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“I Am Chinese, Not Chinese”: Some Implications of an Ambiguity and Proposals for Alternatives

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Abstract

Prompted by the meme, “我是華人不是中國人,” and playing on its (machine-) translation into English as “I am Chinese, *not* Chinese,” this article explores how in English the word “Chinese” ambiguates what are two separately named concepts in Chinese: 華人 (*Huaren*, referring to Chinese ethnicity) and 中國人 (*Zhongguoren*, referring to Chinese citizenship). Within the PRC Firewall, the official designation is: 華人也是中國人, translated as Chinese *are also* Chinese), which co-implicates the two terms, endowing them with a singular, fixed, and primordialist sense. Beyond the Firewall, there are suggestions that 華人和 中國人 should be recognized as separable terms, with 華人 as a hybrid, hyphenated, and localized notion, indicative of some changing senses of identity. A new English coinage, Huabrid (華裔 *Huayi*) may help to encapsulate multiple and hybrid senses of how 華裔/*Huayi*/Chinese/Huabrid can be thought of as separable from 中國人/*Zhongguoren*/Chinese.

Keywords

China – Chinese – *Hua* – identity – Sinophone

In April 2021, I received a meme (*gengtu* 梗圖) via the messenger app “LINE” from a Japanese friend based in Taiwan.¹ The meme presents itself as a

1 The author expresses profound gratitude to Stuart Thompson for his constructive critiques and insightful suggestions, which were instrumental in elucidating key concepts and arguments in this article.

machine-generated translation imitative of Google. There are four lines. The first line is set up with the headings "Chinese (Traditional)" and "English." The second line, the one to be translated, consists of a Chinese phrase "我是華人不是中國人." The third line is the phrase in Hanyu Pinyin: "*Wo shi huaren bushi zhongguo ren.*" The fourth line ventures a translation of that phrase into English: "I am Chinese, not Chinese." I was touched by the message and forwarded it via LINE to Taiwanese friends and also via WhatsApp to friends from Hong Kong who I thought would appreciate its humour. The meme is presented in figure 1.

This popular meme clearly expresses a statement in the traditional (also known as complex) form of Chinese writing "我是華人不是中國人." In doing so, it represents a problem implicit in English translation—assigning one English word "Chinese" for two different Chinese terms 華人/*Huaren* and 中國人/*Zhongguoren*. Therefore, the English word ambiguates these two distinguishable Chinese terms. The lack of two separate English words to translate the two different senses of "Chinese"—two different implications for what's in the name Chinese—generates the apparent confusion of the meme's final line: "I am *Chinese*, not *Chinese*."

The translation "I am Chinese, not Chinese" for "我是華人不是中國人" is a puzzling statement for people who do not understand the cultural, ethnic, and political background of the two key terms. In fact, the "meme" highlights an ambiguity in the meaning of the English word "Chinese," which can refer to a nationality (*Zhongguo*, related to the nation China), an ethnicity (*Zhonghuaminzu*, related to Chinese ethnicity), a culture (*Zhonghua wenhua*

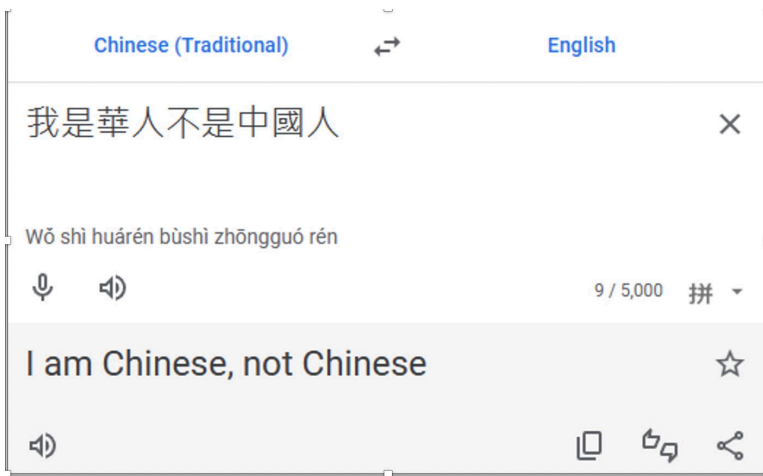


FIGURE 1 The meme represents a problem—one English word "Chinese" for two different Chinese terms 華人 and 中國人

related to Chinese culture), a language family (*Zhongwen* or *Huayu* related to Chinese language), or an individual member of a national, socio-ethnic or cultural group (*Zhongguoren* or *Huaren*). In my discussion, I initially employ the conventional translation “Chinese” but then use it *sous rature* (that is, acknowledging its conventional translation while leaving it behind) so as to deal with its problematic status.² A response to the meme points out: “This China is not that China; this Chinese is not that Chinese.”³ I thus use the term “華人/Chinese” *sous rature*, viz. 華人/~~Chinese~~ (*bushi* [are] not Chinese) until, in my conclusion, I make the case for a new English term to signify I am “華人,” as “not *Chinese*.”⁴

1 Meme: Formulation and Dissemination

I begin to study this popular meme by analyzing its formulation and dissemination. The word “meme” was coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976). He portrayed a “meme” as a cultural idea, symbol, or practice that can be transmitted from one mind to another through pictures, writing, speech, or other imitable phenomena with a mimicked (itself almost a pun with the word “meme”) theme. A meme is to be regarded as the cultural equivalent of the unit of physical heredity, the gene, though without the influence of genes. This word has since been appropriated by the internet. Dawkins explains how an “internet meme” is a hijacking of the original idea. Instead of mutating by random change and spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, memes are altered deliberately by human creativity. Unlike genes (and Dawkins’ original meaning of “meme”), there is no attempt at accuracy in copying; internet memes are deliberately altered for a particular purpose or effect.⁵

2 *Sous rature* is a strategic philosophical device originally developed by Martin Heidegger. Usually translated as “under erasure,” it involves the crossing out of a word within a text, while allowing it to remain legible and in place.

3 My translation from Rafael Jaspe Gracia, “Zhege China bushi nage China, Zhege Chinese bushi nage Chinese 這個 China 不是那個 China, 這個 Chinese 不是那個 Chinese,” accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

4 In this article, *italicized* text indicates Romanized Chinese terms, or emphasizes certain English terms and phrases.

5 Olivia Solon, “Richard Dawkins on the internet’s hijacking of the word ‘meme,’” 09/07/2013, accessed July 16, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130709152558/http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-06/20/richard-dawkins-memes>.

Internet memes normally aim to amuse or surprise through imitation, allusion, irony, or self-mockery in the hope of popularity—“going viral”—on the internet or spreading on social media. The meme which this article examines seems to have gone viral, spreading exponentially to become a “successful” meme. The meme had already gone viral when sent to me, and continued to spread for months afterwards in some “regions” of LINE and WhatsApp.

Later, I discovered the same meme in a Facebook post named “Taiwan Passport Sticker” dated 18 September 2019, which outlines and draws attention to the apparent contradiction: “When you think ‘中華/*Zhonghua*’ and ‘中國/*Zhongguo*’ are categorically different ... Native English speakers tell you: ‘there is no difference.’ *Zhongguoren* (People of China) also tell you: ‘there is no difference.’”⁶ Following up, I traced the earliest occurrence of this meme to a post on a Disp BBS board dated 15 June 2018 prefaced with a note saying: “I have a Malaysian Chinese [Malaysian national of Chinese ethnicity] friend who recently studied how to say ‘我是華人不是中國人’ [in English].” Underneath, there was a screenshot of the meme mimicking a Google Translation: “*I am Chinese, not Chinese.*” From this Disp BBS board, the earliest formulation of the meme I could find was in a PTT BBS board dated 13 July 2015 when it was raised merely as a question—“我是華人不是中國人”—by a Malaysian Chinese (probably the person mentioned above) asking for its English translation.⁷ A further exchange of thoughts on this same question (without the meme) was posted in a LIHKG board in 2020. Two years later, as I write this article, this question of translation into English continues to be a live issue on East Asian social media platforms outside the PRC.

2 Social Media Platforms Outside and Inside China

In this section I examine the main social media platforms on which this meme has spread, including LINE, WhatsApp, Facebook, Disp BBS, PTT BBS, and LIHKG. These six social media platforms are internet applications for communicating, commentating, and sharing though they have varying levels of openness and public visibility. They are all free and open access, allowing

6 Taiwan Passport Sticker, “Taiwan Guo huzhao tiezhi, ‘woshi huaren bushi zhongguoren 台灣國護照貼紙, ‘我是華人不是中國人’ [Taiwan Passport Sticker, ‘I am Chinese, not Chinese’],” 18/09/2019, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

7 Uiiong, “Woshi huaren bushi zhongguoren 我是華人不是中國人 [I am Chinese, not Chinese],” 13/07/2015, accessed May 8, 2021, <https://www.ptt.cc/bbs/Malaysia/M.1436721266.A.901.html>.

a variety of topics to be discussed and/or disseminated online. I particularly focus upon those users who passionately engage with the issues encapsulated by this meme, in the process of which, they hope to generate some social impact in the real world.

The first computerized Bulletin Board System (BBS) was created in 1978 in Chicago, US.⁸ The original idea was to create an electronic version of the type of bulletin board found on the wall in many schools and workplaces. BBS were initially used to post simple messages sharing or exchanging ideas on a network and became the primary online community in the 1980s and early 1990s, before the World Wide Web (“www” or “The Web”) arrived.

Today, the BBS that remain are used in most parts of the world as a nostalgic hobby. Cutting against the grain, though, from the 1990s to the present day, BBS have been a popular form of communication for young people in Taiwan. This coincides with the timing of Taiwan’s lifting of martial law in 1987 and transition to democracy in the subsequent years. It took another five years until the Temporary Provisions against the Communist Rebellion were repealed, together with the amendment of Article 100 of the Criminal Code in 1992, marking an end to the oppressive period known as the White Terror, and during which individuals lived in constant fear of imprisonment for the mere suspicion of voicing support for Taiwan Independence. From this point, freedom of speech became a reality in Taiwan. People started to express their opinions openly. Consequently, discussions surrounding Taiwanese identity and the politics of identity have surged to the forefront of public discourse, sparking intense debates and controversies.

