Introduction:
Envisioning Taiwan in a
Changing World

Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness;
it *invents* nations where they do not exist.—Ernest Gellner

China, Taiwan, and the Rhetoric of "Nation"

During an interview with a German radio station in July of 1999, Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), Taiwan's first native born, democratically elected president, touched off a political firestorm with his seemingly offhand remark that Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) enjoy a "special state-to-state relationship"—a surprising departure from the intentionally ambiguous terminology in which Taiwan's status has traditionally been shrouded and a statement that many in the international community thought came perilously close to describing Taiwan as an independent nation. Both Beijing and Washington interpreted Lee's words as a rejection of the "one China" formula that has maintained peace in the region for half a century, and they reacted with alarm. The former responded by conducting military exercises in and around the Taiwan Strait, and the latter hurriedly dispatched envoys to both Beijing and Taiwan to try to calm the waters. Eleven days later, Taiwanese officials sought to "clarify" President Lee's description of the relationship between Taiwan and China by expressing their belief that "there is one nation and two countries." As journalists quickly pointed out, these remarks were made in English rather than Chinese.[1] When invited to repeat the statement in Chinese, the government spokesman politely declined, saying, again in English, that "we are still looking for the right words." In Chinese, of course, there is only one term—*guo jia* (國家)—that might be

used to describe Taiwan's undefined status. English, on the other hand, has several different words—*nation*, *state*, *country*,—whose slight gradations of meaning appeal to Taiwanese officials, who have long relied on slippery semantics to describe the island's separate but not quite independent status since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949.

Local, National, Global: Reframing the Terms of Cultural Analysis

Taiwan's quandary over how to define itself and the alarming fallout over President Lee's remarks present a fascinating illustration of just how volatile the idea of "nation" continues to be—even in a world that has increasingly been described as "global" or "postnational." Much of recent cultural criticism—in disciplines ranging from history, sociology, and political science to literary and cinema studies—has focused on the interrogation and demythologizing of a number of fundamental terms of cultural analysis. Foremost among the cultural configurations that are being challenged and reevaluated is the category of nation—long the primary organizing principle for people's economic and political activities as well as the main vessel for their social and cultural identities.[2] Those who prophesy the "withering away of the nation" attribute its decline to several dimensions of geopolitical change that have, in the last several decades, radically reshaped the modern world. These include the collapse of the three-world cosmology and rigid polarities of the Cold War era, the spread of multinational capitalism, a dramatic increase in mass migrations, and the development and proliferation of new electronic media, such as the Internet, which circulate postmodern culture around the globe at ever-increasing speeds. All of these factors—but particularly the new diasporic flows of capital, people, images, and ideas—have, it is argued, undermined traditional boundaries and condemned the idea of nation to irrelevance. One of the surprising hit books of 2001, for example, was *Empire*,[3] a dense and lengthy analysis whose central argument is that political authority and the power to regulate economic and cultural exchange no longer reside in the sovereign nation-states of the imperialist era but are now completely deterritorialized and distributed into hybrid, unpredictable, and ever-changing global networks.[4] The authors envision their new global narrative of empire as a revolutionary and all-encompassing paradigm that supplants all others, "suspends history," and "operates on all registers of the social order." In the book's preface, for instance, the authors state that "The passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial

center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a de-centered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperialist global rainbow."[5] Yet, despite the almost euphoric and emancipatory tone that the authors of *Empire* take in declaring the nation-state dead and gone, the daily realities of global events remind us that even as the world globalizes the concept of nation continues to exert a profound influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples. As the mounting tensions precipitated by identity politics and ethnic and religious fundamentalism in all its varieties make clear, the territorial impulse toward drawing borders and defining an "us" against a "them" remains vigorous. What the proliferation of studies on nation and nationalism over the last four decades has pointed out, however, is that it is a cultural category very much in a state of crisis.[6]

