"Liminality" and "Taiwan tropism" among Taiwan's Mainlanders on the eve of Kuomintang's return to power

「臺灣趨向性」以及「中介時期」與「中介地帶」這兩個概念可以幫助我們理解臺灣「外省人」的歷史立場？這個中介時期與地帶的特色為它並沒有經歷人類學家在人類社會裡所觀察到的「過渡儀式」。李、陳政府使得外省人透過危機來調適，引起一般外省人逐漸地適應臺灣的新政策，但他們卻被困在無止盡的中介地帶裡；是否因為國民黨沒有提供足夠的協助嗎？相當類似族群團體與族群界限的建構過程，與其他黨派劃界並建立差異的必要性協助國民黨保持團結且避免再度分裂；這麼做能持續動員選民，並且策略性地使其本土派與較保守、面向大陸而有著強烈中國意識的派別團結一致。因此「外省人」之臺灣趨向性的發展較難得到外省籍政壇菁英支持。但是究竟什麼是趨向性？臺灣「外省人」似乎常常游移於他們認同的清晰與不清晰的意識之間。這是因為認同是被建構的、會轉變的而且是多元的，並且因為在認同政治與民主遊戲裡國家認同往往已被政治化。不斷探索他們的限制時，有些人似乎好奇界線的後方是什麼，但是就在這些內心深處的感覺到達他們意識的邊界時—或者就在他們即將完全認知到時—許多人很快地後退。這或許是因為觸摸光源會導致燙傷，或因為當有人告訴你會燙到時，你便會覺得好像真的會燙到。

Dear friends and colleagues,

I will try today to share with you a few ideas about how to interpret schemes of national identifications among Taiwan's mainlanders, with the help of the notions of *"liminality"*, *"Taiwan tropism"* and *"evanescent consciousness"*. Page numbers below refer to the pagination of the Chinese translation of an English text I published last month on this topic, and that I prepared for today's talk.

The two notions I'll discuss today are the "Taiwan tropism", which I translated into "臺灣趨向性", and of "liminality", which I borrow to anthropologists, and that is usually translated in Chinese by the words "中介時期" or "中介地帶" (p. 4-5, 24, 28-29), depending on whether we insist of the temporal or (symbolically) spatial step one individual is, in the course of a transitional period between two states in his/her life.

1. Describing identifications

I my previous work, I have described *"national identifications"* as 1. constructed 2. changing and 3. pluralistic. I rarely speak of *"national identity"*, stressing instead the need to focus on *"national identifications"*. The first is hard to describe, and perhaps does not even exist as a concrete entity. The second calls for a study of feelings nurtured by individuals for potential objects of identification (潛在的認同選項, p. 32, 34).

Those two close yet distinct notions cannot be distinguished clearly by the Chinese language, as 認同 can be here verb and noun: in both case, we would speak of "國家認同", which both means "national identity" and "identification to the nation" (國家認同是甚麼 would be "national identity", while 我們怎麼樣認同一個國家 would be "identifying to the nation", or "national identi*fication*").

Since a few years, while trying to refine my tools, I started to examine the notion of *tropism*, to help me clarify what is precisely not clear in identifications: identifications at the border of consciousness, or evanescent identifications (煞那意識, p. 4, 24, 32). A transtextual analysis of the notion of "tropism" (趨向性, pp. 20-28, 34), based on a French literary pre-war opus has helped me a great deal.

2. Avoiding essentializing the object of study

Acknowledging the uneasy task of defining who a Mainlander is and in whose eyes, as just discussed, is certainly an insufficient precaution to avoid committing the error of essentializing the notion under scrutiny. In fact, when describing any social "reality," an author may be partially imagining that reality by simply coining a word or by merely using it. This is a form of symbolic violence made to the delicate, pluralistic and evolving nature of realities we observe.

In order to escape this fate as much as possible, I have, in previous works on Taiwan's Mainlanders, consistently insisted on presenting the notion as :

- a new, constructed *ethnic category*, and not as an *ethnic group*
- as a label that does not designate a population sharing common traits, but as a label *being seen* by most in Taiwan (including themselves) as qualifying a population sharing some homogeneity
- even though that population is evidently divided into several opinion groups on cardinal issues;
- as a group whose boundaries change with the questions addressed by the researcher (voting behavior, day-to-day life in the Taiwanese society, unification, the image of China, Taiwan's "national" identity," etc.) (Corcuff 2000c & 2011); and as a heterogeneous population adapting constantly to the political environment that shapes and dictates, including through politicization, the various "bottom lines of acceptability" (for Mainlanders) of political or symbolic changes (Corcuff 2011).