In 1995, some Taiwanese students felt emboldened to establish their own form of BBS—named the Professional Technology Temple (PTT)—to voice their opinions on important matters such as questioning national and/or cultural identity. The main site of the PTT BBS was built by Tu Yi-Chin and other students from National Taiwan University.⁹ Using the TELNET protocol, PTT BBS provides a quick and instantaneous online forum community while allowing site managers to oversee forum discussions that matter. By 2000, the PTT BBS had become the largest platform for online forums in Taiwan. By 2007, PTT had 120,000 visitors online, making it the largest Chinese language-based BBS in the world.

8 Mariusz Zydyk, “Bulletin Board System (BBS),” 09/2005, accessed August 21, 2021, <https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/bulletin-board-system-BBS>.

9 Wikipedia, “Professional Technology Temple,” accessed August 28, 2021, <https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/4204696>.

Disp BBS is a website combining webpages and BBS posts, built in 2010 by another student from National Taiwan University, Huang Jiun-De. It has no direct relationship with the official PTT but forms another website within the PTT culture. Disp BBS was updated to operate as a web interface, and so offers a web-based BBS for conducting forum discussions, as had BBS in its earlier stages. Its technical update allows for keyboard operation, posting images, web searching, and the service of converting BBS forums into web pages for easy sharing.

LIHKG—a Link for Hong Kong—is essentially a Hong Kong equivalent of Reddit, an American forum site where users create threads and submit diverse content through relevant “sub-reddits” that categorize posts into different sections. Since its establishment in 2016, people in Hong Kong have felt safer using LIHKG, as users’ accounts can only be created with a valid email address provided by an internet service provider or higher education institution in Hong Kong, meaning users cannot hide their identities on LIHKG. However, the forum does not require users to reveal any personal information, including their names, so they can remain anonymous. The authorities can still try to get this information through a search warrant.¹⁰

Facebook, LINE, and WhatsApp are freeware apps available worldwide for instant communication on electronic devices (such as smartphones and tablets). Facebook and WhatsApp are run by Meta Platforms with headquarters in California, USA. The LINE service is a co-operative venture operated by a Tokyo-based subsidiary of the Softbank Group and the Seoul-based Naver Corporation.

Facebook is primarily a profit-making commercial enterprise, taking advantage of its popularity to aggregate so-called “big data.” The term “big data” refers to extremely large and hard-to-manage volumes of data—both structured and unstructured—that may be analyzed computationally to reveal patterns, trends, and associations, especially relating to human behaviour and interactions. “Big data” can then be applied for insights that might improve decision-making and enhanced strategic business moves as well as algorithms for bespoke advertising. Facebook has the largest global reach, with 2.5 billion active users per month, making it the world’s most popular social media platform.¹¹

10 Rachel Yao, “Hong Kong Protests: How the City’s Reddit-like Forum LIHKG Has Become the Leading Platform for Organising Demonstrations,” *South China Morning Post*, August 3, 2019.

11 Julia Zell, “The (Social) Medium is the Message,” 09/05/2020, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://uxdesign.cc/the-social-medium-is-the-message-9cfe53d22b1>.

LINE and WhatsApp are not set up to provide forum discussions. Rather, they are meant to serve as communication tools for messaging (e.g., texting), albeit with a group chat function. Conversations sent through LINE and WhatsApp are relayed to intended recipients only, instead of being accessible to a wider public. WhatsApp has become the primary form of messaging in Hong Kong, Macau, America, Europe, and Africa while LINE is the most popular messaging application in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and some parts of Southeast Asia. Texts on these six platforms, which circulate memes, are primarily in traditional Chinese characters. Netizens from China (PRC) or Singapore often use simplified characters.¹²

In China/PRC, the internet arrived in 1994. The first online forum in China was SMTH BBS created in 1995 by students from Tsinghua University. In 1998, the CCP government constructed the so-called “Great Firewall” (combining two words “Firewall” with the “Great Wall” of China) to regulate and censor the internet domestically with the key purpose of blocking undesirable transmissions from outside China. China’s two Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macau, governed under the “one country, two systems” regime, are not yet subject to the PRC Firewall.

In contrast with how PTT BBS (1995) and Disp BBS (2010) were taken up in Taiwan, and LIHKG (2016) set up in Hong Kong, in the PRC since 2005 SMTH BBS and other university BBS have been blocked from communicating beyond their university confines. The Chinese authorities have also blocked Facebook (since 2009), LINE (since 2014) and WhatsApp (since 2017), though some netizens, using Virtual Private Network (VPN), AnyConnect, and other means, have been able to climb over the Great Firewall. While Taiwan and Hong Kong netizens have embraced BBS or LIHKG social media platforms which allow for discussions of politically sensitive issues, in the PRC the tendency has been in the opposite direction, with government censorship and oversight of such media growing more invasive. I suggest that the 2014 banning of LINE can be connected with the spread of Taiwan’s Sunflower movement in that same year. Also, the significance of the 2017 banning of WhatsApp can be seen in the aftermath of Hong Kong’s Umbrella movement (2014), when the movement’s student leaders were imprisoned in 2017.

Meanwhile, China has created its own social media system and platforms, which use the PRC’s simplified Chinese characters exclusively. Baidu (百

12 The Government of the PRC introduced simplified Chinese characters in 1956. Simplified Chinese is now used in China/PRC, Singapore (from 1976), and Malaysia (in official publications). Traditional Chinese characters are being phased out in Hong Kong and Macau but are still used in Taiwan. Chinese communities outside of China have seen a shift to simplified characters, partly due to new immigrants from China/PRC.

度, 2000 onwards) is China’s equivalent of Google; Microblog (微博, 2009 onwards) is China’s equivalent of Twitter; WeChat (微信, 2011 onwards) is the dominant communication app; and Zhihu (知乎, 2011 onwards) is a community website where people post questions. In each of these online “communities,” there is a definite effort on the part of the CCP to create, police, and valorize its authorized version of what *Huaren yeshi Zhongguoren* (華人也是中國人) community should look like.

Through this investigation of the social media platforms associated with the meme, we have seen the marked differentiation of Chinese-language social media platforms on either side of the Great Firewall, and the extent to which use of different media platforms provides a message in itself.

3 Divided Messages Outside and Inside the PRC Firewall

In his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), Marshall McLuhan coined the well-known phrase: “The medium is the message.” McLuhan defined media as technological extensions of the body, and argued that the medium itself, and not (just) the contents it conveys, is a significant message in its own right. In the present discussion, I have demonstrated that social media operating in the Chinese world is predominantly divided into two domains: one available in China, and the other popular outside China. Social media platforms used within or beyond the PRC Great Firewall determine not just content (what is sayable), but also the ways in which messages are (re)presented, (re)produced and perceived.

Analysis of the abovementioned meme is the catalyst for my current investigation. A key factor to take into account is that the meme circulates only in the social media platforms beyond the reach of China while it is virtually absent within the confines of the PRC Firewall. This division in the availability of messages on either side of the Firewall has sharpened since 2014 political protests and changes in Taiwan and in Hong Kong.

That year in Taiwan, the Sunflower movement emerged, mainly led by students. They protested against the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement by the then-ruling Chinese Nationalist Party that was rushed through the legislature without due clause-by-clause review. The Sunflower protesters perceived the trade pact with China/PRC as hurting Taiwan’s economy, leaving it vulnerable to political pressure from Beijing.

In the same year in Hong Kong, the Umbrella movement emerged also mainly led by students who campaigned against CCP plans to rule out universal suffrage in Hong Kong. The movement to demand more transparent

and meaningful democratic elections was sparked by the decision of the Standing Committee of the PRC National People's Congress on 31 August 2014, prescribing a selective pre-screening of candidates from Beijing for the 2017 election of Hong Kong's Chief Executive. This struggle evolved into the campaign against the Extradition Bill in 2019, with protesters demanding that Hong Kong not be exposed to China's deeply flawed justice system. Some netizens have branded the anti-Extradition Bill protests, given its internet aspect, as "the Umbrella movement 2.0." Both movements sought to expose what they see as the fundamental flaws of the promise of "one country, two systems."

That same year (2014) in China, LINE was blocked. Because the CCP continues to claim that the territory of China consists of the mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, the sole authorized point of view—advocated and policed by the CCP—is that people of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even Chinese overseas are all categorized as *Zhongguoren*/people of China. For the CCP, *Huaren*/Chinese and *Zhongguoren*/Chinese are essentially flip sides of the same coin, the two are inexorably co-associated (also see Liang Chia-yu's Article in this special issue).

The Sunflower movement in Taiwan and the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong were both portrayed in the PRC as violations of the Chinese state's insistence that the people of Taiwan and Hong Kong should and must be seen as members of China's national family, in which *Huaren* cannot be other than *Zhongguoren*.

Beginning a year later, in 2015, the translation issue with its associated meme went viral on social media platforms outside China, such as PTT BBS and Disp BBS in Taiwan, LIHKG in Hong Kong, and Facebook, LINE, and WhatsApp worldwide. Though technically Baidu, WeChat, Microblog, and Zhihu are also available to residents outside the PRC, those discussing 華人/Chinese—as a separate political categorization—are duly wary of the PRC's pervasive censorship and therefore, given its potential implications, any circulation of the meme has been severely limited within the PRC Firewall.

I think we can argue that the effort on both sides of the PRC Firewall, to fix and determine what terms should mean can be understood as an attempt to *zhengming* (正名, rectify names/terms). In line with this, the divide in the meme's circuitry—inside and outside the PRC Firewall—parallels and exposes differences in what 華人/Chinese/Chinese can signify. On this basis, we might tamper with Marshall McLuhan's pronouncement to read: "The *social medium* is the message."

