ren’s narrative project. The general tenor of post-Maoist cultural production is embodied in the anguished line from army writer Bai Hua’s screenplay, *Kulian (Bitter Love)*, in which a young daughter tells her dying father, “You loved your country but your country didn’t love you.”\(^{19}\) Written at a time when the question of whether the cat is black or white had ceased to matter for as long as it catches the mouse, Bai Ren’s novel appears to harken anachronistically back to the idealism and patriotism of a revolutionary past that is now in danger of being erased from popular memory. Bai Ren’s best-known works (*Bing Lin Cheng Xia* and his first (1951) novel *Zhan Dou Dao Mingtien*),\(^{20}\) deal with the high noon of Chinese nationalism during the anti-Japanese struggle from 1937 to 1945; indeed, in *Nanyang Piaoliuji*, the protagonist Ah Song ends his eventful stay in the Philippines on the eve of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, and sails back to China to join the resistance movement.

Yet Bai Ren’s *Bildungsroman* narrative, with its focus on the sentimental education of a young, laboring *huaqiao* and its posing of the fraught question of the wandering self within the framework — both conceptual and experiential — of the nation, is, as I will argue in this essay, a reconfiguration of Hu Feng’s theory of the “subjective fighting spirit.” Formulated, in fact, during the Sino-Japanese war (the same period covered by most of Bai Ren’s longer works), the theory of the subjective fighting spirit sought to cement the link between individual consciousness and social revolution by positing the idea of revolutionary resistance at the level of subjective, lived experience. This theory of

\(^{19}\)For an extended analysis of *Kulian*, see Duke, pp. 123-48. The central character of the “film-poem” is a patriotic overseas Chinese artist named Ling Chenguang who turns his back on his American success in 1949 in order to return to China. Persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, he lives long enough to see the fall of the Gang of Four. Against his wishes, his daughter elects to leave China upon marrying an overseas Chinese. Another important character in *Kulian*, the overseas Chinese poet Xie Qiushan, loses his wife Yun Ying during the upheavals of the 1960’s.

the revolutionary subject had subsequently been neglected or suppressed by later Chinese literary critics’ emphasis on the preeminence of “collectivism” as a mode of revolutionary struggle and national liberation.21 Already subjected to reductive simplification by dominant Chinese literary criticism during the Mao years, this revolutionary subjectivity, which traces its intellectual lineage to the patriotic anti-imperialism of the May Fourth enlightenment, is also ironically in the process of being banished to the fringes of historical and popular memory by the kind of liberal-humanist individualism being articulated in Chinese literary criticism in consonance with a post-Maoist China undergoing massive economic reorientation along capitalist lines.

Bai Ren’s novel memorializes a popular, anti-colonial nationalism that is course through the prism of subjectivity. Nanyang Piaoliuji limns the concept of revolutionary subjectivity by asking, not the post-Maoist question of how one’s country came to betray one’s love for it, but the forgotten popular-nationalist question of how it is that one came to love one’s country in the first place. And it asks this question by considering the situation of those to whom love of country does not come “naturally,” that is, those who spent their formative years elsewhere, outside China. But what place, if any, does Bai’s delineation of revolutionary subjectivity through a narrative of the huaqiao’s involvement in the anti-Japanese struggle have in the post-Maoist era of political

21Hu Feng, “Zhi shen zai wei minzhu de douzheng limian” [Situating Ourselves in the Struggle for Democracy], Hu Feng Pinglun Ji [Hu Feng’s Collected Critical Essays], vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue, 1984), p. 17. A short discussion of literary critic Hu Feng’s career and concept of subjectivity can be found in Kirk A. Denton, The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), especially pp. 73-116. Born in Hubei in 1902, Hu Feng (1902-85) became a prominent leftist critic in the 1930’s and 40’s, but was purged (along with two hundred other writers and intellectuals branded as members of the Hu Feng Fangemingjitian or “Hu Feng Counterrevolutionary Clique”) in 1955 for allegedly promoting an “idealist literature grounded in a bourgeois worldview and thus [posing] a threat to a Marxist materialist ideology” (Denton, p. 2). As a result, “[t]he Hu Feng group of writers were effectively erased from modern Chinese literary history, and views of literature stressing dynamic, creative role for the writer were suppressed” (Ibid., p. 3). Denton argues that the concept of subjective fighting spirit “was an oft-repeated catchword in Hu Feng’s sustained attack on Marxist dogmatism and its literary manifestations, ‘mechanical determinism’ and ‘formulism,’ and marked an attempt to find a place for individual subjectivity within a Marxist framework” (p. 96).
cynicism and economic decentralization, the wholesale importation of "postmodern" cultural theory alongside the critical denunciation of Marxist literary orthodoxy? How do we read a novel that has been shaped by media efforts to stress the working-class character and revolutionary contribution of the overseas Chinese simultaneously alongside the seemingly contradictory public policy espousal of capital accumulation ("To Get Rich is Good") and valorizing of overseas Chinese capital investment in the Mainland?

These questions cannot be answered without any reference to the Philippines, the setting of Bai Ren's novel, and to the questions of "Chineseness," to questions of national identification and belonging that are also salient and equally fraught features of the huaqiao's experiential involvement in Southeast Asia. Bai Ren's relative invisibility in Philippine arts and letters, or rather his marginalization — alongside the relative marginalization of Chinese Philippine literary production in Chinese — from the Philippine literary scene has restricted the reception of his novel to a small, Chinese-speaking circle within the Philippines. Yet his realistic depiction of life among the huaqiao in the Philippines is one of the rare full-length treatments of that subject to have appeared in print, and constitutes an invaluable source for scholars and students of Philippine studies and, more generally, of Southeast Asian studies.

This essay takes up historian Wang Gungwu's call to give overseas Chinese responses to nationalism a place in the recent history of Southeast Asia by looking into the hidden history of the Chinese Left in the Philippines and its contribution to the making of "national" communities in both China and the Philippines. It is about the political salience of a revolutionary huaqiao nationalism that has been marginalized from most histories of the Chinese in the Philippines. It argues that the 1983 Bai Ren novel Nanyang Piaguiji's depiction of the development of a young Chinese sojourner's patriotic consciousness forces us to question and rethink our commonsensical notions of nationness and national belonging.

This essay delineates Bai Ren's novelistic treatment of the politics of memory and the mutual determination of the constructed terms

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“China” and the “Philippines” in the subjective constitution of the *huaqiao*. Its primary focus is on the ways in which the novel worked through the idea of a *huaqiao Bildung* (education, also culture) at a specific conjuncture in Chinese and Philippine history through notions of work, pedagogy, and experience. But this essay also sets out to interrogate not only the “borders” of patriotic love, experience, and memory, but also of scholarly inquiry as well, which — given its restrictive reliance on the given boundedness of the nation-state and the discourse of citizenship as units of analysis — has tended to elide the crucial delineation by *huaqiao Bildung* of the constitutive relationship between Chinese and Filipino nationalisms. The arguments presented in the following sections attempt to broaden the discussion of both Chinese and Filipino nationness, and of nationalism in general, by showing how the making (and remaking) of national communities depends in part on a historically situated, constitutive experience of the “outside” and of “foreignness”, a potentially radical openness to the foreign other that is often ignored, if not repressed by articulations of Chinese, Philippine as well as Philippine Chinese identity-politics which favor the assertion of an unnecessarily monolithic and exclusionary national identity.

**Plot Summary**

*Nanyang Piaoliuji* is the story of Ah Song, a fourteen-year-old Hokkien boy from an impoverished family in Jinjiang Province, China and of his four-year sojourn as a shopkeeper’s apprentice, a Robinson Crusoemanqué, a newspaper boy, a student, and an activist in various parts of the Philippines from early spring in 1932, to early winter in 1936.

Having borrowed money to purchase, on a ten-year installment arrangement with a professional middleman, a two-hundred-yuan alien

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23 Liren Zheng has criticized the propensity of studies on overseas Chinese nationalism to resort to an “academic loyalty test, which tends to identify overseas Chinese nationalists as either loyal to China or loyal to the countries where they resided.” Such a “dichotomous approach … ignores an important fact that at the time there was a new ‘imagined community’ called overseas Chinese society emerging between China and local nation-states.” See his “Overseas Chinese Nationalism in British Malaya 1894-1941”, Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, U.S.A., 1997, pp. 3-4.
certificate of registration (dazi in Mandarin, or toa-di in Hokkien) that entitles him to reside in the Philippines, Ah Song’s family entrusts him to an uncle. At the entry port of Manila, they are met by Ah Song’s “paper father” and a Chinese agent in charge of facilitating the processing of Ah Song’s documents. Under the name Li Xin, son of the merchant Li Zaixing, Ah Song with his official papers in hand moves south after a week’s stay in the capital, and takes up his apprenticeship in a dry-goods store in L_.

Although Ah Song’s father and brother also operate a shop in the same town, Ah Song is apprenticed to another shopkeeper to learn the rules of the trade, as is the custom among the Philippine Chinese in the pre-war years. As an apprentice, Ah Song starts at the bottom of the work ladder of responsibility, as a janitor and gofer: he sweeps the floor, ties the store awning to the wooden pole, arranges the rice piles on display, cooks rice for the meals, chops wood and builds the fire, grinds the corn and mixes it with molasses. Ah Song earns praise from his employer for his honesty and industry. But among the store employees and compañeros (partners), Ah Song forms his closest attachment with one of the store workers, the strapping mestizo Chen Shan, whose tragic love affair with the beautiful mestiza dancer Yisha, whom he had rescued from rapists but who had married a landed spendthrift on her aunt’s behest, forms an important sub-plot of the novel.

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24 Bai Ren still has the original landing certificate issued by the Philippine Bureau of Customs describing him as a son of merchant and entitled by law to remain in the country under the provisions of Section 7 of Act no. 702 of the Philippine Commission. The text of this landing certificate is reproduced in Sun, pp. 231-32. “Obtaining access to a visa to immigrate to the Philippines required one to show kinship to a merchant already present. For some men, this meant purchase of the teng-ki-toa-li, or alien certificate of registration. Other men had relatives to claim them. Still other men (and some young women) were adopted by childless Chinese; Filipinos did not adopt Chinese … The teng-ki-toa-li system, which was only a kinship on paper, did not constitute adoption; many men never met their supposed “certificate parents.” But teng-ki-toa-li ‘brothers,’ entering the country as sons of the same man, though perhaps not mutually related, would sometimes develop close personal ties if they were employed together by their sponsor. Some strong lifetime brotherhoods between Iloilo Chinese leaders were created because of this propinquity in immigration histories.” John T. Omohundro, Chinese Merchant Families in Iloilo: Commerce and Kin in a Central Philippine City (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1981), pp. 22-23.

