Prefatory remarks: I thank the organizers of the 5th World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention for this opportunity to consider the very idea of 'the global Chinese community'. In particular, I seek to understand the reasons behind the new 'globalization' of Chineseness. I shall also raise some questions about the 'global Chinese community' in relation to the national environments that Chinese find themselves and the need for a larger sense of global humanity as the world approaches the 21st century.

From Huaqiao to 'the Global Chinese Community'

In the second half of the 20th century, the long-standing term huaqiao (overseas Chinese or Chinese sojourners) has given way to the term haiwai huaren (Chinese overseas). With settlement and the attainment of citizenship and permanent residence status in other lands, huayi or Chinese descendants can no longer be regarded as huaqiao. Indeed, even the term haiwai huaren has been criticized by some scholars as perpetuating a 'China-centric' standpoint in the study of Chinese communities in different parts of the world.

The term 'diaspora' - meaning 'dispersal' in Greek - is also now used to refer to the collectivity of Chinese outside China, spanning not just East and Southeast Asia but also the Americas, Australia and Oceania, Europe, and the Indian Ocean region and Africa. Although it has become common to refer to different diasporas (Indian, African etc. or even to religious communities, e.g. the Sikhs.) in the world today, the term was historically applied to Jewish communities dispersed among the Gentiles and, in contemporary times, outside Israel. In the Jewish case, there is an idea of an original or spiritual homeland, which continues to serve as a focus of collective memory.

While the notion of 'diaspora' covers the global reach of local Chinese communities outside China, there has now developed among some circles the concept of 'the global Chinese community'. Whether or not intended by people who use this term, the idea is that of a single overarching community, which encompasses Chinese all over the world, including in China. This is indicative of what I would call the 'globalization of Chineseness' or the rise of 'globalized Chineseness': a sense among some Chinese across the globe that they can and even should identify - and, more than that, actively 'network' - with each other on the basis of common ethnicity and for some common purpose. In this conception, all persons of Chinese descent are members of 'the global Chinese community'.

The New 'Global Chinese Community'? by Dr Kwok Kian-Woon, Sociologist

Melbourne - October 7, 1999

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community' and can potentially find common cause with each other.

The globalization of Chineseness is a phenomenon that has developed most dramatically in the last decade of the 20th century. Among the reasons for the rise of globalized Chineseness is the economic and political rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the global stage by the early 1990s, spurred by domestic open-door, pro-market reforms and by international recognition as a geopolitical power. To be sure, the rise of the PRC followed the rise of the East Asian and Southeast Asian region in the global capitalist economy, led by Japan and the so-called 'tiger' or 'dragon' newly industrializing economies (NIEs) of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In addition, the successes of Chinese overseas in business and in professional fields had been prominently highlighted in the global media.

The early 1990s was thus seen by many as ushering in the 'Pacific Century', pushed by the 'Asian Miracle' and with the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, the economic integration of the South China coastal region with Hong Kong and Taiwan (and also Macao) engendered the concept of 'Greater China'. But the boundaries of 'Greater China' were not readily fixed. According to The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas, 'An idea more grandiose is that of Greater China as a transnational "Chinese business circle" embracing all "ethnic Chinese," both within and outside China.' And it is quickly added: 'This raises fears of Chinese expansionism and evokes suspicions about the loyalties of overseas Chinese towards their countries of residence'.

Thus, I wish to ask at the outset: is the more recent idea of 'the global Chinese community' just as grandiose as that of a Greater China consisting of transnational Chinese business networks, and does it raise similar fears and suspicions of Chinese in the countries in which they have settled?