4 Inside the Firewall: Rectifying “*yeshi* (are also)”

Within the PRC Firewall, the meanings and identities of 華人/中國人/Chinese are closely tied to CCP political power. The issue of “correct terminology” in the discussion of cultural/ethnic/national identity is thus one factor which lies behind CCP efforts to control online discourse in the PRC and within the Great Firewall. According to the Exit and Entry Administration Law of the PRC, Chinese emigrants who settle abroad are required to cancel their household registration. Those overseas Chinese who retain a PRC passport are classified as “*Huaqiao*” (華僑), translated as “Overseas Chinese” (also as “Chinese overseas compatriots,” and later as “Chinese sojourners”). Those overseas Chinese who obtain a foreign passport—consequently relinquishing their PRC passport (since the PRC does not permit the hyphenized identity of dual nationality)—are referred to as “*waiji huaren*” (外籍華人, “overseas Chinese”). This group is alternatively known as “Overseas Chinese” or simply “*Huaren* / Chinese” (華人). Additionally, the CCP put forward the associated concept of “a *Huaqiao-Huaren* (華僑華人) continuum, illustrating an ambiguous use of this combined term.”¹³

Yet, in some circumstances a distinction is made between *ethnic Chinese* (民族) and those on whom the CCP confers legal status as Chinese. For instance, Singaporean Chinese are identified as “Chinese” based on their ethnicity, whereas Taiwanese and Hong Kongers are recognized in accordance with legal status. This differentiation has tangible implications, as laws like the Anti-Secession Law and the Extradition Law apply to Hong Kongers and Taiwanese, but not to Singaporeans or other *Huaren*.

In contexts where the focus shifts away from nationality and legal implications, the term *Zhongguoren* transcends criteria of passport-assigned nationality to encompass aspects of ethnic and/or cultural identity. Consequently, the terms “*Huaren*,” “*Huaqiao*,” and “*Zhongguoren*” are sometimes used interchangeably. This usage implies that “*Huaren*” (who generally hold foreign passports) which, in theory, designates “*bushi* (are not) 中國人” (who are Chinese passport holders), often, in practice, might be used as if to designate the equivalence: *Huaqiao-Huaren* “*yeshi* (are also) 中國人.”

In essence, the CCP’s official stance embodies something of a blurring between their definition and their practical application of the Chinese terms “華僑,” “華人,” and “中國人.” This inconsistency is latent within what Zhang

13 Wang Gungwu 王賡武, “Upgrading the Migrant: Neither *Huaqiao* nor *Huaren*,” in *Don't Leave Home: Migration and the Chinese*. (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 156–59.

Wenmu, Beijing University Professor of Strategic Studies, has described as “a uniform national strategic language recognized by all people of China internationally.”¹⁴ It underscores a broader strategy for fostering a unified identity among people of Chinese origin, regardless of their citizenship status, as part of China’s global narrative.

There has been minimal attention or response from PRC netizens to the meme in question. Within the constraints of the PRC Firewall, I have found only two reactions to the meme’s query: “How to say ‘我是華人不是中國人’ in English?” on a Baidu search platform, a service akin to Google. The responses, both dated 2019, are:

– I am [a] dog ... not [a] human.¹⁵

– 我也是中国人 I am also a Chinese. 我也是中国人 I am also a Chinese.¹⁶

The first response appears to be a derogatory comeback, providing a translation that vilifies the assertion that one can be 華人/*Huaren*/Chinese without being 中國人/*Zhongguoren*/Chinese, essentially dehumanizing someone who might claim such an assertion. The second response, rather than offering a direct translation, presents a statement twice that emphasizes: “我也是中國人 I am also a Chinese,” and that seems to imply: “[我是華人], I am also a Chinese/中國人/*Zhongguoren*,” a deliberate avoidance of the meme’s anomaly. These responses could be interpreted as stemming from a fundamentalist Chinese nationalist sentiment, in which the decoupling of the terms touches a raw nerve and is consequently viewed as offensive and/or unacceptable.

I think we can argue that the CCP’s co-identification of 華人 (*Huaren*) with 中國人 (*Zhongguoren*) is akin to the sort of conventional inculcation of *zhengming* advocated by Confucius. When asked what he would do if appointed to rule, Confucius said that he would emphasize *zhengming*, ensuring that words correspond with reality. “If names are not correct, words will not flow sensibly; if words do not make proper sense, things cannot be accomplished.”¹⁷ In a manner akin to Confucian *zhengming*, the CCP has ascribed a “correct” meaning and connotation to the term *Zhongguoren* (citizen[s] of the PRC) as identical with *Huaren* (individual[s] of Chinese ethnicity and/or culture) to

14 The Editor, “Tien Hsia,” *China Heritage Quarterly* No. 25, (2011), accessed August 1, 2023, http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=025_sinophone.inc&issue=025.

15 Dannylin07, 31/07/2019, last accessed July 23, 2024, <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/1953048565423545908.html>.

16 77d25d5, 05/04/2019, last accessed July 23, 2024, https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/397948173718411485.html?&mzl=qb_xg_1%20%20&fr=relate&word=&refer_title=中国人和中国人怎么用英语表达啊?&

17 Cited from *Lunyu Zilu* 論語子路 [*Analects of Confucius*, Chapter of Zi Lu] Section 13 in my own translation.

validate its ruling legitimacy. This is an attempt to make words correspond to their “reality”, to correspond with what, for them, constitutes the ideological foundation of Chinese/CCP nationalism, and the CCP as the sole legitimate ruler of an all-encompassing China and demarcation of those reckoned to be Chinese.

As regards the constitution of the PRC, rectifying the names of the CCP/*Dang* (黨, political party) and PRC/*Guo* (國, country/nation/state) corresponds to what they still refer to as *zhengtong* (正統, authentic unity), which was the critical component of the legitimacy of the imperial court in imperial China. It designates the legitimate inheritance of rulership as continuing from the imperial court of the previous empire to that of the present. The criterion for legitimizing their legacy is the inheritance of the entire territory of the previous empire, and their established rulership over all peoples in that territory (for deeper insights into the concept of “*zhengtong*” refer to Liang Chia-yu’s article in this special issue). I think we can argue, based on the premise of *zhengtong*, that the CCP intentionally ambiguates the two names—*Zhongguo* and *Hua*. This ambiguity can be traced all the way back to Liang Qichao’s invention of the term “*Zhonghua Minzu*” (中華民族, Chinese nation).

Under pressure from the Western powers, some late Qing intellectuals began to urge a transformation of China from imperial Empire to modern state. At the very beginning of the formation of the modern Chinese state, Liang Qichao (1875–1929) claimed in 1901, “No country can be called a state without going through the stage of nationalism ... I hope our China will practice nationalism taking one nation as citizens of one state.”¹⁸ In 1902, he coined the term “*Zhonghua Minzu*” within which the term “*minzu*” was borrowed from the Japanese translation as equivalent to the German sense of “nation.”¹⁹ This was one of the Meiji reforms for establishing “a state becoming a nation” among Japanese people. Liang thereby invented a name/notion for China as a single nation, which to his mind entailed the large body of Chinese people being defined by what he regarded as modern national features.²⁰

18 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Zhongguoshi xulun 中國史叙論 [The overview of Chinese history],” in *Yinbingshi Heji* 飲冰室合集 [Thoughts from the ice-drinker’s studio] Vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1901/1989), 1–12.

19 Hao Shiyuan 郝时远, “Zhongwen ‘minzu’ yici yuanliu kaobian 中文‘民族’一词源流考辨 [An examination of the origin and evolution of the Chinese term *minzu*],” *Ethno-National Studies* 民族研究 6 (2004): 60–69.

20 Liang Qichao, *Lun Zhongguo xueshu sixiang bianqian zhi dashi* 論中國學術思想變遷之大勢 [The general trend of changes in Chinese academic thought] (Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1902/2019).

Wang Ke is one of many contemporary scholars who judge that Liang Qichao carried forward the misimplication through the Japanese understanding of “nation” that “the citizens of a new China must be created on the basis of one “nation” ... therefore advocating a kind of “cut to fit” nationalism in order to create a “nation-state.”²¹ However, I believe we need not read Liang’s proposal as a mistake but more as a rhetorical strategy. I think we can argue that since the introduction of the nation-state into China, the goal of modern Chinese state-building has actually become to invent a single nation as a state, thereby combining “ethnic group” (民族) and “citizen of a state” (國民) into one category.

In 1905, Liang Qichao replaced “*Zhongguo Minzu* (中國民族, China’s ethnic groups) with his coinage of “*Zhonghua Minzu* (中華民族, Chinese Nation) by justifying it as a product of historical evolution: “not a single ethnic group [*minzu*] from the beginning, but gradually forming a collective body, a mixture of multiple *minzu*.”²² And, “the Chinese Nation has two major characteristics: political unity and ethnic mixture.”²³ Moreover, Liang’s contemporary, Yang Du regarded the so-called “Chinese Nation” not so much as a racial fusion but more as a cultural community, when he stated in 1907: “The unity, cohesion and indivisibility of culture have created the big family of the Chinese Nation.”²⁴ No matter whether prioritizing ethnicity or culture, both Liang and Yang integrated all ethnic groups into one single large Nation named “*Zhonghua Minzu*” to form “the citizens of a new China.”

In order to instill loyalty among the people towards the abstract notion of the ROC, Sun Yat-sen adopted the notion of “*Zhonghua Minzu*.” In his inaugural declaration as provisional president of the ROC in 1912, where he first proposed the ideology of the “Five Races under One Republic (五族共和),” he confirmed his view that: “The foundation of the Nation lies in the people, uniting the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan territories into one country, and uniting the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan ethnic groups into

21 Wang Ke 王柯, “‘*Minzu*’: *Yige laizi Riben di wuhui* ‘民族’: 一個來自日本的誤會 [A misunderstanding originating from Japan],” *Twenty-First Century* 二十一世紀 77 (2003 June): 75.

22 Liang Qi-chao, “*Lishi shang Zhongguo minzu zhi guan* 歷史上中國民族之觀察 [Observation of China’s ethnic groups in history],” in *Yinbingshi Heji*, Vol. 27. (1905/1941).