We find ourselves, then, at a fascinating and paradoxical juncture in which two concurrent and conflicting—though not always contradictory—modes of understanding are shaping not only the production but also the study of culture worldwide. On the one hand, there are theories of cultural multiplicity and hybridity, which emphasize the transnational nature of the newly emerging cultural spaces; on the other, there are studies that insist—perhaps in response to the perceived homogenizing power of globalization—on the continued importance of local differences and indigenous popular cultures and seek to reinscribe, if you will, the nation into the critical discourse of globalization.[7] While the critical terrain they inhabit may be tense and contested, these two modes of understanding are not strictly oppositional. Both are posited, as with most recent critical discourse, on a conception of nation not as something that is simply and empirically identifiable—a legally defined political entity; a geographical unity; or a linguistic, ethnic, or religious community—but as something much more nebulous: what Ernest Renan in 1882 called "a spiritual principle" that binds people together with common memories and a shared will, and what Benedict Anderson, in his influential 1983 work, reconceptualized as an "imagined community."[8] The work of Anderson and others marked a significant shift in thinking about the nation because, while acknowledging that its appeal is essentially emotional—a sense of identity that often arises from common experiences in a struggle against invaders or overlords from someplace else, for example—it unveils these communal sentiments as culturally constructed. Hence, the

idea of nations as "natural" communities linked by the "facts" of common blood, language, race, or soil is replaced by the recognition that they are products of the *imagination*—the totality of discursive and representational practices that defines and legitimizes a specific unified community (a republic) and constructs individuals as members of that collective (citizens).[9] As such, nation is seen as thoroughly ideological—not the "natural destiny" of a people but a projection of their collective fears and desires. In response to globalization and as part of a larger trend in postcolonial and postmodernist theory, the most recent critical discourse on nationhood has also moved away from a classical reliance on the traditional dyadic oppositions generated by imperialism—East/West, native/foreign, traditional/modern, past/present—toward a view of nations less categorical than relational, as interconnected structures created and re-created through repeated enunciations of cultural differences between multiple complex and historically specific influences. In the postcolonial/postmodernist understanding of the term, *nation* becomes ever more fluid, an always contingent and unstable discursive surface, and a continuous process of articulating difference. Unlike the retrospective gaze of the "myth of nation," it focuses not only on memories of the past but also on the needs of the present and the desires of the future, more fully recognizing the role of the rhetoric of nation and cultural identity in the ongoing struggles for sociopolitical power.

If the contest for sociopolitical power is intimately tied up with the cultural production and manipulation of nationhood, then there are a number of reasons why modern Taiwan, with its persistent uncertainty over the issue of national identity, presents a particularly provocative site for examining the complex problematics of the local, the national, and the global. It is, after all, an island struggling to define itself and its place in the new world order at a time when categories such as nation and cultural identity are steadily being undermined. As the ongoing tensions with the People's Republic of China have underlined, the very existence of Taiwan poses a fundamental challenge to the idea of a unified Chinese nation—an imagined coherence that has, in any case, never adequately accounted for the internal tensions and myriad linguistic, ideological, and experiential differences that have shaped modern Chinese societies.[10] In addition, the island's political democratization over the last two decades and its focused efforts to integrate itself into new networks of global exchange have led to a sociocultural diversity that conventional conceptions of "Chineseness" can no longer encompass.[11] The capital city of Taipei, for example, has increasingly taken on the contours of a peculiar type of global city. The city itself is a curiously hybrid space, with unpredict-

able juxtapositions of tradition and modernity and a remarkably diverse mix of Asian and Western cultural influences. As in Hong Kong, an influential sector of its population is affluent, educated, and well traveled. The complex cultural heterogeneity of major Asian cities such as Taipei and the breadth and scope of the Chinese diaspora are important to current discussions of culture and globalization because they highlight the changes in global dynamics that have undermined the efficacy of existing categories of cultural analysis, particularly by exposing the limitations of conventional models of the nation.

Postcolonial Global Awareness and the Indigenization (本土化) of Post–Martial Law Taiwan

Taiwan in the twenty-first century is, even to the casual observer, a remarkably different place than it was fifteen or twenty years ago. Today the people of Taiwan enjoy a healthy economy, one of the highest standards of living in Asia, and a diverse array of consumer goods, services, and entertainment whose variety and availability rivals that of any Western industrial nation. The population is relatively well educated and well traveled, contributing to the enrichment of a culture that has become increasingly tolerant of diversity. The island's freewheeling print and electronic media have proliferated in recent years and, like the raucous street demonstrations and boisterous legislative sessions that are now so commonplace, have become public forums for lively and enthusiastic debate about all manner of topics—personal, social, or political. In short, Taiwan is well on its way toward becoming a truly democratic society. What is most astonishing about Taiwan's democratization is how, after so many decades of autocratic and repressive rule in which Taiwanese natives had no political voice, the mainlander minority has, gradually and with relatively little turmoil, transferred control of the island's government and cultural institutions to the Taiwanese majority. Indeed, the process of liberalization that has allowed Taiwan to evolve, in a mere two decades, from severe and authoritarian one-party dictatorship with zero tolerance for political dissent or unorthodox ideas to a vigorous young democracy in which almost anything goes was initiated from within the long-ruling Kuomintang (國民黨), or KMT, regime itself. It was Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) son and successor, Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國), who first set the wheels of reform in motion. Before his death in 1988, Chiang Ching-kuo took several steps toward shifting the balance of power in Taiwan back to the native population. These included selecting Taiwan-born men to serve as his vice president in 1978 and 1984, allowing previously

