Book Webinar "Home Is Not Here" & "Home Is Where We Are" delivered by Prof. Wang Gungwu via Zoom on April 21, 2021.

Mr. Ching Hin Anfield Tam

Prof. Wang, Prof. Siu, Prof. Leung, Dr. Wong, ladies and gentlemen, good morning, and welcome to our book webinar, jointly organized by the Government and Laws Committee HKU (GLC), and the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, in collaboration with its research cluster "Delta on the Move."

I am Anfield Tam from GLC, currently a second-year student reading Government and Laws at HKU. May I first take this opportunity to congratulate Prof. Wang on his Distinguished Service Order, conferred recently at the National Day Awards in Singapore.

GLC is the flagship student community of the Bachelor of Social Sciences (Government and Laws) and Bachelor of Laws (double degree) programme at the University of Hong Kong. Home [of] the *Hong Kong Journal of law and Public Affairs*, and *Public Jurist*, GLC promotes robust debates about legal and public policy issues at the nexus of international and domestic levels. GLC also works closely with the Department of Politics and Public Administration and the Faculty of Law to deliver customized mentorship schemes and academic support programmes to GLaws students.

We are immensely honoured to host Prof. Wang Gungwu in reflecting upon his autobiographies, *Home Is Not Here*, and *Home Is Where We Are* in this webinar.

Prof. Wang is currently University Professor at the National University of Singapore and Emeritus Professor at the Australian National University. He also served as Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong from 1986 to 1995. A distinguished historian of China and Southeast Asia, he has authored groundbreaking publications on the Chinese world order and the Chinese diaspora. He was conferred numerous titles and honours, including the International Academic Prize, Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prizes, and a Tang Prize (in technology).

Without further ado, may I invite Prof. Helen Siu, Founding Director and Honorary Professor of HKIHSS to comment on Prof. Wang's long-standing intellectual relations with the Institute. Prof. Siu is currently a Professor of Anthropology and former Chair of the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University. Prof. Siu, please.

Prof. Helen F. Siu

Thank you, Anfield. Good morning, Prof. Wang. Good morning, everyone. This is such an honour for Angela and me to welcome Prof. Wang here to speak about his recent books, The *Home* Series.

Prof. Wang needs no introduction and our HKU community knows him well as a former Vice Chancellor and a frequent visitor. As a long time Honorary Fellow of our Institute, he has offered us both intellectual wisdom and practical advice on issues big and small. We would very much wish to highlight our appreciation here, very briefly.

Several programmatic transformations of the Institute have to do with Prof. Wang's works: first, his early writings on the Chinese diaspora focuses on multi-faceted Chinese-ness — a world beyond geographic China; second, his insistence on putting Eurasia on our analytical map (together with Jack Goody, Janet Abu-Lughod, etc.) that his insistence challenges both Eurocentric and Sino-centric mindsets. It has inspired Angela and me to make inter-Asia connections our major research agenda a decade ago, and to rethink Asia as an empirical reality, as well as a conceptual category.

Prof. Wang and Margaret came to HKU in October 2018 and graced us with his powerful summary of grand Chinese history using the concept of maritime China South. He reorients East-West dichotomy by stressing an interactive north-south perspective in the long view.

This of course becomes the cornerstone for the Institute's project on the Greater Bay Area today. Our Delta on the Move follows the natural and the multicultural ecologies of China, through the borderless dynamic human-scapes to reach Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and Africa.

Today, we look forward to his moving reflection of an epoch of change in particular of his own agency and of Margaret's in a personal journey of almost a century. Together they have navigated the turbulent, multi-ethnic currents across Asia and the globe to forge an identity not based on territory, but on a bonding that is encompassing, loving, truthful, and dignified.

Let me end my comments here with a quote from Prof. Wang's and Margaret's book *Home Is Where We Are*: "Does home have to be a country or city? Or is home this house or that? We have been fortunate. We seem always to have been home."

We thank you, Prof. Wang for agreeing to share your precious experiences with us here today. On to you, Prof. Wang.

Prof. Wang Gungwu

Thank you very much, Helen, for that.

I find it very moving because it reminds me [of] how these two books began — it really began with Margaret — but let me also thank Anfield and his colleagues and students of HKU for inviting me to talk about this. I was pleasantly surprised because I was taken aback when they (the students of political science and on law and practical affairs) suggested that I talk about these two books about home, and, indeed, these are books about home.

It is something that arose because Margaret had, some twenty years ago, written for our children the early story of her life, and because of that — because the children loved it — they began to point to me asking me to do the same. And I eventually gave in and did that, although I didn't know how to do it because I hadn't thought about it and had been doing other things all that time. But it came across quite powerfully to me because I realized that, although I knew quite a lot about my parents, because my mother told me quite a bit about her past, there were so many questions I'd never asked — and this is the same point that Margaret makes, that she had not asked questions of her mother, in particular, and therefore when by the time she wanted to know, it was too late. And therefore, she thought she should put them down, it was a responsibility to put them down to help the children understand where they came from. Similarly, the same question was put to me and I did the same, that was quite some time ago. I did that, for just my early

childhood, which is the basis of the first volume, *Home Is Not Here*, about what it was like to grow up [in the world/way] that I did, but as it turned out, I was persuaded — when people heard about the fact that I had written that — that this is something I should encourage other people to do and get it published — make it at least available to others, to get others to do the same, because we've come to a time where now time is treated very differently: fractions of time in the social media and so on take up the lives of people, and people don't really think about the past very much — and I was persuaded to do that. I give this background, because, why am I talking about home in this stage of my life? But I was persuaded that this was almost something that I had to do.

As it turned out these two volumes are really only about the early years of our lives: the first volume was about the first nineteen years of my life, and the second volume, purely by coincidence, ends where Margaret ends her story — when we were leaving Kuala Lumpur to go to Canberra, [which] gave me what turned out to be the title of the book, *Home Is Where We Are* (and I'll explain that later). But what we suddenly realized, when the two books were written, [was] that I had been talking really about *two* homes ([including] my parents' home for the first nineteen years of my life when I was what may be called a "*huaqiao*" (華僑) — a "Chinese overseas"), and, in a sense, each of those homes [contained] two worlds: **China**, the country of origin, and **Malaya**, where I was brought up, went to university, and where I started to work. So in both books, both the idea of China and idea of Malaya dominate us — it is actually the underlying or the background feature of what we understood — gradually understood — by *home*.

First of all, China is a country of origin — that's normal. Millions of Chinese overseas had that experience, but, for me, most of all, it was a China in my *mind*, because, as it turned out, I was not merely an overseas Chinese. Our little family of my parents and me — I was an only child — we were very different from other overseas Chinese in one sense: my father didn't go out [of China] to settle; he went out to teach for a brief period he thought, just to serve the country in the context of teaching the *huaqiao* Chinese, which was what he was asked to do, and, [he was] very much intending to go home very shortly afterwards. As it turned out, he never really did go home — he went home for a little while; never did go home — and that was a major departure [from what he had planned]. The other thing was that, throughout that time, both my parents talked of going home. It was on the table in almost every conversation we ever had, [in] which we talked about people back in China — back in their own homes: their parents, their family, their hometowns, and what was happening in China at the time, when it was going through a period of civil wars between the Guomindang [國民黨, Kuomintang] and the Communists, and the Japanese invasion from Manchuria, all the way down to the opening of the major war in Shanghai; all that was part of the conversation. So, at home, it was China, all the time, as *home* — some place we were about to return to whenever we could. [We were] delayed by the war … stayed on … kept on being delayed … not possible to go … kept on waiting, but [it was] always a place that we would go back to, so that was one. (Of course, during those nineteen years, we did actually go home — I won't go into that now, but just to let you know.)

The second part of it — *Home II* (the second volume) — was really about Malaya (and I would tell that later): Malaya was constantly on our minds (but, actually, the whole of the 38 years Malaya was there — being brought up in Ipoh in my case; in the case of Margaret, it was Penang and Singapore); [we were] getting used to living in a country which, in a way, [had] nothing to do with China at that time — getting used to it, and growing up in it in environments which were uniquely peculiar to those places that we grew up in.

