

In this Issue

The four articles in this issue deal with the politics of ethnic categorization (Keyes), public architecture and political culture (Nair), politics and resurgent festival life (Eng and Lin), and debates about political unification (Hong). All of the articles are concerned with the state, and they all avoid, to adopt the term used by Eng and Lin, a “blanket notion” of state power. Rather, they show interactions of various agents of the states in question (China, Thailand, Vietnam, India, North Korea, and South Korea) and local constituencies, showing through careful analyses the ways in which state policies, political debates, and monumental buildings often have diverse and unintended effects.

CHARLES KEYES writes in his presidential address of Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese projects to identify and define ethnic groups in “scientific” terms. As Keyes writes, a “byproduct of the undertaking of a scientific classification of diversity of peoples within the boundaries of states has been a clear distinction between the *nation* and the *peoples* or *ethnic groups* that are taken as belonging to this nation.” This insight has potential implications for thinking about states and ethnicity, as well as for thinking about the ways in which the states in question have come to be defined as multiethnic or pluralistic.

SEUK-RYULE HONG writes about the debates surrounding reunification which occurred in the Koreas in 1960. He shows the diversity and complexity of points of view, and his conclusion suggests ways in which the debates of four decades ago might have relevance to the contemporary situation in the Koreas.

JANAKI NAIR writes about the ways in which the postcolonial state in Bangalore, India, expressed a political vision in the monumental buildings surrounding Cubbon Park. She clearly delineates how the vision of the builders was contested. Her analysis of the ways in which access to public space has been restricted suggests how space “is increasingly defined in ways that are largely opposed to democratic citizenship through a mixture of architectural choices, physical barriers, prohibitions on movements, and, not least, unintended uses.”

IRENE ENG and YI-MIN LIN write about the resurgence of religious festivals in Chaozhou in southeastern China in the wake of decollectivization. Their article provides a detailed analysis of the function of state power in contemporary China. They see what they term a “reemergence of multicentric bases of authority” in China and argue that conclusions about these emergent forms of authority must be “examined closely in the concrete and evolving context of social interaction.”

I sent all of the articles in this issue to all of the authors and asked them to comment on thematic resonances among the articles. In addition I sent Susan Blum’s review of seven recent books on minorities in China to Keyes. My goal in asking for these comments is to provide for you, the reader, cross-regional and cross-disciplinary readings of these articles and to suggest some of the ways in which these readings across regions and disciplines can be fruitful.

In her response, Nair writes that she found that the articles all dealt with issues of nationalism and governmentality. She suggests that reading these articles side by

side might help us think about democracy and political space in ways which might help us go beyond the classical liberal European models of democracy. She writes:

One theme that links the articles is the question of “governmentality” and the nationalism of the years immediately following freedom from colonialism (or, in the case of China, a renegotiated relation to capitalism itself). This historically has produced tensions between the need to produce a credible and viable new nation through homogenization, a mythicized past, etc. and the desire to democratize structures inherited from the colonial past within the specific cultural experience of Asia. These processes have taken various forms: reinventing technologies of governance (such as the scientific counting of populations, as discussed by Keyes) or symbolically evoking the notion of an uninterrupted past (in architecture and public space, as I discuss in my article) or claiming that the nation-state must have a geographical and cultural coherence within a broader framework of economic prosperity and social democracy (as in Hong’s article).

Yet, there is no moment when the task of nation building may claim to be complete, and it is clear (as the example of the festivities in China discussed by Eng and Lin shows) that the space of democracy is constantly renegotiated: in fact I found that an interesting contrast to what I am trying to argue. In India the structures of democracy were guaranteed formally (and constitutionally), although over the past fifty years they have been restricted somewhat in practice; the Chinese example is indicative of the new and unexpected forms that an assertion of democratic right might take as it recasts local power structures. (Of course I must emphasize that in India, too, such a devolution of power occurs alongside the attempt of the state to absorb more power.) Democracy in newly independent nation-states therefore assumes a form for which the classical European liberal histories have not prepared us (and indeed those categories may be inadequate and irrelevant to understanding the experience of the countries discussed).

Nair, e-mail, 29 September 2002

Hong, too, sees the articles as examining various aspects of the relationship between democracy and state power. He writes:

All four articles in this issue deal with state power and democracy in various ways and aspects. Keyes describes how classifications of ethnic groups by state power are always mixed with prejudice and stereotypes and inevitably have had harmful effects on the group of people who were classified. Nair depicts an interesting situation in which the process of maintaining the beauty of Bangalore by local authorities and elites constrained democracy of the market and social movement by labor unions and poor people. Eng and Lin explore a change in the state-society relationship in post-Mao era China through an analysis of the revival of local cultural rituals in Chaozhou. I argue that the social movements for reunification in South Korea have been linked with democratization of the country.

