REINSCRIBING PATRIARCHY:
THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM
IN CONTEMPORARY SINGAPORE

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Introduction

ALL Chinese societies, whether on the mainland of Asia, in Taiwan, Hong Kong or elsewhere in world-wide diaspora, have had to struggle with their past, to recall it, to edit it, and, where necessary, to invent it. The intensity of this historical remembering, in contrast to the societal amnesia of much of the West and of contemporary Japan, comes from three sources: the need to remember because individual and cultural identity lies primarily in continuity (best expressed anthropologically in the concern with descent and the role of ancestors); because present political legitimacy derives from the patterns and fractures of the past; and because of the constant pressure to assimilate, express, and reinterpret the fuzzy body of practices, sentiments, and ideologies known collectively as 'Confucianism'. Much of the history of the Chinese-speaking world in the last half-century can be seen in these terms: in the struggle against, and subsequent reincorporation, even redeification, of Confucius in the People's Republic; in the struggles for legitimacy, autonomy, and democracy in Taiwan; and in the identity politics of Southeast Asian Chinese, most of them ethnic and linguistic minorities in societies still their own, but in which to varying degrees they are still considered outsiders.

The society in Asia which is in many ways the clearest exemplar of these preoccupations is Singapore—the one state in Southeast Asia with a substantial Chinese majority, the one in which identity-anxiety seems to be most keenly felt,

but also the one that committed itself at its origin as an independent state in 1965 to a model of perpetual multiracialism, a model from which it is now in some significant ways retreating. Chinese dominance in this society of many ethnicities has begun to reassert itself in some obvious and many subtle ways. The Singapore situation also condenses or focuses social processes going on in Chinese communities elsewhere in Southeast Asia and especially in neighbouring Malaysia, significantly the country with the second biggest Chinese population in the region, but also to some degree throughout the Asian diaspora. It is also of great interest because it represents an attempt to achieve the 'resinification' of a population already ethnically Chinese sociologically as well as culturally. To attempt resinification culturally is one process—to reintroduce language, art, architecture, literature, music, and even philosophy—and is one which has to some extent occurred spontaneously, individually, or through the efforts of community associations and religious and educational bodies in many Southeast Asian Chinese societies over a considerable period of time (Clammer 1975). But for the state to attempt a deliberate policy of sociological resinification requiring the creation or adaptation of social forms—family organization, descent systems, community organizations, the management of the microeconomics of everyday life, religious practices, and patterns of reproduction and socialization—which had previously not existed or had fallen into disuse is a rare and interesting phenomenon.

And indeed, this has happened and is continuing to happen in contemporary Singapore and can be analyzed from a number of points of view—in terms of ethnic relations for example, or through the study of the political sociology of the society. While these and a number of other dimensions are involved and will be discussed here, I will also argue here that the phenomenon of resinification is best approached through the exploration of a group of social policies involving population, education, the creation of ideology and the refurbishment of Confucianism, which collectively but hiddenly focus on the re-establishment of patriarchy. In a world in which patriarchy is under fairly general attack, the attempt to reassert patriarchal practices and values is a somewhat audacious move and one worthy of deeper comment. In order to do this, some context needs to be established which makes sense of the framework in which these policies have arisen.

The Context of Policy

The movement towards the establishment or invention of patriarchy reflects the end-point of four characteristics of social change in Singapore over the last decade. The first of these is the slow shift from genuine pluralism or multiracialism—the original 'founding charter' of post-colonial Singapore society (Benjamin 1976)—towards a distinctive Sinocentrism in language policy, political culture, the promotion of high culture, and the siting of Singapore within the geopolitics of the wider

region. The second is the increasingly politically driven nature of change. As far back as the 1970s some commentators (e.g. Chan 1975) were arguing that Singapore was an 'administrative state', one in which bureaucratic management had replaced genuine politics. What this argument overlooked was that plenty of politics in fact existed, but were élite politics committed to a form of 'guided democracy' which involved the suppression of political alternatives other than those sanctioned by the government together with the intense politicization of virtually every level of Singapore life—housing, education, culture, language, reproduction and family life, religion, car ownership, the keeping of pets, and the chewing of gum. Social change has, as a consequence, arisen almost entirely not from spontaneous sources, but from political intervention designed to create, direct or prevent the evolution of social practices and values.