Let me start with the first volume now.

For my father, I think, uppermost in his mind, China was very much a heritage of *wen* (文) — *wen* meaning language, and, to him, *wen* is the written language, the classical language from which our speech — our vernacular, our *baihua* (白話), and, today, our Putonghua — derives, and that *wen*, the rich written classical Chinese, is a source of what China means and everything that derives from that language — the classical literature, the classical texts of philosophy and religion and politics, statesmanship, administration, economic growth, whatever it was — all derived from these concepts which were developed out of *wen* as the Chinese had it, and [was] what made China so distinctive. That was my father's concept of China. I don't think he ever limited China to a country or just to his own family and hometown.

My mother, on the other hand, was very much grounded on the reality of China being *home* — where family was, hometown was, where all the extended family were together, or nearby, or in touch. That was the source of the sense of home. The country, however, was important too, especially after the fall of the Qing dynasty, and she was born during the end of the Qing dynasty. When she grew up in the Republic, she began to develop the sense of country. I think my father also had a sense of country, but it was secondary to the fact that it was the great traditions arising from [the] Chinese language and civilization that really meant China to him, whereas my mother would put the emphasis upon the country being the protector of the family and all the Chinese people and their heritage — all the things that we, the Chinese, are proud of. So the country was necessary, but, in her conscious mind, the country started with the Republic of China, and she was in that sense, much more openly nationalistic about this country than my father was. So that was what I grew up in: my world at home was all about this China.

But, actually — for reasons which of course I talk about in my book — my father was also a lover of literature; he developed a love for *English* literature, so much so that when he thought of my schooling when I was five years old, he decided to send me to an English school, on the premise that he would teach me the *wen* [to] make sure that I would always be Chinese, and then he would now send me [to] an English school, because it was only temporary (Remember, he was expecting anytime the opportunity would come and [we] would all go back to China?). So he would send me to an English school to have a good start to learn the language of a literature that he loved — he fell in love with English literature as a student at university and took English literature for his degree, and he decided: Why not give this little boy a chance to learn this tool and get it done before [we] go back to China when it'll be much harder to learn? — at least, that, I think, was what was in his mind; my mother actually protested, but they sorted it out somehow, and I was sent to an English school, but the decision turned out to be quite different from what they expected, because they *didn't* go home.

So, from age five, I started schooling in a primary school, until 1941 when the Japanese occupied Malaya — when I stopped schooling altogether: briefly I went to a Chinese school until my father discovered that they were going to introduce more and more Japanese language, and my father decided to take me out of school and he would educate me himself — he would make sure that I would learn my Chinese at home. Of course, during that three and a half years of the Japanese occupation, I did not use any English: no English, did not go to school (English school), did not learn English from anywhere, I didn't speak English at all but entirely Chinese, and — one great thing about the Japanese occupation — it gave me a chance to mix among all the myriads Chinese communities in Ipoh, and they were Hakka, Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, and others, and I began to realize how different we were: because we spoke Mandarin at home, my parents coming from Jiangsu — my mother spoke nothing but Zhenjiang Chinese; my father had at

least a more general Putonghua, but neither of them mastered any of those dialects, whereas I, as a little boy, wandering around and playing with the other kids, learned a little bit of almost all the dialects and actually turned out to be quite happy doing that.

So that's my background: the two worlds were that I went to school in an English school in a Malay state with a Malay sultan, protected by British officials and located in what the British called the British Empire at that point, so there was some kind of imperial background to that. I mean, I was not particularly concerned about it, and nor was my father, because after all I was born in the Dutch Empire in Surabaya in Java; my father himself [and] my mother were born in empires too — Manchu Empire (the Qing Empire) — and so the idea of empire was quite normal. So that was the background.

And then we went to China when the war ended — incidentally, that's also interesting — when the war ended, the question came up again: now there was a chance to go to China, and my parents had to make a decision whether to go straight away, [but] what would they do with me — no schooling for three and a half years, no school certificate of any kind, how could I start in China? With my father's wisdom as a teacher and educator, he decided that he should let me finish the English school education that I [had] started out with, finish it, get a certificate, and hope that that certificate would be recognized by a university in China to allow me to enter into a university, and at first, that was possible because my English would have been good enough, if not better than most Chinese students, and that [might] at least help me over[come] the difficulties with all the things that I lacked in the Chinese education. So, already, I was caught, in a way — neither Chinese educated enough for a modern Chinese university, nor properly English educated, because I lost three and a half years, having not gone to school and really formally I was barely educated in subjects other than English literature, which at least I kept on reading a bit through my father's collection.

I was very fortunate: I got into my father's own university, the National Central in Nanjing at the time, but the China that I got home to turned out to be very, very different from all the things that my parents had been telling me — not their fault, they were telling me hopeful things, preparing me for the China — with a positive and optimistic view of what I would do one day as a good Chinese citizen: serving this new country, especially one that had come out of the Second World War on the side of the victors, so [those were] very hopeful times in many ways, except that we arrived when a new civil war had begun, and at the university, the students had been demonstrating and gotten into big trouble. The government had clamped down and by the time I arrived, so many of the student leaders were in jail and the students community was very quiet and did not openly talk about politics at all. What we did observe, however, was that the civil war was going very badly for the Guomindang government (although the newspaper(s) said otherwise), but even then, we did not know how badly it was. We certainly did not expect the Guomindang government (the Nanjing Government) to collapse within a couple of years.

Well, I enjoyed my university life very well. I got admitted. I took foreign languages — that was about the only department I think I could have qualified in. I enjoyed it all. First, as a first-year student, we all had to take Chinese; we all had to take Chinese history, we even had to take *sanmin zhuyi* (三民主義, the "three principles of the people") to study the politics of the Guomindang, Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) ideas, and so on — all that we took very lightly; nothing was very difficult, not too demanding, and I enjoyed every moment of it as [a] student among my fellow students, except that at the same time I knew that something was going wrong: not only the war was going wrong, the economy was going wrong, the inflation was terrible — I mean, our money was not worth very much, and my parents — my father went and got a small job in a high school attached to the university, and he fell very ill.

The first winter [that] he encountered — he was not a very strong, bouncy man anyway — and he fell very ill, and my mother simply decided that he would not survive another winter — it was actually that bad. So, in the end, *sadly*, they decided they had to go back to Malaya, where it was tropical, warm, and he could then live — this [was] my mother thinking, and made a very [in]formed decision to leave me alone to study in China, but they would go back, not expecting that within months whole political scene was about to change: the collapse of the currency, the attempts to revive it, the economy completely destroyed by middle of 1948, and then the war went wrong, the Communists began to win in Manchuria, getting close to Beijing, finally reaching the Huaihai, the Huai River — not far from Nanjing — and, in that context, the university actually closed down in the middle of my second year — first semester of the second year they decided to *jiesan* (disband) and send us home. At that point, those of us who had no home to go back to in China we just stayed on, but my parents insisted that I returned to join them, and after a lot of to-ing-and-fro-ing, I decided — I was persuaded that, as an only child to older parents who now seemed to have no prospect of coming back to China — I had to return, so I reluctantly left my studies and came back to Malaya, That's the end of my first volume.

Behind it all, my mother, in her late years, wrote her own account of what happened in her life — this was after my father's death — she wrote it down. She said — and this is another point which is very important for me — in her own [tale], "You are so busy, I have no time to talk to you and tell you about what I felt about all this time that we lived outside of China, [so] I thought I'd write it all down for you." And she did that, put it aside, until just before she died she gave it to me, and I read it, [and] I was tremendously moved, which is why I use her account in the first book, because it parallel[s] and in fact it [is a] much more realistic, genuine, authentic picture of what actually happened; I was merely, in a way, remembering what a young child, schoolboy could remember; she was actually talking about what happened as she saw it.