25 All the towns and cities in the novel are referred to only by their initials. M—most likely refers to the capital city of Manila.
The store at which Ah Song is an apprentice falls victim to the depression that hits the Philippines in the early thirties. Bad business is compounded by a strong typhoon which floods the store. The owner, a shrewd illiterate man, decides to return to Tangshan ("Tengsua" in Hokkien), the proverbial term for the Chinese homeland, and leaves his store to his two sons. Ah Song is quickly disillusioned with the first son, a wastrel who spent all his years of idleness in Manila and who now, in charge of the ailing business, resorts to all manner of quick-profit chicanery, including cheating the customers and stealing electricity. The younger brother, who befriends Ah Song, works as an apprentice at someone else’s store.

Despite the hard work and his own dim prospects for advancement in his profession, Ah Song is able to find the time to learn boxing under the tutelage of Chen Shan (Tan Sua) and to indulge his love of reading. One of the books he is reading, Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, will later prove to be of immediate relevance to his own experience. The store is soon forced to close down, and its employees, cast adrift to survive in the rough waters of the economic depression, go their own way. Chen Shan decides to try his luck in S—as a professional boxer. Ah Song decides to seek out his uncle for a job (*toulu*, or *taolo* in Hokkien) or, alternatively, go to D—to join his father and brother. The family business, precarious enough to begin with, is utterly destroyed when a fire burns down the store. Father and brother both find their way back to the capital preparatory to their return to China. Ah Song’s brother later decides not to go back to China; he renews his love affair with the Chinese mestiza Bili (Pili), whom he marries after a year.

Ah Song, alone again, decides to look for Chen Shan in S—and is befriended at the pier by Niuniu, a Filipina dressed in men’s clothes. Ah Song is conscripted to work in a boat in exchange for free passage. Only later does he find out that the men on the boat are smugglers. Niuniu, who has developed a fondness for “Pepe,” helps Ah Song escape the boat when it stops at an island to rendezvous. Now a veritable Robinson Crusoe, Ah Song survives on his wits for three days before he is found by a tribe of friendly, indigenous people. The tribal elder, Mohani, invites Ah Song to stay with them, and, after a few days, helps Ah Song find his way to Cebu.
In S—, he finds a much-aged and embittered Chen Shan, left crippled in a vehicular collision that had been engineered by a Portuguese-Arab gangster who had sought to arrange with him the loss of a boxing match. Chen advises Ah Song to pursue his studies at a huaqiao high school in M—. Back in the capital, Ah Song becomes a part-time student, working his way through school as a newspaper delivery boy. Encouraged by his teachers, a number of whom are dissident patriots who have taken refuge in the Philippines after being hounded by the Europeans for their progressive politics and publishing activities in China, Ah Song takes up writing and immerses himself in the anti-Japanese student movement. He falls in love with Ah Hong, a classmate who is also active in the movement. Coming from a well-to-do and conservative Christian family, Ah Hong is under great pressure to forego seeing her newspaper boy and part-time-student boyfriend, who has been branded a “radical.” The two quarrel, however, when Ah Hong offers to pay for Ah Song’s education. Ah Song gives up his work as a newspaper boy and turns to full-time study and writing. After reading a long letter from Ah Hong, who is torn between her loyalty to her family and her love for Ah Song, Ah Song abandons his dream of returning to China with Ah Hong.

A chance encounter allows him to renew his friendship with a married Niuniu. Trapped in a loveless marriage to the captain of the smuggling ship, Niuniu finds herself falling in love with Ah Song. Ah Song faces some difficulties at school and is forced to withdraw from it at the instigation of Huang Xiuzi, a Guomindang sympathizer who was also instrumental in alerting Ah Hong’s parents to her love affair with Ah Song. Ah Song transfers to the Nanyang High School as events in China take their inevitable course toward war with Japan. Although Ah Song is fond of Niuniu, he explains to her his inability to reciprocate her love, owing to his commitment to the anti-Japanese cause. In the meantime, Chen Shan tells Ah Song that he has extracted retribution from the gangster who had engineered his motor accident, and is now set to leave for Hong Kong with money given him by his maternal uncle. Chen Shan gives Ah Song enough money for the latter to book himself a passage to North China to join the anti-Japanese resistance effort on the eve of the Sino-Japanese war. As the boat leaves the harbor in late 1936, Ah Song watches as Niuniu waves goodbye.
Huaqiao Bildungsroman

Part romance, adventure story, travel narrative, Nanyang Piaoliuj is Bai Ren’s own fictionalized Bildungsroman detailing in general terms his brief sojourn, from 1933 to 1937, in the Philippines. The Bildungsroman, literally a “novel of education,” charts a character’s formative years and intellectual, spiritual, or sentimental education. By focusing on the trials and adventures of a young person, in Nanyang’s case, an adolescent boy, the Bildungsroman highlights youth as the “essence” of modernity, sharing in “the formlessness of the epoch, its protean elusiveness.” Preeminent among the characteristics of modernity are mobility and interiority, the themes of wandering and exploration of both the world and oneself, and the potential metamorphoses inherent in this restlessness.

Bai Ren was one of the young Philippine huaqiao who left the Philippines to join the anti-Japanese war effort in China. Although Bai Ren did not join the Communist Party until 1939, two years following his return to China, his close association with left-leaning intellectuals and Chinese activists based in the Philippines had already aroused

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27 Ibid., p. 4.
28 Huang Zisheng and He Sibing, Feilubin Huaqiao Shi [History of the Philippine Huaqiao] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Gaotejiaoyu Chubanshe, 1987), p. 441. Huang and He name about twenty returned overseas Chinese from the Philippines. Lin Bin provides an invaluable summary of the activities of various leftist organizations (including labor organizations, anti-Japanese patriotic organizations, and a group of huaqiao students who left for China and were subsequently trained at Yenan) during the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War in her “Zhongguo Xinwenxue Heshizoujin Feilubin de Jikao” [When Did China’s New Literature Enter the Philippines?: An Examination] Shijie Ribao, 17 February 2001, p. 15. She notes the important role played by May Fourth literary exponents who went to the Philippines (Du Ai, Liang Shangyuan, Huang Wei among others) to disseminate reading materials, including revolutionary literature such as Mao Zedong’s works, that were newly published in China. Especially noteworthy is Lin’s mention of the participation of huaqiao women in the anti-Japanese movement among the Chinese in the Philippines. A brief account of Bai Ren’s post-Philippine career and popular reception of his works (especially of his spoken dramas) is also recounted in Wang Zhenhan, “Bai Ren zai Guxiang” [Bai Ren in the Homeland], Shijie Ribao, 10 October 1999, p. 25.
the suspicion and persecution of those in the Philippine-Chinese community who had close ties with the rival Guomindang group.

It is not just the autobiographical elements of the story, but the first-person narrative of Nanyang Piaoliuji itself that foregrounds the construction of individual subjectivity, thereby enabling Bai Ren to work through the question, “How is it that one comes to love one’s country?,” in a far more detailed way than has been attempted in Philippine Chinese fiction. How does one, an individual, come to have an emotional investment in what is essentially an abstraction, “China,” an attachment that encompasses but at the same time supersedes one’s identification with the place of one’s birth?

The development of individual, patriotic consciousness is not simply what the novel is about; it is arguably a performative effect of the text. That is, the text not only writes about the formation of the individual by revealing the mechanisms underlying this formation, the text itself contributes to, in fact enables, this very formation. This is because, as Lydia Liu has pointed out in her study of the literature of the May Fourth movement, the first-person narrative creates a split subject which involves the doubling of the “self” — the “self is both the narrating I (subject of enunciation) and the narrated I (subject of utterance).”30 The subject that comes into being in the text is also the subject that writes itself into being through the text. Nanyang is as much about how Ah Song represents himself as it is about Ah Song himself; by foregrounding the narrative act and the writing that enables it, the novel problematizes rather than takes for granted the politics of representation that underwrites the novelistic project.

Indeed, a heightened awareness of the power and politics of representation is very much evident in the novel. Its protagonist, Ah Song, is a prolific writer, and a voracious reader whose commerce with the written word is constitutive of his patriotism. Ah Song renders his acquisition of culture in quasi-biological terms:

I was like a hungry child, greedily devouring cultural foodstuffs. Good or bad, I wolfed down everything. The culture that I was to

acquire in later years was most likely the result of my reading during this time.\footnote{Nanyang Piaoliuji, p. 94.}

Ah Song "greedily devour[s] cultural foodstuffs," each reading material feeding his imagination with tales of China and its people, including its heroes and martyrs. The protagonists of the classic Qing novel of manners, *Hong Lou Meng (A Dream of Red Mansions)*, even invades his dreams. *Nanyang* highlights the crucial role played by print, by books and magazines and journals, in constructing the "plight" of China and deploying the rhetoric of "national salvation" and revolutionary activism by narrating Japanese activities in that country and disseminating nationalist interpretations of China's recent history. As newspaper boy, Ah Song literally participates in the dissemination of the printed word, even as he participates in the literal production of the printed word when he begins contributing articles and stories to one of the Chinese newspapers.

The written word exercises a fascination for Ah Song, not least because the worlds it conjures up help to shape Ah Song's perceptions of social reality. Its utopian content enables Ah Song to note the discrepancy between the way things are and the way things ought to be. At the same time, the apparent transparency of the written word coexists alongside its maddeningly elusive "depth", its promise of "hidden" meaning that can only be excavated by repeated acts of (re)reading and by the sharpening of insight that can only come with the reader's growing maturity. Raised on a steady diet of classics and popular works such as *Qi Xia Wu Yi, Xi You Ji, Feng Shen Bang, Shi Gong An*, and *Peng Gong An*, the studiously receptive Ah Song finds himself unable to fully digest the import of "difficult" works such as Lu Xun's masterpieces, *Kuangren Riji, Kong Yi Ji*, and *A Q Zhengzhuang*. These half-digested stories await supplementation by years of formal education, an account of which occupies nearly half of the novel's narrative.

