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## The Province, the Nation, and the World: The Problem of Chinese Identity<sup>1</sup>

ONCE, in the 1950's, I attended a conference on "Europa, Erbe und Aufgabe." "Europa" meant "West Europa," the inheritance was Hellenism and Christianity, the task (assumed with surprising aplomb, in a happy act of oblivion) was the preservation of sweetness and light through this David's-band in the middle distance, between the giants, the philistine materialists, America and Russia. There were other surprises. China received a passing (or failing) mention. It was paired, not with the Soviet Union, but with the United States: areas outside Europe which had been subject to the influence of Europe.

It was a nice conceit, rather like indexing, "J. S. Bach: composed the accompaniment to Gounod's 'Ave Maria' " (one can find it in "The Well-Tempered Clavichord"). And no one need be ill-tempered, for his country or his "field," because of a bit of deprecation—especially when it suggests a bit of truth. The United States and China (to trade on a famous title) may have been pasted together too casually in Mainz, but Europe did pose

<sup>1</sup> This is the only footnote, because what follows is an essay, not an article—an essay in the sense of first attempt, some theses thrown at the paper, a suggestion of a larger work in progress.

to them both, through all of American history and the latest part of China's, the problem of "Provincialism."

For generations, Americans have pondered the theme of innocence and experience. Christopher Newman was Henry James' *The American*. A nation of new men: perhaps it meant that America had it better, no ruined towers—or was it the callow land, gauche and timidly genteel, provincial? Yet, whatever it was doing, taking dictation or sending lessons back, America shared in a Western world. If America was provinces, its capital, in Europe, was really its own. But nineteenth-century China, which had plenty of ruined pagodas (or vanished, beyond ruin), was still a world itself. It had its own provincials within it while Confucian sophisticates ruled. It was when this world faded and a nation began to emerge that the old sophistication began to fail. Cosmopolitan in the Chinese imperial world, Confucianists struck a provincial note in the wider world of the nations. And consistently, provincialism as a literal, political fact dragged at the nationalists of the early twentieth century, post-Confucianists with a wide range, who figuratively, culturally, were changing the implications of "provincial."

Yet, when it came to establishing a Communist China, heir to the nationalist revolution and (some think) more essentially national in its fervor than ideological, a feeling for provinces was invited, not discouraged. Invited—in a way: the Communists were turning back the past, repelling it, not turning back to it. Modern history had not gone for nothing. They were exorcising the anti-national potential of the provinces. It was an act of killing the blooms (or certifying the deaths) of provincial selves, then not blowing them away, but pressing them into a national album. What blighted them was the cosmopolitan spirit—the same spirit (others think) that stamped the Chinese Communists as national all right, but national in an internationalist ideological sense.

#### PROVINCIALISM (LITERAL) AND RESISTANCE TO NATIONALISM

How nationalism became prominent in China is a story by itself. But if nationalism be taken as given, embroilment with provincialism will have to be there, too. French Revolutionaries, classic

nationalists of that modern world which was now receiving China, had insisted that provinces be transcended, particularities smoothed away, to serve the sense of nation. Chinese history since the Opium War had seen the issue in many forms. There were the myriad examples of interest, sympathy, even consciousness cut off, and seen to be cut off, well below the level of any national integration. There were the observations, at home and abroad, that foreign conquest of the whole China would be easier to achieve while the inhabitants failed to see it as a whole. There was the running debate, in the context of shared nationalism, about the technical question of *administrative* provincialism, decentralization. There were the streams of provincial sentiment, rising out of propinquity and expressed in separate organizations and areas of action, which flowed into the movement for revolutionary national union, even while they bedeviled it with divisive threats of faction. There was the "objectively" nationalist character of anti-Ch'ing provincialism in the last few years of the dynasty (or one could turn this around, to explain the chaos of the Republic, with its growing national feeling while the center could not hold)—Manchu centralizers (the conservative provincialists' targets), Manchu "usurpers" (the radical nationalists' targets), and Manchu purveyors of provincial plums to foreigners (the targets of both) were the same Manchus. There was the insinuating nationalist corruption of the atavistic rhetoric of provincial xenophobia, and of provincial warlord slogans of political self-assertion.