I come to my second volume.

The second volume is different in many ways: it was a new world for me because I had to come back to Ipoh not knowing what my future was going to be. I didn't want to leave the university; I enjoyed being in the university. I didn't know where I would go next: "Where can I continue my studies?" My father, however, was equally anxious and wanted to make sure that I did not lose the chance to go to university--that I followed what was happening in Malaya.

By coincidence, the University of Malaya was formed out of two earlier colleges built by the British in Singapore — the medical college, and an arts and science college, as a teachers' training college, and neither gave degrees. Eventually, on the eve of [the British's] departure (so to speak, as the whole process of post-War decolonization and the empire's going back and leaving all these colonial states behind), [the British] allowed this university to be set up, to train the people who would take over from them and, in the hope that these [people (inaudible) would] be sympathetic to their values and the whole system that they had set up in the colonial states.

My father wasn't terribly concerned about that part of it: he was concerned [about me] continuing my studies. He could not afford to send me abroad; there was no question of that, so if I didn't go to university,

I would have to find some other way of making a living, and he would regret that, and I would, of course, have regretted it.

I won't go into the details now — my books tell you that story — but I did go to the University of Malaya — a brand new university made out of two colleges, and then given, in a way, a kind of mission to train the people to run the country called "Malaya" after the British [left] — and this was on the cards, that the British would leave; the Empire was winding down, so to speak — and the university was meant to do that. But, of course, it was a university with very limited number of students — very small university, in fact — my class of arts students had 60 of us in that first-year entry; 40 science students, 60 arts students, and then there were about 100 medical students, and that was all.

But the point about it all was: this was something new; there was no country called "Malaya"; there were a bunch of Malay states and three colonies that the British had set up called the Strait Settlements of Singapore, Penang, and Melaka (Malacca), and somehow in the mix after the war — in the planning after the war — they had turned all of them into one particular country called the "Malayan Union," and they renamed and restructured it as the Federation of Malaya, but it was not yet independent; it had no sense of being one in fact; it was an *aspiration*, what Benedict Anderson would call an *imagination* — in this case, imagined by the British, but of course supported that much by the people in this area waiting for the British to leave, and waiting to take over from the British when that [would happen], so the university was to perform that job.

So, purely by chance, here [I was], leaving home as a country called China — a country in my mind, rather abstract — coming to a country that [was] not yet there but was *going to be there*; it was a nation to be built, and we were the generation [that] was supposed to build that nation, at least this [was] how the propaganda that was put out at the time made it out to be. That was how we started. So, I, in a way, left a country and found myself, with my father's help, and by the fact that I had actually lived in [this "country"] — this is, again, [by] some curious coincidence that I won't go into — but I was qualified to apply to become a federal citizen of this yet-to-be country, and in that mix of things — it was actually a very confused period — I don't know whether anybody knew what they were doing exactly — but my father thought, "If you want to get to this new university and you are a citizen of China…" (At that time my passport was China, and China was just about to become Communist — in fact, on the eve of the People's Liberation Army marching into Nanjing as it were.) How could he be sure that I'd be acceptable, I was a foreigner? [But] he enabled that — because he found [out] that I could qualify, he asked me to apply; because I thought that was the only way I could get into university, I applied, [and] I got my citizenship, just a few weeks before I actually entered the university as a freshman, and that was a week after the People's Republic of China was openly announced, 1 October, 1949.

So all these momentous events were happening while I was just getting into a second gear into a new university (but starting as a freshman, starting all over again). But what did I want to study? I had nothing except this interest in English literature — and that's how I started: I wanted to go on studying English literature. I knew virtually no history to speak of (never was much interested, neither was my father who was not particularly interested in history): The past was that — the past is not the same as history — the past hangs over all of us, but the study of history as an academic discipline was not in my father's mind, nor mine, when we started. We started in literature, but the question of nation building was very much alive among all the students — my fellow students: Unlike the fellow students in China who were in a very depressed state of being, [looking forward not to a great moment but] to a disastrous end to the Guomindang government, and willing themselves to welcome the new Liberation Armies marching into Nanjing and Shanghai, that was a very, I would say, difficult moment for my fellow students in China.

But in Singapore, almost all the students came from Malaya. All these students from Malaya were in [an] opposite kind of exuberance about this possibility of a new nation, being left in the hands of our generation so to speak — a very exciting moment.

I must confess: I was caught up in it — this was something positive, and it was not something totally unknown to me because, remember, I started with two worlds — one world was this China that my parents had given me; the other world was what my school gave me — an English school, a colonial school that taught in English — didn't teach much — not a great deal of substance in what I learned, but it taught me enough of the language and the mathematics and so on, enough to get around. And then, of course, I lost it for three and a half years. When I came to get the certificate, it was really a rushed affair in which, I would say, I managed to get the certificate without being educated — there was just not enough time to be educated — so my education was extremely patchy.

But whatever it was, it belonged to these two worlds: the *wen* of my father — the classical Chinese that he got me to learn, and this mastery of basic English — to be able to use it as an efficient tool for learning other things. By the time I realized that I really wasn't set to be a literature scholar; the idea of writing literary criticism or being a scholar of English literature didn't really appeal to me. I was interested in the creative side, and I tried that, but, in the end, it didn't really fit my skills or temperament; I wasn't inclined that way.

What drew my attention was the exciting nation-building politics, [and] the need to know the history of what was behind all this: What was the empire that was there, from which we [were] now building new nations? What kind of nation are we going to build out of the kind of empire that the British led? We looked around: there were other empires leaving behind other kinds of states, and they were very, very different from us; the Philippines came out of the Spanish and American background — totally different; Indonesia, taking over the whole of the Dutch empire, becoming one enormous nation — something they never were before, and this [was] incredibly exciting for our neighbors in Indonesia; and above us there was Myanmar, which absolutely rejected the British completely; and the Vietnamese who were already fighting bitterly against the French; and then there were the Cambodians and [Laos], so we looked around, and my goodness, this [was] an extraordinary moment in time for this region.

There were no nations to speak of: maybe Thailand — kind of monarchical — they could claim to be some kind of nation, but it was not yet to be; they too had their nation-building problems. So [that was the circumstances] all of us — all these miscellaneous people who were never one political unit, didn't even share the same language or culture or religion or anything at all, frankly, except having been colonies of Western empires for a long time — found ourselves [in], [and] empire and nation became the dominant feature of our daily lives as students: we were preparing ourselves, as it were, to be responsible citizens once a nation, one day, [would come] about. So my first five/six years living in a hostel was primarily among students for whom this was a major concern, with me, however, deciding that I really didn't want to be a civil servant or a school teacher. I loved the idea of a university; I enjoyed university life so much — the opportunity to learn things in such a free way, I really appreciated. That was the kind of life that I would love to have.

And then came the most dramatic moment in my life — put it that way — I met Margaret.

Now I met Margaret in a literature class — she was a student of literature; she was [inaudible] fond of literature — to her, literature was really wonderful. She was a year junior to me, but we met in the class, and we found we had much in common, but what was remarkable was, while we found much in common and got to know each other, the more we knew each other, the more we realized we were uniquely outsiders in this new sphere — everybody was an outsider to some extent when this new nation was yet to be; nothing there was clear cut, with little miscellaneous structures all trying to renegotiate something that would make themselves come together as a nation.

And there we were, both of us.

In my case, born in Southeast Asia, but somewhere else in the Dutch territory, brought up in a Malay state — not a British colony; instead, a Malay state — looking to China as home, and then being forced to return to this Malay state — about to become a new nation called "Malaya" — and really not belonging to any of those Chinese communities out there: the vast majority of them were either Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, Cantonese, and they all had their own organizations, own networks, own associations, and so on. Whereas we — my parents and I — [were] people from Jiangsu speaking Mandarin and my mother and father never learned any of those dialects — that's how separate they were, in a way, that their obsession with China (back in their country of origin) kept them apart from the peoples below. I was really an outsider not just among the indigenous and local people; I was [an] outsider even among the Chinese community. I didn't belong to any of those major organizations and networks that were predominant among the *huaqiao*.

