

# What's in a Name?

## *Culture, Identity, and the "Taiwan Problem"*

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Taiwan is a global hot spot. The events and rhetoric surrounding Taiwan's second presidential election in March 2000 raised fears that tensions in the region might result in actual warfare among nuclear powers. Why is Taiwan—with a stable, democratic government and a strong economy—considered a threat to world peace? The People's Republic of China (PRC) disputes Taiwan's *de facto* sovereignty. The "one China" policy, officially supported by the PRC, the U.S., and many other countries, and formerly supported by Taiwan, asserts that there is only one China and that Taiwan is a part of it.<sup>1</sup> And yet, Taiwan is clearly no more a part of the PRC at the turn of the twenty-first century than, say, South Korea. So why does the PRC dispute Taiwan's sovereignty? Ultimately, the problem is one of identity—Han ethnic identity, Chinese national identity, and the relationship of both of these identities to the new Taiwanese identity forged in the 1990s.\* The PRC

\*Discussion of these issues is further complicated by problems in terminology. The English term "Chinese" can refer to ethnic identity (Americans of Chinese ancestry) or to national identity (citizens of the PRC). In Mandarin Chinese, the official language of both Taiwan and China, the distinction appears clear: *han ren* (lit., "Han person") refers to the Han ethnic majority, whom most Americans would think of as the ethnic Chinese. (Han are the ethnic majority both in China and in Taiwan.) *Zhongguo ren* (lit., "China person") refers to national citizenship and includes all 56 *minzu* (ethnic groups) officially recognized in China. However, the use of *zhongguo ren* in Taiwan is complicated by the term's earlier political uses: under the martial law rule of the Nationalist party (1947–1987), the term was used to support Taiwan's claims to ruling mainland China. For clarity, I use "Han" to refer to ethnic identity and "Chinese" to refer to national identification with China.

claims that Taiwan (unlike Korea) is ethnically Han and therefore should be part of the Chinese nation. Even though Taiwan acknowledges and honors its Chinese heritage, it now claims not to be Chinese. In the 1990s, this claim was made primarily on the basis of Aborigine contributions to Taiwanese culture and ancestry.<sup>2</sup> Since 1999, however, Taiwan has started to assert its claim to sovereignty in terms of the social basis of its identity. The complex ways in which identity underlies the political debate over Taiwan's future relationship with China are the subject of this book.

One of the most fundamental misunderstandings about identity is the widely accepted view that ethnic and national identities are based on common ancestry and/or common culture and therefore that identity is grounded in antiquity. Ancestry and culture are the ideological terms in which ethnic and national identities are claimed,<sup>3</sup> and as long as identity is discussed in these terms, antiquity seems a reasonable measure of its authenticity. However, culture and ancestry are *not* what ultimately unite an ethnic group or a nation. Rather, identity is formed and solidified on the basis of common social experience, including economic and political experience. When we realize that identity is really a matter of politics, and that it is no less authentic or "real" as a result—real in the sense of being meaningful and motivating to people—then we must examine identities and their implications very differently. We must untangle the social grounding of identities from the meanings claimed for those identities in the political sphere. We must also reveal where the claimed meanings run roughshod over the very personal, experienced-based meanings of individual members of identity groups.

Taiwan is a global political hot spot now because it is transforming its national and ethnic identities in ways that have unwelcome implications for the PRC's national identity and ethnic politics. Between 1945 and 1991, Taiwan's government portrayed Taiwan as ethnically Han and nationally Chinese, even claiming that it was the lawful government of mainland China. Since 1987, for the obvious political purpose of justifying their distance from the PRC, people in Taiwan have increasingly claimed Taiwanese identity to be an amalgam of Han culture and ancestry, Aborigine culture and ancestry, and Japanese culture (but not ancestry), in the making for almost 400 years, and separate from China for the entire twentieth century (cf. Chang 2000). (China disputes the length of separation.) Ironically, the PRC was more comfortable when Taiwan's government claimed legal authority over China, because at least then there was no questioning of whether Taiwan belonged within the Chi-

nese nation. An independent Taiwan poses problems for China's national identity. First, it leaves out of the Chinese nation a territory that originally left China's authority due to colonial annexation: the PRC emphasizes this problem. Second, an independent Taiwan also raises issues for ethnic territories under Chinese authority: if Taiwanese are allowed to "leave" the nation because of ethnic differences, then why not Tibetans, or Turkic Muslims (such as the Uighur), or even Cantonese? Taiwan independence could have a domino effect that would break up the PRC, like the USSR or, worse, Yugoslavia. Given the political stakes involved, the rhetoric is emotional and often convoluted.