illegal opposition groups to merge and form the Democratic Progressive Party in 1986, and lifting martial law in 1987. Whatever Chiang's objectives were in initiating these liberalizations, though, it is unlikely that he could have imagined the breadth and depth of change that characterizes today's Taiwan. In all dimensions of life—cultural and social, as well as political—the island is rapidly being "indigenized," looking less and less like the Republic of China and more and more like Taiwan.

Chiang was succeeded, for instance, by a president, Lee Teng-hui, and a premier, Lien Chan (連戰), who are both Taiwanese. Thanks to the institution of direct elections in the early 1990s, the majority of members in the National Assembly and Legislative Yuan—once monopolized by elderly mainlanders—are also native-born islanders. In the years since the lifting of martial law, many former political prisoners jailed by the KMT have been released, and dissidents who went into forced or self-imposed exile have returned to participate in the young democracy. The Nationalists's sacred vision of a unified Republic of China suffered severe blows in 1993, when the objective of "recovering the mainland" was formally abandoned, and again in 1997, when Taiwan's provincial government was dissolved. All of these factors have contributed to the increasingly strong demands for a reassessment of the island's "national" identity, including the possibility of an independent Taiwan. As president, Lee Teng-hui was notably tolerant of pro-independence agitators. While he continued to at least pay lip service to the idea of a reunified China, he never tried to hide his own lack of historical or sentimental attachment to the mainland. Born in 1923 to a Taiwanese rice farmer, Lee is a devout Christian who received an elite education under the Japanese, first at one of the island's best colonial schools and later at Kyoto Imperial University.[12] He also spent several years doing graduate work in agronomy in the United States, receiving a master's degree from Iowa State University, and a doctorate from Cornell. In private and in public, he is fond of emphasizing his cultural hybridity and frequently points out that he did not learn Mandarin until the age of twenty-one and still speaks it with a heavy Taiwanese accent. He also acknowledges that he has always considered the KMT government, which arrived in Taiwan in 1945, to be a foreign regime. As for his official position on Taiwan's status, Lee prefers maintenance of the status quo—"no reunification and no independence"—a deliberately vague strategy that he himself calls "creative ambiguity."[13] He articulated his views most clearly in his 1999 book *The Road to Democracy: Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity*, which demonstrated his determination to carve out and define a space for the island in the new world order.[14] Lee's vision of Taiwan revolves around two central ideas—existence and experience—

which in many ways reflect the current tensions and interplay between globalization and the persistent appeal of the national. Unable to declare Taiwan's independence as a nation-state yet determined to continually articulate and assert its undeniable existence and central importance in the new global community, Lee made it a priority to integrate the island into emergent networks of transnational exchange—whether strengthening economic ties worldwide, entering into joint ventures in manufacturing, or encouraging cultural interaction via student exchange programs, the Internet, and other forms of global communication. While Lee envisions recognition in the United Nations as Taiwan's ultimate goal in its quest for legitimization, he feels that active participation in other international organizations—the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank—are equally vital. As president, he found creative ways to rally support for Taiwan through the use of unorthodox tactics that one analyst has dubbed "dollar diplomacy, vacation diplomacy, and golf diplomacy."[15]

While he was reaching out across borders to ensure Taiwan's participation in global networks, however, Lee was also encouraging the exploration and closer examination of the historical, sociological, and cultural specifics of the Taiwanese experience. Hence, it is not only that the island's affluence and increasing integration into global networks have made Taiwan a more culturally diverse, less sinocentric society, but also that in recent years the island has been redefining itself by deliberately rejecting the mainland Chinese heritage imposed by the KMT in favor of a more local identity.[16] The enthusiastic rediscovery of Taiwan's historical past and indigenous culture—discouraged if not altogether forbidden in the days before reform—can be seen in any bookstore, where shelves are suddenly overflowing with books about all things Taiwanese: history, literature, visual arts, crafts, music, folklore, and politics. Trendy restaurants, teahouses, and pubs not only feature Taiwanese cuisine, but also strive, in their decor, to re-create the ambiance of the island's pre-KMT past. Emblematic of this assertion of Taiwanese identity is the revival of the local dialect. Where it was once considered vulgar to speak Taiwanese, it is now not only acceptable in any social context but even fashionable.[17] Anyone campaigning for public office, for example, must at least try to speak the local dialect.[18]