I found that Margaret was even more so: She was born in Shanghai. Her father, as I discovered, was actually a Taiwanese who was born in Jilong (Keelung, 基隆) in northeastern Taiwan, but studied in Xiamen in Gulangyu, and then went on to Yanjing University (Yenching University, 燕京大學) and became Chinese in that way, whereas her mother came from an obscure town in northwestern Fujian, and [was] not related to any of the other Hokkiens in Southeast Asia. In fact, till now, till this day, I have never met another family from the town called Shaowu (邵武) — it's on the way to Jiangxi in northwestern Fujian.

I didn't know all these things, of course, as I met Margaret, but eventually as we got to know each other, the more we found that we not only had common interest in literature, we not only got fond of each other as human beings, fond of literature, fond of music, shared a lot in common, but in the end we found ourselves both on the edge of all the communities and societies, in her case even more unique, for me, because, in her case, her family broke up, father and mother were separated, father returned to Taiwan, mother remained — an extraordinary woman. There are two women in the world I admire tremendously: my own mother and Margaret's mother, in her case, a woman who brought up five children on her own. As a teacher and did that, and coming from this place called Shaowu.

As we realized why we were, in a strange way, equally excited by the idea that we (could) now be part of a new adventure to build a new nation called "Malaya." This Malaya was new to everybody, but for us — we were on the margins of everything anyway — all of us being on the margins of a yet-to-be country, [which was just] extraordinarily unusual, and something that we really learned to appreciate. So meeting Margaret not only meant that we'd begin [being] attached to one another, we found that we really wanted the same thing: we wanted to see this country called Malaya succeed.

To cut the story short: We went, we studied ([my father had] supported me and my move to history) to be a scholar, to learn, and, as it turned out, when I turned to history, I turned to Chinese history, quite

naturally, because that was really interesting — I wasn't interested in British history; I certainly wasn't interested in British *imperial* history. Whereas I was very curious about the Chinese in Southeast Asia — so many of them — their history, the fact that people like Kang Youwei (康有為) and Sun Yat-sen spent years among these *huaqiao* in Southeast Asia and influenced the way of thinking and influenced the way, in fact, the Nanyang *huaqiao* developed and became patriotic *huaqiao* — *aiguo huaqiao* (愛國華僑) — that so dominated the story by my lifetime. That kind of interest drew me to history of this part of the world.

And when it turned out that I could not do modern history, because by that time the anti-Communist policies of the governments of Malaya and the British behind it, and the fact that the Cold War had been extended to this part of the world meant that anything to do with China — modern and contemporary China — was suspect; we could be Communist agents — fifth column — for the Chinese Communist Party, spying for China, or, being very nationalistic and supporting the Guomindang, who were also sending agents to Southeast Asia to influence the Chinese people and carrying out, as it were, the kind of political civil war between the Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party among the *huaqiao* in Southeast Asia. That was a fierce thing going on throughout the 1950s and 60s.

In that context, the fact that my father had stayed away from all this and not being active in it had in fact passed on to me a certain hesitancy about joining in things which had no direct concern to us and the excitement of building Malaya actually freed us from being locked in into any particular Chinese political dilemmas which the ordinary — most of the overseas Chinese — were faced with, so in a way, gave us certain freedom from that kind of politics into a new venture, a new initiative that excited a whole new generation, all of us, prepared to give up a lot of our lives to make sure that this new nation could succeed one day. In that context, I turned to history and because I couldn't do modern and contemporary Chinese history, I turned to ancient history — that's just a long history by itself and that's eventually how I turned to sinology when I went to London to do my PhD.

By the time I came back, in 1957 — coincidentally, on my way back on our ship back to Singapore — the Federation of Malaya became independent. The country was now legitimate. We, as Malayan citizens were now recognized internationally — this was a country, but it was still very much the early stages, the country was only starting to build a nation; many, many people were very fearful of what would be the outcome because there were different ethnic groups, different kinds of interest and many of the people in the country were involved in the politics outside — the Malays involved in Indonesian politics; Indians had Indian politics; the Chinese, of course, interested in both mainland and Taiwan politics. So in that sort of context, what (were) the chances of building a peaceful and harmonious new nation out of this Malaya? It was really a challenge.

I saw that, however, both — and this is interesting — Margaret, who came from China to Penang and Singapore, had only lived in British colonies — never had anything to do with the Malay state, whereas actually I grew up in a Malay state, so I had a feeling and a certain affection for the nature of Malay society, but when it came to it, when I came back to teach, I asked to teach in the University of Malaya's division in Kuala Lumpur when that was set up, so that I could move to and work in Kuala Lumpur in the heart of this new country called the Federation of Malaya, Margaret was only too happy to join; she was delighted. This — leaving Singapore to come with me to Kuala Lumpur — was part of the same, in a way, vision of our link with this new country. And she joined me; she became a Malayan citizen; she [started to learn (inaudible)] Malay; she prepared herself to eventually become someone in the Malayan Teachers

College to educate the new generation of students, in particular in English language as a working language for official business and legal business.

We were prepared. We committed our lives to the University of Malaya and I taught Chinese history and I continued to work on Chinese history — pre-modern — I taught in fact pre-modern, at least in Chinese terms, but not *jindaishi* (近代史) but *gudaishi* (古代史) from 1500 to 1800, which, in the West, they call it "pre-modern," but in China, if you take out the Opium War [then that would be the (inaudible)] beginning of *jindaishi*; anything before the Opium War was *gudaishi*, then I would still continue to teach *gudaishi* in the University of Malaya.

Coincidentally, all that time, what was happening to the Chinese in Southeast Asia was uppermost in the minds of all the governments, not only in Southeast Asia, but in the United States, in China and, for that matter, other active members of the Cold War that this was a political kind of linkage with the Communist world through the Chinese, which had to be watched and treated with great care and caution. And of course within Malaya itself, there was emergency — the Malayan Communist Party was fighting a desperate war, which the British called "terrorism" — early use of the phrase to call it "terrorism" — and it was a very bitter war.

Although I was a federal citizen by 1949, I was perfectly aware that this was the situation there: It was very clear [that] every Chinese was suspect, and if we showed any interest in contemporary China, we were even more suspect. And so I had learned, as I had learned in Nanjing itself, among my fellow Chinese students, how to keep your head down when the whole government [was] out there looking out for dangerous subversives among the students. In Malaya it was in a way the same; the special branch was keeping an eye on us. Many of my own classmates in University of Malaya went to jail and were detained for anti-British activities of one kind or the other, so it was a time of great tension. It was a mixture — excitement, tension. Ultimately the hope was, out of all this, the British would leave one day; the country would be independent, and we would have a chance to build a nation that we could call our home because we had participated in and helped to build it up. We, as it were, were part of the work in progress, as we saw it at the time.

Margaret shared everything, and because she was willing to make that commitment, our partnership was more than just an ordinary marriage of husband and wife; she was equally committed to the picture of our future in this home associated with a country.

Let me now bring it all together, because this is just our lives, and now my books — two books — tell that story. What did we make of all of this?

It's quite clear that, when the time came, I was still committed to wanting to be a scholar and teacher, because working in a university, teaching at that level, doing research was the most wonderful thing I could imagine doing for the rest of my life, and Margaret supported me in that, and this became, as it were, the focus of a new kind of home — not a home that was tied to a country, but home that could tie to an environment in which there was a freedom to learn. I began to be enamored of that, I was actually completely lost in enjoying those opportunities to learn and to teach, while being, of course, very cautious about what I was teaching, because I was perfectly aware that all of us, particularly those of Chinese descent, like me, and whatever we were teaching were being carefully scrutinized [by] my fellow

colleagues or students — they were out there, making sure that I wouldn't do anything wrong. That was assessed, I was aware of that, and I accepted that. That was part and parcel of this painful process of nation building in the middle of a Cold War, in the middle of ideological bitterness on both sides, totally irreconcilable and willing to turn to violence and so on. It was not at all a pleasant or easy environment to live in. All that, I totally accepted — those were part and parcel of what was given, and it was in the context of what was given that we could do what we could do, whatever we could do to make this country work. And I was prepared to do that, but in my little frame of Chinese history — ancient Chinese history, (which) I taught in the University of Malaya.