How can we get at the reality underneath the political rhetoric? How do we know what identities ordinary individuals in Taiwan and China have, and the basis on which these identities are actually built and claimed? Examining the borders of identities—how borders are drawn and how people cross them—helps to answer these questions. On the Taiwan side, three identity changes by descendants of plains Aborigines who intermarried with Han—one shift in the seventeenth century and two in the twentieth century—show the extent to which Taiwanese people and culture really are an amalgamation of Aborigine and Han contributions. These shifts also help us understand how identity changes can occur at all and how new identities come to be meaningful. Similar identity changes in China—among the ancestors of Tujia (an officially designated ethnic minority) in Hubei—shows that such changes in ethnic identity are not unique to Taiwan before 1949. Descendants of intermarried locals and Han immigrants in Hubei became the local Han. Although the fact of identity change in Hubei appears to raise questions for Taiwan's claims to nationhood, in fact it does not. Examination of subsequent identity change in Hubei after 1945 (to a non-Han minority), and PRC policies and actions affecting local identity and culture, shows that there *were* real differences in identity between Taiwan and Hubei at the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, the PRC's own policies and actions drove these differences. China's dismissal of the pre-1949 change to Han identity in Hubei contradicts its claims about Taiwan (where it emphasizes Han identity). That contradiction provides room for negotiating Taiwanese identity.

#### A CHINESE VIEW OF THE "TAIWAN PROBLEM"

People in China feel strongly that Taiwan is and should be a part of the Chinese nation. In March 1996, the PRC held war games in the strait

between Fujian Province and Taiwan—effectively subjecting Taiwan to a military blockade. These war games were in response to actions that might eventually lead to Taiwan’s declaring itself a nation, independent of China. Many Americans do not understand why tensions run so high on this issue, given that Taiwan functions independently of China and has done so for years. But to date, Taiwan does not *call* itself a nation independent of China. Its government officially calls itself “the Republic of China” (sometimes adding “on Taiwan”) and has done so since Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) and his Nationalist (*guomindang* or GMD) followers fled the Chinese mainland in defeat in 1949. Both sides of the Taiwan Strait use the phrase *taiwan wenti*—translated variously as the “Taiwan problem” or “Taiwan question” or “Taiwan issue”—to refer to this impasse, but the phrase has slightly different meanings from these different vantage points. On the China side, the problem is how to bring Taiwan back into the Chinese nation. On the Taiwan side, the problem is how best to maintain comfortable economic and political trajectories without being swallowed up or bombed by China.

In July 1999, Taiwan’s first democratically elected president, Lee Teng-hui (Li Denghui), said on German radio that future talks between Taiwan and China should be “state-to-state” talks, suggesting that Taiwan be *treated* as an independent country by the PRC. Beijing was furious and called Taiwan’s president a “troublemaker.” His move has been debated, with the PRC considering it a move toward independence and others, such as James Lilley (head of the U.S. mission to Taiwan under Reagan and U.S. ambassador to China under the elder President Bush), seeing the move as maintaining the status quo. Although one Taiwanese student in the U.S. suggested to me that Lee has a tendency to speak off the cuff without thinking, this move may not have been unplanned. In the summer of 1994, Lee publicly referred to his political party as the *taiwan guomindang*—the Taiwan Nationalist Party. The “*guo*” in *guomindang* refers to the nation, which since the party’s founding has always meant the Chinese nation. Lee’s usage as early as 1994 implied Taiwan’s status as a nation. Moreover, Lee has publicly stated, “What the Republic of China [Taiwan] needs the most is an international affirmation of its sovereignty” (see *Free China Journal*, June 16, 1995:1 for the text of the speech).