Transnational Networks and National Loyalties

Indeed, the biannual World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention, which was first held in Singapore in August 1991, is itself a manifestation of the globalization of Chineseness. It also suggests that one of the driving forces behind this new phenomenon is the greater push for economic networking among entrepreneurs and professionals across national boundaries and in a highly competitive global economy, increasingly integrated by new telecommunications and transportation technologies. Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Senior Minister of Singapore, is one of the strongest voices behind this push. In his keynote address at the 2nd Convention (1993, Hong Kong), he noted that given the rate of migration from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China into the major cities of the Pacific, North America and Europe, 'the potential for economic networking is considerable'. Borrowing from Joel Kotkin's idea of racial or ethnic tribes which form 'transnational economic networks' through advanced means of communications, Mr Lee also called for more efficient and systematic networking: 'Networking is the natural thing to do. There is no need to be apologetic about wanting to maximize benefits through each other's contacts and access to opportunities'.
At the same time, Mr Lee cautioned that 'overseas ethnic Chinese have to guard against Chinese chauvinism as they become successful'. At the beginning of his speech, Mr Lee had said: 'People feel a natural empathy for those who share their physical attributes. This sense of closeness is reinforced when they also share basic culture and language. It makes for easy rapport and trust which is the foundation for all business relations.' But towards the end of his speech, Mr Lee says:

To believe that we have more in common with one another and with the country of our ancestors than we do with our fellow citizens in our respective new homes is unrealistic? It will also cause misunderstanding and friction with our fellow citizens who are not ethnic Chinese, even in countries where ethnic Chinese form the majority of the population as in Singapore. After two or three generations away from China, we have become rooted in the country of our birth. Our stakes are in our home countries, not China where our ancestors come from.

From this perspective, therefore, the idea of 'the global Chinese community' should not necessarily detract from the reality that local Chinese communities are found within national contexts. In many instances, the Chinese overseas and their descendants see themselves - and are seen by others - as belonging to the place that they have settled in. This sense of belonging may be ambivalent but it is the result of a conscious choice. To illustrate, consider the poem 'My Country and My People' written by Singaporean Lee Tzu Pheng. In the opening stanza, she writes:

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My country and my people
are neither here nor there, nor
in the comfort of my preferences,
if I could even choose.
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At an early stage, immigrants and their children do experience 'being neither here nor there'. And although identity is not simply a matter of preference, the poet takes a personal stand:

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My country and my people
I never understood.
I grew up in China's mighty shadow,
with my gentle brown-skinned neighbours.
I claim citizenship in your recognition of our kind.
My people, and my country,
are you, and you my home
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In the end, it is identification with a people that precedes identification with a country or a state. And the claim of citizenship as a more than a purely formal claim is made only with the recognition and acceptance by non-Chinese in the host society. A fine statement of this expressed is by Usman Awang, the Malaysian poet, in 'Chinese Neighbour's Child' (Anak Jiran Tionghua, 1962), especially
in the stanza that follows a tender description of two boys, Chinese and Malay, at play:

A Chinese child born here
on this green earth amidst rubber and rice fields
he can tell whoever asks
this is his land and his mother's forever

The two poems that I have quoted from were written in the 1960s. Three decades after the publication of 'My Country and My People', Lee Tzu Pheng spoke of this 'early and, in many ways, anguished effort' and 'the deep need to write this poem, the struggle to articulate a real, meaningful connection with a people whose identity and destiny I had to call mine'. In subsequent years, Usman Awang continued to articulate the struggles of the times in independent Malaysia. In 'My Friend', a dedication to Dr Rajakumar, his physician and friend, Usman wrote:

My friend
A free people that we dream of
Is still far from the real
My anger turns to bitterness
When we are divided
Space becomes enormous
I am called 'bumiputera' and you aren't.

Usman wrote against the backdrop of both the New Economic Policy but also had in mind the youthful aspirations of building a new multicultural nation with all citizens, as the last line goes, 'known by a single name / Malaysians'. In spite of affirmative action policies favoring Malays, the majority of settled Chinese do evidently continue to make Malaysia their home and participate in the economic, social, and political life of their nation, even as it has been going through a difficult period of transition since the onset of what we now call the Asian crisis. The local and national sentiments that such Chinese have for their people and country, therefore, persist in spite of the globalization of Chineseness.