23 Liang, “*Lishi shang Zhongguo minzu zhi guan*.”

24 See Li Fan 李帆, “*Genzhi yu Zhonghua wehua di Zhonghua Minzu guannian—Yi Yang Du jintie zhuyi shuo wei hexin* 根植于中华文化的中华民族观念—以杨度金铁主义说为核心 [The concept of the Chinese Nation rooted in the Chinese culture: Reflected in the *On golden iron doctrine* by Yang Du],” *Journal of Beijing Normal University* Issue 2 (2022): 65–69.

one nation.”²⁵ Prior to his death in 1925, Sun had laid the groundwork for the establishment of a unified Chinese Nation encompassing diverse ethnic groups and territories. For this contribution, Sun Yat-sen was (from 1940 onwards) given the accolade “Father of the Nation [ROC]” —a status retained by the CCP with their epithet “Forerunner of the Chinese democratic revolution,” implying the CCP as the successor to Sun Yat-sen’s Revolution.

“*Zhonghua Minzu*” was thereby invented as a “facticity”—as a name for what had not existed previously—an invention similar to Gregory Lee’s depiction of the invention of “China” having come into being as an imagined term.²⁶ Liang’s invention of “*Zhonghua Minzu*” became, in the decades since, the crucial component for China’s identity as a modern nation-state and of Chinese nationalism. It was not solely the case for the ROC, for this sense of “*Zhonghua Minzu*” has also served as a key premise of PRC’s sense of nationality. Since its founding in 1949, the CCP has consistently utilized “*Zhongguo*” as the abbreviation of its national name—*Zhonghua Renmin Gonghe Guo*—and, conjointly, embraced “*Zhonghua Minzu*” as the name for the PRC’s “nation/national people(s).”²⁷

This ambiguity is also reflected in the language used by its current leader, Xi Jinping. In his inaugural address to the nation as head of state in 2013, Xi urged *Zhonghua Minzu* (中華民族, Chinese Nation) and *Zhonghua ernü* (中華兒女, sons and daughters of China) to collaborate “to achieve the China dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.”²⁸ Political critic Liu Zhongjing compellingly illustrates that the CCP’s “United Front strategy” (統戰策略) to incorporate or utilize those *Zhong-Hua* from whom China and the CCP can derive benefit, encompasses four interlocking concentric circles: *Hua-Zhong-Guo-Dang* (華-中-國-黨).²⁹

25 See Chang An 常安, “Qingmo minchu xianzheng shijie zhong di ‘wuzu gonghe’ 清末民初宪政世界中的‘五族共和’ [‘Five races under one republic’ in the constitutional world of the late Qing and early republican period],” *Peking University Law Review* 2 (2010): 13.

26 Yu Hui-ching 于蕙清, “Sun Zhongshan di Zhonghua Minzu guan 孫中山的中華民族觀 [Sun Yat-sen’s concept of Chinese Nation],” *Zhengxiu Xuebao* 正修學報 15 (2002): 39–48.

27 Tang Yong 唐勇, “Zhonghua Minzu di zhengzhi yiyi 中華民族的政治意義 [The political significance of the Chinese Nation].” *Political Science Research* 政治学研究 3 (2020): 59–66.

28 Xin Jinping 习近平, *Xin Jinping guanyu shixian Zhonghua Minzu weida fuxing di Zhongguomeng lunshu zaibian* 习近平关于实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦论述摘编 [Compilation of excerpts from Xi Jinping’s discourse on achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation] (Beijing: The CCP Central Compilation Bureau, 2013).

29 Liu Zhongjing 劉仲敬, *Jianming tongzhanxue jiaocheng* 簡明統戰學教程 [Concise tutorials on United Front studies], 13/08/22, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://forum.hkgolden.com/thread/7160945/page/1>.

Those overseas Chinese designated by the CCP as *Hua*/華, symbolizing “*Huaxia wenhua*” (華夏文化, Chinese culture) based on cultural affinity, are depicted as possessing the outermost circle, implying the outermost degree of Chineseness. Subsequently, those identified with *Hua*/華/Chinese culture, perceived as essentially Chinese, are cajoled or enticed into feeling a responsibility toward advancing *Zhong*/中, representing “*Zhonghua Minzu*” (中華民族, Chinese Nation) grounded in ethnic inheritance. *Zhong*/中/Chinese Nation are portrayed as occupying the second outermost circle, suggesting the second outermost degree of Chineseness. Additionally, cultural Chinese and the Chinese Nation are inescapably and morally co-associated with *Guo*/國, representing the “only one China/中國,” that is “*Zhonghua Renmin Gonghe Guo*” (中華人民共和國, the People’s Republic of China). Those who are part of *Guo*/國/the PRC are, in turn, perceived as even more intensely “Chinese,” possessing the second innermost circle. Furthermore, *Dang*/黨, representing the sole legitimate governing body of China, that is, “*Zhongguo Gongchan Dang*” (中國共產黨, the Chinese Communist Party), as distinct from the relatively passive ascription of those designated “*Hua–Zhong*” on the outer fringes of Chineseness, are at the agentive core of what “Chineseness”—in the CCP’s view of itself—ought to exemplify. The nearer the centre of the concentric circles, the more authentically “Chinese” and the more “core” is the category, with *Dang*/黨/the CCP as the key directive agency (figure 2).

In short, the terms “*Zhong*” and “*Hua*” have undergone a modern invention—a process of fixing and being fixed—of meanings which essentially signify Chineseness. Chineseness, as argued by Allen Chun, is “less a social fact *sui generis* than a crisis invoked not necessarily by the inherent nature of culture but by situations of context.”³⁰ Within the framework of the CCP centrality/concentric circles, the boundaries between *Huaren* and *Zhongguoren* and between *Zhongguoren* and not-*Zhongguoren* are blurred. The CCP’s emphatic concentration on the core of the concentric circles serves at least three purposes: (1) it rectifies the names of the CCP/*Dang* and PRC/*Guo* with Chinese Nation/*Zhong* and Chinese culture/*Hua* in order to justify its political legitimacy; (2) it ambiguates “culture as ethnicity as national identity as political identity” aiming to unify various political interests as asserted by Liang Qichao for the sake of political unity; and (3) it relates to the CCP’s claim to political authority through *their* version and instantiation of what essentially constitutes China as an *ethnic* nation/PRC, and Chinese/CCP *cultural* nationalism. Nevertheless, this fits with and within the Firewall

30 Allen Chun, *Forget Chineseness: On the Geopolitics of Cultural Identification* (New York: SUNY, 2017), x.

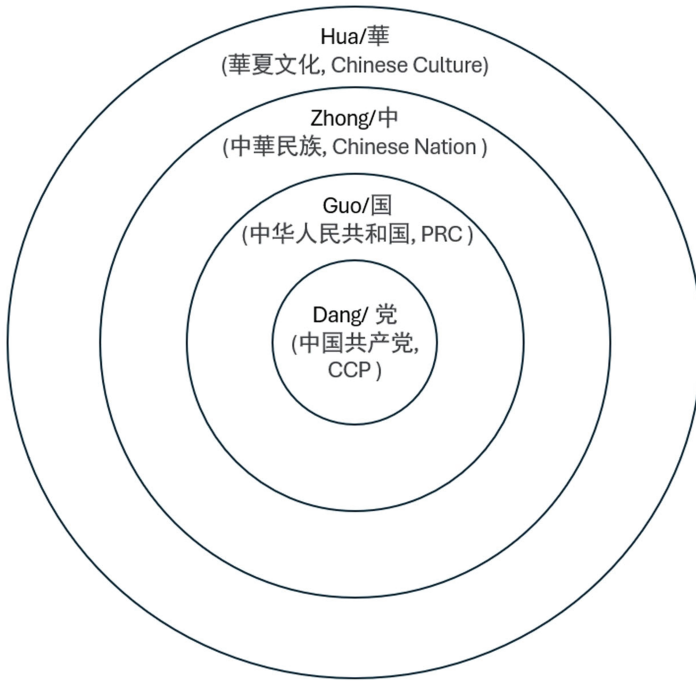


FIGURE 2 My modification of Liu Zhongjing’s concentric circle theory

boundary: inside the PRC Firewall (i.e., 海内 *hainei*), “華人 (*Huaren*) *yeshi* (are also) 中國人 (*Zhongguoren*).”

5 Outside the Firewall: Re-rectifying “*bushi* (are not)”

On the other side—outside the PRC Great Firewall—where the meme went viral, some interlocuting netizens feel or project a marked difference between what is signified by 華人 as opposed to 中國人, thereby emphasizing *bushi* over *yeshi*—asserting that the two terms are *not* equivalent. The Election Study Center of National Chengchi University publishes the identity trends of the people in Taiwan every year as suggested by their surveys. In 2023, the proportion of Taiwanese people who identified themselves as Chinese/中國人 had reached a new low since the surveys began in 1992, showing a downward trend from 25.5% in 1992 to only 2.4% in 2023. These results seem to reflect the growing percentage of the population of Taiwan who would subscribe to *bushi* over *yeshi Zhongguoren* (中國人, Chinese).

Since 2015 there have been exchanges of ideas about an alternative translation proffered for “我是華人不是中國人” in the social media platforms examined earlier. Some of these netizens are passionate about differentiating the two Chinese terms “華人/Chinese” and “中國人/Chinese.” Some go so far as to advocate alternative translations in English for the two terms. Such a differentiation, I reckon, is tantamount to a new form of the rectification (maybe even “*wreckedfication*,” if we make a Joycean or Derridean play on the word)³¹ of names/terms—which we might refer to as a re-rectification of terms (正正名, *zheng-zhengming*).

Such a re-rectification of terminology is perhaps a somewhat heterodox form of the rectification of names/terms advocated by Confucius. Attention to the correspondence of “words and reality” is therefore from a radically different perspective from that of conventional Confucian *zhengming*. This difference corresponds to the contrast between the earlier Wittgenstein (presented in his 1921 book *The Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*) as against the later Wittgenstein (presented in his 1953 book *Philosophical Investigations*).³²

For early Wittgenstein, the world was the totality of facts which are structured in a logical way. He argued for a representational theory of language, regarding language as picturing or representing the logical form of the world in that fixed structure. The approach is one which endows terms with their correct, essential, dictionary-like definitions. On the other hand, the later Wittgenstein—in some ways placing a Saussurean emphasis on the *arbitrariness* rather than the *essentiality* of the link between a sign's signifier and what is signified—rejects his earlier emphasis on correct, essential, dictionary-like definitions. He proposes instead that creating meaningful statements is *not* a matter of mapping the logical form of the world. It is a matter of using conventionally defined terms within “language games” that people play out in the course of everyday life. In accordance with this altered perspective, Wittgenstein famously wrote: “The meaning of a word is its use in the language.”³³ Wittgenstein's solution to the philosophical problem is to “bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.”³⁴

31 Both Joyce and Derrida were known for their complex and often playful use of language, which involved playing with the meanings of names or terms, creating ambiguity, and thereby deconstructing traditional understandings of language.