If Ah Song's relationship to China is mediated by the text, the Chinese in the Philippines among whom Ah Song finds himself also have a discursively mediated relationship with China, a fact owing to the visibility of institutions such as schools and print media in *huaqiao* daily
life. Education was a cornerstone of the socialization of the huaqiao as Chinese patriot, yet the very form taken by it, and the relative distancing of this educational process from the China it was crucial in mediating (notwithstanding periodic trips back and forth from China by those who could afford it), served to qualify the nature of the Nanyang nationalism it was supposed to foster and make it different from mainland Chinese nationalism. The kind of “long-distance nationalism”\(^{32}\) of the overseas Chinese was mediated by overseas Chinese institutions, networks, and organizations. Moreover, as Wang Gungwu has pointed out:

Separation from China meant that the nationalism being kept alive among younger generations of Nanyang Chinese was more abstract and cerebral, taught, as it were, through textbooks in the modern Chinese schools and subtly worded articles in local Chinese newspapers and magazines but cut off from where the action was. It was a nationalism held in reserve while the settled Chinese learned to emulate their fathers in profiting from the colonial network and laissez-faire capitalism of the 1920’s and 1930’s.\(^{33}\)

The textual mediation of the Nanyang Chinese’s relationship to China renders the kind of nationalism instilled through the written word open to modification and revision on the basis of the exigencies attending specific events and developments in the Philippines, and the

\(^{32}\)I borrow the term, with important qualifications, from Benedict Anderson, who expounds on the concept in Chapter Three of his Spectres of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 58-74. Anderson’s term is used to describe a later phenomenon of self-chosen exile (as opposed to forced exile for economic and political reasons, as is the case of Ah Song and his activist mentors) on the heels of accelerated capitalist globalization and is used to remark a “serious politics that is at the same time radically unaccountable” (p. 74).

\(^{33}\)Wang Gungwu, “The Limits of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism, 1912-1937”, pp. 53-54. Zheng Liren argues against the idea that Chinese nationalism was “taught” to, and calculated and controlled by China’s nationalists, and espouses instead the idea that overseas Chinese nationalism were relatively self-sufficient, growing and developing out of the specific historical and experiential conditions of the overseas Chinese communities throughout Nanyang. In some cases, overseas Chinese nationalists even came into antagonistic conflict with mainland Chinese nationalists over questions of the latter’s criticism of the former’s “independent attitude” (“Overseas Chinese Nationalism,” pp. 6-9).
Chinese’s social location within these islands. Among the important sources of qualification are class and educational divides within the so-called “Chinese community,” and the varying political orientation of its members, with young unmarried working-class men being more inclined to sympathize with the leftist cause.\(^{34}\)

Inscribed as well into the logic of Nanyang Piaoliuji as an exemplary Bildungsroman, is a faith in the power of education to shape both the mind and the body in accordance with an ideal or a set of values. Anticipating the years ahead that would bring hardship, and exact from him both self-sacrifice and the abjuration of happiness, Ah Song goes about developing his revolutionary idealism and disciplining his body, though in a manner that mirrors the asceticism, the renunciation of material comfort and pleasure, not uncommon among small-time merchants in the 1930’s, or depression-time Philippines. Ah Song’s boss, Mr. Hong, for example, describes his small dry-goods retail business as a product of long years of sweat and labor (the actual term is “a lifetime’s heartblood,” iciency). So even though Ah Song repudiates his putative socialization into the merchant class, his apprenticeship in this class, under the thrue of practices, and values, that are oftentimes exploitative come to serve him in good stead. For it is the lessons that he gains from his hard work and the self-discipline which he develops during his apprenticeship as a merchant, that are channeled into his subsequent career as an activist.

In this respect, the merchant himself is the dark double of the patriotic activist. In the Philippines, the Sino-Japanese war provided the historic occasion for the fusion of merchant and patriot, as all across Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, the merchant also became a patriot who contributed the largest average sum per capita to helping in the war effort in China.\(^{35}\) But if the merchant’s notion of work is inseparable from the demands of asceticism and sacrifice, his very identification with money will mean that in Filipino public discourse he will

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\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 54.

be held in suspicion as a figure of exploitation, all the more so for being a citizen without a country.\textsuperscript{36} Not surprisingly, Ah Song’s disillusionment with the materialistic society into which he is thrown expresses itself in terms of his renunciation and repudiation of the chosen profession of his father and brother, the profession his own preparation for which his family had sacrificed so much, and spent so much, to ensure. Yet Ah Song’s own emergent patriotism is precisely enabled — therefore inherently “contaminated” — by the “merchant values” of self-abnegation and asceticism that have come to associated with “Chinese-ness” in Southeast Asia. In this sense Ah Song is partly, and unavoidably, indebted to the very system against which he rebels.

In Ah Song, the conflicting demands of capital and labor and the resulting predicaments generated by the contradiction between capital and labor, with which the Chinese in the Philippines have had to contend, are played out. Nowhere is the contradiction more evident than in Ah Song’s legal status as an alien resident in the Philippines. Ah Song’s official status is guaranteed by a piece of paper, the \textit{teng-ki-toa-li}, and it is this document that he is concerned to salvage and keep with him even when he loses everything during his castaway days on an unknown island. Ah Song’s relationship with the Philippine state is codified in terms of a \textit{legal fiction} which rests on the state’s misrecognition of Ah Song’s “blood ties” to a Philippine Chinese merchant. Ah Song’s alien registration certificate officially affirms a fictive “merchant family” genealogy which allowed the entry into the Philippines of young Chinese men who were neither merchants themselves nor sons of the merchant fathers listed in the documents. It is true that even without consanguinity to a merchant, many of these “paper sons” were subsequently socialized into the merchant class through the apprenticeship system. It is also true that many of these paper sons’ real fathers were themselves merchants, though, owing to the fact that the \textit{teng ki toa-li} they acquired

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were separate and different from those subsequently acquired by their sons, these real fathers had different legal surnames.

But the fact is that the myth of merchant sons belies a social reality that is much more complex, because ridden by internal differences, than the popular image created by the legal classification and representation of the Chinese. The Philippine state recognizes the Chinese only insofar as the Chinese are either merchants or can prove that they are sons of Chinese merchants already based in the Philippines. This immigration rule works to strengthen the association of the Chinese with mercantile capital, but it is complemented by a system of naturalization that makes the acquisition of Filipino citizenship by the Chinese merchant so difficult and expensive that few but the monied and the most well-connected socially can become naturalized citizens.

Thus, on the one hand, the Philippine immigration laws served to drive the Chinese ever deeper into a merchant niche, while making it extremely difficult for the Chinese to be anything but "Chinese" in legal, and arguably socio-cultural, terms. But, on the other hand, corruption within the immigration and naturalization department also allowed the Chinese to evade the strictures of the state’s onerous legislation. The "newly-arrived" Chinese who yearly entered the Philippines were either integrated into the Chinese community’s predominantly mercantile middle-class social fabric or, as in the case of Ah Song and his co-workers at the grocery store, nominally absorbed, though in reality socialized as urban laborers in all but name. These latter — consisting of unmarried men who lived out most of their lives in the company of their co-workers or other fellow workers — formed the Chinese community’s underbelly of nominal merchants who were more categorically *lumpenproletariat* by socio-economic standing and lifestyle.

As men who worked for merchants, or men who pooled their scarce, hard-earned resources to form *kongsi* partnerships in small businesses, but who as often as not ended up neither owning shares in the business nor being properly compensated for their labor as "store-minders," these nominal merchants were particularly visible during the depression years. With small business after small business failing in the wake of the stock market crash of the late 1920’s, the Chinese merchant’s status became even more pronouncedly fluid and precarious as numerous Chinese flitted between socio-economic boundaries. As much as he is
sympathetic in his treatment of the Chinese merchant, Nanyang’s Ah Song is ambivalent about the mercantile capitalist ethos. Ah Song is privy to his employer’s eldest son, Yaohua’s, desperate resort to such dirty tactics as handing a bribe to the electricity-meter reader, and cheating customers. He hears enough of the latter’s oft-quoted philosophy (“have money, have virtue!,” “youchien jiuyoude!”) to form a decidedly pessimistic view of the society, and to realize that he himself is unable to stomach the sordid, exploitative practices that seem intrinsic to the act of buying-and-selling:

Hong Yaohua’s underhanded practices threw a black shadow on my young soul, leaving a deep and lasting impression. Even now, as I recall the past, the scenes remain fresh and vivid in my mind. Although the majority of the huajiao were upright and law-abiding merchants, my young boss’ double-dealing tricks played no small role in engendering my subsequent unwillingness to learn the trade [chansheng buzuoaimai de juexin].

As an apprentice, Ah Song sees society from the vantage point of someone who occupies the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. Nanyang, in fact, lays bare the deep economic, political, and social divisions and tensions that give the lie to the appearance of homogeneity among the prosperous, predominantly Hokkien-speaking “Chinese community” in the Philippines. These divisions and tensions would become especially apparent during the period leading up to World War II. The ambiguous, often indecisive stance taken toward the world events during the 1930’s by prominent Chinese community leaders like Dee C. Chuan and Alfonso Z. Sycip, who sought to protect their interests, both social and economic, provoked harsh criticism from those who favored a less equivocal stand on the political issues affecting the Nanyang Chinese and China.

These conflicts are especially highlighted by the subplot dealing with Ah Song’s love affair with his classmate Ah Hong. Ah Hong is active in the anti-Japanese student movement in their school, but she is also subject to pressure from her prominent Protestant family to truncate her involvement with an indigent newspaper boy (and a known troublemaker to boot, according to one of his teachers) and to entertain

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37Nanyang Piaoliuji, p. 90.
instead the suit of the relatively more acceptable Dr. Chen (Tan). Ah Hong writes Ah Song a long letter — a veritable *cri de coeur* — which laments the “over-protectiveness” of her parents. Yet Ah Hong cannot finally bring herself, in the name of her love for Ah Song, to completely sever her ties to her family.

Ah Hong’s dilemma points to a real gap that separates the Nanyang Chinese bachelors, mainly indigents, from the prosperous Nanyang Chinese who had settled down in Nanyang and who, as in the case of Ah Hong’s father, not only have a stake in their adopted country through their business interests, but who have children whom they expect to inherit and reproduce their socio-economic standing. An embittered Ah Song writes:

In *huaqiao* society, human relations are governed by the capitalist ethos and bound by feudalistic thinking, which denigrates the poor and idolizes the rich. In matters of marriage, people are expected to marry within their class.\(^{38}\)

Ah Hong’s family background bears out the complex nature of the “assimilation” process in which Chinese-ness and the espousal of a specifically China-centered nationalism cannot but be recontextualized and renegotiated to accommodate the exigencies of everyday life in Southeast Asia. Wang Gungwu argues that “[b]oth nationalists and the advocates of assimilation among Nanyang Chinese were always the articulate minority at opposite ends of the spectrum while the majority who said little considered the relative strengths of China and the local governments while they carefully erected defences to ensure the survival of their communities.”\(^{39}\)

*Work as Pedagogy*

The war in China was without doubt the key political event which cut through the class, educational, and political divisions within the Nanyang Chinese community. It stoked the fires of patriotic fervor among the Nanyang Chinese and served as the most powerful emotive bonding element among members of the community. Yet Wang Gungwu remains convinced that Nanyang Chinese nationalism is, over-


\(^{39}\) “The Limits of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism,” p. 53.
all, a “conditional, peripheral, dependent nationalism which had no capacity to generate itself because it depended on China to continue to take an interest in them and an expatriate Chinese to continue to prepare later generations to be nationalistic.” Argues Wang:

The quality of nationalism for the few Nanyang Chinese who were attracted to it at the beginning of the century seems to have been determined not so much by a passionate self-discovery because they were strangers being discriminated against in a foreign land or because they found new perspectives in the modern world away from home, but much more by the skilful persuasion of the educated Chinese from China who were able to explain and confirm the sources of all their grievances — a kind of ‘taught nationalism.’