This stance does not go over well in China. Traveling around southwestern Hubei in 1996 (before the war games, but when tensions were building), I frequently met local-level officials. Most of them would ask me about Taiwan when they found out I had done research there. Although

each of these conversations began with questions about what Taiwan is like socially, economically, and culturally, they all turned sooner or later to the question of Taiwan's status as part of China. My responses—that most people I knew in Taiwan who had discussed the issue with me were not strong supporters of independence but were not enthusiastic about reuniting with China either—were invariably met with vehement assertions. Taiwan is part of China's territory, I was told, it is for China to decide Taiwan's fate, and the U.S. had better stay out of it. I always agreed, and still do, that the U.S. has no right to decide this issue. However, I pointed out that in Taiwan, people think they—the people of Taiwan—should decide their own future, not China. The international support sought by Taiwan, which China interprets as moves toward independence, can ensure this freedom for the people of Taiwan to decide for themselves. The problem with this position, from China's point of view, is that it assumes precisely what they want to question—that Taiwan is *sovereign*—for sovereignty is a right granted to *nations*, not to their constituent parts.<sup>4</sup>

#### NARRATIVES OF UNFOLDING

National identity and ethnic identity are commonly portrayed as fixed, with clear borders. Identity is seen as the product of a person's culture and/or ancestry, and there is no room for individual choice about belonging or departing. In order to “mobilize people behind their political agendas,” governments and ethnic leaders “actively hide the fluidity and changeability of identity and group membership” (Harrell 1996a:5); they discuss identity in terms of purported common descent and/or purported common culture (including language), even though ultimately it is common sociopolitical experience which binds group identity. The concealment of fluidity is accomplished by constructing “narratives of unfolding” (Bhabha 1990:1, Harrell 1996a:4), origin myths (Keyes 1981:8, Williams 1989:429), or a reified “History” (Duara 1995:4) that portrays the group as having a long and unified history distinguished from other groups. These narratives draw heavily on selected historic sociopolitical events to galvanize support around claimed ancestry and/or culture.

I prefer the term “narratives of unfolding,” bulky as it is, because of three conceptual advantages. First, the term clearly distinguishes between constructed narratives of the past and the totality of what is actually known about past events, in a way that the term “history”—capitalized or uncapitalized—does not.<sup>5</sup> I use “history” to refer to actual events that

occurred in the past, and I emphasize that we know about history imperfectly. Many events are completely unknown to us, many events are known only through extremely biased perspectives, and many events are so contradictorily reported that it is difficult to reconstruct even a chronological sequence of what occurred. Narratives of unfolding are not history, nor are they simply a biased interpretation of past events; they are ideologies—“a conscious falsification, a conscious selection of some of the *available* evidence” of the past over other evidence for political purposes (Harrell 1996a:5–6n, emphasis in original). Thus, narratives of unfolding attempt to selectively shape our understanding of the past for political purposes. Their authors may call these narratives history, but they are in fact constructed ideologies.

The second conceptual advantage of the term “narratives of unfolding” is that it captures the sense which these narratives attempt to convey of an inevitable unfolding of destiny from the primordial past. At the same time, the term can refer to narratives about the “unfolding” of different things—the unfolding of one’s own nation, the unfolding of a hostile nation, the unfolding of a disputed territory as part of one’s own nation. Although the anthropological concept of “origin myths” incorporates both an attempt to construct a primordial past and a notion of a group charter, the term lacks the flexibility to refer to one group’s version of the origins of another group and also lacks the sense of a destiny which continues into the present. The relation of the past to the present is crucial to narratives of unfolding. Although ostensibly about the past, they are really about the present. They are attempts to justify, to naturalize, to immortalize the present-day claims of a nation or an ethnic group.

Finally, narratives of unfolding change as societies change, as present-day political goals change, as international relations change. The terms “history” and “origin myth” do not easily accommodate the concept of a narrative that is constantly changing as people reformulate and transform their identities in the present. The term “narratives of unfolding,” however, can be understood both as a purported unfolding of primordial destiny and also as narratives that are themselves continually unfolding and changing in relation to changing social contexts.