The third characteristic is the progressive racialization of identity. At its inception independent Singapore opted for a primary ordering of the social structure in terms of race. Every permanent member of the population is required to 'have' a 'race', the title of which is inscribed on his or her identity card and which determines many aspects of social life—languages of education, possible religious identities, and position in relation to privileges, quotas, and access to cultural resources (from issues as significant as entitlement to scholarships or entry to the civil service or indeed to political life to those as minor as the amount of television or radio airtime available in one's native language and reflecting one's cultural interests or the public holidays and religious festivals that symbolically mark, or do not mark, the political visibility of one's ethnic group). The rhetoric of meritocracy in Singapore in fact masks unequal ethnic distribution of national resources. The result has been the enshrining of a classificatory system which allocates every individual to a racial category (Chinese, Malay, Indian, or 'Other') which is regarded as permanent, essentialist, and non-negotiable. This system has been both reinforced in its fundamental characteristics—immutability, creation of a social organization based on vertical loyalties rather than horizontal class lines, conflation of race, ethnicity, and culture—and slowly distorted in a pro-Chinese direction by other social policies. These refer to education, the establishment of quotas for ethnic minorities (i.e. non-Chinese) in public housing estates, and very much in the area of language with the active and very public promotion (with taxpayers' money) of Mandarin, not only as a way of unifying the 'dialect' (i.e. South Chinese regional languages) speakers who form the majority of Chinese Singaporeans, but also to assert Singapore's primarily Chinese identity and to establish closer cultural and business links with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Shifts in regional geopolitics have made this 'Chinese' identification possible. Almost surrounded by Malaysia to the north and Indonesia to the west and south, stressing a Chinese identity was not such a healthy idea until the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) created a relatively stable regional grouping including Singapore, and until diplomatic relations had been established between the individual nation-states comprising ASEAN and the PRC.

While sensitivities to China's long-term political and economic objectives in Southeast Asia still remain, these are to some extent deflected by even greater fears of Japan's large and ever-increasing presence in the region (Ben-Ari and Clammer 1997); by the increasing significance of Overseas Chinese investment in China and of the links that these are creating and of the interest that this is generating regionally and internationally (e.g. Seagrave 1996); and by the sheer business opportunities that the Chinese market or use of cheap Chinese labour offers to entrepreneurs familiar with the language and culture of that most populous of countries.

Public policy and geopolitics have both found an ally in the spread, especially in Singapore and Malaysia, of ideas derived from sociobiology which seem to suggest to their supporters not only the basically racial nature of identity (i.e. discrete groups, each with distinct physical characteristics, culture, intelligence, and even entrepreneurial skills) derivable from this primary identity, but also, of course, the irreducibly *biological* character of these elements (Chee and Chan 1984). The appeal to sociobiology, which I will shortly return to in respect of its direct connection with patriarchy (for a broader discussion, see Clammer 1996) relates closely to the fourth aspect of social change—the attempt to legislate values. This is interesting for several reasons—the attempt itself in a world in which the effectiveness of such propagandist methods has been called severely into question; the attempt to create a 'national ideology' in a society of disparate ethnicities and cultures; and the attempt to base this ideology on a but faintly veiled version of Confucianism (Clammer 1993a). Where an essentialist view of identity exists, the easiest way to derive values is not from open debate about what kind of world people want and how their religious and cultural histories might contribute to this, but from a view of racially defined 'givens' of an ultimately genetic nature. Taken together, these four aspects of social change in Singapore have great significance for the organization of the family and the situation of women, a theme which takes us to the next level of analysis.