So much for the political implications of provincialism, its capacity for inhibiting nationalism, aborting it, indirectly abetting it, or submitting to its solvent influence. But if these were all, no especially modern theme would have been sounded in Chinese history. The Chinese Empire, too—*t'ien-hsia*, the world of all-under-Heaven—knew tensions between the provinces and center, and the wholeness of China was certainly asserted. Yet it was not in the name of nationalism, but of Confucian universality. Why were such nineteenth-century officials as Tseng Kuo-fan and Chang Chih-tung loyal to the dynasty after the Taiping Rebellion? Why did they not seize the chance, on late-T'ang lines, to be regional satraps? It was the Confucianism of a man like

Tseng that committed him to Empire, not region, even his own (really almost his own) beloved Hunan. For Confucianism was "high culture," above local ground. Tseng's literati language, the classical written style, had no provincial life; it was the language of no province, only of a past. This is part of what was meant when iconoclasts of the twentieth century called it, and wished it, dead.

Ironically, this was the language which had made the spoken forms *mere* speech, provincial, since none of them was the sole language of *t'ien-hsia*, the property of some men in all provinces. What all men in each province spoke was dialect, even the "mandarin" speech of Ch'ing Peking, supreme as speech—but speech was not supreme. Everywhere in the world dialect is a vehicle of restricted views on the world, compared to national languages, the media, translatable and translating, for world expression. And yet, by this criterion, in the cosmopolitan, revolutionary twentieth century, this same Chinese literary language, a very model of the more-than-provincial on its own historic ground, was arraigned as provincial: inadequate for world expression, when the world was not its own.

#### PROVINCIALISM (FIGURATIVE) AND NATIONALIST RESENTMENT

It was an aura, then, of cultural revolution which distinguished nationalists from Confucian universalists (whether as radicals the nationalists scored tradition, or as conservatives they showed in themselves the marks of its corrosion). They were still an elite, like the Confucianists—no distinction there—for the nationalism had to be preached first by men who knew the world, at least more of the world than "provincials" would ever know. Knowing this, they knew that provincial differences within China, compared to the foreign clash with China in general, paled in significance. And goaded by provincial unawareness, they were hortatory and lofty, to make the provincials *see* the nation which the elite could not but see. Where provincials would drone along the accustomed ways, nationalists would break with custom—by pondering foreign ways—to liberate creativity, to create a liberated nation. Like Nehru on Le Corbusier's Chandigarh ("The site chosen is free from the existing encumbrances of old towns

and old traditions. Let it be the first large expression of our creative genius flowering on our newly earned freedom.”), like Emerson repudiating “provincial culture” as “excessively deferential toward the past . . .,” they made a connection between creativity and shaking free of tradition—or of provincialism.

This is provincialism in the figurative sense. If the Chinese past had congealed, resisting free and fresh intellectual probing, then China itself was provincial, together with the stale literati who organized the past, and whose cosmopolitan standing was now in the past itself. At least they should have been provincial and obsolete, and would be, when the avant-garde that saw it could expose it to the nation, and make the nation conscious. What new men saw was the “anachronization” of language that expressed traditional values. First it became inadequate, then sham—used to conceal a worldly interest, not just to explain the world. When Lu Hsün published what he saw between the lines of *jen*, *i*, and other classical terms, he was not quite ready to say that these grams of instant Confucianism no longer spoke to him; they did speak, and spoke deceitfully. Confucianists, that is, were not quite yet provincials, resting quietly, quaintly using vocabulary whose tone had slipped from universal range to local color. One does not fight a safely retired provincial, but smiles at him. Lu Hsün was not smiling.

The fully provincial is not only partial but really *passé*. Szechuan newspapers, for a year or two after 1919, gave a fine example of the provincializing process. They used the colloquial *pai-hua*, the language symbol of new thought and a post-Confucian world, and then abandoned it: “more space and less literary value than the literary language.” And this took place in a context of Szechuan’s retrogression from alignment with the nation. Thus, to go back to the literati’s language, which was sophisticated, cosmopolitan, in the old world, was a provincial act, both literally and figuratively, in the new.

The modern historian Ku Chieh-kang, using a Chinese province literally as his reference point, shows what the metaphor “provincialism” implies. Discussing the work of two nineteenth-century Cantonese historians, he described their book as written “from the standpoint of that region—nevertheless, they show

rather a lot of intelligent judgment." The expectation of limited views in "the provinces," the scientific historian's condescension, could hardly be more obvious. (Thus Matthew Arnold, wishing to "see life clearly and see it whole," dismissed the view of the Protestant sects as partial—and provincial.) Ku, like other post-Confucianists, saw China whole, and they prescribed for the nation's ills not Chinese medicine, but cosmopolitan science. The Confucian classics had etched out a Chinese "world" identity, above provincial identities in the past. But a Chinese *national* identity (which rendered the classics a purely national historical possession) involved a new "world" intellectual appeal—transcendence of nation to build a nation which itself transcended provinces.