Wang’s argument is persuasive, but it glosses over the fact that the process of “self-discovery” is not solely spurred by the huaqiao’s experience of discrimination in the host country. More importantly, it ignores the complex nature and condition of nationalist pedagogy in the Nanyang territories. Pedagogy is never a one-way process, a simple matter of overseas Chinese passively being subjected to “skilful persuasion” by an active cadre of educated Chinese from China. It is true, of course, as shown in Nanyang, that good and committed educators did play an important role in teaching students about Chinese history and in encouraging students to organize or participate in the anti-Japanese movement. Ah Song makes sa specific mention of two teachers, Zhuang

40Ibid.
41Ibid., p. 42. Interestingly enough, Bai Ren’s novel contains no account of Ah Song’s personal experience of discrimination in the hands of Filipinos. Except for the sojourn on a small island, Ah Song spends most of his time in various Chinatowns in the Philippines. His “Chinese” consciousness is more likely to have been a product of a more generalized discursive construction of the “Intsik” as any or all “Chinese in the Philippines,” a construction that may, though it does not necessarily, entail racial discrimination.
42“When Did China’s New Literature Enter the Philippines?,” p. 15. “More important in its long-term effects was the spread of modern education to the Nanyang Chinese .... The young Nanyang Chinese were told that being in the Nanyang was itself a patriotic act but only if they could use their stay there to help China. Thus before long the most effective political activity became inextricably bound with the modern schools and many of the political leaders were the school teachers” (“A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese,” p. 33)
laoshi and Tong laoshi, as individuals who spurred his growing consciousness of, and responses to, the imperatives of anti-Japanese resistance and Chinese national salvation. Tong laoshi was one of the first people to encourage Ah Song to publish his articles and stories in the local Chinese daily.

Yet the act of teaching never entails the presupposition of a tabula rasa on the part of even the most compliant student. Ah Song’s receptiveness to the ideas and teachings of his teachers is not even conditioned primarily by his teacher’s authority and persuasiveness as teachers. After all, for every revolutionary Zhuang, there is also a reactionary like Xie laoshi who sees fit to foist his own view of Chinese history on his students. Ah Song’s predisposition to respond positively to a very specific version of nationalist pedagogy is rooted in his social location (working-class, from an impoverished family) and, most important, in the specificity of his own “educational” experience in the Philippines.

This educational experience is elaborated throughout the novel. In fact, there is a close-knit relationship among the three major episodes, each chronicling an aspect of Ah Song’s education, that are recounted in Nanyang. The first episode centers on Ah Song’s experience as a shopkeeper’s apprentice. The second recounts Ah Song’s brief career as a self-proclaimed Robinson Crusoe on a remote island. The third covers the rest of his stay in the Philippines as a working student. Each of these episodes plays an integral, cumulative role in Ah Song’s sentimental and political education as a committed revolutionary.

As discussed above, Ah Song’s two-year apprenticeship educates him in the ways of the ruthless, materialistic and atomistic world of commerce, even as his stint at hard physical labor as a merchant’s apprentice forms the unwitting yet ineluctable basis of Ah Song’s education in self-discipline, which prepares him for the self-discipline and self-sacrifice warranted by his later decision to join the war effort.

The world is Ah Song’s classroom. He learns about China and Chinese history from acquaintances and friends alike. Casual conversation with a veteran fanke yields invaluable information and history lessons on the origins of the word, fanke, which originally referred to foreign sojourners in China during the Song and Yuan dynasties and subsequently came to be applied to the Hokkien lamnang who went abroad — a term that encapsulates the becoming-foreign of “our people.” A chance encounter with an old huaqiao aboard the ship bound for
Manila, for example, leads to a short but useful lesson on *huaqiao* history, illustrated with stories of *huaqiao* persecution in the Dutch East Indies as well as *huaqiao* resistance in Singapore. Ah Song also learns about the local history of Tengsua through another old *huaqiao* who regales him with stories of Arabs and Persians who aided the Mongols in putting down peasant rebellions in Chuanchou during the closing years of the Yuan dynasty. Furthermore, Ah Song learns about Chinese elsewhere in Southeast Asia and in America, and about the need for the *fanke*, as the old *huaqiao* tells Ah Song, to know their own history in light of their general invisibility in official Chinese and foreign discourses. A key lesson is conveyed by the old *huaqiao* in the following words:

At present, *huaqiao* can be found residing in ninety-one countries in the world. They rely on their wisdom and hard labor to make important contributions to the societies in which they live.43

These conversations would be repeated and amplified not just in the classroom much later, but in the Afterword of the novel itself.

The second episode, which has Ah Song living like Robinson Crusoe on an island off the coast of Negros before he is rescued by a tribe of indigenous people, further catalyzes Ah Song's growing activist consciousness. Robinson Crusoe is both an apt and an ironic literary figure for Ah Song to compare himself with, considering the fact that Defoe's character is the embodiment of the entrepreneurial ethos Ah Song is unwilling to school himself to live by. Ah Song draws on the obvious parallels between his experience and Crusoe's forcibly self-sufficient existence on a deserted island. There are other marked similarities between Ah Song's sojourn in the Philippines and Crusoe's on his island — both are country boys rather than city-bred sophisticates, both are disobedient sons who refuse to take the paths their fathers expect them to take, both grow and mature by the expedient of seeking to survive, and because both learn about the meaninglessness of worldly goods, both emerge stronger from their experiences. The crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that Crusoe views his mastery of himself as an indispensable condition of his mastery of his surroundings

43 *Nanyang Piao liu ji*, p. 111. The idea is repeated in the Afterword, p. 292.
(i.e., the island), whereas Ah Song makes no other claim beyond that of having further attained a measure of self-mastery and discipline amidst his surroundings.

The Crusoe episode, part of which Ah Song spends with his Filipino friend, Niuniu, may seem out-of-place in a novel that is unremittingly realistic in its depiction of life in various parts of the Philippines, but it serves a crucial function in further materializing Ah Song’s patriotic predisposition. The days that Ah Song spends scrounging for food, battling monkeys and snakes, and later interacting with the kindly indigenous people are remarkable for the fact that it is during this brief period that Ah Song’s memories of his childhood and hometown assume their crystalline form as vivid recollections and, more importantly, as episodic narratives. It is during this time that Ah Song first learns to tell stories (not least to himself) about — to narrate — his Chinese past. In this seemingly desolate corner of the Philippines, Ah Song recovers fragments of his childhood while learning to reflect, in a sustained and methodical way, on his all-too-brief sojourn in the land of his birth.

If patriotic consciousness is stoked by the narrative investment of meaning in one’s childhood memories and one’s place of birth, what is interesting about this process of narrating self-discovery is that it is made possible only by what Ah Song actually sees and does on the Philippine island, and by a group of indigenous people with whom he interacts, during his sojourn. The sight of the indigenous people’s boats cresting the waves like arrows conjures up in Ah Song a vivid picture of the Chinese dragonboats during a rowing contest in May. The sight of a cactus plant, which Niuniu mistakes for a tomato, triggers Ah Song’s memory of having eaten one. Ah Song draws on his childhood experience of having captured snakes to do the same thing on the island, and of dealing with snake bites.

The snakes serve as a mnemonic device in regard to a complex chain of interconnected recollections: of Ah Song’s father cooking a snake dish and passing it off as an eel; of his mother, dying, when Ah Song was eight years old; of his father leaving Luzon to live in Tengsua for a while; of his own childish pranks, his habit of trapping snakes and keeping them in his desk drawer in the classroom. This last memory sparks an elaborately detailed account of a long-ago lesson on Mencius (Mengzi) during which Ah Song prompted his seatmate Shitou during the latter’s class recitation, and got Shitou into real trouble when the latter was later
asked by the teacher to recite the same text in front of the class. Subsequently beaten by the teacher for his bad performance, Shitou learns that Hongcai, a female classmate, had snitched on Ah Song’s prompting of Shitou. An enraged Shitou then tells Ah Song to put a snake in Hongcai’s desk drawer. For this piece of mischief, Ah Song got twenty raps on his hand.

His encounters and interactions with objects and creatures and people on this Philippine island precisely enable Ah Song’s sense of his past to take shape in his memory, not just as hauntingly vivid fragments, but as full-fledged meaningful stories with a beginning, middle, and end. The Philippines is something more than our commonsensical idea of the medium which serves as a self-effacing vehicle for conveying pre-existing ideas about the nation and the self. It is at once the site of, the means for, and the very substance of, the transmutation of Ah Song’s patriotism. Ah Song’s first-ever sight of two whales in the Negros waters gives flesh and substance to his grandmother’s tale of shipwrecked fishermen taking refuge on a small island which turns out to be the back of a whale. Moreover, Ah Song’s survival skills are not only honed by invaluable lessons from the past. His more recent past serves him equally well: Niuniu teaches him how to swim, and he puts his knowledge of the Filipino technique for opening coconut shells to good use to obtain the necessary sustenance to see him through his rescue.

What follows is even more suggestive, as Ah Song has an inkling of the first and only real freedom he will ever enjoy as he lies on the grass, fanned by the sea breeze, and lulled into reverie and sleep by the song of the ocean and the floating sky. In the throe of a dream-logged sleep, he forgets his worries and cares. He sees, in this dreamstate, images of Tengsua and of Luzon. He sees the fabled Mt. Bao Ta of his homeland, Chen Shan knocking his boxing ring opponent to the floor, and Filipino women gathered at the store front. He hears a harana (serenade), and the strumming of guitars. He sees Niuniu swimming in the ocean. The images flow into one another, intermingle, in his dream, and act as a Lotus-like anodyne which makes him for the moment forget that he is alone on the island. His rescue by a group of indigenous people caps this specific segment in his education. He receives an invitation from the tribal leader, Mohani, to join the tribe, but as much as he warms to the hospitality and friendliness of the indigenous people (he gives Mohani’s people his hunting knife as a token of his appreciation), he is
heartsick for the *huaqiao* society that only recently had triggered in him such negative impression. His sojourn among the indigenous people accords him, nevertheless, invaluable lessons in hospitality, friendship, mutual trust, indebtedness.