Lee Teng-hui was succeeded as president in 2000 by Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), another native Taiwanese who is a member of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party. Despite his party's official stance, Chen has not taken the step of declaring Taiwan an independent nation but instead has continued on the course of "creative ambiguity" pursued

by his predecessor,[19] taking incremental but steady steps toward asserting Taiwan's existence and global significance—all with an eye toward ending its diplomatic isolation.[20] Like Lee, he has also sought to nurture a sense of separate Taiwanese identity both within the island and without. Chen's government, for instance, continues to encourage the reexamination of Taiwanese history and has opened up the processes of democratization to include members of the island's population who have long been suppressed and neglected.[21] The government has also taken small but significant steps that signal its determination to assert Taiwan's separateness from China and the KMT legacy. In January of 2002, for instance, it decided to stamp its passports with the phrase "Issued in Taiwan" rather than "Issued in the Republic of China." It is also considering a plan to rename its overseas liaison bureaus—defacto embassies that are called Taipei Economic and Cultural Affairs Offices in deference to Beijing's sensitivities—Taiwan Representative Offices.[22]

Taiwan: The Nation in the Cultural Imaginary

National liberation is essentially an act of culture.
—Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral

Democratization, indigenization, the emergence of a vigorous native Taiwanese consciousness—all these recent changes have emboldened, even compelled, the island's residents to challenge long-held assumptions about their status as a people, about their relationship with China, about their role in determining the island's future, in short, to ask questions about Taiwan's identity as a nation. While political democratization since the martial law era has been dramatic and the "indigenization" of Taiwan has contributed to the surfacing of a newly vital and refreshingly uncensored native consciousness, it is important to understand that these changes are not so much manifestations of a cataclysmic shift in Taiwanese life as the culmination of a decades-long process of social and cultural decolonization—a process in which the island's popular cultural forms have been deeply implicated, particularly in the construction and articulation of a Taiwanese nation. Indeed, many of the issues surrounding Taiwanese identity that are only now being debated in the island's political circles have long found articulation in Taiwanese literature and cinema. This study, therefore, puts aside the question of whether Taiwan is a nation in any legal or political sense in order to focus on the island's cultural polemics, attempting to trace the growth and evolution of a Taiwanese sense of itself as a separate and distinct entity through an examination of

the diverse and multiple ways in which the rhetoric of nation has been produced, manipulated, and transformed in the Taiwanese cultural imagination.[23] At the heart of this investigation are two cultural phenomena—one literary and one cinematic—whose textual and visual representations of the "Taiwan experience" during the past several decades have been critical for the emergence of a uniquely Taiwanese consciousness and whose histories have intersected and engaged the rhetoric of nation in volatile and mutually illuminating ways.[24] The study begins with the literary movement known as *hsiang-t'u* (鄉土), regionalist or nativist literature that first emerged in Taiwan during the late 1960s and flourished in the 1970s. One of the earliest attempts to articulate a distinctly Taiwanese cultural identity, this influential literary movement included native Taiwanese authors such as Wang Chen-ho (王禎和) and Ch'en Ying-chen (陳映真), but its undisputed master, Hwang Chun-ming (黃春明), is the primary focus of analysis.[25] Hwang's *hsiang-t'u* stories are notable not only for the richness and complexity of their depictions of contemporary Taiwanese life but also for their inherently cinematic qualities.[26] It is these qualities that not only put his writing at the center of inspired debates about aesthetic and cultural nationalism among his contemporaries but also gave his works lasting resonance and influence among those who followed, including the filmmakers who were part of the cinematic movement known as Taiwanese New Cinema (臺灣新電影). Emerging in the 1980s, Taiwanese New Cinema put Taiwanese filmmaking on the international map and is thought by many to be the heir to the nativist cultural traditions of hsiang-t'u literature. Many of its participants do indeed have direct links to the literary movement that preceded it, and one of the key works that marked its birth was in fact an anthology film based on three of Hwang Chun-ming's short stories.[27] Hwang's counterpart in Taiwanese New Cinema is the director Hou Hsiao-hsien (候孝賢), a filmmaker who shares Hwang's commitment to capturing the everyday realities of the Taiwanese sociohistorical experience. He has come to represent, both in Taiwan and to the international community, this new direction in Taiwanese filmmaking.[28] It is on Hou's body of work, therefore, that this study focuses.