The narrower the horizons, the more homogeneous the society; as Redfield noted in folk societies, by and large the country, "the provinces," shows local uniformity and regional diversity. But nationalism is the product of cities, and modern industrial cities, full of the *dépaysés*, reverse the pattern: it is local diversity—division of labor and a varied range of experience—with more and more international uniformity. Hence the paradox of the technological revolution, making nations more and more alike ("continents into provinces and countries," thought Yen Fu), while passions rise for national independence. Chinese nationalists' rejection of provincialism—in which they included, or to which they reduced, Confucian cosmopolitanism—was a fateful modern gesture; it launched China into modern cosmopolitanism, and into all the doubts, the search for roots, which the highly technological modern world is heir to.

#### THE COSMOPOLITAN WASTE LAND

The modern world is the culture of cities, with their connotation of rootlessness, the severing of bonds (in both the "good" and the "bad" sense: "*Stadtluft macht frei*" / "New York's a lonely town"). Another "bad" sense—Tagore: "Calcutta, Bombay, Hong Kong and other cities are more or less alike, wearing big masks which represent no country in particular." Another "good" sense—H. G. Wells: "Yet don't you think this very fact is an

indication that we are reaching out for a new world-wide human order which refuses to be localized?" This recalls Michelet, who saw "the local spirit . . . disappearing every day . . . man's own power will uproot him from the earth . . . to the idea of the universal fatherland, to the city of Providence." But William Blake: "To Generalize is to be an Idiot, to particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit"; and J. M. Synge, for the west of Ireland, deprecating "the modern literature of towns," clinging to the "springtime of the local life," before "the straw has turned into bricks"; and the composer Vaughan-Williams, ready for international audiences but not cosmopolitan art: "As our body politic becomes more unified, so do the duties of the individual members of that body become more, not less, defined and differentiated." This is organic theory, vitalism; and what is the city but artifice compared to the life of nature ("conquered," for Michelet, by his dear but dry abstractions, "society and liberty"), the organic life of the country, the provinces? But what if the provinces really are provincial, in the sense of Hume and Henry James: "provincial" meaning "barbarous and ignorant" (the Scottish preachers), "common and inelegant" (the Cambridge ladies)? What if the regional man's ignorance of the world is not what Allen Tate admires, "an intense and creative ignorance," "the only effective check upon the standardizing forces of the outside world . . ."? Whether the cosmopolitan city is the spoiler or creator, the anti-cosmopolitan note of duty, "the duties of the individual," is the note of desperation.

For time passes and "provincial" and "anachronistic" tend to coincide. Out from the center means backwards in time. Venice and Florence, "provincialized" by the unification of Italy (like the famous Greek cities under Roman centralization), became largely cities of museums, and museums as cities. "I was reminded of Nice or Biarritz in the time of Napoleon III," wrote Lévi-Strauss of the "Tristes Tropiques," provincial Brazil. Except for the occasional anti-nationalist, avowedly "provincial," only a rustic, a natural provincial, would be caught wearing the queue in China after the Ch'ing. The urban years of the Chinese Communist Party were the years of its unequivocally modern bias; it was in the nineteen-thirties, in back country, that the

indigenous and the old (as in a measure of medical provincialism) recovered a certain standing with the Party. No wonder Trotsky, intransigently urban and explicitly cosmopolitan, arraigned the Party leadership for reducing revolution to "provincial peasant revolts"—provincial not merely in the categories of political geography, but in a deeper sense than that.

#### NATIONAL THEATER

Trotsky was wrong about the political prospects of the Party in the provinces. Culturally, too, the Communists, with their revolutionary nationalist and internationalist commitments, did not succumb to provincialism, whether temporal or spatial. They went neither "backwards in time" to the high culture of the Empire, nor "out from the center" to folk traditions. Their cosmopolitanism, both as an agent to kill provincialism and as a resource to fill its place, remained inviolate. In their early city days, as in Shanghai in the nineteen-twenties, they knew they ran afoul of provincial sentiment; the "rootless" class approach to combination was impeded by provincial guilds, which were trying by natural ties to humanize the vast nowhere city. And later, in the country, though provincials became their protégés after Liberation, the waste land was not re-sown, provincial traditions were not revived to any pre-nationalist, pre-cosmopolitan, vibrant historical reality. Peasants became actors, the Party was director, the revival was theater.

