CHAPTER 41

"Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality" and "Afterword: An Anthropology of Transnationality"

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FLEXIBLE CITIZENSHIP: THE CULTURAL LOGICS OF TRANSNATIONALITY

On the eve of the return of Hong Kong from British to mainland-Chinese rule, the city was abuzz with passport stories. A favorite one concerned mainland official Lu Ping, who presided over the transition. At a talk to Hong Kong business leaders (*taipans*), he fished a number of passports from his pockets to indicate he was fully aware that the Hong Kong elite has a weakness for foreign passports.[1] Indeed, more than half the members of the transition preparatory committee carried foreign passports. These politicians were no different from six hundred thousand other Hong Kongers (about ten percent of the total population) who held foreign passports as insurance against mainland-Chinese rule. Taipans who had been busy doing business with Beijing openly accumulated foreign passports, claiming they were merely "a matter of convenience," but in a Freudian slip, one let on that multiple passports were also "a matter of confidence" in uncertain political times.[2] The multiple-passport holder seems to display an élan for thriving in conditions of political insecurity, as well as in the turbulence of global trade. He is willing and eager to work with the Chinese-communist state while conjuring up ways of escape from potential dangers to his investment and family.

Another example of the flexible subject is provided by Raymond Chin, one of the founders of the Better Hong Kong Foundation, a pro-China business group. I heard a radio interview in which he was asked about his investment in China and the future of Hong Kong under communist rule. Here, I paraphrase him: "Freedom is a great thing, but I think it should be given to people who have earned it. We should take the long view and see the long-term returns on our investments in the mainland. Self-censorship and other kinds of responsible behavior may be necessary to get the kind of freedom we want."

This willingness to accommodate self-censorship reflects the displaced person's eagerness to hedge bets, even to the extent of risking property and life under different political conditions anywhere in the world. The Chinese in Hong Kong are of course a rather special kind of refugee, haunted by memento mori even when they seek global economic opportunities that include China. The novelist Paul Theroux notes that Hong Kong people are driven by the memory of previous Chinese disasters and shaped by their status as colonials without the normal colonial expectation of independence. They are people always in transit, who have become "world-class practitioners of self-sufficiency."[3] In this, they are not much different from overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, who have largely flourished in postcolonial states and yet are considered politically alien, or alienable, when conditions take a turn for the worse. For over a century, overseas Chinese have been the forerunners of today's multiply displaced subjects, who are always on the move both mentally and physically.

The multiple-passport holder is an apt contemporary figure; he or she embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets. In this world of high modernity, as one scholar notes, national and ethnic identities "become distinctly different entities, while at the same time, international frontiers become increasingly insignificant as such."[4] But are political borders becoming insignificant or is the state merely fashioning a new relationship to capital mobility and to manipulations by citizens and noncitizens alike?

Benedict Anderson suggests an answer when he argues that the goal of the classical nation-state project to align social habits, culture, attachment, and political participation is being unraveled by modern communications and nomadism. As a result, passports have become "less and less attestations of citizenship, let alone of loyalty to a protective nation-state, than of claims to participate in labor markets."[5] The truth claims of the state that are enshrined in the passport are gradually being replaced by its counterfeit use in response to the claims of global capitalism. Or is there another way of looking at the shifting relations between the nation-state and the global economy in late modernity, one that suggests more complex adjustments and accommodations? The realignment of political, ethnic, and personal identities is not necessarily a process of "win or lose," whereby political borders become "insignificant" and the nation-state "loses" to global trade in terms of its control over the affiliations and behavior of its subjects.[6]

If, as I intend to do, we pay attention instead to the *transnational practices and imaginings* of the nomadic subject and the social conditions that enable his flexibility, we obtain a different picture of how nation-states articulate with capitalism in late modernity. Indeed, our Hong Kong taipan is not simply a Chinese subject adroitly navigating the disjunctures between political landscapes and the shifting opportunities of global trade. His very flexibility in geographical and social positioning is itself an effect of novel articulations between the regimes of the family, the state, and capital, the kinds of practical-technical adjustments that have implications for our understanding of the late modern subject.