It is tempting to think of Ah Song’s brief adventure as a kind of palimpsest on which Ah Song discerns the traces of his Chinese past while writing his experiences in the Philippines. The resulting document of his subjectivity does, indeed, bear traces of earlier writing, but these traces have been altered retrospectively by Ah Song’s act of recounting his Philippine experience. The Robinson Crusoe episode is a miniaturized account of sojourning housed within the general narrative of Ah Song’s adventures in a foreign land in which he comes to “discover” his Chineseess. Yet, like the overarching narrative of *Nanyang*, it also serves to defamiliarize Ah Song’s experience of the originary Tangshan, his homeland. Ah Song’s first-hand experiences in the Philippines subtly reshape his memories: they intensify, if not substantiate, the past in ways that alter — no, create — the meaning and significance of the past for Ah Song. This is the first time that Ah Song is able to think back to “his” childhood, the first occasion in which the past becomes narratable as a retrievable past, as both object and subject of narration. And this is so only through the insinuating power of the material culture of Ah Song’s Philippine sojourn.

The Ah Song who eventually undertakes to get a formal education is no *tabula rasa*, but an individual whose educability,44 whose capacity and amenability to being educated, has been conditioned by years of “learning” outside the walls of the classroom. Ah Song is, in a very important sense, educated as well as educable by the time he enters the classroom, having been “primed” for it by the labor and experience of the past two years in the Philippines.

Experience and work are important forms of pedagogy, not least because the former, in keeping with the older definition of “experience,”45 is a form of experimentation in which the subject of the experiment — the knowledge being “gathered” and processed — is the

44For a discussion of the educability of the individual as a *sine qua non* of nationalist pedagogy, see Chapter One of my *Necessary Fictions*, pp. 15-47.

observing and reflecting individual himself and the past and present events in his life. These lessons not only reinforce the individual’s sociality by linking him to the world, to other people, to “nature.” They serve as grounds for reasoning and analysis, for developing the individual’s self-awareness. At the same time, experience also indexes affects and dispositions which exceed the representational logic of analytical reason. Experience, too, may entail a loss of innocence that offers epistemic access to a more “truthful” view of the current milieu. Best of all, although experience is almost always coded as personal and subjective, the fact that it is essentially a work of writing entailing a “subjective witness,” lends it a textual quality that enables it to be “shared” with other subjects.

Labor is the defining element of Ah Song’s sense of self:

These four years in Nanyang, I have depended on my own effort and sweat to survive and get an education. Self-sufficiency is my only principle. I am proud of myself, and I look down on spoiled brats.

It reshapes Ah Song’s relationship with his family, putting to the test the very notion of intimate, “natural” familial bonds. His apprenticeship had made it necessary for him to spend much of his time away from his father and brother. He had established his footing in trade, and had honed the related social skills assisted, not by kin, but by his co-workers, the totality of those that were part of a larger, supra-familial, network of connections. His most intimate ties were not to his brother, but to Chen Shan, the boxer, to Niuniu, the second son of his employer, his classmates, teachers. He had only his own judgment to fall back on, and the kind advice of people other than his family, as he did not in any way wish to impose on this latter group of people, who had plenty enough to worry about. So Nanyang ends, not with Ah Song’s reunion with his family, but with Ah Song’s radical decision to move to Northern China, beyond the pale of the kinship network as he knew it.

47Keywonds: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, p. 128.
48Nanyang Piaoliuji, pp. 220-221.
Labor, coupled with hardship and deprivation, had schooled Ah Song in the art of surviving the harsh world in bad times. It had sculpted Ah Song's body, reshaped his personality and perspective, and taught him not to fear or avoid, but rather to embrace, opportunities for self-experimentation, for becoming something — or someone — else. Truly, in his case, what had made him suffer was also what had made him better, what had spurred him to "maturity." His experience of labor had brought Ah Song to yearn for things other than the mere prospect of survival. It had taught him to pin his hopes on the power of the word, upon the value of commitment to a higher ideal.

My mind was brimming with new things: full of thoughts about my calamity-ridden homeland, yearning for love, and thirsty for a life of freedom.49

Testing the Limits of Chinese/Philippine Nationalism

As much as Nanyang relates to Ah Song's self-formation and political socialization, his education in accordance with patriotic ideals of self-sacrifice and revolutionary activism, it remains fraught with unresolved issues. Foremost among them is the question of the "bounds" of loyalty drawn by exclusivist notions and practices typical of prevailing official nationalism. Ah Song's story reveals the constitutive role played by his Philippine experience in conditioning — in fact, materializing — his patriotic love for China, but it is precisely the constitutive determination of "Chinese" nationalism by the huaqiao's experience of — and experience within — another nation, that is, the grounding of Ah Song's Chinese nationalism in his intimate experience of an other (foreign) place, which is often elided if not actively suppressed in the official nationalist discourses regarding both China and the Philippines. In the process, Ah Song's story is susceptible to being read in simplistic terms as a clearcut illustration of Chinese nationalism, leaving no room for serious consideration of the politically salient role and transformative potential of his Philippine sojourn for informing either his own "Chinese" nationalism or Filipino nationalist experience. This kind of misreading springs from the assumption that the relationship between

49Ibid., p. 246.
the *huaqiao* and China is transparent, that is, self-evidently given and natural, rather than mediated in a complex way by the *huaqiao*'s experience in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps the disappearance of Ah Song from the text of Philippine history may be attributed to his decision to leave the Philippines to join the resistance struggle in China. Where nationalism is primarily coded as loyalty to, and identification with, the country of one's birth, Ah Song's departure from the Philippines lends itself to being read, even within the framework of a specifically Chinese-Filipino identity politics, as an example of the "first-generation" Chinese' deliberate disengagement from the Philippines which, in turn, betrays the *huaqiao*'s exclusive orientation toward China and is contrasted with the second- or third-generation *huaren*'s Philippine-centered orientation. *Nanyang* would, by this definition, occupy a marginal place in Philippine Chinese literature as the writing of a Chinese person who did not settle permanently in the Philippines, even as it already occupies a relatively marginal place in Mainland Chinese literature as the work of one of the relatively small number of returned Overseas Chinese (notwithstanding Bai Ren's authorial reputation, which rests on a number of critically acclaimed pieces of patriotic fiction and drama dealing with the anti-Japanese struggle in China).

The marginalization of *Nanyang* is most emphatically underscored by its relative obscurity within the Philippine literary scene. Despite the fact that the novel offers one of the most sustained and complex treatments of the nature and vicissitudes of sojourning ever attempted in

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30This periodizing impulse, which draws on sociological and anthropological categories to characterize the style and substance of overseas Chinese cultural production, is used to highlight conceptual "differences" among "first-generation", "second-generation" and "third-generation" Chinese. This influential formulation of the "Chinese question" informs much of the writings, written in English, dealing with Chinese Philippine literature. See, for example, Teresita Ang See, "Social Change: Impact on Chinese-Philippine Literature," in her The Chinese in the Philippines: Problems and Perspectives (Manila: Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, 1990), pp. 68-83; Lily Rose Tope, "The Chinese Margin in Philippine Literature," in Priscelina Patajo-Legasto and Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, eds., Philippine Post-Colonial Studies: Essays on Language and Literature (Quezon City: Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines at Diliman, and University of the Philippines Press, 1993), pp. 73-81; and Charlson Ong, "A Bridge Too Far (Thoughts on Chinese-Filipino Writing)," *Philippines Free Press*, May 14, 1994, pp. 31-32.

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overseas Chinese writing, *Nanyang* has been translated neither into Filipino nor into English.\(^{51}\) Even if *Nanyang* were to be fed into the Philippine literary mainstream, critics would be hard pressed to assimilate the novel into the multi-tiered structure (first-generation, second-generation, third-generation writing) increasingly being used to characterize Chinese-Filipino literary production.\(^{52}\) *Nanyang* is the story neither of a *huaqiao* who, notwithstanding his imbeddedness in the Philippine context, became intensely involved in the local affairs of his hometown in Tengsua, nor of second-generation children of *huaqiao* struggling to make sense of their conflicted identities. Even less is it the story of third-generation *huayi*, that is, descendants of overseas Chinese in the Philippines who describe themselves as Filipinos comfortable with or curious about their "Chinese heritage."

Yet *Nanyang* resists the barometric impulse, typical of certain influential formulations of Chinese-Filipino literature, to use questions of political allegiance and orientation as critical gauges to determine the inclusion of a given text in, or conversely its exclusion from, the canon of Chinese-Filipino literature. For one thing, Ah Song’s decision to leave the Philippines is not conditioned by his *disregard* for the Philippines, but by the pressing demand for action created by the exigencies of historical timing. Ah Song reaches the decision to depart for China due to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, at a time when the Philippines had not yet declared war on Japan, at a time when the incipient political independence of the Philippines, newly a Commonwealth "under American tutelage," appeared dubious in light of the behind-the-scenes machinations to delay the "granting" of political independence to the Philippines by the same high officials who had

\(^{51}\)In fact, although there are efforts to translate literary works in English and Filipino into Chinese, few if any of the major works by *huaqiao* in Chinese are ever translated into English or Filipino. The notable exception is Joaquin Sy’s translation of Chinese Philippine poetry and of Liang Shang Wan and Cai Jian Hua’s 1996 book, *Wha Chi Memoirs* (Manila: Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, Inc., 1998).

\(^{52}\)A heuristic breakdown of the different identity options that were historically and are currently available to the ethnic Chinese in the Philippines can be found in Edgar Wickberg, "Anti-Sinicism and Chinese Identity Options in the Philippines," in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, edited by Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 153-83.
made their careers as advocates of Philippine independence. Ah Song would have had no way of predicting the Philippines' involvement in the world war, in view of the American isolationist policy in the mid-to late-thirties. For another, as argued in this essay, it is not true that Ah Song remains "purely" Chinese when he is in the Philippines, and even less true that, supposing he had not remained in his second homeland, he "reverts" to being Chinese after his brief sojourn in the Philippines.