For example, consider China’s narrative about the diversity of its population. China’s Han imperialism (*da han zhuyi*) is glossed over in a narrative celebrating China’s status as a united nation of diverse ethnicities (*tongyi duominzu de guojia*) (cf. Harrell 1995b). Yet we can see, simply in the classification of ethnicities, where the power lies. There are fifty-

six officially recognized ethnic groups (*minzu*) in China—the Han ethnic majority, constituting 91 percent of the population, and fifty-five ethnic minorities, together constituting 9 percent of the population.<sup>6</sup> However, there are also many unofficially recognized “regional” varieties of Han, and these so-called “regional” differences (or “subethnic” differences, as they are sometimes called) among the Han are really ethnic differences, both by the Stalinist criteria purportedly used to define ethnic groups in the PRC—common territory, common language, common economy, and common psychological make-up reflected in common culture—and by comparison to ethnic differences elsewhere in the world (as I discuss further below). Officially, all ethnic groups are determined according to the Stalinist criteria. However, the PRC government never considered variation within the Han ethnic group in terms of these criteria.<sup>7</sup>

Han were never subjected to classification into distinct *minzu* because of an older narrative of China’s unfolding as a Han civilization. Han viewed themselves as a single group embodying Confucian civilization—the Middle Kingdom (*Zhongguo*, China) that stood between Heaven and the barbarian non-Han (cf. Ebrey 1996). In this older narrative, the great linguistic, cultural, social, and economic variation among the Han was irrelevant to their classification as part of a single Han civilization. In the PRC, classifying all Han as a single ethnic group both maintains the links of the present-day nation-state to past Han civilization and justifies Han political and demographic dominance as natural and predestined. If Han had been broken up into different ethnic groups, they would have competed with each other and none could have claimed to be the exclusive inheritors of the Confucian mantle. In spite of its dissonance with the older Han narrative, the very existence of a Chinese narrative about diversity (which I discuss below) shows that narratives of unfolding do change along with societies and their politics.

#### TAIWANESE IDENTITY

Because Taiwan’s sociopolitical experience took a different path from China’s, Taiwanese identity does not neatly correspond to any of these PRC identities—ethnic minority or “regional” Han. Before 1895, when Taiwan came under Japanese colonial rule, people in Taiwan did not think of themselves as a unified group (Chang 2000: 53–54). Although Han in Taiwan undoubtedly viewed themselves as different from non-Han (both Aborigines and Europeans), there is no evidence of unity among the Han.

On the contrary, in the seventeenth century Han merchants warned the Dutch about an uprising of Han farmers and laborers, showing class rather than ethnic solidarity. From the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries, while some Han cheated Aborigines of their land and rents, other Han married Aborigines and helped them sue and even rebel against such abuse, showing solidarity along lines of personal connections and common economic interests rather than ethnic identity. Nevertheless, Han in Taiwan were surely as aware of European colonial incursions as Han on the mainland, and they may have begun to develop a single Chinese identity in reaction. Still, feuding (*xiedou*) based on ethnicity, lineage, and place of origin erupted frequently in Taiwan, with alliances crossing and re-crossing these identities as circumstances varied (e.g., Lamley 1981, Harrell 1990, Shepherd 1993:310–323), thus showing no signs of ethnic solidarity.

With the imminent arrival of Japanese troops came the first indications of a pan-Taiwanese identity, an identity limited to Han. James Davidson, an American war correspondent with the Japanese army, reported (1988 [1903]:257–370) that representatives of the various Han groups in Taiwan formed a short-lived “Republic of Taiwan” and organized a seven-year resistance to Japanese occupation of the island (cf. Harrell 1990, Ka 1995:83n1, 84n2). Thus, the first clear Taiwanese identity was a national one, linked to the unsuccessful formation of a nation-state.