Hong, e-mail, 19 August 2002

Keyes sees commonalities in several of the articles which show a concern with the conceptualization of the nation and what he calls the politics of heritage:

Eng and Lin, Hong, and Blum are all concerned, as I am in my paper—albeit, each of us in different ways—with the real or presumed divisions of a nation. Those belonging to a nation are assumed to share a common cultural heritage, but the promotion of a particular heritage by the holder of state power, as Prasenjit Duara (1996) has so clearly shown, entails suppressing or rending invisible some significant links with the past. Yet, as these papers all demonstrate, there is increasing contestation of a state- (or party-) imposed politics of heritage.

Until recently in China, as in Vietnam, the ruling communist party sought to suppress, and often to repress, religious practices that have been marked as unacceptable legacies of the past—ones incompatible with a “modern” nation. Despite four decades of efforts to repress religious practices as not “scientifically” based and as “opiates” that preclude people from taking pragmatic stances toward the world, religious practices have become increasingly significant in China (as they also have in Vietnam, as well as in other countries formerly ruled by communist parties). As Eng and Lin demonstrate, there now exist strong local pressures to gain acceptance of some religious practices as being acceptable within the modern Chinese nation. The same has been happening in Vietnam since the party opted for “renovation” in the mid-1980s (see Malarney 2002). I wonder if in China, as in Vietnam, there will be an effort by the state to co-opt resurgent religious practices for support of national objectives, even if these are no longer construed with reference to Marxism-Leninism.

Keyes, e-mail, 24 July 2002

Keyes notes in particular the ways in which Hong’s discussion of reunification in Korea foregrounds questions of national integration:

Hong considers the case of South Koreans who have faced a political division of their nation. Calls for reunification, as Hong shows with regard to the debates in South Korea in the early 1960s, can entail very different views of national integration, as well as of the politico-economic restructuring that must exist in order to make such integration possible.

The question of reunification was not only an issue—as Washington construed it—of competing ideologies, communism vs. democracy. Rather, it was framed significantly with reference to the colonial past. Hong quotes a newspaper from 1961 that asks, “Why should we ally ourselves with an old enemy [Japan], instead of focusing on cooperation within the same nation, with North Korea?” The debates about reunification in South Korea in the 1960s find echoes in the debates in South Vietnam from 1954 until 1975 about competing visions of national unity. As in South Korea, the debate in South Vietnam was also complicated by credible claims made by the communist party to have provided the leadership for the anticolonial struggle. There was also significant support among intellectuals and religious leaders in South Vietnam, as in South Korea, for “neutralization.”

Hong concludes that today “sudden reunification would not be desirable when we think about the diversity of ideas put forth on reunification. Even among Southerners, there is a vital need for negotiating a basic agreement on the future of a reunified country.” Reunification has occurred in Vietnam, but the initial (1975 to early 1980s) price was very high: the perpetuation among the very large refugee communities of alternative visions of national unity, a de facto ethnic cleansing of Vietnamese of Chinese descent, isolation from the global economy, a decade-long economic decline not only in southern Vietnam but also in the north, etc. Although the consequences of a Korean reunification led by the democratic South, rather than the communist North, would be quite different from those that occurred in the case of Vietnam, the Vietnamese experience certainly provides support for Hong’s call for slow and deliberate negotiations.

Keyes, e-mail, 24 July 2002

Hong sees a resonance between his piece and that of Keyes. He suggests that the two articles are both concerned with processes of distinctions and divisions among peoples—Keyes writes about the processes which make those distinctions, and Hong writes about a discussion which would eliminate the political lines between North and South Korea. Hong writes:

I have found some interesting and inspirational connections between Keyes's article and mine, although these two pieces of work deal with almost opposite subjects: the classification of human groups and the reunion of divided human groups, respectively.

Keyes argues that ethnic classifications by biological, linguistic, and ethnological measures are founded on scant scientific and historical grounds. Yet, many Koreans consider reunification of their country as a recovery of the damaged ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the country. In my article, I tried to show that Koreans' yearnings for reunification did not come merely from nationalism promoting ethnic, cultural, and historical unity and homogeneity. I argue that these yearnings are closely linked to the problems of democratization and economic development of the country. I agree with Keyes that classifying or grouping people by biological, linguistic, and ethnological factors is neither scientific nor desirable.

Hong, e-mail, 19 August 2002

Eng and Lin see connections between the work of Keyes and that of Hong in terms of the issue of the connection (or contradiction) between political borders and conceptualizations of ethnic identity. They write that Keyes shows how

the evolution of both the classification and the perceptions of ethnic groups is conditioned by the interplay among multiple social forces. (An intriguing question that could be further explored in this connection is how different peoples have responded to the political classifications imposed by the state.) The paper uses three countries as examples, but the implications of the analysis extend beyond the study of ethnicity in these countries. Hong's article, for example, illustrates the inconsistency and tension between the different identities circumscribed by political borders and those influenced by perceived similarities between peoples of the two Koreas in physical features, language, and other aspects of cultural-historical heritage. This points to the challenge that cross-border identities pose to political classification and manipulation, a point also made in Keyes's paper.