All that time, as it turned out my work on Chinese history came to be recognized. I became better known for my work on Chinese history. At the same time, my commitment to Malaya, the years I spent trying to define what this new Malaya and new Malaysia was turning to be. You see even the borders of the country were indeterminate; we were still in the middle of shaping what this country was going to look like, what with the British were leaving behind Sabah and Sarawak, and making sure Singapore would join in the rest of the Federation of Malaya to be larger country called Malaysia — the complicated issues [there's] no need to trouble you here — but to bear in mind at least this was a period of great changes, all internal changes and much tension, including ethnic tensions between the Malays and the Chinese, including ideological tensions among the Chinese themselves — between those who were not Communist and those who were very sympathetic with new PRC China.

All this was happening at the same time. I not only became known as a scholar of Chinese history, it became expected of me that I would know what was happening to China and, indeed, what was happening in China was extraordinary, I mean, while all this was happening, there was the Great Leap Forward, after the Hundred Flowers Blooming, the Great Leap Forward, and then eventually the Cultural Revolution. I was expected to know what was happening. That was impossible; I couldn't know; I didn't know, because in the anti-Communist policies of the time anything to do with these subjects — these books were banned, were not available, none of their sources were available to any of us and we had to make do reading bits and pieces here and there, but really not able to explain or to understand it. That's one side.

On the other side, I was increasingly drawn to the history of the overseas Chinese. I was interested from very early on, but I got into Chinese history, and now I was really drawn, much, much more so, because, if I wanted to identify with the country called Malaya, the Chinese in Malaya and their future — their political future, in particular, where would that come from? — had to rest on its history: what the Chinese contributed to the development of the country, how it related to all the people, how well they fitted in for a long time, until the problems came with British intervention in Malaya, the Malay states' and the Chinese governments and the British and the Chinese conflicts and so on, or these added to the complexities in that relationship, so the study of the overseas Chinese became more and more intense, of intense interest to more and more people, and I began to take that very seriously, and I said, it is my contribution to this formation of a new Malayan state to help to understand the role of the Chinese, the history of the Chinese contributions to the making of this country and to be able to make the Chinese also understand their future role in the country to be.

All these were part and parcel of the kinds of things that were going through my mind: that by contributing to Malayan history, I was also contributing to an understanding of all the Chinese in Southeast Asia. That subject itself was being studied by more and more people, so I would engage in that as well. While all that was happening, this subject became enormous, and I had to, in a way, make a choice: I knew, for one thing, I could not directly contribute to Malayan history to my satisfaction. I did not understand enough the roots of Malay society, the Malay sultanate, the Malay state as such — those riverine states that had

developed over centuries and how they evolved among themselves into the kind of Islamic states that eventually became [the] Indonesia Raya, Malaysia Raya, the large territories involving the Malay peoples — I didn't really belong to that; I knew I could not make a contribution there that would be of any great significance compared to what other people could.

I could make a contribution to the study of the Chinese, but, in comparison, what I was also, at the time, being recognized, was that I knew enough Chinese history to be expected to understand what was the role of [the] relationship between the Chinese past and the Chinese present. How, for example, do you explain what happened after the Great Leap Forward, the Socialist Movement and down to the Cultural Revolution? And when that happened, I was drawn into a lot of other conferences, meetings, and so on, in the midst of the Cold War; for us, it was an unavoidably political subject. I was not interested so much in the politics of it; I was particularly concerned to understand how could Chinese civilization — that heritage of 3,000 years — end up with Mao Zedong's attack on the whole of [the] Chinese tradition to build on this Cultural Revolution [inaudible], ultimately [wanting] to eliminate all signs of the hereditary values that the Chinese were so proud of. How could that be explained?

I was myself so intrigued by that very question, that I really was tremendously tempted to learn more about it. It was in that context, when I was very much involved in university administration, teaching, and really over-stretching myself, I was conscious of the fact that I wasn't doing enough research. I was not learning enough — trying to teach and get things done, while not learning enough to make myself clear and credible in trying to explain what was happening was something that left me with great dissatisfaction; I was totally unsatisfied in the way my life was going. It so happened, coincidentally, I was offered jobs abroad, and funnily enough, all jobs that I was offered was on the study of China — not on the study of Malaysia or Southeast Asia, but on the study of China — and the opportunity to get back to research was, frankly, irresistible.

Margaret was perfectly aware how I was getting very frustrated at my lack of research and the fact that I was not learning enough to satisfy myself, and [she] realized how deeply I was concerned about my own academic future as a scholar, so when these offers came, she seriously considered them. We discussed it, because it involved her: She was committed to Malaya just as much as I was — she had learned her Malay, prepared herself for a career in [the] Malayan Teachers' College, and we had in fact made our decision to build a new home (we built a new house), we had three children — two of them were already in primary school, learning the national language, preparing themselves to go up in this new country called Malaya. But the fact that I was not able to do what I believed I had to do to remain a scholar troubled her almost as much as it troubled me, so when the offers came, she shared my concern: "Maybe we should take up one of those offers, go away for a few years, do your research, and then come back."

On that basis, we made the decision to leave (for my job at [the] University of Malaya, I didn't want to leave, but it was necessary; I had to actually leave it to somebody else), have my research, take my chances, and come back later on. I was prepared to do that; Margaret was prepared to do — that decision that we made together, in fact, had greater implications for *her* career than for mine. It was actually for my career, and was a great sacrifice [on] her career to make that decision with me. That really turned the story round about this question of home: "If home is Malaya, the country (we've got China, and now it's Malaya), if home is a country, if home is this particular university campus that I've enjoyed so many years of working, then why are we going away? Why are we going to do something else?"

All that thinking led us — well, we made the decision: we did leave — to that final conclusion where, at the time when we left our house to get ready to go to Canberra, Margaret turned round to say, "Not to worry. *Home is where we are*," and that was the conclusion part of it.

What else could I draw from it? I want to draw three things from it. Home is where we are is the first; that was obvious.

I had lived a life in which there had been very few choices I could make; most of the choices were made for me; most of the choices were limited choices — the best choice I could get, I could [make]. In the end, the only choice that was totally free was that choice to marry Margaret, and Margaret's choice to take me as her partner. That was the one choice that both of us made *freely*.

In making all those choices we were surrounded by larger political concepts like empire and nation — ending empires and starting nations — and it was a much, much more painful and difficult process than anyone had expected (certainly than I had expected), and Margaret and I felt these complexities, and ultimately it was work-in-progress and was going to go on — it's still going on, to be quite frank.

But in the middle of all that, there was one great discovery that both of us made: no matter what things were like, choice or no choice, you make the most of it, and you look out for — you seek — the little freedoms that you can get, because freedom is never absolute; we can never have enough of it. And it can never be some kind of ideal: that you *must* reach that ideal freedom — either that or nothing. That's simply not practical and not something that we experienced, and it is not — we don't see it as — necessarily a universal thing; it could be, but not necessarily. What was important was, if you can get some freedom, take it. Take whatever freedom you can get, look out for it, find your freedoms, make the most of it, and if you make the most of the freedoms that you can find, you can find you can make a life that can be quite satisfactory. In that context, then, indeed, the conclusion must be: *Home, is wherever you are*.

Thank you.

Mr. Ching Hin Anfield Tam

Thank you, Prof. Wang, for your insightful sharing. The following session will be open question and answer, moderated by Dr. John Wong, convener of the Delta-on-the-Move research cluster of HKIHSS. As reminded previously, if you have any questions for Prof. Wang, please submit them through the Q&A button in Zoom. We'll then read them out during the session so that Prof. Wang can answer them. So, Dr. Wong, please.