'Virtual Chineseness': Identity in the Electronic Age

Indeed, the Asian crisis started out as a currency or financial crisis in late 1997 but, as time went by, what unfolded was also a political and social crisis, and nowhere was this more dramatically seen than in the case of Indonesia. This is not the place to analyze the many significant aspects of the traumatic transformation that the country and its peoples are going through. I say 'peoples' intentionally because the very notion of a single Indonesian nation or people has been put into question as never before.

However, from the standpoint of the study of Chinese overseas, the crisis in Indonesia has raised
aned the question of the Chinese as a minority in a land that many of their ancestors had settled in for generations. In referring to the 'tragedy that befell those of Chinese descent in Indonesia in May 1998', Professor Wang Gungwu has recently (November 1998) highlighted the fact that, unlike past occurrences, 'all the Chinese victims were citizens of Indonesia' and 'some of their wives and daughters were raped'. Professor Wang also referred to Pramoedya Ananta Toer's brief speech in October 1998 on the occasion of the relaunch of the latter's 1960 book Hoakiau di Indonesia, a collection of articles on Dutch anti-Chinese policies in response to Sukarno's 1959 'formal policy of racism' against Chinese. With reference to the May 1998 riots, Pramoedya concluded his speech with a call to end such 'crimes against humanity'.

Pramoedya's has been a small and lone voice in a vast and dark forest of silence and forgetting over decades. However, what I wish to highlight here is the contrast between the relative silence worldwide and in Indonesia concerning the events of 1965 and the global attention that has been given to the events of May 1998. In particular, I refer to the apparently massive expression of outrage by people of Chinese descent through the medium of the Internet. In brief, the mobilization of the expression of such outrage in cyberspace was started by a few individuals living thousands of miles from each other, but it has since appeared to have united thousands of Chinese across the globe under the banner of a common ethnicity. According to newspaper reports in July and August 1998, these individuals were Mr Joe Tan of Wellington, New Zealand (a chemist who had emigrated from Malaysia 20 years ago) and Mr Daniel Tse of Canada (an engineer who had emigrated from Hong Kong 18 years ago). Together with other Chinese 'netizens', including Mr Edward Liu, a Chinese-American lawyer based in San Francisco and Wan Looi, a Chinese-Malaysian computer professional in Silicon Valley, they established the 'World Huaren Federation', an on-line forum for Chinese around the world. In its website (www.huaren.org) editorial statement of June 14, 1998, the organizers wrote: 'In this moment of darkness in Indonesia, our inter-networking has hopefully provided a flicker of light to ease the pain and suffering of those victimized and savaged by the brutalization of our huaren brothers and sisters. It is now time to organize and develop concrete plans of action, both inside and outside Indonesia, and amongst global Huarens'.

'Global huaren'. I am not sure if this new term will replace haiwai huaren or 'diaspora Chinese', but its use and spread in cyberspace is a newer manifestation of the globalization of Chineseness, adding to the notion of the 'global Chinese community' that has been seen in the economic networking activities among Chinese entrepreneurs. In this newer manifestation, the community is a much more 'virtual' one, and its members appear to be highly educated, more 'computer-literate and 'Internet-savvy', professionals. Moreover, the majority reside in advanced Western countries, many having re-migrated from other countries. Their 'internetworking' is directed not at mutually maximizing economic benefits but forging a sense of solidarity in response to the mistreatment of Chinese as a minority and serving as a source of information on the Chinese diaspora.

A fuller study of this latest - and possibly short-lived - phenomenon has to to be done. Suffice it
here to highlight a few points before I conclude. The Internet is one of the major developments in
global communications technology in recent decades, and it has enabled quick mobilization of
netizens across national boundaries, and the medium cannot be effectively policed by any national
government. For example, Mr Joe Tan has estimated that the World Huaren Federation will have a
membership of 10 million within a few years, especially with the Chinese version of its webpage.
By the same token, the medium has its own unique weaknesses, as seen in, for example, the posting
of fake photographs of the May atrocities, thus affecting the credibility of the cause and posing the
danger of a backlash for the Chinese in Indonesia.