Women, Biology, and Race

The most conspicuous and best-known example of these elements coming together and being expressed in policy is undoubtedly to be found in the 'graduate wives' controversy that broke out in 1983 when the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced figures that showed that women who were university graduates were not marrying to anything like the same extent as non-graduate women and that those who did were having fewer children. These bald statistics however were placed in an interpretative framework deriving from some of the most dubious examples of writing in sociobiology, an interpretation which led Lee to the conclusion that intelligence is eighty per cent genetic and only twenty per cent en-

vironmental in origin, that intelligence is genetically transmitted, and that consequently declining fertility rates amongst the well-educated would lead to a progressive diminution of the intelligence of the nation as a whole (Lee 1983). Policies were instituted, including substantial tax advantages for graduates with children, the setting up of an agency called the 'Social Development Unit' to encourage marriage between graduates, and cash grants for less educated couples who agreed to voluntary sterilization. The whole issue is significant not only for grounding social policy on the flimsiest of scientific bases but equally for its racist overtones. Most graduates being Chinese and most Malays (the second largest ethnic category) both being non-graduates and having much bigger families, it is apparent at once that the real issue was the declining percentage of Chinese in the total population and the potential loss of Chinese educational supremacy, as the 'intelligence' of Chinese children declined as predicted by Lee's fantastic model.

The blame for this sorry state of affairs was significantly laid at the feet of Singaporean Chinese women, especially the well-educated ones: they were selfish and career-oriented, were refusing to get married and were failing in their duty to expand the number of intelligent consumers in Singapore. The social inadequacies of Singapore Chinese men (a constant source of local humour and satire), *their* careerism, materialism, and self-centred attitudes were not discussed or considered publicly to be part of the 'problem'. The difficultly facing the government in 1983–4 was how to address the issues raised by Lee in order quietly to offset the ethnic erosion that he was clearly referring to while not making it too obvious that the policies being introduced were actually racial ones, an important difficulty, given that the ideology of multiracialism cannot be publicly questioned, even if it is being undermined in practice. Two possibilities emerged: the financial and social incentives mentioned above, and a broader set of policies intended to create a world-view, a sense of reality, in which certain behaviours would be seen as naturally acceptable, so that people, in particular Chinese women, would adjust their attitudes and practices accordingly. Normalization, the creation of an acceptance of 'reality' where there is actually only ideology, is standard Singapore political practice. In this case, however, the adjustment of population coincided with what in the mid 1980s was beginning to emerge as the major underlying domestic political agenda: the enhancement of Chinese superiority not only in educational, occupational, and material terms (goals already achieved), but also in cultural and symbolic terms—as creators and arbitrators of *values*—something which had as yet been imperfectly achieved and which was by its very nature a contested realm.

To create this shift was not entirely easy, even in controlled Singapore, for two major reasons. The first of these, of course, was the status of multiculturalism as the formal foundation of the society and the fact that, in light of this, the ethnic minorities would oppose any signs of the erosion of their position or opportunities. The second was that the new population policy of encouraging larger families for the educated was a complete reversal of the preceding policy, with its slogans (posted on bus shelters throughout the island and even projected at night on to the

end walls of public housing blocks) of 'Boy or girl—two is enough' and its dire warnings of overcrowding, pressure on social facilities and resources, and the economic non-sustainability of a large population in a small country. At that time a different set of incentives and disincentives had been offered (including tax measures, access to preferred schools, and access to public housing) to promote limitation of family size, and many Chinese women had undergone sterilization to gain these benefits. These same women (many of them no longer able to have children) suddenly found themselves castigated for bringing about a long-term population decline, in terms of both numbers and intelligence. Now suddenly the emphasis was on providing more people to swell the ranks of consumers (to stimulate the domestic economy) and to maintain Singapore's economic competitiveness internationally. But how were these new ideas to be made to take root and achieve their desired effect, especially on a population that is well educated and which is increasingly sceptical of ever-changing campaigns of exhortation and bullying? Clearly the best plan was to make the shift seem 'natural', to place it in a framework where policy seemed part of a social cosmology. And the place to begin, given that the 'problem' was seen as arising from the behaviour and attitudes of Chinese women, was quite logically the family.