32 Wolfgang Huemer, “Wittgenstein, Language and Philosophy of Literature,” in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, edited by John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London: Routledge, 2004).

33 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1953/2009), 43.

34 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 116.

Hereafter, we explore the “everyday use” of those netizens who have commented on the meme. In the discussion which follows, I draw heavily on the BBS and LIHKG boards and one Facebook post about the meme. I have not been able to use LINE and WhatsApp since they have no built-in search function for accessing related groups and their discussions. So researchers (including myself) and other netizens are precluded from knowing whether, and the extent to which, netizens have been using WhatsApp or LINE for discussing the meme and alternative translations.

The popular comments in forums from PTT BBS, Disp BBS, and LIHKG are composed as “favorite reading boards” (好讀板) displayed on websites for further reading and sharing. As regards the meme examined, there is a “favorite reading board” in PTT BBS dated 13 July 2015 which comprises 37 comments; in Disp BBS dated 15 June 2018 containing 250 or so comments; in LIHKG dated 2020, composing 160 or so comments. On a Facebook post operated by “Taiwan Passport Sticker” dated 18 September 2019, there were 30 shares, and 654 likes/love etc and 133 comments in response to this translation question with associated meme. This is my data base for the discussion which follows.

To explore the meanings that may be attributed to the meme, I have delved into a total of six hundred discussions of the topic “我是華人不是中國人.” These comments are mostly written in traditional Chinese characters. The two comments supplied in simplified Chinese were assumed by other netizens to be from PRC netizens who had climbed over the Firewall. More specifically in the LIHKG, many comments are written in Hongkongers’ mother tongue using Chinese characters to represent Cantonese speech.

To investigate alternative translations—what I am calling “rectification”—I have focused on twenty comprehensible and distinguishable translations suggested by netizens on the topic of how “我是華人不是中國人” should be translated into English. Eschewing repetitions, I have selected, collated, and ordered chronologically the suggestions as follows:

- I am Chinese. I am not from China.³⁵
- I am a Chinese, not a citizen of PRC.³⁶
- I am Chinese not Chinese of China.³⁷
- I am “Oversea (*sic*) Chinese.”³⁸
- I am “ethnic Chinese, but not Mainland Chinese.”³⁹

35 Saram, 2015, 07/13 01:15, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://www.ptt.cc/bbs/Malaysia/M.1436721266.A.901.html>.

36 Nawabonga, 2018, 9F 06/15 14:39, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

37 Chenweichih, 2018, 12F 06/15 14:39, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

38 Howshue, 2018, 13F 06/15 14:39, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

39 Akainorei, 2018, 27F 06/15 14:41, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

- We may have similar genes, but we belong to different countries⁴⁰
- I am of Chinese descent, not a Chinese national.⁴¹
- I am Chinese Malaysian, not Chinese from China.⁴²
- I am Chinese in blood, but not from China.⁴³
- I'm Chinese in culture, not Chinese in politics.⁴⁴
- I come from Chinese cultural (*sic*), but not Chinese citizen.⁴⁵
- I am a descendant of Chinese, not a citizen of China.⁴⁶
- I speak Chinese but not from China.⁴⁷
- I'm Chinese as I know, but not a Chinese as you know.⁴⁸
- I'm democracy Chinese, not communism Chinese.⁴⁹
- I am a Chinese descendant/Formosan/Taiwanese, not a Chinese.⁵⁰
- I am ethnically Chinese but not a Chinese national from China.⁵¹
- I am ancestral Chinese. I am not from China.⁵²
- I am 華人 which is Chinese in English, but not 中國人 which is also Chinese in English.⁵³
- I am Taiwanese, I speak Taiwanese and Mandarin. We speak similar language as Chinese; We write Chinese in different way. We use traditional Chinese words, but Chinese people use simplified ones.⁵⁴
- I am from Hong Kong not China. There's a difference between two places.⁵⁵
- My race is Chinese, not my nationality/political identity.⁵⁶

40 Belongings, 2018, 63F 06/15 14:51, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

41 Tiuseensii, 2018, 71F 06/15 14:55, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

42 fever105, 2018, 93F 06/15 15:05, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

43 Wushihiyen, 2018, 94F 06/15 15:06, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

44 daye2012, 2018, 97F 06/15 15:07, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

45 Consantion, 2018, 101F 06/15 15:08, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

46 Nicehsing, 2018, 122F 06/15 15:18, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

47 Clyukimo, 2018, 213F 06/15 18:36, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

48 BILLBADY, 2018, 06/15 16:10 TW, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

49 sp840816, 2018, 06/15 17:09 TW, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

50 Paul Hsu, 2019, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

51 Ryder Ko, 2019, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

52 Jeffrey Lai, 2019, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

53 Rafael Jaspe Gracia, 2019, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

54 Estela Huang, 2019, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

55 Schnauzer, 2020, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

56 Lai Foshi 萊佛士, 2020, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

- I'm human not doggie.⁵⁷ [This seems teasingly to reflect on the Baidu interpolation cited above in Section 4: "I am a dog ... not a human."]
- I am an ethnic Chinese who embraces traditional Chinese heritages such as literatures ... but I don't consider myself a citizen of this China run by the communist party.⁵⁸
- [I] am Han people [within which belong to 南越人/Southern Yueh people], not Chinese.⁵⁹
- I am Hongkonger, not Chinese.⁶⁰
- I am democracy Chinaman, not Communist Chinadog.⁶¹
- I am not fucking China, but China is fucking you.⁶²
- I am Asian and not Chinese.⁶³
- I am (Hong Kong/ British/ America/ Australia) Chinese, not from China.⁶⁴

To modify the Google machine-generated translation—"I am Chinese, not Chinese" for "我是華人不是中國人," netizens have suggested a number of alternatives for translating the two terms 華人和 中國人 into English phrases in ways that do not duplicate both as "Chinese." Their suggestions involve differentiating the senses of "Chinese" which they attach to each instance of the word "Chinese."

For the first word translated as "Chinese" (華人), most netizens clarify it either: (i) by inserting an adjective, such as "ethnic," "cultural," "overseas," or "democratic," to specify its reference; or (ii) they describe 華人 as referring to a person with one of the following characteristics: one "who has Chinese genes," "who is Chinese in blood," "who is Chinese in culture," "who is Han people," "who has Chinese ancestors," "who is Chinese descendant," "who belongs to Southern Yueh people," "who speaks Chinese," "who writes Chinese," "who shares Chinese culture or literature," or "who settles overseas such as in Malaysia or in Taiwan or in Hong Kong."

57 Yuansheng Sizhong 原生死志, 2020, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

58 Sanwenyu Dango 三文魚蛋糕, 2020, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

59 Wuwenzi 五文字, 2020, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

60 Yingkong Taonaimu 櫻空桃乃木, 2020, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

61 Dawei Hexin Yuan Benchu 大魏核心袁本初, 2020, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

62 よりもい, 2020, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

63 Aurum79, 2020, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

64 Aurum79, 2020, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://lihkg.com/thread/1405041/page/1>.

For the second word “Chinese” (中國人), they fix it either: (i) by adding other adjectives, such as “national,” “political,” or “communist,” to define the noun “Chinese;” or (ii) by using referents, such as “Mainland Chinese,” “Chinese of China,” “a citizen of China,” or “a citizen of PRC,” to refine 中國人.

In summary, such everyday usage by interlocutors shows an intention to query—in my term, “re-rectify”—the CCP’s rectification by disambiguating the CCP’s elision of the two names—中國人 and 華人 as a single English term and concept of “Chinese.” Beyond the confines of the PRC Firewall, we witness a plurality of proposals as to how the term “華人/Chinese” might be re-rectified as a categorization for non-PRC citizens who notionally have or feel varying degrees of ancestral and/or cultural connections to China, along with varying senses of affiliation mediated through different times and places of origin and settlement. On these bases they can be reckoned—and increasingly reckon themselves—to be or have become distinguishable from 中國人/Chinese (refer also to K.B. Izac Tsai and Doreen Bernath’s co-authored article in this special issue). These suggestions or proposals for alternatives generally align with the boundary set by the PRC Firewall: outside the Firewall (i.e., *haiwai* 海外), “華人 *bushi* (are not) 中國人 (*Zhongguoren*).”

6 Differing Implications for What’s in the Name 華人/Chinese

It is important to note that there have been debates about “Chineseness” in academia and social media for three decades or more. Tu Weiming’s seminal article on “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center” (1991) is regarded as pivotal to attention being paid to what it means culturally to be labelled as, or choose the label of, “being Chinese.” According to Tu, “The meaning of being Chinese is intertwined with China as a geopolitical concept and Chinese culture as a living reality.”⁶⁵ Whether geopolitically and/or culturally defined, a certain sense of “being Chinese” has been promoted by Chinese regimes during the course of the last century. However, since the 1990s there has been an increasingly substantial interest shown by scholars in critiquing the imposition of a singular definition or way of “being Chinese” and its consequent implications. In this respect, Allen Chun’s thought-provoking work *Forget Chineseness: On the Geopolitics of Cultural Identification* (2017) alerts us to hidden assumptions underlying the complicated question of what it means to identify or be identified as “Chinese.” Gregory Lee’s landmark study *China Imaged* (2018) offers another important critique of the CCP’s instantiation or

65 Tu Weiming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” *Daedalus* 120, 2 (1991): 1.

inculcation of set authorized meanings for key terms such as China as a nation, and Chinese culture as a culture of that China nation.⁶⁶

Concurrently, social media forums have increasingly provided a platform for questions of—and the questioning of—identity and the politics of identity. The names “Chinese” and “Chineseness” have been undergoing a new phase of critical self-reflection and re-evaluation. It is against this background that we now place our discussion of the meme.