Mainlanders' identities have been shown to be constructed, pluralistic, and evolving, as any other. However, this does not necessarily exclude heritage and the passive acceptance of elements of their identity that become such by the very fact that they are lived with or through, without being systematically questioned by individuals who are not necessarily conscious of them. Such elements of their identity can remain for a long time at the very border of what may one day become consciousness - or not. They characterize an *evanescent consciousness.*

Mainlanders, just as any other group within Taiwan's multicultural society, are elements of a continuum (在認同意識及價值觀方面的臺灣多元文化社會裡的連續體, p. 4): differences within the Mainlander group are just as striking as differences distinguishing their group from other groups. In my 1997 study, just 10 years after Lee Teng-hui's rise to power, Mainlanders were already severely divided into several opinion groups, ranging from hardcore pro-unificationists to pro-independence militants.

3. The issue of Mainlanders under Chen Shuibian

In the context of the current reflection on the historical meaning of the presence of this specific population on Taiwan in the period after World War II, I tried to recontextualize their "identity journey" in what may be a "postcolonial" situation in Taiwan. Could their situation be qualified as a *liminal state* between two ideal type identities (被建構的理想類型), the essentialized, idealized and constructed Chinese and Taiwanese identities?

This 2007 research has led to two papers, one that has been published early last month in a collective book called *The Politics of Difference in Taiwan*, and the other, which is actually the first part of my analysis, that will be published this month in another edited volume, *Taiwanese Identity in the 21st Century: domestic, regional and global perspectives.*

In that first paper, called "Taiwan's Mainlanders Under Chen Shuibian. A shift from the Political to the Cultural?", I argue that the "bottom line of acceptable changes" for common Mainlanders (接受改變的底線, p. 3, 5, 18 of the text presented today) has changed from the Lee Teng-hui period to the Chen Shuibian era. Under Lee, the bottom line was about protecting the ideal of China's future unification. Under Chen, it was a new cultural anxiety, over what Mainlanders now perceived as an attempt by the green government to "de-sinicize" Taiwan.

The survey revealed that a growing number of common Mainlanders were now relatively at ease with the evidence of Taiwan's already independent status, and even at odds with China, increasingly considered as another "country" (*guo* in my questionnaire). But at the same time, most were very reluctant to accept new cultural policies that were seen to root out Chinese culture from Taiwan.

In the second part of this work, published under the title "Liminality and Taiwan Tropism in a PostColonial Context: Schemes of National Identification among Taiwan's 'Mainlanders' on the Eve of Kuomintang's Return to Power", I propose to interpret their historical position as a *liminal period*, but *without* the *rites de passage* that are supposed, according to anthropology, to accompany people through their journey from one state in life to another.

I argue that under the "green government" common Mainlanders were able to partially adapt to Taiwan's new policies. Analyzing precisely through different variables where exactly stop their readiness to accept symbolic changes, I consider then as being stuck, at the end of Chen Shuibian's presidency, in an endless liminal state and wonder why: is it because of a lack of support from the Kuomintang?

Reponses to my 2007 questionnaire illustrate the readiness of Mainlanders, after 20 years of accelerated Taiwanization, to accept changes that run against the Kuomintang's pro-China stance. I thus wonder to what extent some in the Nationalist Party have not considered these trends as a serious electoral danger, and whether efforts to reinstate Chinese culture a higher profile in Taipei after Ma Ying-jeou's election as mayor and in Taiwan after his election as president are not an attempt to deconstruct the rites of passage that had been gradually established both by Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shuibian.

4. Political psychology and the question of national identification

What Taiwan's nation builders who reached supreme power, presidents Lee and Chen, tried to do during the 20 years that followed the death of Chiang Ching-kuo in 1988, was to apply to Taiwan a modern, moderate, and inclusive Taiwanese nationalism that had been theorized earlier - in pro-independence circles, in Taiwan and abroad.

In the 1990s and first decade of the twenty-first century, this project now carried out by Lee and Chen, meant abandoning as much as possible the old political myths and symbols of the regime, within the limits of Taiwan's "constitutional deadlock" (憲制僵局, p. 7-12); removing limitations on the identity debate; indigenizing national school curricula; and promoting local cultures and languages such as indigenous ones.

Both Lee and Chen established rites of passage for the Mainlanders: Lee officially proposed that the Mainlanders join the Taiwanese in forming a "new Taiwanese people". Chen decided that 國語 would remain the only official language, while an island-wide series of "reconciliation" conferences were organized by the 文建會.