For traditions, authentic in the past on local ground, may survive in the mind, reenacted with all the kaleidoscopic variety and the ultimate detachment which an actor's roles (as distinct from his own *persona*) imply. One grows into oneself, but the actor has to contrive a role, and contriving means consciousness. Awareness of Eden was expulsion from Eden. Even if an actor's only role is to be himself—even if the repertoire, the kaleidoscope, is only the director's—consciousness is there: self-consciousness, the blight on the natural local idiom, the provincial's awareness that now he is "provincial," discovered by central casting for a city impresario. Is it only the true provincial who can, and can only, "be himself," without affectation: the boon,



and the flaw, of a truly rooted identity? But the only provincials left are unauthentic, when their ways are being observed for conversion into "theater." When the bars are down and men are observed, their being observed affects them. We know the modern psychology of provincial and national dress; from the same cosmopolitan viewpoint that makes national dress "provincial," they both are called, significantly, "costume," and their wearers compelled to consciousness. It is as if they were characters in a historical novel of the anachronistic kind, where the issues, the sensibilities, are the author's, so that the "exactness" of the environment is a product of dead research, not living empathy, and the characters are a *cast* of characters, clad not in their own clothes but in costume.

Another type of consciousness: Ku Hung-ming, late Ch'ing and early Republican (in chronology, not in sentiment!), took pleasure in showing Europeans his knowledge of their culture so that no one should imagine that his Chinese affirmations were the fruits of a mere provincialism. But in the eyes of Chinese nationalists, Ku's last stand for the old cosmopolitanism made him precisely quaint and provincial. Unyielding apologist for practices like foot-binding—such a scandal to the moderns—he seemed to be striking attitudes all his life, playing a role, assuming theatrical poses. It was a special type of provincialism, divorced from spontaneity and becoming a performance, in the fullness of consciousness.

Consciousness, fatal to provincial authenticity, is essential to cosmopolitanism. All the world's a stage. It is appropriate, in the cosmopolitan world, that Marx and Freud, two of the most impressive contributors to the modern temper, suggest conversion to consciousness as the typical modern theme. Even the modern irrationalists, celebrants of the unconscious like Knut Hamsun or D. H. Lawrence, mean to bring it to conscious attention. They are primitivistic, not primitive. *The Soil Grows, the Serpent Plumes for thee, hypocrite lecteur, provincialistic cosmopolitan.* Just as for the Marxist the perennial class-struggle should issue forth in class-consciousness; just as for the Freudian the perennial subconscious should be dredged up to consciousness; so for the cosmopolitan in general (who may be wedded to

nationality, which is also the product of consciousness—Renan called it, “a daily plebiscite”), the “natural” ways of the provinces are collected into a pick-and-choose amalgam. Things which have “just grown” from organic local roots—many things from many roots—are codified and selected in acts of conscious scrutiny.

Here, then, I wish to convey the idea of Chinese revolutionaries creating their own “theater.” In another study I interpreted their action—against the world to join the world, against their past to keep it theirs, but past—as a long striving to make their museums themselves; it was to escape being exhibits, antiques preserved for foreign delectation. It amounted to this: let foreigners not be cosmopolitan *at Chinese expense* (as Japanese who prefer Brecht to kabuki—“for foreigners”—hold that the Western taste which the national must resist is the Western *schwärmerei* about the national traditional arts). “Gratitude” for the interest of foreigners in one’s own past achievements would amount to accepting provincial status in the current cosmopolitan world, not vindicating the sufficiency, the sophistication, of one’s own.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the work of Lin Shu, the prolific adapter of European novels into literary Chinese early in the twentieth century, left radical nationalists with a queasy feeling. The cosmopolitan aspect of the enterprise, the interest in Dickens and Dumas and the rest, was not the trouble; the provincialism was. It wasn’t the feat but the humility: Lin was fond of the use of *hsiao* (“filial piety”) in his titles, e.g. *Hsiao-nü Nai-erh chuan*, for *The Old Curiosity Shop*, with its superhumanly filial “Little Nell.” Was Lin (who opposed the vernacular movement) just tactfully easing the traditional sort of Chinese reader into a foreign literature? Or was he defending ancient Chinese virtues by pointing out the *cachet* that came from enshrinement in foreign books? This would be the note of provincialism that vitiated the cosmopolitan effort.

And so autonomous Chinese “theater” and antonomous Chinese “museum” came in together. The only way to keep from being patronized for one’s “ancient wisdom” or “local color”—the only way to avoid feeding the cosmopolitan appetites of

others—was to patronize one's own, on one's own, in a spirit as modern and non-provincial as that of the West which would make China provincial. Hence, "theater," the mode in which provincial traditions, under Chinese Communist aegis, came to be rehabilitated. Such traditions, we know, had once been considered by early nationalists as inhibitors of national consciousness. But if they could be squeezed from the historical stage, they could be restored to just—"the stage." At last they could be regarded, in sophisticated spirit, as a diversified repertoire to which the nation gave attention, not as divisive single spectacles to which the provinces gave themselves. The provinces made an aggregation, and the attitude towards idiosyncrasy was not impatience any more but acceptance, even celebration, as in the loving revival (and *collection*, in every sense of the word) of provincial traditions in opera, lore, and legend. Communists might trip the Shensi light fantastic, the *yang-ko*, partly to get themselves into Shensi—and partly to get Shensi into China. Shantung should know and lay equal claim to what Szechuan had created. All provincials should share all provincialisms, patronize each provincial performance, and so diffuse the provincial spirit—the best way to depress it.