In this book, I intervene in the discussion of globalization, a subject heretofore dominated by the structuralist methods of sociologists and geographers. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey identifies flexibility as the modus operandi of late capitalism. He distinguishes contemporary systems of profit making, production, distribution, and consumption as a break from the earlier, Fordist model of centralized mass-assembly production in which the workers were also the mass consumers of their products. In the era of late capitalism, "the regime of flexible accumulation" reigns, whether in the realms of business philosophy and high finance or in production systems, labor markets, and consumption.[7] What is missing from Harvey's account is human agency and its production and negotiation of cultural meanings within the normative milieus of late capitalism. More recently, writers on "the information age" maintain that globalization—in which financial markets around the world are unified by information from the electronic-data stream—operates according to its own logic without a class of managers or capitalists in charge.[8]

These strategies—the decentralization of corporate activities across many sites, the location of "runaway" factories in global peripheries, and the reconfiguration of banking and investment relations—introduced new regimes in global production, finance, and marketing. These new modes of doing global business have been variously referred to as "globalization" by bankers and as "post-Fordism," "disorganized capitalism," and "flexible accumulation" by social theorists.[9] These terms are also significant in reflecting the new logic of capitalism whereby "nodes of capitalist development around the globe . . . [have] decentered capitalism . . . and abstracted capitalism for the first time from its Eurocentricism."[10]

Instead of embracing the totalizing view of globalization as economic rationality bereft of human agency, other social analysts have turned toward studying "the local." They are examining how particular articulations of the global and the local—often construed as the opposition between universalizing capitalist forces and local cultures—produce "multiple modernities" in different parts of the world.[11] Arjun Appadurai argues that such a "global production of locality"

happens because transnational flows of people, goods, and knowledge become imaginative resources for creating communities and "virtual neighborhoods."[12] This view is informed by a top-down model whereby the global is macro–political economic and the local is situated, culturally creative, and resistant.[13]

But a model that analytically defines the global as political economic and the local as cultural does not quite capture the *horizontal* and *relational* nature of the contemporary economic, social, and cultural processes that stream across spaces. Nor does it express their *embeddedness* in differently configured regimes of power. For this reason, I prefer to use the term *transnationality*. *Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the *trans*versal, the *trans*actional, the *trans*lational, and the *trans*gressive aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism. In what follows, when I use the word *globalization*, I am referring to the narrow sense of new corporate strategies, but analytically, I am concerned with transnationality—or the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has been intensified under late capitalism. I use *transnationalism* to refer to the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of "culture." The chapters that follow will discuss the transnationality induced by global capital circulating in the Asia Pacific region, the transnationalism associated with the practices and imagination of elite Chinese subjects, and the varied responses of Southeast Asian states to capital and mobility.[14]

This book places human practices and cultural logics at the center of discussions on globalization. Whereas globalization has been analyzed as consisting of flows of capital, information, and populations, my interest is in the cultural logics that inform and structure border crossings as well as state strategies. My goal is to tease out the rationalities (political, economic, cultural) that shape migration, relocation, business networks, state-capital relations, and all transnational processes that are apprehended through and directed by cultural meanings. In other words, I seek to bring into the same analytical framework the economic rationalities of globalization and the cultural dynamics that shape human and political responses. As a social scientist, I point to the economic rationality that encourages family emigration or the political rationality that invites foreign capital, but as an anthropologist, I am primarily concerned with the cultural logics that make these actions thinkable, practicable, and desirable, which are embedded in processes of capital accumulation.

First, the chapters that follow attempt an ethnography of transnational practices and linkages that seeks to embed the theory of practice within, not outside of or against, political-economic forces. For Sherry Ortner, "modern practice theory" is an approach that places human agency and everyday practices at the center of social analysis. Ortner notes that the little routines and scenarios of everyday life are embodiments and enactments of norms, values, and conceptual schemes about time, space, and the social order, so that everyday practices endorse and reproduce these norms. While she argues that social practice is shaped within relations of domination, *as well as* within relations of reciprocity and solidarity, Ortner does not provide an analytical linkage between the two. Indeed, her theory of practice, which is largely focused on the actors' intentions within the "system" of cultural meaning, is disembodied from the economic and political conditions of late capitalism. She seems to propose a view in which the anthropologist can determine the extent to which "Western capitalism," as an abstract system, does or does not affect the lives of "real people."[15] An approach that views political economy as separate from human agency cannot be corrected by a theory of practice that views political-economic forces as external to everyday meanings and action. Our challenge is to consider the reciprocal construction of practice, gender, ethnicity, race, class, and nation in processes of capital accumulation. I argue that an anthropology of the present should analyze people's everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts. The *regulatory effects* of particular cultural institutions, projects, regimes, and markets that shape people's motivations, desires, and struggles and make them particular kinds of subjects in the world should be identified.