Dr. John Wong

Thank you Anfield. We have quite a few questions on *identities* — let's start with that if we may. Let me just choose this one, for its representative line of question: [Prof.] Jean-Pierre Cabestan [Chair Professor of Political Science, HKBU] would like to thank you, Prof. Wang, for the talk you give in Hong Kong to us in Hong Kong at this particular juncture. His question is this:

We all have multiple identities — our children even more so — as globalization is getting more profound, but how can we reconcile this reality, with growing nationalism, particularly in China, where only one identity seems to be accepted and acceptable. In other words, is there still some space for multiple identities and even for different ways of being Chinese?

Prof. Wang Gungwu

That's a very good question and a very difficult one. Obviously, it depends on where you are. If you are in China today, you may be under tremendous pressure from your fellow citizens, by the Chinese government, the Chinese Communist Party, and by your neighbors, and so on, to be nationalistic. In that context, the pressure to be nationalistic, I think, is going very strong, and this is part and parcel of the development that I experienced when I was young — the idea that empires become nations (I could go into that because it's a very big subject). What underlines that is the idea that in the 19th century, a new kind of empire had developed — never known before. Before then, empires were empires of monarchs, all kinds of warriors fighting among themselves (and whoever won [would gain] territorial expansion), including all kinds of peoples in empires. They were monarchic, they were feudal, some of them had religious backgrounds, and so on, but there had never been something called a "national empire."

The national empire was an invention starting from the 18th century. I would say that the people involved were people like [those involved in] the independence of the Dutch from the Spanish Empire — that was the first nation that came out of an empire, but it was not really fully understood, because it was a context of formation of sovereign states under the Treaty of Westphalia (and it's often seen that way, that nations emerged from the Treaty of Westphalia). What is important was, from the emergence of nations, what had been previously feudal empires or commercial empires, like those of the Dutch and the British and the French before, now became national empires: [For example, now the French empire was] seen as [an] empire of the French *people*, the French *citizenry* — the whole French nation were in charge of the empire. Similarity with the British, and, of course, the Dutch had that already, and that was expanded: [it] attracted the Italians when Italians became one country in the 19th century, and the Germans when they got (re)united under Bismarck — they began to also think in terms of national empire. Finally, in Asia, the Japanese were converted by the same idea, that you have a national empire — empire in which the nation extends its territory over vast areas as a nation.

Then you get to develop the idea that *empires come to an end*, when empires ended after the Second World War, because they fought each other to a standstill. All these empires had to go home to their own nation states. French went back to France, British went back to England, and so on, and the idea then: what they were succeeded by were all to-be nations — nation-states, and the post-1945 world order, under the United Nations, was a world of united nations. All nation-states qualify.

Now up to that point, China did not fit in into this concept of empire or nation, because China was never a national empire: it was the Manchu empire — a bunch of Manchus conquered China; before that, the Mongols; there were others, but the relationship between the Manchus and the Mongols and the Chinese were historically rooted in many, many encounters in the past, and, in the end, it was possible for a Manchu to become a Chinese, for a Mongol to decide whether or not to be a Chinese. All these things were left in the open and over the centuries were extremely vague — there was no territorial understanding; there's no idea of sovereignty. None of these things existed.

But the Republic of China under Sun Yat-sen broadened the concept of nationhood, of nationality, and even then, immediately, he found that it was a very tricky one, because, if he pursued that, then, Manchuria was not part of China, Mongolia was not part of China, Tibet, Xinjiang, all these places were not part of China. China would only be *Han* (漢), where the *Han* people were the clear majorities and, that, Sun Yat-sen hesitated, and, you remember, they began to adopt the Manchu term and adapted it to *wuzugonghe* (五族共和) — the "five people's republic": [to include] all of them — all of them are Chinese in a big sort of way, and they got recognized when the Qing passed on its mandate to Yuan Shikai as President of the Republic. The Qing Empire became the Republic of China under Yuan Shikai (袁世凱), and it was internationally recognized, more or less, as a legitimate process.

Now, on that basis, they began a new nationalism, which included all the territories once held by the Qing Empire, and this is why they have problems today — they have problems today, because at that point, Sun Yat-sen's *minzu zhuyi* (民族主義) suddenly became very difficult to define. They found themselves unable to call it "*han minzu*." They had to call it *Zhonghua minzu* (中華民族) — they had to invent a term to cover this area of — finally determined by the Chinese Communist Party to be — 55 nations or 55 nationalities, using the phrase that the Soviet Union had created. Now this has led to tremendous confusion all round, led to the tremendous difficulty that China now faces today, because everybody's asking the question: What is China? — this including scholars in China themselves, and because they ask this very difficult question, I think the regime finds it very necessary to encourage the people to feel nationalistic about the territory that they inherited from the Manchus in 1911 and 1912 that includes the defined territory today — can be modified a little bit on the edges, but the whole area must be included. That means Tibetans, Uyghurs (Turk, or Xinjiang people), Mongol people, and Manchu people, all of them are part of a *Zhonghua minzu* that is yet to be defined.

Now we can see that this painful process has made this nationalism something that is quite new, quite uncontrollable, and extremely difficult for even the leaders in Beijing to define in such a way that everybody understands and accepts, and I have a feeling that this is going to be an ongoing process for a long time more.

Dr. John Wong

Thank you very much. We have a couple of follow-up questions on this issue of identity and overseas Chinese. Let's start with Prof. Chen Zhiwu, our colleague here at the University of Hong Kong, who asks: From your interactions and research, what are the most serious misunderstandings by mainland Chinese about overseas Chinese? Where does the big gap lie between the two sides?

Prof. Wang Gungwu

The misunderstanding — you can call it that, I suppose — really began at the end of the 19th century, under conditions which were very, very different from today. It began when the Manchus themselves found it extremely curious that they were not protecting the Chinese who were — millions of them — living in Southeast Asia, and the British (and the Dutch) could claim that those who were born in British territories (or Dutch territories) were British subjects and not imperial subjects. When that conflict arose, the Qing dynasty found itself almost obliged to take on the responsibility of protecting people who came

from China, and that was the beginning — there's a misunderstanding on the concept of nationality already. The British had a concept of nationality and national empires, so if you're born in a Strait Settlement, in Singapore, for example, in a colony, the British [would] say you're born as a British subject, and, similarly, the Dutch did the same. Now, in that sense, the British had claimed them as their subjects and at that point, no Chinese emperor cared to which these people were going to. And they suddenly realized as they really were negotiating the treaties — the so-called unequal treaties — in Beijing and so on, they found that, while the West were defining very clearly what were the rights of *their* citizens, the Qing wasn't able to do that for their citizens. So they had to redefine it and find ways and means of doing so, so gradually emerged the term "*huaqiao*" — it didn't exist before. It was a brand new term more or less worked out by the end of the 19th century to cover every Chinese born of a Chinese father outside of China [to be] a Chinese citizen, by definition. There was no law saying that; it was just simply a definition. It was made into a law finally in 1909.

You can call it a kind of misunderstanding because this kind of recognition was based on the idea of nationality, whereas the Qing, when they called them *huaqiao*, did not have any concept of nationality. It's simply that you were subjects of the Qing emperor, and then the emperor was obliged to protect you and then started to create consul generals and so on, sent out to Singapore, San Francisco, and elsewhere, to protect those citizens or the subjects of the Qing emperor. Of course the *huaqiao* were delighted, because up to that point they were unprotected. They in fact had to accept whatever was happening wherever they went to. They had no choice; they simply had to adapt themselves to the circumstances.