Since independence the Singapore government has had a strong but fluctuating interest in the family (Salaff 1988). Initially, concern with the family focused on, in a sense, *creating* families in an immigrant society with a large percentage of single-person households. Many of the numerous social problems of colonial and postcolonial Singapore, especially as they affected the Chinese population, hinged on crime, drugs, unemployment, and secret-society involvement by single men, and on prostitution, servitude, and ageing among single immigrant women (for case-studies, see Koh 1994 and Chiang 1994). The early policy of developing extensive public housing projects had three objectives: to generate employment and economic activity; to root people in Singapore and generate political loyalty by giving them a stake in the country through home ownership; and to create more stable family units by providing the physical infrastructure for the emergence of more 'normal' patterns of marriage and care of the aged. The Women's Charter of 1961 was designed both to protect women and girls from economic abuse and to encourage the regularization of marriage, through, for example, the banning of further polygamous marriages except among Muslims. With the growth of the economy, the widespread provision of education, and the stabilization of marriage, the family had not been of primary political concern between the late 1960s and the late 1980s. Suddenly, however, with the revised population policy, it moved back to centre-stage, but in an interestingly different way which has not so far received any detailed analysis.

In Chinese society it is not an exaggeration to say that the family has always been the central sociological feature: at least in its ideal-typical form, it organizes descent and is the focus of socialization, the locus of religious activities, and the agency for structuring memory and identity. It is also, as a host of commentators have pointed out, a highly gendered organization, strongly patriarchal in nature, in

which marriage was historically not a free union of equals, but a relation of subservience for a wife to her husband, eventually to her sons and certainly to her in-laws (Watson and Ebrey 1991). Yet in practice many Chinese Singaporeans came from backgrounds in China in which their families did not possess lineages, in which many 'irregular' patterns of marriage and residence were common (Jashok and Miers 1994) and in which poverty was a normal experience. Nevertheless, the family as an ideal remains at the very centre of Chinese self-images world-wide; it is the fundamental element in what Barbara Ward, in discussing the ethnography of a very 'deviant' group—the Tanka boat people of Hong Kong's harbours and inlets—has called the 'conscious model' of Chinese social organiz-ation (Ward 1965). Basic to this model, in other words, is not only an image of culture (language, food, and everyday practices for instance), but also one of race (understood as lineal descent from ancestors of common stock and the pheno-typical representation of that ancestry) and one of social structure. To be Chinese is to be a member not only of a 'race' but also of a distinctive form of social organization. To resinify Chinese Singaporeans thus necessarily requires not only the re-creation of culture, but also the re-creation of that distinctive social organiz-ation.

The need for such fundamental social intervention indicates that the limits of conventional social policies are bringing about structural change. And there is no shortage of such policies, which have been applied at three levels. The first of these is most easily recognizable as a zone of 'normal' policy intervention, which has encompassed a range of strategies including the aggressive promotion of Mandarin, the encouraging of an interest in Chinese art (not only through private or semi-private agencies such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, but also through the creation of an officially sponsored gallery of Chinese art in the old Immigration Department building at Empress Place in the heart of the colonial district, a few minutes' walk from Parliament House and the Supreme Court), and a range of social plans. The latter include the encouragement of in-migration from 'traditional' source areas, which turns out in practice to mean the Chinese-speaking world, including members of North American Chinese communities, but signifi-cantly not India; the restriction of non-Chinese minorities settling in large numbers in individual public housing estates (officially to prevent 'ghettoization', but in practice because minorities tend to vote against the government); and the popula-tion policy noted above.

The second level has been the promotion, since 1983, of sociobiological theories of genetic determinism. This essentially takes the form of the identifica-tion of race with biology (i.e. genetically determined hereditary characteristics), the equation of intelligence with such inherited characteristics, and the assumption that certain races have a specific distribution of such qualities. In reality this is an argument for Chinese superiority, as it is the Chinese who are assumed to have (inherited) qualities of entrepreneurship, intelligence, and cultural development and to be unusually (by the standards of other local ethnic groups) hard-working. It is also an argument against ethnic intermarriage (except presumably among the

non-dominant races) and against any 'melting pot' model of ethnic integration. In fact, it strongly supports in fact the official four-race classificatory model of permanent racial difference. The allegedly 'scientific' nature of this theory makes it difficult for the average layperson in Singapore to argue against it, particularly as it accords so well with widely held local folk models of racial stereotypes.