However, such policies have not been trusted by their main addressees, the mainstream Mainlander population, who remained convinced that this was mere political manipulation. Mainlanders under Chen Shuibian insisted on seeing continuities between the two presidents, and many considered the 20 years of rule by Lee and Chen as similar in terms of a supposed anti-Mainlander, anti-China, and anti-unification policy. Not only did the Mainlanders not consider this form of nationalism to be inclusive, but more importantly, most did not accept as legitimate the idea of a "Taiwanese nation."

Between those whose Chinese consciousness prevailed and Taiwan's nation-builders, there was a basic absence of understanding on the questions of Taiwan's history, status, and belonging or identity, not to mention Taiwan's future: their perceptions were based on two incompatible sets of worldviews. Most of the Mainlanders considered both Lee's and Chen's offers as part of a project of national edification for a country called "Taiwan," a project running against their deepest belief of Taiwan as part of the Chinese nation.

5. Summary of the findings

a) Continuing trends of localization and identification to Taiwan:

Changes in the schemes of national identification among Mainlanders under the presidency of Chen could be summarized this way:

- a decreasing ethnic self-ascription as "Mainlanders";
- a decreasing confidence in "the future";
- a growing perception of China as a hostile party and, for some, as currently a significantly different country;
- Taiwan as a new option for national identification;
- unification with China, as a now debatable option;
- a deep resent of a perceived de-sinicization policy → this is the object of my first paper.

b) Gradual acceptance of Taiwan independence

How do Mainlanders articulate their feeling of belonging to Taiwan and their remaining attachment to an ideal China? Several questions in the 2007 survey related to this articulation were asked, including: "Do you think China should be proud of Taiwan?" "Do you think that China's "one country, two systems" scheme is of any interest to Taiwan?"

To the first question, a majority of the 169 respondents (46.7 percent) were of the opinion that China should be proud of Taiwan, compared to a fifth of the respondents who disagreed (20.1 percent). On the question about China's proposal of "one country, two systems," 9.4 percent thought that "it can help unification," while 61.5 percent agreed that "at least it can bring peaceful unification." However, 22.5 percent, or a fifth, were of the view that "it presents no advantage at all for Taiwan."

The following question was posed, just after the press reported that Ma, who was already preparing for the presidential campaign to be held the following year, had declared that Taiwan's independence was a possible option among others. "Do you accept this idea?" 67 percent do, while only 16 percent rejected the idea (9.5 percent among the young cohort of 20-39).

60 percent of my interviewees considered democracy to be "a sine qua non"; another 80 percent held the view that identity is constructed, can evolve, and is pluralistic; another 67 percent agreed that "Taiwan" is a "sovereign and independent *nation*"; and, as just seen, if Ma Ying-jeou proposed independence, 67 percent said they might accept it; on top of this, again 60 percent acknowledged that they have learnt too little about Taiwanese history at school; and respondents who consider that Kuomintang's history was a politicized distortion are now nearly as numerous as those who do not (about 40% in each case). There are some indications that Mainlanders are apparently ready to accept that *a Taiwan that would preserve its cultural links with China and does not deny its Chinese roots* would be entitled to claim full sovereignty as an independent regime, especially if the move is decided by the Kuomintang.

How can we explain, then, that the Kuomintang has never officially declared Taiwan's independence as one of the different possible options where Taiwan's future is concerned?

On top of an emotional attachment to unification by the KMT leadership, could it have simply to see with the electoral necessity to draw boundaries and build differences with other camps? Opposing TI is a question of boundary drawing: it keeps the Kuomintang united and voters mobilized. A programmatic distinction with the DPP is necessary for electoral purposes. The development of the Mainlanders' "Taiwanese tropism" has thus no chance of receiving encouragement from the Mainlander political elite.

But isn't mobilization of voters, and especially Mainlanders, against an "enemy" camp constructed as longing for independence and the ruin of the nation, equivalent to depriving Mainlanders of the necessary *rites de passage* to accompany them in their identity journey?

c) Limits to Mainlanders' Taiwanization

Soon as the topic becomes politicized, some make a retreat. Democracy may imperative for most, yet significantly more people oppose (42 percent) than accept (27 percent) the idea that "it [would be] an acceptable decision that the government, after twenty years of democratization, gradually erases the traces left over by the political socialization movements of the martial law era." When, using a strong electoral rhetoric, the Kuomintang qualified the decision of Chen's government to change "mainland China" into "China" in school books as a "new form of martial law that imposes a unique point of view," 55 percent of the respondents concurred, suddenly forgetting what martial law had meant for Taiwan in terms of freedom of expression.