Under Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), peoples in Taiwan were classified by a notion of race which in practice, in the early Japanese household registers, looks a lot like today’s ethnic classifications. Under the category of “race” (*zhongzu*), the Japanese colonial government distinguished between Hoklo and Hakka—“regional” varieties of Han with mutually unintelligible “dialects” and some significantly different customs—and classified Hoklo as *fu* and Hakka as *fu* or *guang*, depending on their province of ancestral origin.<sup>8</sup> The Japanese government also distinguished Aborigines—called barbarians (*fan*)—as “raw” (*sheng*) or “cooked” (*shu*), depending on their relationship to Han culture. “Raw” or “wild” Aborigines—living in the high central mountains, on Taiwan’s eastern plain, and on Orchid Island off Taiwan’s southeastern coast—had adopted few or no Han customs. “Cooked” or “civilized” Aborigines—living on Taiwan’s western plain and in the western foothills of the central mountains—had adopted much of Han culture, including language. Thus, the Japanese colonial government perpetuated classification terms from the Qing regime, perhaps concerned that feuding along ethnic lines might continue.

However, by 1915 or so, these distinctions were not particularly important and they were no longer entered in the registers. Much more important to the Japanese were the distinction between Japanese and everyone else, as well as so-called class (*zhongbie*) distinctions, which were really police reliability ratings (Wolf and Huang 1980:19). Among other things, these latter distinctions affected wages and the frequency of routine police visits (Davidson 1988 [1903]:600, Wolf and Huang 1980:19). By the 1930s, many “cooked” Aborigines, who are now more politely referred to as “plains” Aborigines, had assimilated to Hoklo identity, and the Japanese government brought “raw” or “mountain” Aborigines forcibly under their control, removing once and for all Han fears of them.<sup>9</sup> Efforts were made during the late 1930s and early 1940s to get people in Taiwan to think of themselves as loyal subjects of the Japanese empire, but people in Taiwan experienced clear categorical differences between themselves and Japanese which left them with a sense of non-Japanese identity (cf. Chang 2000:56–62).

In 1945, Taiwan was “gloriously returned” (*guangfu*) to Chinese rule. Control of Taiwan was given to the Chinese Nationalists (GMD) by the terms of a 1943 agreement among Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek. “There must have been a moment when, knowing they would soon be under Chinese rule again, Taiwanese [i.e., Han in Taiwan] could assume themselves simply to be Chinese. That moment lasted until shortly after the Mainlanders arrived” (Gates 1987:44, cf. Chang 2000:62). Corruption was rampant at all levels of government and the military, inflation skyrocketed, and the Mainlanders kept coming—some one to two million of them by the autumn of 1949. Tensions led to a Taiwanese uprising, referred to as the 2:28 Incident because of its start on February 28, 1947. The GMD brutally suppressed the uprising, executing thousands of Taiwanese within a few weeks and later hauling many more off to jail.<sup>10</sup> The GMD declared martial law, suspending constitutional rights for “security” reasons.

Under Nationalist martial-law rule (1947–87), Taiwanese identity became a strong “regional” identity. The term *taiwan ren* (Taiwanese) is often used in Taiwan today to refer to the Hoklo, who are the ethnic majority. Through the late 1980s, however, the term was generally synonymous with *bensheng ren* (lit., people from within the province), thereby including both Hoklo and Hakka whose ancestors came to Taiwan before 1895 when the Japanese colonial government suspended further immigration from China. “Taiwanese” were thus mainly contrasted with *waisheng ren* (lit., people from outside the province), that

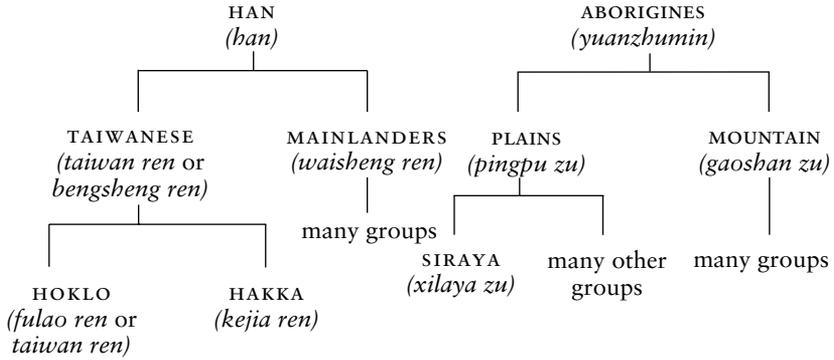


Figure 4. Relation of ethnic terms used for peoples in Taiwan.

is, Mainlanders who came to Taiwan with the Nationalists between 1945 and 1949 and their children and grandchildren born and raised in Taiwan.<sup>11</sup> “Cooked” Aborigines had disappeared (in the Japanese period) into the Taiwanese category, and “raw” Aborigines were classified separately as *gaoshan zu* (mountain tribes) but ignored in the political sphere until recently. (See figure 4.)