The third level has been the attempt to out-Weber Weber himself, by assuming and building into policy the belief that values determine practice, and not the other way around. This is seen most clearly in two policies, one that ran throughout the 1980s and was then quietly abandoned, the other which began in 1988–9 and is officially still in place. The former was the attempt to introduce the teaching of values into Singapore schools via the introduction of religious education. This was a considerable innovation given the secular nature of the state in Singapore; it makes sense, however, when seen as an attempt to offset the situation that the government's own social and economic policies had brought about—a highly materialistic, individualistic society in which public levels of participation in voluntary and political affairs were declining—and as an outcome of the assumption that religion is potentially dangerous (its prophetic dimension could lead and has indeed led it into opposition to government policies), and it is best handled by teaching sanitized and approved versions which stress socially 'positive' moral values such as thrift, honesty, and hard work. In other words, the policy designed to compensate for the government's own destruction of the tender shoots of civil society in Singapore took the form of compulsory religious education, pupils being taught, however, their own religion (or in practice that of their parents). Muslim children were thus to be taught Islam, Protestant or Catholic ones Christianity, Hindu ones Hinduism, and only those who could not claim any religious affiliation were taught comparative religion. However, Chinese students, who form the bulk of the school population, were taught not Buddhism, the religion to which they or their parents adhere (mostly in its Mahayana form and substantially mixed with elements of Chinese 'folk' religion, mainly Taoism and spirit-mediumship), but rather Confucianism. Confucianism as a *religion* has almost no followers in Singapore (there was at the time only one small Confucian temple), although Confucius appears as a deity (usually of education) on the altars of many syncretic Mahayanist temples. There thus occurred in Singapore late in the twentieth century a process parallel to that which had taken place in Japan almost a century earlier, when the modernizing government of the Meiji Restoration set about the systematic suppression of both Buddhism and folk Shinto in an attempt to replace them both with state Shinto, a bureaucratized, non-critical religion closely watched and controlled from the centre.

Significantly, however, this policy was quietly abandoned after a decade (and great public expense in the training of teachers, preparation of teaching materials, and so on) because it had not delivered the political goods and because religion itself was becoming more visible, with the revival of traditional forms of religiosity, the substantial expansion of Christianity, the spread of fundamentalism in just about all religious communities, the rapid spread of the Japanese 'New Religion'

Soka Gakkai, the appearance of numerous sects (for example, that of Sai Baba among Hindus), and the migration of large numbers of both Indians and educated Chinese to Therevada Buddhism (Clammer 1991). Many of these forms of religious expression were beyond government control or understanding and as such were very anxiety-provoking in a government that values control above all else. The consequence was the abandonment of religious education in schools, the passage of an Act of Parliament (the quaintly named 'Maintenance of Religious Harmony' Act), designed to restrict the expression and practice of religion to approved forms and to ban absolutely any political expression of religion, and the decision to formulate and promulgate a 'National Ideology'. This latter policy, which I have analyzed in detail elsewhere (Clammer 1993a), has many elements and strategies within it. Among key elements relevant to the present discussion are two: the decision to define the family officially as the basic unit of society; and the decision to replace the vaguely Marxist-sounding notion of ideology with one of 'shared values'—based, however, not on any empirical attempt actually to discover whether such values exist in Singapore, and if so, what they are, but rather on the a priori decision to base these values on, or derive them from, Confucianism.

This idea in itself conceals two others. First, the idea that Confucianism is based on something called 'consensus' (i.e. not on debate), is *the* fundamental expression of something called 'Asian values', which are mainly defined by what they are not—i.e. Westernized, which in the words of Lee Kuan Yew are 'individualistic and self-centred'. Quite apart from the extreme unlikeliness of there being any genuine pan-Asian values, Lee seems to have overlooked the fact that the National Ideology was introduced not to prevent the emergence of such 'Westernized' values in Singapore, but precisely because they are already rampant in what must be the most Westernized society anywhere in Asia and one which derives its distinctive culture from exactly that fact. Secondly, there is the idea that essential to Confucianism is not only a set of fairly vague 'values', but also its sociological expression: Confucianism means a particular ideology of the family and a particular practice which embodies that ideology.