It is not surprising, then, that on the central issue of the extent to which it is acceptable for Taiwan to be ruled by Taiwanese for a long period, we also see limits of this Taiwanization, indicating that Mainlanders' Taiwanization is a "tropism" - in other words, a trend, a tension, and not a total acculturation.

To look into the issue, the following question was asked: "Do you think that access to Presidential power by a Taiwanese is a historical necessity or the result of political manipulation?" Striking is that the percentage of those who considered this the result of political maneuvering seems to have dramatically increased over time. In 1997, 60.1 percent of my sample thought that Lee came to power because of this so-called "historical necessity" (歷史洪流下的必然) whereas in 2007, only 29 percent had the same opinion, probably bearing Chen Shuibian in mind (which has probably to see with the conditions of Chen's election in 2000 and reelection in 2004).

It still remains unclear to what extent and how many Mainlanders still considered the Kuomintang, at the end of those 20 years of "Taiwanization by Taiwanese," to be the only legitimate and natural ruler of Taiwan. My feeling is that many, at this moment of history, are still convinced of this, at least among the first and second generations, but perhaps also, surprisingly, among the third generation.

To summarize, I would characterize a new attitude among Mainlanders at the end of Chen's presidency - knowing that this is not the result of a clustering representing a defined percentage of Taiwan's Mainlanders - as follows: "*I am Taiwanese, too, and Taiwan is perhaps indeed my country; the problem is when the Greens speak of it, and the way they speak of it.*"

For sure, the simple addition of different majority answers on several important variables does certainly not define the profile of a typical Mainlander; and we should keep in mind that there is no single issue on which to found a large consensus: any majority opinion on any variable finds its percentage of contradictors, which illustrates the diversity of opinion within this population. As suggested in my doctoral work (Corcuff 2000c: 537-615), there is no Mainlander "community" in terms of political beliefs, and, ultimately, we can say that their values and beliefs are still in a process of evolution. "Mainlanders" are a social reality in Taiwan: their may have a specific identity, but hard to describe; as to their identifications, there are evanescent ones.

6. What is this "Taiwan tropism"?

The identity changes that Mainlanders have experienced in Taiwan are still recent, have run opposite to some of their deepest feelings, and have not been openly supported by the Kuomintang since its former chairman Lee Teng-hui left the party. They have *adapted* in spite of many obstacles. How can we interpret Mainlanders' role or position in the longer frame of Taiwan's recent 400 years of immigration history in a complex geopolitical context? Mainlanders are undoubtedly marked by a tropism "toward" Taiwanese identity. But what is exactly a "tropism"?

This word is originally used in biology to designate the movement - toward or away - of a non-mobile organism, such as a plant, induced by an external, physical, or chemical factor or stimulus, such as a source of light or heat. Can we use this term as a paradigm applicable to social sciences and human groups?

In 1939, French writer Nathalie Sarraute published *Tropismes*, a collection of short stories from the everyday, describing *minor feelings* of *common people*, such as this charming and loving old man, afraid, when he is crossing the street with his grandchild, that an accident *may happen* in case a car suddenly appears. In a 1956 preface to another book, she defined her idea of *tropisms*:

> *The indefinable movements swiftly sliding along the threshold of our consciousness, from which derive our gestures, words, the feelings we demonstrate, that we believe we are experiencing and that it is possible to define. I considered, and still consider now, them as constituting the secret source of our existence.*

Sarraute's hesitation on whether these feelings are definable or not this point illustrates the ambiguity of what (feelings, identifications, opinions) actually makes a Mainlander. These feelings, she says, are situated *at the border of consciousness*, on the verge of being recognized by the subject.

When studying Taiwan's Mainlanders, we cannot but find inspiration in these *tropisms*. According to the findings on several variables in my 1997 and 2007 questionnaires, Taiwan's Mainlanders appear to often navigate between a clear and an unclear consciousness of their identifications. This is because identifications are constructed, evolving, and pluralistic, and because they are, in Taiwan's identity politics and democratic game, often politicized. In a constant exploration of their limits, some seem curious to know what is beyond the line, but as they are just about to become fully

conscious of them, many quickly step back. Perhaps because touching the source of light can burn, too ... or because when someone tells you it burns, then you may feel just like ... it actually burns.