If we have time for a snack between the acts, let us turn, for another analogy, to cuisine. Provincial cuisines may be the delectation of the cosmopolitan. For these to have been created in the first place, there had to be limits, ingredients and combinations which were not locally known. But the cosmopolitan knows them all and may use them all, prizing the parts for making a perfect whole, and breaking down the wholeness which the creative limits formerly defined. A Jewish style of life, for example, may be more endangered when everyone eats bagels than when Jews eat hot cross buns. Such was the anti-provincial, cosmopolitan vision of the nationalist Michelet (if only he could have known!), who looked for the French provinces to flavor the national character while they yielded to the higher designs of nation, and then in the fullness of time, world state. To consciousness and homogenization, as characteristics of modern times, one should add specialization, the end of self-sufficiency. In the national collective, provincial characteristics are available

—simple contributions (how one can patronize the simple!) to a compound.

The "provincialism" of provinces, taken one by one, lies in their relative simplicity. They lend themselves—Chinese provinces certainly did, historically—to stereotyped identities, which are death to ambiguity. Writers with a sophisticated modern sensibility (Proust, or James, for whom "American innocence," an innocence of guile and ambiguity, was provincialism itself) thrive on ambiguity, rejecting single, simple lines in the coloring of characters. Just so, the nation is a sophisticated concept: not only is it farther along toward abstraction than the local, rooted province, but it seems, as an amalgam, inherently more ambiguous. The sum of many stereotypes—honest Shensi, greedy Kiangsi . . . —is not so easy to stereotype. The collector of many traditions is not so bound to tradition. And provincial traditions at last, as contributions to a repertoire of roles, not a congeries of identities, would no longer make a range of natural styles, dividing the nation or aborting the nation's birth.

How, then, could Communists preserve Confucius, whom once they had to attack? They put him in the museum (cf. Henry Ford, a new man for a new world, and his Dearborn "old America"). And how could Communists redeem provincials, whom once they had to deplore? They put them in the theater—less a provincial theater (victory of the old) than Old Vic in the capital. And the provinces go to pot, the common pot. The original anti-provincial aims were not gainsaid, but accomplished.

Accordingly, Chinese Communist economic indulgence of local expression, like cultural indulgence, has been really nationalist and centralizing. There is a difference between decentralization as a technical prescription and decentralization as a pre-nationalist "fact of nature." "Centralized decentralization" (ordained from the center, in the interests of the totality) is analogous to nationalist provincialism, whereby "provincial culture" may be patronized for central and modern, not provincial and pre-modern reasons. The question of degree of centralization, which fluctuates, is only a technical question; the whole is always the end concern.

"We no longer look on the past as a son looks on his father,

from whom he may learn something, but as a grown man looks on a child. . . ." (Valéry, on modern civilization—"a machine . . . [which] will not tolerate less than world-wide rule.") From Confucianism to communism is a history like that, from reverence to condescension, and condescension sets the tone for the epithet, "provincial." This is the tone of the Chinese Communists' curious elitism, with its Heepish humility before "the people"—condescension, really, as the very term, "the people," "the (*little*) people," implies. "The people," in their several provincialisms, have created roles (*in the past*), and therefore they can be honored. But the Party, in the true spirit of elites, assembles and directs the repertoire, and the peasants, with their contributions from fine local cultures, are put on the stage. This is a fair specimen of modern "psychic tourism," joy in the "authentic" while the authenticity fades under the stare. But it is a Chinese stare at last, the revolutionary independence of making one's own theater (like one's own museum)—taking from the West not just certain values (in revolution against the "feudal-Confucian" past), but (in revolution against a "bourgeois-imperialist" presence) the license to condescend.