The Problem and Practice of Confucianism

The difficulty with introducing Confucianism in an approved and bureaucratized way into Singapore, whether as something taught in the schools or as the basis of the 'Shared Values' or National Ideology, was that nobody in Singapore appeared to have a clear idea of what it was. Paradoxically, and without the least sense of irony (for this was, after all, supposed to be a *national* ideology), 'experts' on Confucianism were flown in from the United States and elsewhere to advise the government on exactly what it was that they were supposed to be talking about.

The local intellectual and academic community leapt as usual on to the bandwagon and began to produce instant books on the subject (e.g. Lu 1983, Lim 1992). And parallel to all this mental activity was a quasi-sociological one, which must be understood against the background of a very specific form of local cultural politics.

David Brown has argued (Brown 1993) that the status of ethnicity has evolved since independence from the original multiracialism, seen as a delicate structure requiring a strong state to keep it all together, through a series of intermediate transformations, each one of which has redefined the relationship between race, politics, and culture, to the current model, one that he dubs 'corporatist'. Here, as in all the earlier models, the primacy of the state is not questioned, but two innovations have occurred: the definition of a national community based on allegedly shared values, and the reconceptualization of ethnic groups as interest associations. This last idea means that, without diminishing the priority of the state, responsibility for the welfare of individual ethnic communities is transferred from the state apparatus to those individual communities themselves. Such a move has occurred within the context of large-scale 'privatization' in Singapore (meaning that the state keeps ultimate control while increasingly transferring responsibility, problems, and costs to the public)—in housing, medicine, education, and other key areas. In a sense 'corporatism' means the 'privatization' of ethnicity, the transfer of responsibility for management and the provision of social services from the state to those communities themselves. But to do this requires the creation of institutions and structures to make the delivery of any such services effective.

The problem has been, however, that the modern history of Singapore has been one of the suppression of pre-existing social networks and social movements and their replacement by a government-created set of local as well as national institutions, such as community centres and residents' associations. Community associations, one of which is found in every constituency, provide recreational and cultural facilities, often including Mandarin lessons, and are often part of the same complex housing government-run kindergartens and the local Area Office which has among its many functions the registration and monitoring of all the inhabitants of its district. Political, educational, and cultural functions are thus often run together and become effectively indistinguishable, as the few constituencies that have gone over to the opposition have found to their cost, it being very easy for the government to step up monitoring activities while simultaneously reducing social and cultural resources in such places. The destruction of civil society, however, has not been complete, and each community retains at least residual institutions reflecting its culture of origin and very frequently its religious practices. In the case of the Chinese community, these have been the remains of the once dense network of clan, dialect, and other associations which formerly animated the immigrant Chinese community from its earliest days (Hsieh 1978, Mak 1992).

At its inception, Singapore Chinese society was made up of a disparate mass of migrants—mostly male but with a slowly increasing number of women—from a number of areas in China, mostly along the southern seacoasts. Each of these

areas spoke different languages—Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, Hainanese, and in a few cases more easterly languages such as the Shanghai dialect. Very rarely were northern dialects such as Mandarin spoken at all among migrants to Singapore. Very little sense of ethnic or class identity united the first generation of migrants, and reports from as late as the 1960s still speak of rivalry between language communities, clashes between secret societies, and the need for social workers on the island to speak several of the many dialects, since there was no lingua franca among the Chinese community, except possibly varieties of Bazaar Malay. Even after independence this situation continued to prevail for years until military service for men, imposition of common political institutions, the spread of Mandarin through the school system, and participation in the common economy and public housing schemes began to forge an increasing sense of unity, or at least of being Singaporean, among the local Chinese population. At least until independence, the numerous associations of the Chinese community, some based on dialect, some on place of origin in China, others on occupations or trades and yet others on religion, made up the basic social structure of that community and provided many of what welfare facilities then existed—hospitals and hospices, schools, and homes for the elderly.