Even as Nanyang resists easy categorization by conventional scholarly treatments of Chinese-Filipino literature, it presents a case against its being considered merely as an example of "regional literature" in Mainland China since its setting and plot invoke an audience that is neither strictly Mainland Chinese nor even Southern Fujianese. What is remarkable about Bai Ren's novel is the clarity with which it manages to depict the historically determined "alchemy" that turns an immigrant merchant-wannabe into a Chinese nationalist. This alchemy, as argued above, involves a judicious mixing of things Chinese and Philippine, such that the "Chineseness" that is its product challenges deep-seated and widely held notions of the purity and fixity of both "Chinese" and "Filipino" culture.53

This mixing evinces itself on the level of language in the text, which is replete with languages other than standard putonghua: there are Hokkien terms which will be unfamiliar to those who do not speak minnanhua, which is further characterized by the use of Philippine Chinese expressions (huanke for the huaqiao, tuadi for the residence

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53One would be tempted to use the word "hybrid" here to describe the inflection of Chinese nationalism by huaqiao material culture and experience, but hybridity as a postcolonial term is freighted with theoretical assumptions that I wish to avoid. For one thing, its original articulation by Homi K. Bhabha draws on the structural agency of language as a model for psychosocial relations obtaining in colonial space. See his "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 102-22, 264-65. Stripped of its historical valence, this term lends itself to being appropriated in patently ahistorical ways to shore up uncritical celebrations of hybridized Filipino culture. Posited as an explicit challenge to ethnocentric chauvinism rooted in the infrangible "purity" of a given culture, hybridity ends up, ironically, becoming essentialized as the fundamental cultural attribute of the countries in the Southeast Asian region.
certificate, tsut si a for mestizo, taoke for employer, sengdi for business for instance); and there are Chinese-character phonetic transcriptions of Philippine languages (anim, pito, kamatis, kilo, boy, sarong), English (boxing; the words ultimatum, Asia, OK, and King Kong, and bye-bye appear in their original romanized form in the text), and Spanish (chiquito, toma). Although Bai Ren is careful to provide parenthetical translations of these verbal transcriptions, there are some words that remain untranslated, as when Chen Shan at one point lets lose the invective putangina.

The novel itself does not always mark the moments when Ah Song and other characters switch languages, when they go from speaking Cebuano to Hokkien to putonghua to English to Tagalog. Ah Song and Chen Shan talk in Hokkien liberally mixed with Tagalog words and, in Chen Shan’s case, curses. Ah Song and Ah Hong’s intellectual arguments appear to be conducted in putonghua rather than minnanhua. The unambiguous exceptions are when Ah Song speaks to Filipinos. The text indicates that Niuniu converses with Ah Song in zhongbudetuhua or “the native language of the central part” (most probably Cebuano) of the Philippines, while Mohani is conversant in several central Philippine languages. Ah Song describes himself as a fast learner, and presumably able to pick up languages on the street and in the marketplace; indeed, he and most other characters in his autobiography speak and narrate in a putonghua riddled with terms and expressions from other languages.

The effect of the mixing of languages from both inside and outside Chinese putonghua is to defamiliarize Chinese putonghua, strip it of its transparency by raising issues of readability, translation, and readership. Nanyang was written for a general Chinese-speaking audience, but it also has a special if not poignant resonance for the Philippine Chinese “insiders” who see the familiar dialectal variations of Chinese and the equally familiar multilingual codes circulating within the Philippines suddenly wrenched from the context of ordinary life and rendered literally visible through their representation in writing. In addition, Bai Ren writes within a multiplicity of languages, and the effect of such an assumption of multiplicity is to problematize the politics of translation. Translating from one language to another cannot any longer be thought of as a bridge linking two distinct languages, because the very act of translation already changes both languages by changing the language
into which the “other” language is supposed to be rendered intelligible. Standard *putonghua* must now deal not just with the incursion of Jinjiang and Philippine Chinese Hokkien, but with the appearance within itself of Tagalog, Cebuano, Spanish and English, in the same way that Philippine Chinese Hokkien (*gunggong* being the latest) itself evinces the presence of the Filipino *lingua franca* with its liberal doses of English and Spanish.

Ah Song translates Hokkien, Tagalog, English and Spanish into Chinese and vice versa, and every time he does so, he can no longer go back to being the person he was before he entered translation. The Ah Song who embarks on the task of translation is transformed into another Ah Song who is both Chinese and something else, Filipino as well. Ah Song becomes “Chinese” only because he has also become “Filipino”—because his Chineseness, far from being an impermeable totality, is always incomplete and partial and therefore open to the experience of being something other than Chinese. This double translation of apparently indisputable and ineluctable cultural differences exposes the constructed nature of these differences and their constitutive openness to the “outside,” to other “cultures” or “nations.”

This constitutive openness of nationness to the foreign “outside” is not without its own tensions, because nationalism often operates on a set of assumptions (citizenship and allegiance) which tends to stress the singularity of a given nation and the relative cohesion and impermeability of national identity. As it happens, the idea that to be Chinese also admits of the possibility of being other-than-Chinese can be a source of deep uneasiness in a world that operates on the basis of the assumed boundedness and integrity of “national” (if not “cultural”) totalities. That the act of movement across borders can have political significance, that it can even create political possibilities for action and change in the countries concerned, can be disturbing and is liable to be interpreted as a threat to the social.

In China, returned overseas Chinese were persecuted for bearing the mark of difference from other Chinese, for having been “contaminated” by their years of living outside China, for being harbingers of alien and

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alienating capitalist and bourgeois values which supposedly posed ob-

stacles in the path of national, socialist reconstruction. Communist cad-

res from Fujian and Guangzhou were particularly vulnerable to cen-

sure during the Cultural Revolution, while relatives of overseas Chinese 

were stripped of their privileges and returned overseas Chinese were 
discriminated against in the workplace. Bai Ren states in the 

Afterword that his life in the China to which he had chosen to return 
remains full of hardship and suffering; the “golden years” of his youth 
loom large in his imagination precisely because life in the years after 
has not been easy, the path being extremely bumpy (daolu kanke).

At best, this indicates that the sacrifices demanded of her patriots ap-

parently did not stop upon China’s attainment of national liberation. 
At worst, his reticence about the exact nature of his suffering under-

scores all the more the betrayal of patriots like him by elements within 
the state claiming to speak in the name of the Chinese people.

In the Philippines, the fraught association of Chinese with merchant 
capital, and much later, with finance capital, engendered state legisla-
tion during the Commonwealth and post-war years aimed at curbing 
the Chinese’ perceived dominance of the economy. At the same time, 
state legislation also sought to contain the Chinese “chimerical nation-
ality” through its citizenship laws which, albeit relaxed during the 
Marcos era through the Mass Naturalization Act, continue nevertheless 
to foreground the thorny questions of the Chinese’ identification with 
money and the Chinese’ ever-doubtful allegiance to the Philippines.

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55Special treatment had originally been extended to relatives and dependents of overseas Chinese and included exemption from forced manual labor, access to special educational facilities and to remittances from overseas, and greater rations of consumer goods. See Carino, China and the Overseas Chinese, p. 3.

56Interview with “Yisheng” (pseudonym of a returned overseas Chinese from the Philippines), Manila, February 22, 2001.

Furthermore, the anti-Left tenor of state policy for much of the post-war period would have also ensured that had Bai Ren stayed on in the Philippines, he would most certainly have been hounded for being a "Communist" or a Communist sympathizer under the Magsaysay, Garcia, Macapagal, Marcos, Aquino, Ramos, Estrada, and most recently the Arroyo, administrations. He would have had to answer to accusations of having allegedly acted to create a Fifth Column among the Chinese in the Philippines (as in the case of *Chinese Commercial News* publishers Quintin and Rizal Yuyitung), and his patriotic fervor would still have been derided even by third-generation Chinese Filipinos who simplistically equate emotional attachment to China with political disloyalty to the Philippines. A consequence of this anti-Communist stance has been the silencing, whether forcible or voluntary, of the history of the Chinese left from accounts of everyday life among the Chinese in the Philippines.

Yet *Nanyang* offers a much more nuanced, and perhaps far more unsettling, picture of the politics of "belonging" and "national identification" and its potentially radical implications for interrogating and redefining nationness. It suggests that, given the right historical opportunity (afforded, in this instance, by the anti-Japanese resistance struggle in Asia) and given the right ideological leanings (in this case, the Left's advocacy of internationalist solidarity against imperialist oppression), one can be patriotically Chinese yet still stake a claim on Philippine national belonging. For not only does Ah Song owe his "Chineseness" to the specific mediation of his Philippine experience (which includes his stint as merchant apprentice, and his mentors, his lover Ah Hong, his Filipino friends like Niuniu, tribal chief Mohani, among others), his love for China can only be expressed in a form that admits the salience of his love for the second homeland, the Philippines. Throughout the years in which Ah Song taught himself and was taught by his Chinese compatriots to "remember" a far-away and abstract China in the here and now of the Philippines, and to contribute his part to the Chinese nationalist cause within the Philippine arena, Ah Song's "Chinese nationalism" becomes something other than "Chinese".

One telling instance of the inflection of Chinese patriotic expression by Philippine experience can be seen in Ah Song's account of his growing involvement in the anti-Japanese resistance movement. Ah Song's idealism is fired up by, even as it stokes, his romantic involve-
ment with Ah Hong. Romantic love and patriotic love are, for a time at least, intimately connected in a relation of mutual incitement. In a most revealing scene, the two conduct their courtship at the Luneta, in which they express their love for each other by singing patriotic songs. But what is most telling about this scene is that they warble songs, not only in Chinese, but also in English and in “the local language” (*bendihua*). Languages and meanings meet and intermingle in the common expression of deep-seated emotion.

This Philippine-inflected Chineseness has radical implications insofar as it verifies the of-repeated but ill-understood generalization that some of the most noted first-generation Chinese nationalists (notably Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the 1911 Chinese Republic, and himself a *huaqiao*) were those who had been exposed to the markedly “foreign” outside. More important, it substantiates Sun Yat-sen’s statement that the *huaqiao* were historically the “mothers of revolution” (*gemingzhimu*).58 At stake is nothing less than a rethinking of nationness and the constitution of the national subject as unitary self.

Yet even *Nanyang* itself stops short of exploring the full implications of this unsettling of the national self. This truncated move may owe something to the masculinist strain of thinking that dominates the discourse of self-discipline which informs notions of the revolutionary self. There is, curiously, very little close-up, let alone positive, representation of Filipino males in the novel, Ah Song’s narrative being anchored in his social relations with his male Chinese mentors, with the female Ah Hong, and with a succession of Filipinas who are mainly *mestizas*, who save his life. This absence of Filipino males, beyond the caricatured “badboys” who harass Ah Song’s Filipina friends, appears to fit in the novelistic project of substantiating a disciplined Chinese revolutionary body — the physical development of the body becoming a literal

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58 Overseas Chinese based in the Philippines and Vietnam played an important role in sustaining for more than fifty years the anti-Manchu resistance in Southern China during the 17th century. Writes Wang Gungwu, “In the Philippines, Cheng Ch’eng-kung [Ming loyalist and anti-Manchu resistance leader Koxinga] received more active support. So important were the revenues from the Philippines, it is said, that the Spanish massacre of the Chinese there in 1622 was a great blow to him and one of the reasons for Cheng Ch’eng-kung’s early death.” Wang Gungwu, “A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese,” pp. 19-20.
marker of the growth of a political consciousness — that is masculine and desirable, the reverse of the self-gratifying, unruly, and repulsive “machismo” of Filipino “badboys.” This essentialist fantasy creates a “Chinese” male gaze, a traveling Eye/I that self-consciously seeks to occupy the position of the Filipino male in the admiring glance of the Filipina female, a substitutive or metaphorical strategy that is reinforced by the literary conventions of various colonial travel narratives.