Eng and Lin, e-mail, 8 August 2002

Eng and Lin are also appreciative of the ways in which Hong's paper looks at the crystallization of a social movement advocating reunification and the ways in which his analysis focuses on the particulars of one historical moment. They write:

Hong's article examines the concrete causal process in which a social movement materialized. It shows why something happened at a particular historical juncture—in this case both ideological/social and material/economic concerns mattered and reinforced one another in a peculiar international and domestic environment. This, in a way, is parallel to what our article seeks to explore in a different context—the driving forces for the revival of religious activities and rituals in rural China after the start of economic reform.

Eng and Lin, e-mail, 8 August 2002

Keyes also sees connections between Nair, on the one hand, and Lin and Eng, on the other, in terms of the ways in which they discuss how communities conceptualize and use space. He writes that looking at those two papers in tandem

could lead to fruitful discussion about the competition for public space between local groups and representatives of the state in determining how the heritage from the past is to be remembered. In keeping with my comparativist bent, I am struck by some similarities between Bangalore and Bangkok and Hanoi in the ways in which public space has been site for competition about how the precolonial and colonial pasts are to be remembered (or forgotten) and how the modern is to be manifest. On Bangkok,

see Maruzio Peleggi's (1997) soon-to-be-published revised dissertation, and on Hanoi see Logan 2000 and Boudarel and Nguyen Van Ky 2002.

Keyes, e-mail, 24 July 2002

Eng and Lin see a common concern between their article and those of Nair and Keyes in terms of the significance of unintended consequences:

An interesting part of Nair's article is the discussion on unintended consequences in the contest over the design and use of the local public space (e.g., spatial features defined by one group/actor for certain purposes are used/interpreted by another for quite different, sometimes contradicting, purposes). This seems to be a recurring theme in some of the other articles in this issue. Keyes, for example, points out the contradictions that political classifications of ethnic groups in modern nation-states inevitably create. Our article suggests that like other villagers, the early activists who were strongly motivated by materialistic concerns in reviving religious rituals have had to face and cope with new patterns of social relations that began to emerge as a result of their collective action but have outgrown their initial intentions.

Eng and Lin, e-mail, 8 August 2002

Although we do not usually include review articles in the discussions in these pages, the thematic resonances between Blum's essay and Keyes's presidential address were so strong that I sent each of them a copy of the other's essay. Keyes responded to Blum's essay as follows:

I wish that I had had Blum's very useful review article available before I wrote my presidential address, as it has added more details regarding Chinese minorities that would have been useful to incorporate into my reflections. I here pick up only a few of her points.

Blum notes that only one of the books she reviews (Mueggler's) is a classical ethnographic study, in that it is based on research in a bounded locality. "All the others roam and wander, picking up bits of observation as their gaze touches on the entire nation-state and beyond." In noting this, she is implicitly raising the important question of whether or how a local community or group can be said to represent a people as a whole. And, to turn the question on its head, how valid can claims be that an officially recognized "people" or "ethnic group"—Chinese *minzu*, Vietnamese *dân tộc*, Thai *chātīphan*, and so on—subsumes many diverse local groups?

In her conclusion she observes: "Though we often believe we have discovered something interesting about China, some of our musings also reflect, I think—and I include myself in this group—our difficulty in accepting China's version of classification of humans. It is an *interesting* problem, this incommensurability, but it may not be as interesting as we have made it." Perhaps, but this is not an academic problem alone. It has much wider political significance when, for example, Western human rights supporters of the "liberation" of Tibetans fail to take into account the fact that "Tibetan" subsumes many local communities in China outside of Tibet proper or when people who have migrated from North Korea to China are considered by the Chinese as illegal migrants from a sovereign state, rather than as refugees seeking to "rejoin" the Korean nation by asking for "repatriation" to South Korea.

The Chinese state's effort to impose its own "incommensurable" system of classification on the minorities within the boundaries of the country is being contested in a variety of ways, including, as Blum notes, the convening of international conferences on particular (transborder) peoples. In addition to the conferences on the Yi, Hakka, and Yao that she mentions, I am also aware of conferences on Hmong, Akha/Hani, as well the Tai, whom I discuss in my paper. As I write, I have just returned from Chiang Mai, Thailand, where I attended a conference with scholars

from Thailand, Yunnan, and the U.S. on the “Sipsong Panna.” The very choice of the name for this conference, rather than the Chinese “Xishuangbanna,” was indicative of the recognition by both Dai Lue people, who are the dominant people of a part of Yunnan, and the Thai of Thailand that the peoples of the region can be—indeed, must be—understood in terms other than those set by the Chinese state. International conferences such as these provide international scholarly valorization for the contestation of ethnic discourses derived from state policies.

Keyes, e-mail, 24 July 2002

These four articles and the review essay present a rich occasion to think about questions of state power, local agency, ethnic differentiation, space and its political implications, political demarcation, and legacies of the past.

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