In the middle of all that, this *huaqiao* became an active component of the revolutionary forces under Sun Yat-sen and his followers, and when they won, that process was taken up in the Republic of China, and they were defined now in Western terms, that all these *huaqiao* [were] citizens/nationals of the Republic of China: they would have Chinese passports, they were recognized by China, and the Qing definition that was created by the declaration — or citizenship law — in 1909 confirmed that, which the Republicans used. After that, *Nanyang huaqiao* was taken to mean: all *Nanyang huaqiao* were patriotic, that they were all the same, they were equally loyal to China, bullied by foreigners, treated badly by foreigners, and the Chinese government must protect them from foreigners, and they made no distinction — if you say you're Chinese, your father is a Chinese, [then it's] automatic. That understanding, which is what they call "*jus sanguinis*" — by blood — they're descendent by blood, becomes the basis.

The idea that all Chinese are the same came out of that: all *Nanyang huaqiao* are *aiguo huaqiao*, and *aiguo huaqiao* all the same, and therefore the country must protect them: if they're *aiguo* (patriotic), how can the *guo* (country) not *ai* (love) them? The *guo* must love them as they love China, and this is a reciprocity, which the Chinese government must accept as a responsibility.

Now on that basis, you can say it is a misunderstanding, because it's not a basis on the people loving China or loving the Chinese government, and the Chinese government loving the Chinese people — it was nothing like that on the ground. It was really a kind of device whereby people could travel, people could do business, people would have advantages, one way or the other. It was a very practical device that everybody around the world used in any case.

But that was the beginning of this misunderstanding. I remember growing up being told that "all *Nanyang huaqiao* are alike." But it was very clear, obvious [to be not the case]; easily, just looking around, you found that the Chinese who grew up, settled there many generations in Thailand and those in the Philippines [were] *totally different*. They [were] not at all like one another — they didn't even talk like each other, they couldn't understand each other, they were using different languages. Those brought up in

Dutch Indonesia or Dutch East Indies and became Indonesian, again, [were] totally different from those in the Philippines and in Thailand, and those in Myanmar, those in Vietnam, all of them were different and was not so difficult to understand — very obvious actually, we all knew that by instinct — so to say *Nanyang huaqiao* are all the same is a misunderstanding. It is true that in every one of these territories, the relative newcomers to these territories who've come directly from China, first or second generation, they had their attachments to their home country or to their hometowns and to their families in China — that attachment is genuine, but they're only a small proportion of the total number of Chinese in Southeast Asia. That gives you an example of how easy [it is] to misunderstand, that the gradations of these different Chinese, different sense of identity, different, in fact, commitment[s], different loyalties — those [that] are totally loyal, totally committed to the countries of their adoption are plentiful. In fact, today, I would say, the vast majority [of *huaqiao*] in Southeast Asia are actually loyal to their own countries.

Dr. John Wong

We have a question from Cheong Weng-Kit, who actually would like to think more about the contemporary situation on the same topic. His question is this: Your life experience of finding new identity in Malaya occurred in the midst of open nation-building that gave space for external forces and energy to find a place to live and build a future.

But, today, as many nation states are fragmenting, people are less satisfied with macro nation-building and their futures in a nation. Many now are drawn to a more micro construction in retreating to ethnic or religious identities, which pre-existed before the modern nation-state. How can those who strive for a more unifying and cosmopolitan outlook live and work in such [a] context to work for [the] greater good of a country, but avoid narrow nationalist ideologies that weaponize ethnic chauvinism or religious fundamentalism?

Prof. Wang Gungwu

This comes back to my point about nation-building being work in progress: I was referring to the new nations because they weren't nations in the past, so, of course, it was clearly work in progress. But what has been described early on by your questioner, and I think is absolutely right, nation building in every nation is being challenged today, and this is because of globalization. Globalization has created a new kind of pressure on nations, which are nations of the past — of the 19th century, created in Europe, and [have] never [been seen] before, never thought of before. When you think of those new nations created out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or out of the end of the Soviet Union: they are just beginning; they are themselves also [in the midst of] nation building, so the Europeans are no better off in that sense, and they're based on a narrow [set of] definitions of what a nation is: same language, same religion, same shared history… that's the kind of narrow definition — [a] most narrow one.

But globalization has now enabled people to move fairly freely; modern science and communication has really opened up the world to all sorts of differences and so on. All these ethnic groups that were there before [and] willing to accept narrow definitions of nationhood now say: well, [we] have [our] own identities, because [we] can link up with a similar ethnic group somewhere else through the communication facilities and technologies now available. So we are now into new challenges which actually make the question of nation building open to, I would say, being called "work in progress" again

— "work in progress" now not towards becoming a nation, [but] to ensure that what [has already become] a nation doesn't break up. These are just as difficult questions.

Who [would've] expected there would be such a big battle over Catalonia in Spain? Over the question of Scotland and Britain? All these things, I think, very few people anticipated; in the 19th century, [they] would not have occurred to people. People thought the British were a nation, the Spanish were a nation and so on, and yet, in my own lifetime, when I saw how the Basques fought for their independence in Spain — how bitterly they fought! How many people were actually killed in the process of doing that? Catalan (Catalonia), of course, is even more obvious, and [is] still going on today.

As for Asia, we haven't even begun in some of these countries; they haven't even started to make their nation. They're still in the middle of building it and already the whole world is now being challenged by new definitions of ethnicity and identities, which now leave the question of nation building in Asia even more open and more difficult than ever before, so I would say the whole subject of nations coming out of empires is being totally re-examined, and will have to be re-shaped in order to make something peaceful and harmonious out of them in the future.

Dr. John Wong

Thank you.

We have a question that is a little bit more conceptual, from Shelly Chan, who asks: Have you thought of being "home" or not could be a temporal idea, rather than just a spatial one, perhaps as a device to integrate different times, such as to bring together and make sense of the changing rhythms in the life of one's self, one's family, one's career, and nation or an empire? If these times keep changing or clashing, should we still continue to expect that home remains one and the same?

Prof. Wang Gungwu

Well, I hate to say so, but in my own lifetime I've done just that — I mean, I make no secret of it: those two volumes just describe the first 38 years of my life. But I am now 90 years old, so there's another 60 years after that, I have to say, I have been very mobile; I have followed my own career, depending on the kind of work that I do, and when I'm asked to do things I believe I can do, and I feel I ought to do, I have moved without hesitation, because this is how [I am]. You can say this is because all that time, things [have been] changing; you have actually choices to make now. It is possible to make choices.

I said [in] the first half of my life I had very few choices; most of the things were set for me. I had no choice and just had to make the most of what I was given. But since then, once you reached a certain point and understood, as I understood with Margaret, that "home is where we are," that actually *freed* me. It actually liberated me from the sense that "home has to be a country, a house, or an identified place," and — you might say, as your questioner asked — became more temporal and not spatial, because: that freedom to actually choose to be where you think you can be most useful or be most welcome, and where you can enjoy the freedoms that you expect out of life. When you can enjoy those freedoms there better than somewhere else, you make a choice. You *can* actually make some choices —not all the time, some people are more fortunate than others. I have to say, I have been extremely fortunate; both Margaret and

I had a very, very good set of choices that we could make. We made them — most of them without any regrets whatsoever — and those choices were definitely temporal, and not spatial.

Dr. John Wong

We have a couple of questions about education and more of a cosmopolitan setting: S. Poon asks about your interest in English literature, Dr. Chong Wu Ling from University of Malaya asks about Chinese medium of instruction. Perhaps I can try to synthesize it a little bit as this following question:

You can see that linguistic vibrancy is quite obvious in your account of experience, even though you seldom use any non-English words in the *Home* series. As you explain your father's notion of *wen* was one written in classical Chinese, but the audio scene that you depict in the books, that was quite a different story. Especially in *Home Is Not Here*, one can hear the symphony of English, Malaya, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, and other Chinese languages. Your story makes me pause and consider the situation in cosmopolitan Hong Kong and Singapore, where language variation seems a little bit too harmonized or even muffled. Obviously, your own experience stems from your own impressive language capacity and your parents' foresight of the evolving cultural and linguistic scene. What advice would you offer to young people, especially those of Chinese heritage or young parents living in global hubs?