What emerges in how this everyday usage (as reflected in the meme) is changing over time, is a shift in usage. This shift marks a trend toward using “China,” not as a geographical term, but as a geopolitical term. This trend appears to coincide with an increasingly popular translation for “China” (中國) to equate with “PRC.” The English word “Chinese,” derived from “China,” is reinterpreted as characteristics of the PRC, including its culture, language, and people. In this context, “Chinese” (*Zhongguoren* 中國人) refers to the 1.4 billion citizens of the PRC. Such usages of “China” and “Chinese” seem consistent in emphasizing the geopolitical scope of the noun “China,” accentuating notions of centralization, unity, and homogeneity.

In contrast to the explicit references to “China/中國” and “Chinese/中國人,” the term “華人 as not being 中國人/Chinese” is increasingly considered as referring to those having a certain level of ancestral and cultural connections with Chinese and China, and especially those who are not PRC citizens—maximally the seventy million or so migrants from China who have settled in countries outside China/PRC—thereby operating beyond the Great Firewall. For some, *haiwai huaren* (海外華人, overseas Chinese) includes the twenty-three million Chinese of Taiwan, together with those who have settled in Hong Kong, Macau, Southeast Asia, Japan, Korea, America, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere.

We are recognizing an emerging bifurcation with regards to the usage, meaning, and connotations of the term 華人. This constitutes a splitting of the message regarding 華人—*bushi* (are not) as against *yeshi* (are also) 中國人/Chinese—which parallels the circuitry of those social media platforms located outside the PRC Firewall versus those inside it. The social medium within the PRC Firewall is congruent with the message: 華人/Chinese *yeshi* (are also) 中國人/Chinese, where the two names are incontrovertibly identical with each other. On the contrary, social media beyond the PRC Firewall accord with the message: 華人/Chinese *bushi* (are not) 中國人/Chinese; the two terms are different in usage, in meaning, in their connotations and in their degree of homogeneity.

66 Allen Chun, *Forget Chineseness*; Gregory Lee, *China Imaged: From European Fantasy to Spectacular Power* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

I think we can argue that the CCP has intended to co-associate and thus ambiguate the two names—華 (*Hua*) and 中國 (*Zhongguo*)—by assigning to them a fixed, homogenous and primordialist sense whereby the two notions are presented as naturally (i.e. ahistorically) concurrent or synonymous. This approach is grounded in a primordialist view that posits identities as ancient, natural, and deeply ingrained in human history and biology, thereby largely unchangeable. These identities, defined by characteristics like common ancestry, language, culture, or territory, are perceived as inherited from generation to generation, essentially fixed, and forming a crucial part of individual and group identity. This perspective can be viewed as an invented component of PRC nationalism.

Outside the PRC Firewall, an increasing number of interlocutors seem to reject the CCP's Chineseness and "united front" approach of casting those of Chinese historical, ethnic, or cultural heritage as inescapably and morally co-implicated with those of PRC nationality and nationalism. They seem to intend to make a clear difference, resonating with Tu Weiming's proposed differentiation between 華/Chinese "culture as a living reality" and 中國/China "as a geopolitical concept," consequently making another clear difference between 華人 outside China/PRC as "Chinese by culture and/or ethnicity" versus 中國人 within China/PRC as "Chinese by nationality."⁶⁷ The amalgamation of settlement cultures and other ethnicities has contributed to perceptions—sometimes nuanced, or hybrid, sometimes inarticulate or non-discursive—of Chineseness, perceptions which (tend to) diverge from the unified, homogeneous identity within—or identification with—China/PRC. Therefore, 華人/Chinese who are not PRC citizens are not thought of as a primordial entity, but rather as a diverse array of hybrid, hyphenated, or localized categories.

In this respect, for many of these netizens, there is an urgent need to dismantle the English coupling of the two Chinese terms "華人/Chinese" and "中國人/Chinese." The netizen using the name *sorenhuang* writes that "once '華人' are no longer addressed as 'Chinese,' then we can converse."⁶⁸ The netizen *Tsang Spencer* comments, "we really need to find an English word other than 'Chinese.' Using 'ethnic Chinese' and 'Chinese from China' is the best distinction at present. But it seems cumbersome. Can we create a new word?"⁶⁹ The netizen *Aynmeow* suggests: "Use a phonetic transliteration."⁷⁰

67 Tu, "Cultural China," 1.

68 Sorenhuang, 2018, 21F 06/15 14:40, accessed July 26, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

69 Tsang Spencer, 2019, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/TaiwanPassportSticker/posts/2090697357906694>.

70 Aynmeow, 2018, 6F 06/15 14:38, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://disp.cc/b/163-aFV5>.

Various terms commonly used by academics and others—including “*Huaqiao*” (華僑, Overseas Chinese, overseas compatriots, or Chinese sojourners), “*Huayi*” (華裔, Chinese descendants), and “*haiwai Huaren*” (海外華人, Chinese diaspora)—have been critically examined by Wang Gungwu.⁷¹ Throughout his academic career, Wang has been devoted to exploring and clarifying the diverse patterns of Chinese migration and settlement, and disentangling the intricate web of terminology used to describe these phenomena. Huang Jianli notes that while Wang’s work might not possess the dramatic flair of a Shakespearean play—*Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet utters the famous phrase: “What’s in a name?”—Wang would dispute Shakespeare’s notion that “a name is merely an arbitrary convention.”⁷² According to Wang, each of the *Hua*-related terms mentioned above is inappropriate in its own way.

Wang Gungwu categorized the migration of overseas Chinese into four patterns: the “(1) *huashang* [華商]/trader; (2) *huagong* [華工]/coolie; (3) *huaqiao* [華僑]/sojourner; and (4) *huayi* [華裔]/descent or re-migrant” pattern.⁷³ Wang considered the terms *Huaqiao* and *Huayi* to be inadequate since each refers to only one of the four migration categories. The term “*Huaqiao*” was coined in the 1890s when the Chinese state first began to recognize, protect, and support its citizens living abroad. Since then, “*Huaqiao*” were constructed as “ethnic Chinese with political loyalty toward the ROC [or the PRC],”⁷⁴ what Prasenjit Duara calls “transnational nationalists.”⁷⁵ Significantly, Wang defined *Huaqiao* by its association with “sojourning,” and thus characterized “*Huaqiao*/sojourner” by its primary ties to nationalism and revolutionary movements, as promoted by Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese Nationalist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party. In comparison, *Huayi* is a designation particularly associated with “descent or re-migrant” status. Wang portrayed “*Huayi*/descent or re-migrant” status as pertaining to the post-WWII era, from the 1950s onward, which involved migrations of Chinese descendants from one foreign country to another.

71 Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991); Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

72 Huang Jianli 黃堅立, “Conceptualizing Chinese Migration and Chinese Overseas: The Contribution of Wang Gungwu,” *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 6 (2010): 4.

73 Wang Gungwu, “Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective,” in *China and the Chinese Overseas*, 4–10, 21.

74 Kuo Hwei-ying 郭慧英, “Democracy and Diplomacy: Ideas Concerning *Huaqiao* and Taiwan, 1898–2018,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 31, no. 1 (April 2024): 44.

75 Kuik Ching-Sue, “Un/Becoming Chinese: *Huaqiao*, the Non-Perishable Sojourner Reinvented, and Alterity of Chineseness” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2013), 4.

In 1976, Wang offered a critical perspective which re-evaluated how the term “Overseas Chinese/*Huaqiao*” was employed. The term “Overseas Chinese” had been broadly applied to all people of Chinese descent residing abroad and was the English term used loosely to translate the popular Chinese term “華僑” (*Huaqiao*).⁷⁶ Wang noted that “*Huaqiao*” carries special connotations, notably its linkage with the concepts of “sojourning” and “compatriots.” The component “*qiao*” means “a journey, a temporary stay,” and in conjunction with “*ju*,” it conveys “temporary residence.” However, the term “*qiaoju*” has come to encompass notions such as “enforced migration,” “temporariness,” “a degree of official approval,” “duty to return,” and “nostalgia for home.” According to Wang, the term *Huaqiao*, commonly translated as “Overseas Chinese,” should be more precisely defined as “Chinese sojourners.”⁷⁷

Wang Gungwu further asserted that “historical identity” and “Chinese nationalist identity” were dominant prior to 1950. This perspective transitioned to “national (local) identity, communal identity, and cultural identity” during the 1950s and 1960s, which then evolved into “ethnic identity and class identity” in the 1970s. He argued that “modern Southeast Asian Chinese, like most other peoples today, *do not have a single identity but tend to assume multiple identities.*”⁷⁸ Holding this viewpoint into the mid-1990s, amidst the CCP’s “chauvinistic calls for a Chinese economic commonwealth,” Wang observed that the term “Overseas Chinese” and its Chinese equivalent, *Huaqiao*—initially an official recognition and approval of Chinese residing abroad—had morphed into “a militant commitment to remaining Chinese or to restoring one’s ‘Chineseness.’”⁷⁹

The term “*Huaqiao*” once prevailed as the name for overseas Chinese as though it referred to a single entity. However, over the course of the last three decades or so, it seems no longer to encompass those Chinese individuals who hold foreign passports. With the turn of the twenty-first century, many social scientists shifted to using “Chinese diaspora” as a more satisfactory designation to better capture the evolving nature of the overseas Chinese phenomenon. Nevertheless, Wang Gungwu points out that this term carries political connotations comparable to *Huaqiao*: “it has until recently applied only to the Jews ... the word refers to exile (in Hebrew) or dispersion (in Greek),

76 Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese: What Kind of Minority?” in *China and the Chinese Overseas*, 288–89.

77 Wang Gungwu, “A Note on the Origins of Hua-ch’iao,” in *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), 19–20.

78 Wang Gungwu, “The Study of Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia,” in *China and the Chinese Overseas*, 198–99.

79 Wang Gungwu, “A Note on the Origins of Hua-ch’iao,” 124.

which are rather specific manifestations of the phenomenon of sojourning and migration."⁸⁰ Further he notes that comparing the Chinese to Jews in the Muslim world of Southeast Asia is politically sensitive and potentially misleading.