This idea of "Taiwanese tropism" gives to the expression *"Mainlanders' Taiwanization"* the following meaning: it is *the process through which Mainlanders acculturate themselves, consciously and/or unconsciously, by partially adopting manners, linguistic idioms, and ideas that originally were very distinct from their core habits or values once constructed and maintained by the Kuomintang state; manners, idioms, and ideas that were originally those of native Taiwanese. It is a process through which Mainlanders consciously and/or unconsciously recognize Taiwan as a possible object of identification, as an object of sub national, quasi-national, or national status.*

A 政大 student, who in a recent thesis, used my notion of Taiwan tropism and misunderstood it, helped me by her mistake to clarify further the idea : a tropism supposes rooting, and we don't have several tropisms at the same time. In fact, I wondered when I was clarifying my idea during her defense, whether the existence of several of such tropisms at the same time in the same individual is not the definition itself of an identification crisis. Mainlanders who lean toward both Taiwan and China are experiencing two tropisms, and it is hard to manage. Those who have returned to China have probably no strong Taiwan tropism; they are not rooted in Taiwan anymore. They have re-rooted them in China, but that supposed an uprooting after a life spent in Taiwan.

7. Conclusion: Mainlanders' liminal position and creole identity in a unique post-colonial context

We could characterize Mainlanders' Taiwanization as an still enfolding process of "creolization" of a former colonial minority in a chaotic postcolonial context agitated by a phenomenon called "identity politics".

Mainlanders' identity journey is "postcolonial" in the sense that a former minority, elitist, ruling class that came from abroad/outside and was culturally, linguistically, and ethnically close to, yet distinct from, the ruled majority, has lost its hold on the majority and that its worldview has ceased, at least during the period under consideration here (before 2008) to be the mainstream political standard, an original postcolonial situation.

This post-colonial context is unique, in the sense that after 2008, the former colonial power was back in power on the very territory on which it imposed its rule, a unique situation made possible by its relocation in 1949 in the margin it had integrated to its national territory.

And Taiwan's second and third generations of Waishengren could be seen as "creole," a word originally designating locally born, offspring generations of the European settlers in America, in the sense that they were born on the offshore island of Taiwan of Chinese mainland parents, yet still not fully identifying themselves as Taiwanese (Chang Mau-keui 2006).

In what Chang and Simon called the "diasporic identity" of Mainlanders, the question can be asked of *which one of the two territories is off-shore vis-à-vis the other: Taiwan, as an island away from China, or China and the Asian continent, separated from Taiwan, where Mainlanders are now situated, by a sea?*

This moment of creolization that younger Mainlanders experience is one kind of *liminality*, or liminal period between two states in one's life. Between two States, also, perhaps.

My 2007 questionnaire provides on this question some interesting data. I asked "If a majority of Taiwan's population expresses democratically a support for the establishment of Taiwan's independence, and that we do not consider here the possibility of a Chinese reaction, would you support this majority choice?" More Mainlanders supported than opposed (44 again 40, and 50 against 30 for the young cohort). I then reintroduced the China factor in the following question: "If China does not respect this democratic majority choice, and opposes it verbally, but refrains from taking military action for the time being, would you support this majority choice?" The number of Mainlanders who supported dropped a little to 37 percent, which was now less than those who opposed (44 percent). However this is true only for elder Mainlanders, as the younger cohort remains divided into two equivalent groups (of 39 percent). This tends to confirm that the influence of the past socialization is weakening but also that the Chinese menace still plays a role in the Mainlanders' positions, a point that one can easily understand.

It is probable that the Chinese menace plays a cardinal role in Mainlanders' identification, along with usual factors to be taken into consideration to understand national identifications: political beliefs, discourses, socialization. Taiwan situation is a specific case in the study of national identity questions, as we have to add to the analysis this "military" and "geopolitical" this factor shaping national identifications. In the light of an evanescent consciousness, and of a Taiwan tropism that situates identification to Taiwan at the boarder of consciousness, one can wonder whether a mere geopolitical consideration (the fear of China) is not, in Taiwan's case, the ultimate factor shaping national identifications. As every scholar in Taiwan know, the issue of national identity and of the geopolitics of the Taiwan straits influence each other considerably.

Taiwan's case illustrates, for students of national identity, that identifications are easily influenced by perceptions, political debates, geopolitical consideration, fears, and so on. At the same time, these distorting effects can coexist with natural trends of identification with the land on which people are born, grow, love, and die. People are not necessarily conscious of how fragile their own beliefs are and how they can be impacted by so many factors.