I suggest (contra Chang 1996:78n1) that the category “Mainlander” is an ethnic distinction in Taiwan (and hence should be capitalized, like “Han” and “Aborigine”).<sup>12</sup> Mainlander identity is claimed on the basis of culture and ancestry—sometimes positively, in terms of language, culture, and recent ancestry from mainland China, and sometimes negatively, as simply not having Taiwanese language, culture, and ancestry. The fact that Mainlanders as a group do not share the *same* ancestry and culture should no more disturb their classification as a single ethnic group than the fact that Hoklo and Hakka do not share the same ancestry and culture disturbs their classification as Taiwanese, or the fact that Ami, Bunun, Atayal and other “mountain tribes” do not share the same ancestry and culture disturbs their classification as Aborigines. These differences emphasize the point made earlier: although group identity is *claimed* in terms of ancestry and/or culture, it is ultimately held together by common sociopolitical experience. “Taiwanese,” for example, were largely (but not entirely) excluded from political power and national corporations in Taiwan during the period of martial law, and “Mainlanders,” in turn, were largely (but not entirely) excluded from small and medium-sized businesses owned and operated by Taiwanese (cf. Gates 1981; Chang 1994, 2000; Corcuff 2000).

Taiwanese also excluded Mainlanders from their social spheres when they could. Political scientist Edward Friedman (1994, personal communication) tells a story of such exclusion from the 1970s. A Taiwanese-owned cafeteria that Friedman frequented near National Taiwan University had a sign in the window welcoming Japanese tourists. (In the 1970s, there were no Japanese tourists in Taiwan, in part because of the enmity with which Mainlanders viewed Japanese.) After some time, when Friedman knew the owner sufficiently to ask about the sign, the owner explained that he could not put a sign in the window telling Mainlanders to stay out but that this sign achieved the same results—no Mainlanders came in.

Martial law had important economic implications. The Nationalist government advertised Taiwan abroad as having a plentiful, cheap, and docile labor force that was forbidden to strike, and it established policies and special export zones favoring firms—both foreign and domestic—that exported all their products. Taiwan's economy grew more or less steadily from the late 1960s, faltering most seriously during the oil crisis of the mid-1970s but recovering thereafter. Indeed, the rapid economic development together with the social and political stability of the 1960s through the early 1980s is known as the "Taiwan miracle" (e.g., Gold 1986). Today, Taiwan has a fully developed economy and is quite wealthy, even with the economic downturns in 1997 and 2001.

Until 1986, political opposition to Nationalist Party rule and advocacy of Taiwan independence—meaning the declaration of Taiwan as a nation independent of China—was suppressed, often brutally. Unexpectedly, in 1986, then-president Chiang Ching-kuo (Jiang Jinguo, Chiang Kai-shek's son) tolerated the illegal formation of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which made Taiwan independence part of its party platform. He lifted martial law in July 1987, six months before his death, and set in motion other changes leading to democratization (e.g., Chang 1994, Gold 1994). The people of Taiwan now directly elect the National Assembly (since 1991), the governor of Taiwan and the mayors of the cities of Taipei and Gaoxiong (since 1994), and the president and vice-president (since 1996).<sup>13</sup>

Further political liberalization has occurred since 1986 as well. Mainlanders, and later Taiwanese, were allowed to visit the PRC. Public demonstrations are legal and frequent. Newspapers have genuine freedom to investigate and report. The 2:28 Incident, once unmentionable, has been the subject of an international-prize-winning film (*A City of Sadness*), numerous publications, a presidential committee investigation

and report, an official presidential apology, monuments, and museum exhibits.