What unites the literature of Hwang Chun-ming and the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien and makes their works central to any investigation of Taiwanese nationhood is their common fascination with the sociohistorical specificities of the modern Taiwanese experience and their attempts to formulate a sense of Taiwanese cultural identity. Hwang and Hou represent the generations whose formative years coincided with the decades of enormous economic and sociocultural change that Taiwan experienced

following World War II, during which time the island was transformed from a primarily rural agrarian society to a modern urban industrial economy. They and their contemporaries have personally experienced the rewards of this explosive growth: an increase in material wealth, improved standards of living, and Taiwan's entry into the global order as a rising economic power. They have also, however, witnessed the costs: overcrowding, pollution, an increasingly pronounced gap between metropolitan cities and rural villages, a breakdown of traditional social relationships, and manic consumerism precipitated by a deluge of American, European, and Japanese products into the Taiwanese market. Moreover, they have been shaped by the tensions and conflicts that arose between the island's mainlander ruling elite and its native population, imported ideologies and indigenous traditions, and global imperatives and local needs. It is on these experiences of economic, cultural, and political colonialism, therefore, that they draw in their quest for an understanding of the modern Taiwanese experience. Deeply concerned about the future trajectory of the island's development, they turn a critical eye on the past and the present in search of answers to essential questions of culture and identity: What is Taiwan, how did it get here, and where is it likely to go? What are the most urgent problems and challenges it faces today? What does it mean to be Taiwanese now and what might it mean in the future?

The opening chapters of this study aim both to establish a theoretical framework drawn from a broad diversity of critical discourses—including historiography, literary and film criticism, and postcolonial cultural studies—and to articulate points of intersection between current cultural debates and the unique characteristics of Taiwan's sociohistorical development over the last several decades. Beginning with an examination of the specific historical and cultural contexts underlying the emergence of hsiang-t'u literature in the 1960s and 1970s and the phenomenon of Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s, I explore the ideological significance of the themes and aesthetic strategies that set these cultural practices apart from earlier modes of writing and filmmaking in Taiwan. I offer an initial overview of the way these themes and strategies are manifested in Hwang Chun-ming's fiction and Hou Hsiao-hsien's films and examine the varying ways in which the rhetoric of nation is deployed by the critical discourse surrounding the texts. By emphasizing the critical positioning of these texts within the broader context of Taiwanese cultural discourse, I hope to suggest some ways in which the concepts and issues raised by contemporary cultural theory might illuminate the emergence of hsiang-t'u literature and Taiwanese New Cinema at their particular junctures in Taiwan's history. While tracing the ways in which cultural elabora-

tions of nation shift in the transition from hsiang-t'u literature (textual) to Taiwanese New Cinema (visual), I also attempt to be particularly sensitive to the very different circumstances of production, strategies of representation, and ideological and economic imperatives associated with each medium—differences that in turn determine their sometimes similar, often disparate, but always mutually illuminating relationships with the problematics of nation.

Subsequent chapters focus on more detailed analyses of the literary and cinematic texts themselves and are organized around dominant tropes and specific issues often associated with the discourse of nationhood—the treatment of history, the role of language, the question of modernization, and alternative conceptions of identity. By exploring the changing cultural constructions of a Taiwanese nation in hsiang-t'u literature and Taiwanese New Cinema, I hope to highlight a perceptible shift from conceptions of nation and cultural identity based on unitary coherence and authenticity toward alternative models that emphasize multiplicity and fluidity—models that perhaps better reflect the multicultural, transnational consciousness of today's Taiwan, which, with its history of multiple colonizations and its globally mobile population, is very much at the forefront of cultural hybridity. My purpose throughout is not to shoehorn Taiwan into any particular metanarrative of global cultural understanding, which is in any case still in a state of instability and change, but instead to offer it as a site where broader cultural themes—the relation between popular culture and collective identity and tensions between local/global, national/international, identity/difference, and purity/hybridity—are played out in distinct and provocative ways. The problem of how to define and analyze the newly emerging globalized cultural spaces is an ongoing project, and my hope is that the following pages, by revealing how the complexities of Taiwanese literature and film have themselves necessitated a reassessment of conventional assumptions about the local, the national, and the global, will be a relevant contribution.