Second, I view transnationalism not in terms of unstructured flows but in terms of the tensions between movements and social orders. I relate transnational strategies to systems of governmentality—in the broad sense of techniques and codes for directing human behavior[16]—that condition and manage the movements of populations and capital. Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality maintains that regimes of truth and power produce disciplinary effects that condition our sense of self and our everyday practices.[17] In the following chapters, I trace the different regimes—state, family, economic enterprises—that shape and direct border crossings and transnational relations, at once conditioning their dynamism and scope but also giving structure to their patterning. These shifting patterns of travel, and realignments between state and capital, are invariably understood according to the logics of culture and regional hegemony. Given the history of diasporan trading groups such as the ethnic Chinese, who play a major role in many of the so-called Asian tiger economies, the Asia Pacific region is ideal for investigating these new modalities of translocal governmentality and the cultural logics of subject making.[18]

Third, I argue that in the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power. "Flexible citizenship" refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions.[19] In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. These logics and practices are produced within particular structures of meaning about family, gender, nationality, class mobility, and social power.

Fourth, if mobile subjects plot and maneuver in relation to capital flows, governments also articulate with global capital and entities in complex ways. I want to problematize the popular view that globalization has weakened state power. While capital, population, and cultural flows have indeed made in-roads into state sovereignty, the art of government has been highly responsive to the challenges of transnationality. I introduce the concept of graduated sovereignty to denote a series of zones that are subjected to different kinds of governmentality and that vary in terms of the mix of disciplinary and civilizing regimes. These zones, which do not necessarily follow political borders, often contain ethnically marked class groupings, which in practice are subjected to regimes of rights and obligations that are different from those in other zones. Because anthropologists pay attention to the various normalizing powers of the state and capital on subject populations, we can provide a different take on globalization—one that goes beyond universalizing spatial orders.

Fifth, besides looking at globalization, the point of this book is to reorient the study of Chinese subjects. Global capitalism in Asia is linked to new cultural representations of "Chineseness" (rather than "Japaneseness") in relation to transnational Asian capitalism. As overseas Chinese and mainland Chinese become linked in circuits of production, trade, and finance, narratives produce concepts such as "fraternal network capitalism" and "Greater China," a term that refers to the economically integrated zone comprising China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, but sometimes including the ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. This triumphant "Chinese capitalism" has induced long-assimilated Thai and Indonesian subjects to reclaim their "ethnic-Chinese" status as they participate in regional business networks. The changing status of diasporan Chinese is historically intertwined with the operations and globalization of capital, and their cultural experiences are the ethnographic ground from which my points about transnationality are drawn.

Sixth, I challenge the view that the proliferation of unofficial narratives associated with triumphant Chinese capitalism reflect insurmountable cultural differences. I argue that on the contrary, discourses such as "Asian values," "the new Islam," "saying no to the West," and "the clash of civilizations" can occur in the context of fundamentally playing (and competing) by the rules of the neoliberal orthodoxy. Despite the claims of some American scholars and policy makers that the emergence of the Pacific Rim powers heralds an irreducible cultural division between East and West, these parallel narratives, I argue, disguise common civilizational references in a world where the market is absolutely transcendental.

Through an anthropology of emigrating families, transnational publics, state strategies, and panreligious nationalist discourses, the following chapters will identify the cultural logics shaping individual, national, and regional relations of power and conflict. But before I turn to these themes, I will briefly review how anthropology and cultural studies have approached the topics that can be loosely gathered under the rubrics of "diaspora" and "transnationalism." [. . .]

AFTERWORD: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF TRANSNATIONALITY

This book has considered the varied practices and policies—reworked, of course, in terms of local cultural meanings—that transform the meaning of citizenship in an era of globalization. My focus on transnationality highlights the processes whereby flexibility, whether in strategies of citizenship or in regimes of sovereignty, is a product and a condition of late capitalism. This work also represents an anthropological intervention into the study of changing relations between subjects, state, and capital, and it demonstrates why a keen grasp of cultural dynamics is essential to such an analysis. By tying ethnography to the structural analysis of global change, we are able to disclose the ways in which culture gives meaning to action and how culture itself becomes transformed by capitalism and by the modern nation-state. An approach rooted in the ethnographic knowledge of a region also demonstrates that capitalism, which has been differently assimilated by different Asian countries, has become reconfigured and has taken on new cultural meanings and practices—whether at the level of the individual or the community—that valorize flexibility, difference, and transnationality.