Prof. Wang Gungwu

I'm reminded of the fact that, when I was at HKU, we had a big debate about teaching in English or teaching in Chinese. At that point, actually, Chinese University had started to teach in Chinese — in Cantonese to be quite exact — and some of my colleagues and students raised the question of whether to use Chinese in class in HKU. I was open, but I was simply pointing out the reality was that if we taught in Cantonese, it would be limited to Hong Kong — a lot of things cannot be done beyond Hong Kong, even when you're choosing your staff or students, you are limited by the Cantonese that you use to teach. And if you use Mandarin, then certain considerations will follow.

The fact that Hong Kong was operating in an international global kind of environment and use of English was already established — the one thing that makes HKU and the universities in Hong Kong different from those in China and become useful to those in China — was that you could teach in English, and, you know, the extraordinary thing was when I was Vice Chancellor, [during] my several trips to China, I asked the Chinese many, many times, "Do you expect the universities to teach in Chinese?" They didn't. They were quite content to say, "Go on doing that [(teaching in English)] because you're actually doing something we can't do in China. And you can be more useful to us and in a different sort of way."

When you look at the quality of the students who went to some of the best universities in China, they were extraordinarily brilliant students. They were drawn from a reservoir of talent so much bigger than Hong Kong. If we all taught in, say, the Chinese used in China, we [would not be able to] compete; we [would] not have any advantage over the students in China, so I was able to talk to the students' union at that time, [who] completely supported us on this: simply, that the fact that you have your capacity to do it in English, and you have enough knowledge (you keep up your knowledge of Chinese)… [the fact that] we can do that in English gives you at least that little advantage over those very brilliant students in China when it

comes to the world of knowledge and the world of competitive technologies and methodologies and so on, so I thought actually the students completely accepted that.

There was no pressure — I was open — but there was no pressure on the university to switch to Chinese. And the students — even when some of them were struggling in English — were prepared to do it then (that way to keep up and make it possible for them to improve their English than to give it up altogether), and I thought that was extraordinary. So that was a very rational decision made at the time, and I think this is even more true today.

I mean, personally, frankly, I have nothing against Cantonese; I'm very fond of the language. I loved it, but the fact is that if you're going to switch to Cantonese as being the language of Hong Kong, you're actually cutting yourself off from even more parts of the world. The advantage of having to be both strong in English and the Chinese of China today opens up a world that is absolutely incredible, incredibly broad, more so than at any time in history, and this is an extraordinary moment with this kind of bilingualism — we didn't ask for it, we didn't create it, but it is there, and if you don't take advantage of what is there for you (and you already have that advantage — you already have enough English and enough Chinese to build on) to make yourself absolutely indispensable in a way, in the kind of domination of bilingualism in the world, I think you're throwing away something that is really valuable. I would hate to see that happen.

Dr. John Wong

Great. Well, thanks very much. We have quite a few more questions in the pipeline, but we have kept you beyond the scheduled time, but in the interest of time, let's make this one the last one, and I'll be sure to pass on the rest to you via email. The last question comes from our colleague here at HKU, Bernadette Tsui, who says: You know Hong Kong well enough with an intimate historical perspective. What word of advice would you give to the people, or, even more specifically, to the University of Hong Kong?

Prof. Wang Gungwu

That's a difficult one. HKU has changed so much from the time when I left 24 years ago, and how much [things] can change today! The rapidity of change today is something that is really quite different from what I've experienced. When I was young, things moved far more slowly, and I could always keep up with it. Today, I find it extremely difficult. The older I get, the harder it is to keep up, and keeping up with Hong Kong is extremely difficult, and it's not only Hong Kong; it's the way the world has changed, in particular, to be honest, the biggest change is China. The economic development of China in the last 20 years has been absolutely unprecedented, and it has caused ruptures everywhere, not least to the United States, of all people — they were the most powerful and the richest country in the world. That they themselves should be troubled by this is a reminder to us that this is something unknown, never before. So in that context, HKU has to find a place.

I cannot predict what is going to happen. All I would say is this — and I come back to something that I myself [accepted] — it's a kind of self discovery — as I grew up over time: that there's no such thing as absolute freedom, and I accept it. Every day, our lives are guided by a lot of rules and so on, some spoken, some unspoken, some written down, some accompanied by severe punishments, some are not, some are really lax, but the fact is that we live in [a world] full of rules, spoken or otherwise, around us, and we live

by them and we accept them, but in the midst of all that there are freedoms to find. You can seek little freedoms. You can find little freedoms and those freedoms are not as little as you think. There actually are a lot of freedoms around if you know where to find them, but if you expect absolute freedom, if you expect that the ideals of freedom must be hundred percent, or more or less move towards being hundred percent, you will always be frustrated, and it will never happen.

That's one of the things — I hate to say, you might say it's a limitation. It's not a limitation by any particular person; I think it's a limitation by the very fact that we live in societies, and we have to concede. Other people [have] rights; [it's] not only your own rights. You cannot just demand your own freedom for yourself. You have to recognize and respect other people's need for freedom, and out of all that, you are looking for the little freedoms that enable you to achieve what you want to achieve, and you'd be surprised how much you can find without some loud pronouncement of absolute freedom or absolute liberty, and expect that someone will give it to you.

It seems to me that is something that is actually a product of the Enlightenment. It's one of the things we inherited from the Enlightenment, which, of course, was an ideal, but as ideals go, it's almost utopian — and most ideals are utopian, frankly. And that is one of the lessons I learned in my life: ideals are wonderful to keep you stimulated and keep you excited and so on, but in real life, nothing is absolute, and relativity, for all its faults (and one can be criticized for being a relativist and [having] no clear principles and so on, you find that of course you're always subject to being criticized as such): in reality, I would say, all of us are actually relativist to a greater or lesser extent. The sooner you accept that as a given and do everything you can to get as much of those little freedoms wherever you can find it, and make use of those little freedoms to bring satisfaction to your career and life and work, the better.

Dr. John Wong

Thank you very much, thanks for your wonderful response to the various questions, and thank you to the audience for your enthusiastic participation. Let's conclude the Q&A session here, and I'll hand it back to you, Anfield.

Mr. Ching Hin Anfield Tam

Yes, thank you, Dr. Wong and also Prof. Wang for the question and answer session. Before we officially conclude our webinar, may I invite Prof. Leung, the Director of HKIHSS, to say a few words as concluding remarks?

Prof. Angela Ki Che Leung

Thank you Anfield. On behalf of the Institute, I thank Prof. Wang for sharing his fascinating personal story so intimately intertwined with modern Chinese history and the colonial and post-colonial history of Southeast Asia, and for the very precious lessons that we can learn from his experience. I trust that everybody will agree with me that it has been a real feast for everyone today.

Helen and I and the Institute would also take this opportunity to pay special homage to Margaret, Prof. Wang's lifetime companion and co-author of *Home Is Where We Are*. For those of us who have known Margaret and there are many in the HKU community, Margaret's sharp mind, wisdom, cheerfulness, and humor will be dearly remembered for a long time to come.

In the book *Home Is Where We Are*, if you have read it, Margaret has shown her admirable ability of making comfortable home just anywhere, like Prof. Wang has just said: he has been a very lucky man.

We thank you again, Prof. Wang, for spending time with us. We wish you good health, and look forward to seeing you again, and probably reading your next book before too long. Thank you!

Prof. Wang Gungwu

Thank you all very much for the opportunity. Thank you.

Mr. Ching Hin Anfield Tam

On behalf of the Government and Laws Committee, I would also take this opportunity to thank HKIHSS, Prof. Siu, Prof. Leung, and Dr. Wong, and also the audience for your kind assistance and participation in organizing this book webinar, and making this book webinar a success. Last but not least, [I] wish you all the very best health during the pandemic.

Prof. Wang Gungwu

And thank you Anfield for inviting me in the first place. Thank you.

Mr. Ching Hin Anfield Tam

I'm extremely delighted. Thank you so much.