Moreover, the idea of the disciplined revolutionary body often constructs the female gender as the “other” of the male activist, as a domesticating force which vitiates the revolutionary’s commitment by its association with carefree pleasures (romantic love), and the claims generated by “its” marital and familial demands. True to the logic of this masculinized revolutionary ethos, Ah Song’s love affairs, especially the one involving Ah Hong, can only ever end tragically. Ah Song’s relationships with the Filipinas in the novel is telling in another, historical sense. Despite his avid appreciation of her beauty and charm, Ah Song elects not to reciprocate the love of his best friend Niuniu, and at one point, even turns down the request of Mohani’s daughter that he stay on with the indigenous people and marry her. Ah Song’s repudiation of the love offered by the Filipinas he comes into contact with points to

59In keeping with the concept of Bildung, Nanyang charts its protagonist’s intellectual development through his physical growth over time. The most telling instance in the novel is the one in which Ah Song catches a glimpse of his “new self” in the mirror by the staircase of his lodgings and admires the reflected image of “a beautiful young man” (piaoliang de shaonian). What follows is a catalogue of idealized features: shiny hair, fair skin, large eyes, regular nose, rosy cheeks, and perfectly shaped mouth, features far removed from those of the callow, skinny child who first arrived in the Philippines barely two years ago (Bai, p. 102). Here, the labor-induced flowering of Ah Song’s physical beauty serves as an outward manifestation of his inner self-transformation into a productive and passionate patriot-revolutionary. For a discussion of the reorientation of the modern, politicized body along masculinist lines through ascetic renunciation of feminized sexual desire, domesticity, and consumerism in Chinese literature since the May 4th Movement, see Xiaobing Tang, “Shanghai, Spring 1930: Engendering the Revolutionary Body,” in his Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 97-130.

60For a discussion of the traveling Eye/I, and the mestizo character of the colonized hero(ine)s of European sentimental literature, see Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 86-107, especially 100-101, and Chapter Two of my Necessary Fictions, pp. 48-93.
the revolutionary huaqiao's deliberate refusal to follow the historical trajectory taken by other male huaqiao who, owing to the relatively few number of Chinese female immigrants in the early years of the century, had to deal with "local" women, falling in love with and marrying them, and raising sons and daughters who, not unlike their father, may not ever "return" to Tengsua. To love, for Ah Song, is to risk being unable to go back to one's homeland.

There is, in these accounts of Ah Song's serially truncated loves, an element of masculinist, even orientalist, fantasy, which is evident in the parallel love stories of Chen Shan and Ah Song's elder brother. Both men fall in love with Filipino women whom they first met when they put a stop to these women's attempted rape by unsavory characters. Nanyang paints an idealized picture of the Chinese working-class male, the beauty of whose bodies attract the interest of Filipinas. With the exception of Ah Song's brother, whose love story ends happily in marriage, Chen Shan and Ah Song both renounce their desires by opting to leave the country.

However, the "male" gaze of the committed Chinese patriot, concerned as it is with standing in for the Filipino male, cannot securely define itself as "Chinese" at the expense of the Filipino male. The novel's delineation of Niuniu's formative influence on Ah Song blunts the orientalist fantasy shaped by the novel's use of travel-narrative conventions as exemplified by Robinson Crusoe while unsettling the asymmetrical relationship between huaqiao male and Filipino male. The androgynous Niuniu, first seen in boy's clothing and mistaken for a boy by Ah Song, shows herself to be Ah Song's ally and equal, and the relation that they forge, at least in the interim before Ah Song returns to the hierarchically determined huaqiao society and Niuniu begins to desire Ah Song as a man, is less one of inequality which often pertains between men and women than one of parity and reciprocity between two people whose gender is for the moment indeterminate. It is the beautiful and ebullient Niuniu, one of the best delineated characters in the novel, who sees Ah Song off at the pier on his voyage back to China; it is Niuniu who makes the effort to see a Chinese play and expresses her apprecia-

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61 I thank Benedict Anderson for reminding me of the "tropicalization and mestizaje" trajectory of the huaqiao.
tion of Chinese culture; it is Niuniu who saves Ah Song from certain death at the hands of the smugglers; it is Niuniu who teaches Ah Song how to swim. Niuniu, in short, is an important catalyst of Ah Song's self-transformation. It is this platonic but intense friendship between two equals — rather than a romantic love involving an idealized Chinese man and a pliant and admiring Filipino woman — that Bai offers as an alternative, given his equation of sexual desire with the vitiation of patriotic love.

Moreover, the Chinese patriots whom Bai Ren undertakes to memorialize in his novel did not leave the Philippines without transforming Philippine life as well. Patriotic huaqiao who stayed on in the Philippines organized guerrilla units to fight the Japanese. Luis Taruc has written of the contribution of the famous Chinese leftist Wha-Chi guerrillas to the Huk struggle against the Japanese in this often-quoted passage from his book *Born of the People*:

The presence of Squadron 48 [Hua Zhi] among the peasants shattered an old and disreputable custom, that of treating Chinese people insultingly, and in general using them as the scapegoat in the blind reaction of Filipinos to evils that lie much deeper in our society. The members of Squadron 48 became much beloved by the people of Central Luzon, who often went out of their way to give them special consideration in billeting, feeding, and assistance.\(^{62}\)

Taruc's second book paints a less rosy picture of the Wha-Chi:

When the Japanese war broke out, four of their [Chinese Communist] high-ranking officials joined us in the field. Two of them claimed to have already been given training, one in politics, the other in guerrilla warfare, on the Chinese mainland. They were attached to our Politburo as advisers and acted as liaison officers between ourselves and their own anti-Japanese resistance movement.

Their advice was often resisted by Vicente Lava, who was then our general secretary, and by myself. It seemed to us that their advice was always related to Chinese mainland activities rather than Philippine interests.

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First they advised us to attack the Japanese relentlessly. Although we did so, we suspected that their motives were chauvinistic, that their main concern was with the battle then going on in China. It seemed to us that they viewed our struggle only as a diversionary action.

When our fight resulted in a fierce Japanese counter-attack, and we suffered heavy casualties, they switched to a defensive strategy, urging us to hide our guns and return to our barrios. They sent most of the members of their own organization home to China. They called this policy "retreat for defense." But the Filipinos in the field refused to put it into action. We had great respect for the Chinese comrades. But when we realized the extent of their chauvinism and self-interest, our respect quickly diminished.  

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Taruc's account, which castigates the Chinese Communists for being concerned only with China's affairs, ironically reveals his and Lava's own understandable but nevertheless problematic assumption of the infrangibility — the self-contained "inviolability" and, therefore, either-or logic, of Philippine nationalism vis-a-vis other nationalisms. The strong pull of nation-centered thinking on both sides may have sparked tension and mistrust on the part of the Filipino guerrillas, with the result that the Filipino guerrillas' willingness to heed the Chinese advice was strongly tempered by their suspicion of the Chinese's "chauvinism and self-interest."

Yet the Chinese Communists' "self-centered" practice of sending their comrades back to China actually has a far more mundane explanation than Taruc is willing to grant it — the fact is that these cadres were highly skilled training officers who were as much needed in China as they were in the Philippines. Socialist commitment to forging international solidarity and mobilizing resistance against Japanese aggression meant that it was not unusual for experienced cadres to have to frequently uproot themselves and move from one place to another, as the need to help train people in guerrilla warfare arose in different places — something that Taruc appears not to have considered. Moreover, Liang Shang Wan and Cai Jian Hua's memoirs offer a much more detailed account of the day-to-day cooperation between Hukbalahap and  

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Wha-Chi guerrillas, an account that, despite its taking an "outsider" or "foreigner" position in its depiction of the anti-Japanese struggle in the Philippines, points to a number of important collaborative efforts among Chinese and Filipinos in engaging the enemy forces.64

Despite Taruc's mistrust of the Chinese Communist guerrillas' China-centered "chauvinism and self-interest," the contribution of these guerrillas to the anti-Japanese resistance effort in the Philippines in terms of their participation in the training of Philippine guerrillas cannot be so easily discounted, even if they differed with the Filipino guerrillas not only on questions of tactics and strategy but also on more fundamental issues such as national allegiance.65 Furthermore, this contribution to Philippine nationalist struggle was made by Chinese Communists, many of whom did not remain in the Philippines after the war. Their contribution is no less significant just because they decided to go back to China.

As much as the Chinese guerrillas might have been China-oriented, Taruc's notion of infrangible nationalism does not quite limn the complexity of the Chinese's response to the war against the Japanese in the Philippines. The Chinese guerrillas' solidarity with the Filipino resistance struggle can be explained by the fact that Chinese and Filipinos alike were fighting a common enemy. After the war, the China-centered guerrillas felt they had sufficient enough stake in Philippine affairs to have the right of participation at a mass demonstration protesting Manuel Roxas' candidacy for president, held on September 23, 1945, at the height of the collaborationism issue in the Philippines.66 Prominent Chinese resistance leaders Huang Jie and Li Yongxiao, who headed a contingent of nearly one thousand Chinese leftists were, however, roundly criticized by Filipino newspapers for their action, as we find in an editorial which appeared in the Manila Post:

The Chinese can advance no justification for butting into the Philippine collaborationism question, or into any of our other

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66The Huaqiao Warriors, p. 170.
domestic affairs, for that matter. In passing judgment on our congress, the Chinese have stepped over the heads of the Filipino people who had elected their people to congress, the Filipino people who are the only legitimate critics of the officials they have willed into office. Chinese resistance leaders should have directed its trades [sic] against the Nanking puppets and against his [sic] fellow men here in the Philippines who had voluntarily given aid, comfort, and sustenance to the Japanese during the occupation.67

By telling the Chinese guerrillas to mind “their” own business and to restrict their protest action to issues pertaining to the Chinese community, the Manila Post not only refused to acknowledge the contribution of Chinese activism to the Filipino struggle against the Japanese; it repudiated the claim made on the Philippines by Chinese guerrillas who had risked their lives and seen their comrades die fighting the Japanese upon Philippine, not Chinese, soil. What is significant about the leftist Chinese guerrillas’ action is that even though they did involve themselves in the collaborationism question within the Chinese community, they also came to see the necessity of extending their political action beyond the confines of China or even Chinatown by attempting to speak to the Philippine state in a gesture of solidarity with Filipino nationalists who had the right and the obligation to make the state listen and respond to their anti-collaborationist position.