#### COMMUNIST PROVINCIALISM: CLASS AND NATION

The authenticity fades, the provincial becomes a part—a part of the nation, a part in theatrical repertoire. Is the actor, everywhere in the world, in danger of losing his own *persona*, Ortega y Gasset's "irrevocable 'I,'" menaced by the "mass man . . . mounted on a few poor abstractions . . ."? Is local ground paradise lost in the cosmopolitan-present? "To us today" (the words of Richard McKeon), "the sense of tradition is not strong, not so much because we have no tradition but because we have mixed so many traditions." There are those who feel that art has lost its sting, since (given modern technology, the ground of cosmopolitan diffusion) we see or hear it, all different kinds of it, all the time. And so it is with provincialisms, collected and run by on the stage. What had cultural bite in the concentrated province becomes bland when gathered up in the nationalist's aggregate: the price of sophistication. This is what is meant by the

sophisticate's envy of the simple (provincial) man, Yeats' ideal audience ("a simple Connemara man"), an audience he despised of. Yeats, his personal culture ranging as far as the Upanishads and the Nō, was apparently far removed from the mass culture he hated, the culture he wished to spare the "Connemara man." But he was just as modern as the mass blight, "Calcutta, Bombay, Hong Kong," in their big impersonal masks. Yeats, like Tagore with his cosmopolitan culture, was as far from a lost Bengal or Connemara as any faceless victim of standardized mass society.

One of the things that has stripped provincial roots (and spread a non-provincial culture, in the variants "mass" and "sophisticated") is the universality won by science. Science used to be much more stylized, colored by local cultures, than today. Now it is cosmopolitan, "objectively": in modern times, nothing is more provincial than stylized science. (Psychiatry has been relatively slow to break away from national schools and styles: a way of saying that its standing as science is still not fully secure.) It is sophisticated to mourn the loss of stylization in art (the loss that makes the waste land) and to insist upon it in science. A "subjective" cosmopolitanism invades the provinces, as sophisticates, hopefully and blightingly, seek "the real thing" for their rootless miscellanies. But "the real thing" existed, the province was authentic, when sciences and arts were provincial together. When science was cosmopolitanized, reunion impended, at a level above the provinces, a level where (for the arts) the satisfaction of cosmopolitan taste brings, like a shadow, unappeasable regrets.

Is this a version of "Civilization (sophistication) and Its Discontents"—Freud and the nemesis of progress? Then it would not be by chance (comrades) that Communist China, unequivocally "progressive," should de-nature its local traditions by preserving them in the museum-theater way.

That is, the Communists were not reactionary, even when they seemed to be. Their provincialist excursions were neither primordially anti-nationalist (see above), nor in line with integral nationalism (see below). Provincial traditions, when collected into a national package, could be accommodated to communism be-

cause they added up, not to regional consciousness, which could splinter the nation, but to class consciousness. This is tantamount to saying, in response to another conundrum—is it really other?—that peasant passions could be properly channeled to Chinese nationalist communism in spite of the primal Marxist coolness to peasantries. The province is connected with “the people,” since in Confucian China it was the mandarin literati, in or out of office, who had a trans-provincial identity. Not only their central-bureaucratic “world” standing but their normative high culture (and the language that enshrined it—a cosmopolitan language quite distinct from the local, living dialects, which were *heard* but not *read*) raised them above the barriers of provinces.

Literati had prized local connections and were ready enough, of course, to raise their local standing. But it was their “worldly” ties and identity that gave them the best lever. Intellectually, as Huang Tsung-hsi insisted in his early Ch’ing *Ming-ju hsüeh-an*, schools of thought might be tied to special localities. But these distinctions, these particular claims, often proudly asserted, for the significance of provinces, were felt to be claims to leadership in universal Confucian significance. Provincial *shu-yüan* (Confucian academies) inspired local pride, but the pride was for localities as centers of illumination for the whole intellectual world. It was not just pride in the province, but a fundamental assertion that the province—the *literati’s* province—was not “provincial.” It was a different case entirely with the sub-intellectual local popular forms. Indeed, the literati’s well-developed sense of lofty eminence expressed itself in scorn for the merely local. When the Ch’ing scholar Chang Hsüeh-ch’eng criticized the Sung scholar Ou-yang Hsiu for niggling about choice of words, he called it “three-house village scholarship” (a rough equivalent of “provincial”). And if the Confucianists felt themselves so serenely above the provincial—both the literally provincial outsider, *sans* classical education and doomed to be of one time and one place, and the metaphorically provincial insider bruised in a polemic among the learned—then the Communists, in turning the tables on the “feudalist” literati, granting the low “provincials” a title to “People’s China,” were only stating the logic of revolution.