With the political and economic transformations of the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwanese identity has changed dramatically, becoming increasingly inclusive, proud, and nationalistic. During the 1998 Taipei mayoral campaign, Lee Teng-hui publically articulated the new Taiwanese identity as embracing both the ethnic Taiwanese and the Mainlanders.<sup>14</sup> The fact that Chen Shui-bian—the incumbent DPP mayor of Taipei running for re-election—started using this concept of an inclusive new Taiwanese identity as well shows how popular it is.

These politicians did not invent this identity; they merely articulated and emphasized a change in Taiwanese identity that had been developing over the previous decade. For instance, one person I know from Taiwan, whose parents had fled the mainland with the Nationalists in the 1940s, visited China in the mid-1980s, soon after such visits were allowed by Taiwan's government. After expressing shock at the standards of living, at the loss of Confucian civility and propriety in relationships, and at the apparent lack of work ethic which she found in China, she identified herself proudly as from Taiwan. Other "Mainlanders" from Taiwan have reported similar experiences and sentiments (cf. Hsiao and So 1996). Another anecdotal example of pride in Taiwanese identity dates from 1987, when I met a scholar wearing a knit hat which read "MIT." I asked if she had done her Ph.D. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and she explained that to her it means "Made In Taiwan." She had bought the hat on a recent visit to Boston because she had been a student in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s, when "Made in Taiwan" was on so many labels (as "Made in China" is today), and Taiwan was associated with cheap products—inexpensive and not very well made. She had been ashamed to have Americans associate her with such cheap products. She said that now that Taiwan was known for its economic success, she would wear her MIT hat proudly. As a further example of the social basis of this new Taiwanese identity, another Taiwanese person, who had been bored by the American presidential campaigns she witnessed as a student in the U.S., recounted to me the unexpected captivation of Taiwan's first presidential campaign in 1996 and the strong sense of empowerment from voting in the election. These sentiments are probably not unique, and the people of Taiwan are not likely to forget such feelings of empowerment. The new, inclusive Taiwanese identity is born of such experiences.

Because it initially focused on including various Han identities, the

new Taiwanese identity only recently began to explicitly include Aborigines. However, from the first, it implicitly included Aborigines as a result of the new narratives of Taiwan's unfolding constructing Taiwanese identity as an amalgam of Aborigine and Han ancestry (a major theme of this book). This new identity, with its basis in actual social experiences, contributes to the increasing numbers of Taiwanese who approve of the calculated risk of angering China in order to win international support for Taiwan's sovereignty.

#### FORMING IDENTITIES, NEGOTIATING CLASSIFICATIONS, DRAWING BORDERS

Identities must be negotiated; they are not simply a matter of choice, because identity formation in individuals and groups derives from their interaction with the social and cultural context in which they live (cf. Keyes 1981, Bentley 1987, Williams 1989, Harrell 1995a, Brown 1996a). ("Social context" here refers to the specific hierarchical organization of a society. By this broad definition, social context thus includes political and economic contexts.) Nevertheless, identity—a sense of who we are, in terms of how we fit into the world—is derived from how our minds process the world around us. Identities of individuals are socially constructed—formed and negotiated through everyday experiences and social interactions. Individuals understand these lived and social experiences in terms of the cultural meanings of the specific society in which they live (cf. Goffman 1963, Strauss 1992b, Strauss and Quinn 1994).<sup>15</sup> The experiential nature of identity is usually accepted for idiosyncratic identities associated with personality or achievement, such as Phi Beta Kappa members. However, as I have already discussed, identities of individuals as members of groups—especially national identity and ethnic identity—are portrayed by political leaders as fixed, with borders that are not based on individual experiences.