More fundamentally, the Huaren website is an indication of what I call 'virtual Chineseness': the
assertion, display and mobilization of ethnic Chinese identity in the electronic age with a speed and
to an extent that was not possible in the world before the World Wide Web. One might question,
however, whether the breadth of its evocation of Chineseness as an ethnic sentiment is accompanied
by a corresponding depth of discussion and debate about Chineseness in relation to ethical
commitments and responsibilities in the contemporary world.

Most significantly, in the new globalized Chineseness, China - China as an ancestral homeland, as a
geopolitical entity, as a cultural construct - is apparently no longer the center around which diaspora
Chinese are oriented. Paradoxically, there appears be no center in cyberspace: everyone is
everywhere but has the choice of belonging to a virtual community at any one time by logging on to
a website. Neither, however, are so-called 'global huaren' people who emphasize their rootedness
within local or national environments; they are netizens of the world, not citizens of particular
nation-states. Yet the struggles for the improvement of life for Chinese or other minorities cannot be
fought out only in cyberspace without the role of social movements within national settings.
Hypothetically, it is possible that the mobilization of globalized Chineseness may have the
unintended consequence of raising old fears of Chinese having more in common with fellow
Chinese everywhere than with their fellow citizens at home.

**Into the 21st Century: Being Chinese and Being Human**

What does all this mean as the world moves into the 21st century? Instead of offering an answer, I
would raise some big questions which have troubled me as a sociologist and an intellectual. In the
first place, I would ask: Are we indeed witnessing the end of the twentieth century in a historical
sense? The century opened with the First World War, ushering in a new global scale of violence,
not least made possible by modern science, technology and industrialization. Following the Second
World War, the peoples of the Third World earned their independence, and with the end of the Cold
War, global capitalism seems to have triumphed, no doubt propelled by the Information Revolution.

There we have it, the 20th century in a nutshell: from WWI to WWW, from globalized warfare to
transnationalized capitalism, and yet without the demise of nation-states. In this admittedly
simplistic narrative, the Chinese overseas have also found their niches. This process was not
without hardships and failures on their part, especially in the face of discrimination. Bypassing the successive periods of revolution and trauma in the mainland, however, they thrived in the new lands when they were given opportunities and rights. From being 'neither here nor there' they made choices and made their homes, and their achievements and contributions. But the Asian crisis, and the Indonesian crisis in particular, has shown that fundamental questions remain unresolved for many peoples - and not just the Chinese - in the world today. Does the logic of global capitalism have an uneven impact on different peoples, some of whom are more vulnerable and unprotected? How significant are the Rule of Law and the protection of human rights for all? How can minorities be assured of a place in the lands that they have called their own?

In raising these questions, I am reminded of the words of two non-Chinese intellectuals. In the first instance, a Malay-Singaporean journalist, in the aftermath of the May 1998 atrocities, cautioned against the 'tribal' manner in which some Chinese-Singaporeans and others on the Internet spoke out, including making racist statements and calling for revenge against Indonesians. Instead, she said, 'one should be careful about the language one uses when expressing anger over such bestiality as that which has occurred in Indonesia. This is one instance where a human rights stance is the only peaceful and civilized response. Human beings should not do such things to other human beings, period.' (Indeed, the May atrocities were, in Pramoedya's words, 'crimes against humanity'.) In the second instance, an Indonesian intellectual recently told his audience: 'We are all Chinese'. He was trying to suggest that most Indonesians, in some sense, have been suffering as minorities in relation to political and economic power in the country.

Chinese entrepreneurs and professionals who make up 'the new global Chinese community', I think, share such concerns, which impinge not only on their economic interests or their ethnic sentiments but also, ultimately, on their moral sense. And, ultimately, they can express these concerns not only out of ethnic solidarity with their fellow Chinese but also out of human solidarity with the vulnerable in a highly globalized world. Having thrived in environments that have afforded them opportunities and guaranteed them the free exercise of civic and political rights, they are in a position to go beyond expressing such concerns as Chinese for Chinese. Globalization has engendered a transnationalized sense of Chineseness and other 'tribal' identities, but what is wanting is a sense of global humanity. In that sense, the new global Chinese community has every role to play in the making of a new global community.