Anthropologists can grasp the history of the present in a way that universalizing armchair theorists, who persist in their view of the world as being divided into traditional and modern halves, cannot. Indeed, the modernity-tradition model assumes an intellectual division of labor between sociology and anthropology, and anthropologists are chastised for dealing with "traditional," "disappearing" cultures, when in fact, "non-Western" cultures are not disappearing but are adjusting in very complex ways to global processes and remaking their own modernities.[1] A further mistake in the rationalist and reductionist models of the world is the tendency to view non-Western cultures and human agency as passive or, at best, ineffectual. Let us briefly consider, for example, a dominant sociological framework for grasping the dynamism of global relations and human interaction.

As formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein, the world-system theory views the world according to a tripartite scheme of core, periphery, and semiperiphery.[2] Wallerstein has been criticized for reducing capitalism to exchange relations (at the expense of production) and for his functionalist emphasis on the "needs" of core countries in shaping the global division of labor. At the same time, he downgrades the importance of political and military factors in processes of social change. Onto this system of (narrowly defined) transnational economic interdependencies Anthony Giddens has grafted a system of nation-states, seeking to emphasize the latter as a separate system of political power that counterbalances the economic power of global capital.[3] This separation of capitalism and state administrative power into disconnected entities reduces the usefulness of Giddens's approach for an understanding of globalization. Like Huntington's taxonomy of civilizations, such universalizing models based on systemic relations—economic, political, religious—all paper over the actual uneven spread of capitalism, the intertwining of capitalism and state power, the cultural forms of ruling, and the dynamism of cultural struggles in different parts of the world that do not fit their logical schemes.

More recently, totalizing discourses of globalization, which are drawn from business and management literature, represent the latest example to date of a unidirectional model that sees global forces transforming economies and societies into a single global order, which Castells calls "the network society."[4] Politics, culture, and human agency are viewed only as the effects of globalizing processes, such as trade, production, and communications, rather than as vital logics that play a role in shaping the distribution, directionality, and effects of global phenomena. In contrast, an approach that embeds global processes in a regional formation will yield a finer, more complex understanding of the reciprocal shaping of cultural logics and social and state relations in the course of uneven capitalist development.[5]

Anthropology is a field known for its distinctive methodology (regardless of the populations studied) in exploring the links between cultural and material processes in historically specific contexts and in using ethnographic understanding to explain the cultural logics that shape the relations between society, state, and capital. American anthropology has a long history of attending to local-global articulations and melding fine-grained ethnographic perspectives with an appreciation for the historical dynamics of capitalism and social change. Although earlier anthropologists were also influenced by the binarisms of modernity-tradition, core-periphery, and Europe-"people without history," their careful ethnographic study of the historical dynamics through which the multiple meanings and material practices of colonialism and capitalism are reworked point to the culturally specific ways societies have participated in global history.[6] A newer generation of anthropologists who are freeing themselves from the binarism of older models and deploying post-structuralist theories has refined the anthropological analysis of the complex interplay between capitalism, the nation-state, and power dynamics in particular times and places.[7]

But, in turning away from the overarching theories of social change, we may have rushed too quickly into the arms of cultural studies and postcolonial studies. In our post-cold war flirtations with the humanities, anthropologists have too often ceded ground to an anemic approach that takes as its object culture-as-text or that reduces cultural analysis to a North American angst-driven self-reflexivity or to an equally self-conscious, postcolonial, elite-driven discourse that ignores the structures of power in identity making and social change. A hermeneutic trend in anthropology involves witty texts that pose as a form of self-indulgent identity politics, literary works that build a stage for moral grandstanding, and studies of abstracted cultural globalization that are coupled with insubstantial claims. I am all for flirtations and skirmishes on the boundaries of knowledge and for serious interdisciplinary work, but what we want is not a resulting "lite" anthropology but rather an enlarged space for telling the stories of modernity in ways that capture the interplay between culture and the material forms of social life.[8]

The field must recapture its unique role in addressing the big questions of politics, culture, and society in ways that transcend the mechanical modernity-tradition, first world-third world, core-periphery models and the universalizing assumptions that underlie metropolitan theories of postcoloniality, modernity, and globalization. To the grounding of anthropology in political economy, cultural politics, and ethnographic knowledge, I have added a Foucauldian sensibility about power, thus offering a more complex view of the fluid relations between culture, politics, and capitalism. The different paths to modernity have depended upon