The Chinese guerrillas’ action is a signal moment that marks, not so much a shift in the guerrillas’ political “position” from being China-centered to Philippine-centered, as a modulation from one position to another within a single political continuum. Where the concept of a shift tends to imply a one-way movement from here to there across a distance, however short that distance may be, modulation not only denotes the exertion of a modifying influence on a given entity such as the state, but stresses the potential transmutability of one form or condition (the so-called “China-centered” orientation) into another (“Philippine-centered” orientation) and vice versa. The idea of a shift begins from an assumption of separation often coded in terms of space, of differentiation, that of modulation from an assumption of intimate connection and potential interchangeability, coded in terms of time, of

67 Ibid.
co-incidence. The historical times were such that, in fighting against a common enemy, a “Chinese nationalist” could also be considered a Filipino nationalist without having to give up his Chinese nationalism. One did not have to choose between being either a Chinese nationalist or a Filipino nationalist; one could, precisely in being a Chinese nationalist, be a “Filipino” nationalist as well.

It is true that the Chinese guerrillas did not think of themselves as “dual” nationalists. Their political action derived from, and articulated, a discourse of emancipation which stressed international cooperation and solidarity among Leftist groups and forces all over the world. But more than simply a case of international solidarity, the Chinese guerrillas’ political action in the Philippines opened itself to the possibility of being articulated as an instance of Filipino nationalist action, without necessarily precluding their loyalty and commitment to China.

This kind of huaqiao nationalism is a Chinese revolutionary nationalism which, although it promoted political loyalty to the Chinese state, was not chauvinistic; instead, it contributed to the development of indigenous nationalism and, later, communism and socialism in Southeast Asia. Whereas some of these overseas Chinese came to identify with the nationalist movements in Southeast Asia (as in the case of Thailand), others identified with the international struggle against imperialist exploitation (as in the case of Indonesia). This progressive, revolutionary form of Chinese nationalism seeks to immunize itself against — yet is also irreducibly transduced by — forms of reified “Chineseness,” identified specifically with money, and with merchant “virtues” of asceticism and self-discipline, that were fostered by colonial regimes through census classifications and ethnic/racial policies, and subsequently calcified in everyday life through the historical conflation of “the Chinese” with mercantile capital. The contamination of huaqiao revolutionary nationalism by “Chinese” money thus renders the Chinese patriot particularly vulnerable to the exclusionary impulses of Southeast Asian indigenous nationalism, which looks upon the Chinese not simply as politically, culturally and emotionally China-oriented

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“aliens,” but as economically powerful ones as well who threaten the political and cultural integrity of the nation.

But what is important about Chinese participation in the mass demonstration against collaborationism is that it posits a conception of nationalist politics in which commonsensical questions of citizenship and allegiance, while not immaterial, are superseded by a higher moral and no less nationalist claim based on the unconditional gift of the guerrilla fighters’ (self-) sacrifice and the national indebtedness occasioned by their act of gift-giving to the Filipino nation at a specific moment in both countries’ histories. This gift of self-sacrifice forges an irrevocable bond of solidarity between Chinese guerrillas and “the Filipino people” out of the exigencies of war and requires us to imagine the unimaginable. It substantiates the popular saying that huaqiao were not only the “mothers of the revolution” (gemingzhimu) but also, as argued in the novel, made “important contributions,” by dint of their “wisdom and hard labor,” to the societies all over the world in which they live.  

Nanyang demands that we learn to imagine how leftist Chinese nationalists can be part of the history of the Philippine national liberation struggle even when they do not claim to be Filipinos. It asks us to recover and embrace, in the words of scholar Pheng Cheah, a disavowed “revolutionary Chinese cosmopolitanism” that played a role in making Philippine history. Finally, it gives political significance to the historic movement across borders of Chinese people who, in the name of international solidarity, aided Filipino nationalists in fighting for national liberation from the Japanese during the 1940’s, and in so doing, changed the terms of their own as well as their allies’ notions of nationalism.  

This double nationalism, however, is not a permanent condition, nor even a stable or easily realized one, because it arises only within the context of specific political action enabled by a particular confluence of historico-political contexts. As Thai scholar Kasian Tejapira’s remarks in his study of the transmutation of Chinese nationalism into Thai nationalism:  

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69Nanyang Piaoliuji, p. 111.
70Ibid.
[The fact that] the emergence of Thai radical nationalism among the lookjin communists during the Second World War was ushered in by the other parallel radical nationalism of the Chinese immigrants attests to the intimate complicity and inter-national nature of popular, anti-state nationalisms. Translation thus serves much more than a merely informational function since it transposes concepts, values and beliefs from one national imagination to the formation of another. Given a favorable historic moment when a window of political opportunity swings open, one can see the beauty of comparisons and fall in love with a nation just for the love of another.\textsuperscript{71}

Double nationalism is thus especially vulnerable to erasure by time and forgetfulness of the people on whose behalf the dual-nationalist revolutionaries undertook political action and made self-sacrifices.

Posing the unimaginable question of the Chinese foreigner's "nationalist" contribution to the making of the Philippine nation, in turn, raises an even deeper issue with regard to the limits of taking for granted the use of the nation-state as an analytical and conceptual unit. This is not to argue that the nation-state, or nationalism, is obsolete. Far from it: this essay argues that these concepts remain salient forces and have important socio-political, economic and cultural implications in everyday life, and no amount of talk about capitalist globalization can afford to discount the importance of the nation even in the new world order. The continuing salience of nationness renders it all the more necessary for scholars to foster a more rigorous study of the concept of nationness, and to take into account experiential forms, such as those depicted in Bai Ren's novel, which test the limits of both Chinese and Philippine nationalism in ways that highlight the making and unmaking of both the Chinese and Philippine social through the material flow of bodies and labor which (re)define the experience of nationness in both countries.

\textit{Nanyang} shows that the \textit{Bildung} as process is not so much about the successful formation of an individual in accordance with an ideal as it is about how this very formation is dependent on the necessary short-

circuiting of the process brought about by the chance or accidental connections which end up reformulating the ideal. *Nanyang* shows how one’s experience of one’s homeland is shaped by the vicissitudes of one’s engagement with the “second homeland” (*dierguxiang*) in which one spends the golden years of childhood and adolescence (*huangjinshidai*).

The “Philippines” that Ah Song reconstructs from memory is as “phantasmatic” as the abstract “China” he conjures up, and as contingent and provisional. Ah Song’s narrative rendering of the Philippines is markedly replete with silences, gaps, and omissions. There is talk of Dutch persecution of the Chinese in Indonesia, for example, but Ah Song appears not to have known of the Spanish massacres of the Chinese in the Philippines. The lacunae in Ah Song’s historical knowledge point up the selectiveness and inherent “corruptibility” of memory.

This same historical memory, fraught and riddled though with lacunae this memory may be, constitutes an imperative that animates Bai Ren’s project of recuperating the *huaqiao* experience. Haunted in China by his memories of the Philippines,72 Bai Ren undertook the difficult task of excavating a buried revolutionary past, of reconstructing a *huaqiao* activism that has disappeared from Chinese official memory, an activism that has also been expunged from Filipino official memory and exists only as a trace, a series of untranslated (if not untold) stories about laboring Chinese, in the Chinese-Filipino memory. *Nanyang* recounts the difficult labor attending the *huaqiao*’s becoming-Chinese by showing how this process took the form of a necessary (though often disavowed) detour that entailed the possibility of the *huaqiao*’s becoming-Filipino. The sojourning *huaqiao* male is constitutively Filipinized through the fact of labor that attends his becoming-Chinese. This experiential detour can serve as a potential corrective to the “chimerical nationality” often attributed to the Chinese, whose ethnicity has been historically conflated with capital; in effect, labor returns as the principal repressed element of Chinese-Philippine history.

The questions *Nanyang* raises are numerous and certainly difficult to answer, but they are questions that need to be posed here and now,

72In his Afterword, Bai Ren states that his memories of his youthful experiences in the Philippines loom ever clearer in his mind, appearing unbidden “in front of [his] eyes” [*bushi zai yanmianxian*] and impelling him to set them down in writing. Bai, *Nanyang* Piaoliuji, p. 292.
in the hope that they may lead to a rethinking of the basic assumptions that inform the theory and practice of nationalism. If one’s experience of nationness bears the ineluctable traces of other “nations,” other loyalties, what does it mean to claim that one “belongs” to any given nation? What does it meant to immerse oneself in a “collectivity”, to call oneself one of the “people” when this “national self” is not unitary, but rather irreducibly marked by something “foreign”? Can one have a claim to a nation other than her own? And can this claim be recognized by the people of that other nation even if the person, a *fanke* who is also a *sangley*, a regular visitor and a frequent guest in a foreign land, whose constantly arriving presence poses the “intolerable question”73 that puts into question the conceptual foundations of our notions of Filipino nationness, does not or chooses not to lay any claim? Indeed, can the much-vaunted particularism and exclusivity of nationalist theory and practice be interrogated in such a way as to render nationalism more hospitable to forms of solidarity which may not be based on “political loyalty” or citizenship, and to the difficult question of what it means for a foreigner to be “at home” in a land that she may not even choose to call her own? 

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73 See Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Plato’s dialogues in Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, translated by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 11. In his discussion of Socrates’ defense of himself against accusations charging him with sophistry, Derrida writes suggestively: “He [Socrates] declares that he is ‘foreign’ to the language of the courts, to the tribunal of the tribunals: he doesn’t know how to speak this courtroom language, this legal rhetoric of accusation, defense, and pleading: he doesn’t have the skill, he is *like* a foreigner. (Among the serious problems we are dealing with here is that of the foreigner who, inept at speaking the language, always risks being without defense before the law of the country that welcomes or expels him; the foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc. This personage imposes on him translation into their own language, and that’s the first act of violence. That is where the question of hospitality begins: must we ask the foreigners to understand us, to speak our language, in all the sense of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country? If he was already speaking our language, with all that that implies, if we already shared everything that is shared with a language, would the foreigner still be a foreigner and could we speak of asylum and hospitality with regard to him?” (pp. 15, 17)