Our cognitive processing of the perceived identity choices available to us is influenced both by the biological structure of the human brain and its relation to mind and also by the cultural meanings and social processes we have experienced, which we rely on to make sense of the world around us (cf. Strauss and Quinn 1994). At the most fundamental level, identity is the way that a person classifies him- or herself, a mental representation or thought. This level of identity, however, is not what is generally discussed by scholars or political leaders, because we cannot know exactly what a person thinks, only what he or she reports think-

ing or what we interpret him or her to think based on statements or actions. In other words, we cannot know the actual mental representations of individuals, only their public representations (utterances or actions), which may or may not accurately reflect mental representations.<sup>16</sup> Individuals or groups of individuals may keep their mental representations concealed, for many possible reasons. Thus, what are actually discussed, in this book and in other discussions of identity, are the *public representations of identity* by individuals or groups.

How then can we compare what ethnic identity means to different individuals, let alone to people in different cultures and at different historical periods? Surely what it means to be Taiwanese is different than what it means to be American, and both of these identities were different in the seventeenth century than they are today. Of course the specific meanings of ethnic identities and their significance vary across individuals, across cultures and across time, but I suggest that the way that identity is formed does not vary. Moreover, I suggest that a universal process of identity formation means that the way that ethnic identity shapes the lives of individuals does not vary either. Because ethnic identity is based on *social* experience, Taiwan Aborigines in the seventeenth century and, for example, African Americans in the twentieth century both understood that being classified by these labels affected how other people treated them, their position in their local social hierarchy, and their ability (or inability) to negotiate a higher position.

A wide variety of factors influences which specific identities individuals will form: the meaning of particular identities in the culture(s) to which the individuals or groups are exposed, the social status or relative power of members of particular identities, and the various characteristics—cultural, social, and/or physical—used to mark or categorize particular identities.<sup>17</sup> Individuals may have limited choices about their identities, or may have no choice at all, because these factors affect the possibility of being classified as one or another identity. These factors also affect the benefits and disadvantages of being classified one way or another, and thereby affect which option people choose when choice is possible. There are also constraints on whether others accept the classification claimed by individuals or groups (cf. Yelvington 1991). Thus, the specific identities that form for individuals are the negotiated product of the interaction between what people claim for themselves and what others allow them to claim.

Identity formation occurs through the social experience of this interaction. People negotiate with others, both those who claim the same iden-

tity and those who claim different identities, and what these different groups of “others” allow one to claim often varies. For example, Gentiles and Jews often have different views about whether a person claiming Jewish identity is to be regarded as Jewish (that is, “allowed” to claim Jewish identity). There is variation within a group as well: Ultra-Orthodox, Reform, and secular Jews have different standards for judging claims to Jewish identity. *Identity formation, then, is the process of socially negotiating how to classify oneself in terms of the broader classifications of people existing in a particular social and cultural context* (cf. Barth 1969, Keyes 1981:7). Generally, such classifications (American, Taiwanese, Tujia) have social consequences, including political consequences—only U.S. citizens may run for Congress, non-Han minorities in China are given extra points on their college entrance examination scores, and so on.

Classification is a general human cognitive process. The physiological workings of human cognition interact with the socially and culturally constructed content of specific categorizations. Anthropologist Dan Sperber suggests that because of a human cognitive process which encourages essentializing classifications, cultural input which classifies people can be construed in the brain as signifying a larger, more essential distinction (cf. Boyer 1998):

It is quite possible, then, that being presented with nominal labels for otherwise undefined and undescribed humans is enough (given an appropriate context) to activate the initialization of the *ad hoc* template. If so, then perception of physical differences among humans is indeed not the triggering factor in racial classification. (Sperber 1996:144)<sup>18</sup>

In other words, racial identities—and I would suggest other kinds of ethnic identities—are formed by a combination of social, cultural, and cognitive influences (I define a race as a special kind of ethnic group—an ethnic group with an *assumed* biological basis).<sup>19</sup> Telling a child that a man is black or white—or Han or barbarian, whichever terms are locally meaningful—may set up an essentialized cognitive difference for the child, which is later reinforced when the child finds differences in how black men and white men or Han and barbarians are treated in her society. Sperber’s insight probably also extends to gender: we refer to someone as a man or a woman even more frequently than simply as a person.

Consider an example of classification which I discuss further in chapter 4. There were large numbers of Han men who migrated to southwestern Taiwan in the seventeenth century. Many of these men married local women—Aborigine women or women of mixed Han-Aborigine