Wang's reservations stem from past complications and political implications that both China and some Southeast Asian governments have attributed to the term "Chinese diaspora." He questions whether this term might replicate the notion of there being a single Chinese diaspora, along the lines implicated in the earlier concepts of "Huaqiao-sojourner" and "the *Huaqiao-Huaren* continuum," a term that encompasses all overseas Chinese.⁸¹ Additionally, Kuo Huei-yin criticizes the term "Chinese diaspora" for suggesting that those who have emigrated inevitably harbor a nostalgic longing for China as their homeland.⁸²

Wang has consistently advocated for the study of overseas Chinese to be undertaken within their respective national contexts, eschewing the prevailing China-centric perspective. He believes that the term "Chinese diaspora" carries inappropriate connotations and warns that "unless it is used carefully to avoid projecting the image of a single Chinese diaspora, it will eventually bring tragedy to the Chinese overseas."⁸³ Consequently, he dismisses terms like "Chinese sojourners," "the *Huaqiao-Huaren* continuum," and "Chinese diaspora" as not only inaccurate but also as having harmful effects for those thereby labelled. Distancing himself from the term "*Huayi*" remains a challenge for him, so he proposes using "Chinese Overseas" instead. Despite admitting its lack of precision, he defines "'overseas' as a geographic term, as in 'outside of [China],' to refer to 'everyone of Chinese descent living outside.'"⁸⁴

More recently, the term "Sinophone" (華語圈)—independently introduced by Geremie Barmé in "On New Sinology" (2005) and Shih Shu-mei in "Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific" (2005) could be employed to denote "華人/Chinese."⁸⁵ Derived from "Sino-" (pertaining to China or Chinese, as in

80 Wang Gungwu, "A Single Chinese Diaspora?" in *Diasporic Chinese Ventures: The Life and Work of Wang Gungwu*, eds Gregor Benton and Liu Hong (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 158.

81 Wang Gungwu, "A Single Chinese Diaspora?" 166–68.

82 Kuo Huei-ying, "Ink of Nostalgia: A Review Article of *Home is Not Here, Dear China*, and Recent Scholarship on China and the Chinese Overseas," *China and Asia* 2 (2020): 295–326.

83 Wang Gungwu, "A Single Chinese Diaspora?" 166–68.

84 Wang Gungwu, "Accent on Serious Research," *Free China Review* 46, 6 (1996): 49; Wang Gungwu, "Greater China and the Chinese Overseas," in *Don't Leave Home*. (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 88–89.

85 Geremie Barmé, "On New Sinology," *Chinese Studies Association of Australia Newsletter*, No.3, May 2005; Shih Shu-mei, "Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific," *Ostasiatisches Seminar: Chinese Diasporic and Exile Experience*, Universität Zürich, 10–14 August 2005.

“Sinology”) and “-phone” (indicating a speaker of a language, as Anglophone or Francophone), “Sinophone” as an adjective signifies “Chinese speaking.” As a noun, it describes a person who speaks at least one variety of Chinese, encompassing any Sinitic language (an umbrella term for all things Chinese or related to China), whether as mother tongue or through acquisition. It appears that for both Barmé and Shih, despite their different approaches, the term “Sinophone” offers advantages over previously used terms, including Wang Gungwu’s preferred term “Chinese Overseas.”

Sinologist Geremie Barmé critiques conventional Chinese Studies for its narrowness of perspective, arguing that it unnecessarily limits us to the notion that studying about China, learning its languages, cultures and thought systems confines us to being mere interpreters of a singular, “correct” view of what China and Chineseness is.⁸⁶ Barmé advocates for a New Sinology that embraces a comprehensive engagement with contemporary China *and* the broader Sinophone sphere, emphasizing its complexity across local, regional, and global dimensions. He expands the concept of Sinophone to include not only the spoken and written aspects of language but also the ways in which Chinese-originated languages and dialects have shaped individuals’ interactions, historically and contemporaneously, with the world through various forms of media.

In a complementary fashion, Shih Shu-mei, professor of comparative literature, critiques what she names “regimes of authenticity,” which have enforced both symbolic and physical forms of violence on individuals who are either problematically included or overtly excluded; in her view, a politics of inclusion can be as disempowering and oppressive to those nominally included, rendering inclusion as problematic as exclusion.⁸⁷ In light of this, Shih challenges the established category of “Chinese literature,” and introduces a new field of literary studies called “Sinophone literature.” She goes on to argue for a reconceptualization of the global dispersal of Chinese communities, proposing that they be regarded as either vibrant or vanishing communities of Sinitic-language cultures, transcending the boundaries of ethnicity and nationality. By establishing “Sinophone literature,” she underscores the importance of recognizing the varied expressions and literary works of Chinese locales and language(s). I would posit that just as in comparative literature, the study of English literature has long ceased to prioritize or be centered on the UK and even incorporates the notion of *world Englishes*—so the study of Sinophone literature acknowledges the vibrancy and significance of literature produced beyond China, denying its formerly peripheralized status.

86 Geremie R. Barmé, “China’s Promise,” *The China Beat*, 20 (January 2010).

87 Shih Shu-mei, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (University of California Press, 2007).

The emergence of the term “Sinophone” signifies a scholarly consensus regarding the necessity to conceptualize and articulate the global dimensions of Chinese-speaking communities and their cultural productions. Nevertheless, the application of “Sinophone” primarily revolves around language and literature, and not all individuals identified as (or who might identify as) 華人/~~Chinese~~ are proficient speakers of a Sinitic language. Their identification as *Huaren* may be based on other criteria, such as perceived ethnic connections, shared heritage, cultural affiliations, and/or economic relationships.

It is important to approach the concept of 華人/~~Chinese~~ not as a fixed category but rather a matter of process, or shaping and being shaped, of *becoming*, of allowing for some personal choice as to identification based on a range of local factors and not simply a matter of an imposition from above by a *regime* of who they are or ought to be (their *being*), an imposition of their *authentic* identity. For those academics primarily interested in literature and language, the employment of the term Sinophone has an efficacy. But, as I hope to have shown, it is itself too narrowly focused for dealing with the questioning, hyphenization, and hybridization of Chinese and ~~Chinese~~ identity.

Furthermore, as I have been arguing, the conventional terms that incorporate the descriptor “Chinese” embody the essentializing ambiguity I have critiqued. Such terms like “Chinese overseas compatriots,” “Chinese sojourners,” “Chinese descendants,” “Chinese diaspora,” and “Chinese Overseas,” imply a large cohesive social grouping, despite the lack of substantial cohesion among overseas Chinese. These terms include individuals holding both foreign passports and those issued by the PRC. This essentializing congruity reflects what Shih Shu-mei terms “regimes of authenticity,” and what Geremie Barmé describes as “a “correct” view of what China and Chineseness is.” (see above) Additionally, as I have illustrated, this narrative aligns with the CCP’s strategy of fostering a unified identity among people with Chinese heritage, regardless of their citizenship status, as part of China’s global discourse. It further perpetuates the unquestioned notion that “Chinese identity” inherently holds precedence over other identities or affiliations, which contradicts the diverse realities and localized biographies of individuals.

Hereforth, I propose introducing a new neologism as an appropriate alternative by which to translate 華人/~~Chinese~~ (*Huaren bushi [are not] Zhongguoren*) into English so as to differentiate that concept 華/~~Chinese~~ from 中國/~~Chinese~~. This necessitates dismantling the coupling of the English word “Chinese,” which co-implicates these two distinct Chinese concepts. To undertake this task, I trace the etymology of the Chinese character “華,” acknowledging its historical context, inherent meanings and socio-political connotations.

The character “華” initially appeared in bronze inscriptions during the Western Zhou dynasty (西周 1046–771 BCE), representing “the shape of a flower,” and subsequently came to denote a process of “flowering/ blossoming.”⁸⁸ Since blossoming was perceived as the essence of a plant, the meaning extended metaphorically to signify “the essence of things,” and subsequently, “civilization” within the human realm. This ancient civilization, originating from and flourishing in the region known as “*Zhongyuan*” (中原, the Central Plains)—the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River—is recognized as “*Hua-Xia*”⁸⁹ civilization” (華夏文明), or more specifically, “*Hua* culture” (華文化). Noted for its prime geographical location on the Central Plains and its sophisticated agricultural advancements, “*Hua* civilization” was distinctly different from the perceived barbarity of the *Yi* (夷) peoples on its periphery.⁹⁰ Over time, “*Hua* culture” has spread through migration, reaching into North Asia (e.g., Korea, Japan), Southeast Asia, and beyond, to Australia, America, Europe, and Africa, creating a diverse and influential global presence. In light of this expansion, I am inclined to interpret *Hua* as embodying a notion of process, of blossoming, of “becoming,” rather than being fixated on an ahistorical essentialization.

Building on this speculation, I propose the creation of the term “*Huabrid*.” Inspired by the later works of Wittgenstein, this new term eschews metaphysical and essentialized definitions of 華人/Chinese, reflecting instead on its usage and connotations in everyday contexts. It is therefore a term which needs to incorporate change and is itself subject to change. The coined term itself has a dual aspect: the first syllable, “*Hua*,” derived from both Wade-Giles and *Hanyu Pinyin* Romanization, conveys 華/*Hua* as “culture as a living reality;” the latter syllable, “*brid*,” adapted from “*hybrid*,” highlights the hybrid nature of *Hua* (on which the new coinage *Huabrid* is a deliberate play). The neologism “*Huabrid*” thus signifies a “hybrid of the Chinese variety.”

The intent behind introducing “*Huabrid*” is to encapsulate the evolving and diversifying senses of cultural identity, steering away from a singular sense of Chinese and Chineseness. This shift is also exemplified in the article co-authored by Izac Tsai and Doreen Bernath, featured in this special issue:

88 Bronze inscriptions were written in a variety of scripts on ritual bronzes such as *zhong* and *ding* from the Shang to Zhou dynasty and even later; Gao Shu-fan 高樹藩, *Zhengzhong xingyinyi zonghe dazidian* 正中形音義綜合大字典 [Zhengzhong comprehensive large dictionary of form, sound, and meaning] (Zhengzhong Publishing House, 1971), 1487.