In the implications of local history objectively considered, one

can see the grounds for a Marxist concern with provinces. As a field, local history tends to be social history, with an emphasis on way of life and impersonal trends within it; since the stage is remote and small, individual persons, even local notables, while they may "reflect" history, seem to have too narrow a scope to "make" it. What distinguishes "objective" local history (and Marxist scientism assumes objectivity) from "subjective" local history is that the latter implies what the Communist feel for the province helps to undo: a personal feeling for roots, a loving sense of place, vitality, and vividness instead of the scientist's abstractions. And what distinguishes "objective" local history from amateur "local antiquities" is that, in the latter, individuals, local notables, may well be the subject of discourse. But local (provincial) history, out of range of "the capital" with its levers of power on the grand scale, for the wide arena, is more in the anonymous vein, history of "the people"; and anonymity, with its veiled intimations of determinism, may suggest, to the suggestible, class analysis and dialectical materialism.

When attended to in a Marxist spirit, the contours of provincial life, the offerings of provincial culture, convey (as Lukacs puts it) the "concrete significance of time and place": they are the stuff of that Communist ideal, historical reality (or simply, in the aesthetic realm, *realism*). It has nothing to do with direct concern for the province, and everything to do with indirect concern for the class-conscious nation. Since intellectuals, with their famous lack of concreteness and their cosmopolitan view, wash off the smell of locality, they contrive "superstructure." It is this which releases "substructure," the materialist's realm of reality, to provinces.

But the provinces do not keep it for themselves; they make a nation, an aggregation, which claims the sum of provincial popular values. When high art and culture become international, as the province of cosmopolitans, the only popular art is national. And popular art (again, Lukacs) is anti-capitalist, in the sense that the proper art of advanced capitalist society, with its social division of labor, is a coterie art divorced from popular life. Then "the people" equal a nation—and an international class. That is why the Communists, assuming this, seem both anti-cosmopoli-



tan and cosmopolitan. They counter the cosmopolitan with the provincial, in the interests of the nation—a leveling nation, with that egalitarian passion which led, in the classic example, from the “Marseillaise” to the “Internationale.” Their provincialism being so ambiguous, it is hardly surprising that the same is true of their anti-cosmopolitanism. The anti-provincial provincialists are cosmopolitan anti-cosmopolites.

#### COMMUNIST PROVINCIALISM: CLASS AND WORLD

The benign attitude toward provincial identity, a Chinese nationalist version of provincialism, is the key to communism as a nationalist version of internationalism. For communism is by no means just a cover for Chinese nationalism, any more than the nationalism is just a cover (instead of a consumer) for provincialism.

As a Communist-nationalist version of provincialism, far removed from a pre-nationalist one, we must distinguish it from an integral-nationalist version. The Chinese provinces are not savored for some mystic one-ness of organic irreducibility. Here the Chinese Communist attitude differs from that of the nationalist provincialism of the proto-fascist Action Française or the Nazis, with their “Ich bin vom Saar . . . Ich bin vom Schwarzwald” choruses of Nuremberg Rally mystagogy. The Nazis conceived of a “Germanism” brooding in all the organic localities, which were archaistically praised. The spirit of the past was called from the vasty deep, in romantic Wagnerian old Nurembergs. But Chinese Communist “provincialism” (like Chinese Communist “Confucianism”) conceived of making the provinces past by collecting bequests for the synthesizing nation. In romantic integral nationalism on Nazi lines, the locality is microcosm, containing the nation; for Chinese Communists the nation is macrocosm, composed of local elements.

And when an integral nationalist like Barrès or Maurras sounded paeans to the provinces, he was appreciating their limiting (hence, their nationalist) potential as a counter to internationalism, which he attributed to class-conscious radicals. In this right-wing nationalism, nation confronted class, and the appeal

to roots (peasant and provincial) was an appeal against an urban, cosmopolitan abstraction. This was just as modern an outlook as the Marxist: far from a conservative internationalism like Metternich's (" . . . Europe a pris pour moi la valeur d'une patrie"), and far from a conservative sub-nationalism, where provincial identity was self-sufficient and a natural endowment, with no need of deep angling to bring it up to consciousness. In wartime Vichy, with its Barrèsian, Maurrasian background, Pétain welcomed peasant groups parading (charading) in provincial costume. The provincialism was just as synthetic as the Chinese Communists': the two kinds of nationalists surely have much in common, as modern contrivers of consciousness. But if they belong together in the same world, they belong at opposite poles.

For while the Chinese Communists (and the Soviets), like integral nationalists, struck attitudes against "rootless cosmopolitans," the Communist attitude was hardly supposed to stifle class-consciousness—it assumed class-consciousness. "The people" (for the Chinese Communists), the provincials, were posed not only against "feudalists" (the Confucian-literati establishment, the supra-provincials in the *t'ien-hsia*), but against "bourgeois," and these would-be cosmopolitans in the new post-*t'ien-hsia* world. In the political sphere, this theme was adumbrated in the Opium War, when the conviction arose, to be revived by the Communists, that the Cantonese provincials had really defeated the British, only to see the officials and merchants of Canton city connive at yielding to the foreign will. And in the cultural sphere in Communist China, "bourgeois cosmopolitans" were indicted for holding, for example, that literature is independent of society. Society was taken to mean the real (not platonically), the phenomenal, the material conditions of life, "the concrete significance of time and place": the surroundings where writers are "at home." That is why Feng Hsüeh-feng was purged as a rightist in 1957—for advocating internationalization of "national form" (which was, usually on the folklore model, "people's").

Yet, if the Party was condemning cosmopolitanism not in order to stifle class-consciousness but to enhance it (thus winning abroad the title of "provincial" for the culture it supported), it

was really opening the way for a sort of cosmopolitanism—as long as the class which absorbed it was not an enemy but a friend. What were “the people” whom the Communists found in the provinces, beneath the cosmopolitan culture (in *t’ien-hsia*, Confucian-world, terms) of yesterday’s “feudalists” and the cosmopolitan culture (in *shih-chieh*, modern world, terms) of today’s bourgeoisie? For some purposes “the people” were *min-tsu*, an organic community of integral nationality; not a cosmopolitan conception. An organism, while more than a cell, is less than an aggregation. It made, particularly in Kuomintang usage, for a conception of national essence—transcending individuals, but an individual itself, a folk, in its resistance to cosmopolitanism. For the Communists, however, “the people” were generally not *min-tsu* but *jen-min*, not organic, collective life but a collectivist abstraction—and not single and self-contained, but cosmopolitan.

As *jen-min*, provincials have supra-national not sub-national associations. “The people,” located first at their most particular in the local earth of the provinces, then move into the abstract as the trans-national, trans-cultural, universal ground of a more-than-Chinese vision of the world. Province equals folk; nation equals the folk of province and province; folk equals “the people” of the world. Perhaps the claques for Cuban bongo-drummers were not convened in Peking just as a diplomatic tactic after all.

In short, Mao’s peasant, one of his Hunan “folk” or of any other province, is quite distinct from the “Connemara man”: Mao’s constituency is a world-wide category, not the stubborn flesh and blood (though a poetic conceit) of a single provincial place. The industrialization which cosmopolitanizes the world is Mao’s cause, Yeats’ curse. Mao’s provincial folk, as nationalized as the railroads, and the underpinning of international class society, are a futuristic fancy, not a phantom of nostalgia.

No wonder Liu Shao-ch’i could pay an even-handed tribute to “Nationalism and Internationalism.” Nationalism, hostilities at an end with one seemingly natural foe, provincialism, could plausibly be at peace with another, internationalism—especially

since provincialism, conceived in class, not classical terms, as aggregate and distillate informed the other two.

#### RECAPITULATION

The Ch'ing period was one of transition from *t'ien-hsia* to *kuo-chia*, empire and world to nation. Chinese nationalism involved a scaling up from a collection of provinces, a scaling down from a world. The Confucian *t'ien-hsia* had been its own cosmos, and the owners of the high culture embedded in classical language, transcending provincial speech, were culturally never provincial, though they had provincial ties. Such ties were part of, not rival to, ecumenical Confucianism, trans-provincial or *wordly* and cosmopolitan. These ties formed part of the personal-relationship ambiance of Confucianism, with its amateur's resistance to the impersonal-Legalist, specialist-cog variety of culture.

Industrialization, no Confucian value, has been conducive to uniformity in various ways—turning people into cogs (the critics say), erasing distinctions of provinces and obliterating the human, local ties. But it makes for diversity, too: the diversity of the many vocational types that come in with specialization. And specialization makes new elites, of professionals, not amateurs on the Confucian model. It is the professional field, not the fields of Flanders or Hunan, that more and more provides the "local" or particular identity.

Early Chinese nationalists, late Ch'ing and Republican, who were created by the rise of industrial nations and were seeking that kind of power for their own, strained against provincial ties politically, and scorned the self-sufficiency of literati-China, intellectually, as smothering and narrow. The Ch'ing's, the Empire's cosmopolitans became the Republic's, the nation's provincials. And the Ch'ing's provincials, the rustics whose culture was too "low" to release them from local ground, were moving toward a radical reassessment. In sum (in part) modern Chinese history is this: a history of movement from the politics of Confucian faction (deriving at times from provincial fellow-feeling, but in a world commanded, overall, by a common Confucian

fellowship) to the politics of a new world, an international politics conceived in terms of class. The province, the nation, and the world, in sequence and combination, have all entered the Chinese view—provincial, nationalist, cosmopolitan—of “China, Erbe und Aufgabe,” “China, its inheritance and task.”