89 The character 夏 (*Xia*) represented “a long-faced humanoid with hands clasped and feet crossed over,” signifying “the grand people/s” of the Xia dynasty (夏朝 2070–1600 BC). See *Zhengzhong xingyinyi zonghe dazidian*, 10.

90 Hsu Cho-yun 許倬雲, *Wozhe yu tazhe: Zhongguo lishi shang di neiwai fenji* 我者與他者: 中國歷史上的內外分際 [Self and Other: The Distinction between insiders and outsiders in Chinese History] (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2009), 7.

the conception of *Huaren* [華人] and *Huabu* [華埠] offers a comprehensive understanding of their maritime heritage and trade history ... As urban systems no longer restricted to national or territorial frameworks, cultural identities of *Huaren* shifted away from monotonous relation to China and formed a new cultural hybridity with the colonial loci ... The hybridity of Chinese heritage, maritime cultures, global trade history, and laws within the colonial loci constructed the physicality of *Huabu* and the characteristics of *Huaren*.

My newly coined term, “*Huabrid*,” is not positioned “against” (or “versus”) *Huaren* and Chinese; rather, it serves as both an alternative and a supplement—and, in this way, aligns with the sense of designating a name as *sous rature*. To disambiguate the two senses of “Chinese” in English (as reflected in “我是華人不是中國人”), I propose an alternative translation: “I am *Huabrid*, not Chinese.” Possible Chinese language alternatives could include as a literal translation “華混” (*Huahun*)—which would connote a denigrating sense of being “mixed breed,” or, my preference “華裔” (*Huayi*)—which is a standard, well-established Chinese term that more accurately reflects the intended meaning.⁹¹

Wang Gungwu denoted “*Huayi* in one foreign country migrated or re-migrated to another foreign country.”⁹² However, his “*huayi* pattern of migration” did not gain wide acceptance, prompting him to embrace a more nuanced perspective: “[S]ince 1945, the idea of the Chinese all being sojourners has been challenged, especially in Southeast Asia. Many more have preferred to see themselves as having settled abroad as foreign nationals; if Chinese at all, they see themselves as descendants of Chinese (*huayi*).”⁹³ Terms such as “華裔美國人” (*Huayi Meiguoren*) for American-born Chinese, abbreviated as ABC; and “華裔英國人” (*Huayi Yingguoren*) for British-born Chinese, abbreviated as BBC, illustrate this distinction. Wang points out that “*Huayi*” “go beyond the mere descent line and even impose the requirement of political integration and cultural assimilation.”⁹⁴ However, the common English translation of “*Huayi*” as “Chinese descendants” fails to fully convey the complexity of this term/pattern/category. By contrast, my neologism “*Huabrid*” does not preclude

91 The character ‘裔’ (*yi*) originally denotes the edge of clothing and, metaphorically, something remote or distant. The term ‘後裔’ (*houyi*) describes descendants of generations long past and has come to broadly signify descendants in general.

92 Wang Gungwu, “Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective,” 8–10.

93 Wang Gungwu, “Adapting to Non-Chinese Society,” in *Don’t Leave Home*, 119.

94 Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese Revoultion and the Overseas Chinese,” in *Diasporic Chinese Ventures*, 198.

questions of cultural assimilation and political integration within individuals' adopted countries.

Consequently, I propose the term "*Huabrid*" as a more suitable English equivalent for "*Huayi*." The term/pattern/category *Huayi* (華裔, *Huabrid*) encapsulates a complex and multi-layered sense of identity that incorporates various aspects of a person's ethnic background, local experiences, and cultural influences. This concept recognizes that identity is not a fixed, singular label but rather a dynamic interplay of many factors that can shift and evolve over time. This leads me to suggest that the English phrase "I am *Huabrid* (aka Chinese), not Chinese" be translated as "我是華裔不是中國人" (*Woshi Huayi bushi Zhongguoren*).

As stated before, "*Huabrid*" is designed not to replace any of the aforementioned terms but to function as an alternative choice of, or supplement to, identity, particularly for those who are not PRC passport holders and who do not identify with China/PRC, who do not commit to China's affairs, and who would not positively respond to China's mobilization. Furthermore, "*Huabrid*" (華裔, *Huayi*) can serve as an umbrella term for Chinese names like "華人 (*Huaren*, overseas Chinese)," "中國海外僑胞 (*Zhongguo haiwai qiaobao*, Chinese overseas compatriots)," "華僑 (*Huaqiao*, Chinese sojourners)," "散居海外的華人 (*sanju haiwai de huaren*, Chinese diaspora)," and "海外華人 (*haiwai huaren*, Chinese Overseas)."

By embracing the neologism "*Huabrid*" (華裔, *Huayi*), individuals who may identify as *Huaren*, *Huaqiao*, *Qiaobao*, and/or "*haiwai huaren*" can acknowledge and emphasize the co-existence of different senses of "Chineseness" (or Chineseness?) and their potentially hybrid interconnections. This stands in contrast to the PRC's insistence on the equivalence of the two terms. My coinage, rather, allows for the plurality, fluidity, and changing range of terms to be encompassed. *Huabrid* is my effort to capture these elusive senses of Chinese.

Doreen Bernath has argued that as the twenty-first century began, the euphoric embrace of the global has been waning, accompanied by a defiant return of the local. In this process, she postulates a critical dichotomy, focusing on the bifurcation between having identity ascribed or choosing identity:

On the one hand, there is the local in identity politics that competes in the arena of nationhood and cultural representation, as a kind of localism championing homogeneity, integration and settled security; on the other hand, a different kind of local has been sought, as that which intends to transcend the geographically-bound formulation of the local

anchored to place and as a centripetal point of reference of identity, culture, history and tradition.⁹⁵

She extends her argument about the *translocal*, which, in the spirit of this article, we might term the *tocat*, as follows:

In order to go beyond the location-centric framework, there has been growing interest and impetus to develop so-called “trans-local” perspectives and approaches, which have been characterized by emphases on fluidity, connectivity, plurality, hybridity and heterogeneity ... All of these ... demonstrate the possibility of a mobile locality, of being “translocal.”⁹⁶

We might characterize Bernath’s approach as distinguishing the *tocat* from the local, a maneuver that is strikingly parallel to that adopted in this article. This bifurcation is congruent with both my redressive focus on “Chinese versus Chinese” in the twenty-first century, and my interrogation of the contestability of different connotations (heuristic and otherwise) that can adhere to the terms 華人 and 中國人. My emphasis on the distinguishability of the two terms meshes with the bifurcated senses of the *tocat* versus the *local* which Bernath has built cogently but on very different premises. Naming is inevitably a political as well as an analytical act. Description entails an often-hidden prescriptive aspect. In the context of China within and beyond the PRC’s Firewall, “What’s in the Name ‘Chinese/Chinese’” is at the very heart of very different understandings of how identity is, or should be, configured. Naming—which can never be freed from its context of utterance—far from being an incidental surface feature, can press down with heavy gravity if a singular definition (of identity) is fixed in place or imposed by a state as opposed to allowing or entitling people to either choose their own criteria of identification or, indeed, leave questions of naming their identity or identities in abeyance.

Volosinov (*is also* Bakhtin vs. Volosinov *is not* Bakhtin) proposed that a sign (or word) should be open to multiple interpretations which he terms “multi-acculturality.”⁹⁷ When meaning is fixed-in-place and limited to a singular

95 Shih Fang-long and Doreen Bernath, “What’s in the Name ‘Chinese’? Translocation and Hua-logy,” in this special issue *What’s in the Name ‘Chinese’? Contexts and Concepts in Comparative Perspective. Journal of Translocal Chinese: East Asian Perspectives.*

96 Shih and Bernath, “What’s in the Name ‘Chinese’? Translocation and Hua-logy.”

97 In a curious parallel to the dispute about the meme which has provoked this article’s discussion, there is debate about whether Volosinov and Bakhtin were or were not one and the same person.

definition (which he terms “uni-accentual”), this is indicative of a dominant authority imposing and monopolizing its own meaning of the sign, what we could here call a “rectification of names” (see Section 4 above). Tony Crowley aptly summarizes Volosinov’s position as follows:⁹⁸

the dominant class attempts to make language serve its purposes by making meanings “uniaccentual,” which is to say, determinate, closed and “given.” Whereas the effect of oppositional forces is to produce “multi-accentuality,” which is to say, meanings which open up alternatives, differences, historical possibilities. It is for this reason that the signs of any particular language will necessarily embody [in Raymond Williams’ phrasing] “the contradictory and conflict-ridden social history of the people who speak [it].”⁹⁹

Dominant groups seek to fix determinate meanings for key signs or names—as is the case with the PRC’s imposed conjunction of meaning for *Zhongguoren* and *Huaren*; oppositional forces—as, here, netizens beyond the Firewall—allow or encourage a proliferation of meanings, a multi-accentuality of the sign (in Volosinov’s phrasing) which critique—at times implicitly sometimes explicitly—the PRC’s fixed-in-place definition. Language is rarely neutral, and so “What’s in a name” is a key question to be addressed comparatively and not just in China/~~China~~. In the present context, on both sides of the digital and informational boundaries enforced by the PRC Firewall, it is a question that is particularly vital and fraught.

In conclusion, writing this article has been a significant and meaningful exercise. It has reinforced the notion that the exploration of “What’s in a name” can never be complete; the search should not culminate in the ascription of fixed-in-time definitions. Rather, it is an ongoing and never-completed process of complex and ever-changing iterations and realignments of social usage. I close, for now, by quoting Wang Gungwu’s insightful reflection: “after 40 years living with the problem, I no longer believe that there must be a single term for such a complex phenomenon ... I recognize that conditions change, and more names have to be found to mark the more striking changes.”¹⁰⁰

98 V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik (London: Seminar Press, 1929/1973).

99 Tony Crowley, “Marx, Volosinov, Williams: Language, History, Practice,” *Language Sciences* 70 (2018), 39. He is referencing Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), 176.

100 Wang Gungwu, “A Single Chinese Diaspora?” 169–70.