Very importantly they also provided what might be termed quasi-kinship functions. Many Chinese migrants to Singapore were single or, if married, had left their spouses in China. And although most did originally intend to return to China, many never did, which meant of course that they grew old and died far from their native villages. Essential to Chinese familialism is what is often called ancestralism or sometimes, and inaccurately, 'ancestor worship'. What this term actually refers to is the centrality of patrilineal descent and the necessity for the dead, especially the recent dead, to be memorialized (for elaborations of this, see Hsu 1975, Baker 1979). Failure to do this meant a kind of cosmic loneliness for the dead—not being remembered, and no offerings being made to them—or at worst (for both the living and the dead) becoming a wandering ghost. Normally the functions of memorialization—the enshrining of the soul-tablet of the deceased, the cleaning and maintenance of graves and the making of offerings to the spirits of the ancestors—would be performed in the clan temple in China. For those dying alone in Southeast Asia, without kin and far from their native soil, the prospect of death was even more of an existential crisis than it was anyway. Community associations overseas took on these functions and often provided a variety of services under the same roof, oddly disparate to members of many other cultures, but very acceptably combinable to the overseas Chinese. Thus an association, formally based on dialect and/or district or even village of origin, would provide a shrine for the display and memorialization of the soul-tablets of its members (who would pay a subscription to the association while they were alive and economically active), a recreation area and space for elderly members to relax, drink tea, and read newspapers, sometimes a free or very cheap clinic on certain days or evenings of the week, and very possibly space for a *wayang* of Chinese opera performance for the dead (and the living) during the Hungry Ghosts month.

Some would provide retirement places for elderly individuals such as single women and might provide loans or welfare payments from the capital accumulated from members' subscriptions. Religious, social, and recreational functions would thus often be combined in the same association.

Two issues stand out here: the production, among such associations, of quasi-kinship relations between people not genetically or agnatically related; and the fact that, in order to reproduce a system of Chinese kinship, a form of patrilineal descent had to be created. In practice some associations fudged this second requirement. In theory, the spiritual status (i.e. the disposition after death) of an unmarried Chinese female was extremely marginal and dangerous. Not incorporated into any husband's lineage and without access to patrilineal status in her father's lineage, the death of a female of marriageable age was an extremely anxiety-provoking event for all parties—for the woman herself and for living relatives and neighbours—since she too was liable to become a wandering ghost, resentful and revengeful in the way that such Chinese ghosts are often expected to be. The sociologically unincorporated individual is spiritually dangerous in Chinese religious culture. But there were always such women in Singapore—female labourers, domestic servants, prostitutes and others—often unaware of what legal protection was available to them and until 1961 with no clear code governing Chinese customary marriage (Chiang 1994). Some such women married and their names were inscribed on their husband's soul-tablet; others took the option of never marrying (many indeed had fled from China precisely to avoid marriage (Topley 1975)) or became members of women's vegetarian houses, to which they paid a subscription during their working lives and where they could spend their days off and could eventually retire, sometimes even going through a form of marriage with another woman and adopting a female child to care for them in their old age (Topley 1954). In such cases the house took care of their post-death status. For those who took neither of these options, associations would sometimes enshrine a soul-tablet on their behalf. But generally, in ideology and in practice, a patrilineal world-view prevailed.

Although they had retained some residual functions (mainly of a cultural and religious nature) this once extensive network of associations steadily lost ground as their position was eroded by the expansion of government activity, conversion of members to Christianity and other religions, and the many alternative attractions that an expanding consumer economy could offer young people. By the early 1990s many still existed (many others had entirely disappeared), but as shadows of their former wealth and influence, a far cry indeed from the days when they had essentially composed the social structure of the Singapore Chinese community. However, two things had now suddenly occurred which once again reversed previous government policy, which had been deliberately to diminish the strength of 'natural' organizations and to regulate and monitor them closely through an agency set up specifically for this purpose—the Registry of Societies. The first was that with the invention of the 'corporatist' conception of ethnicity, clan associations were suddenly needed again to carry out the new 'privatized' policy.

The second was that the parallel reinvention of Confucianism as the ideological basis of the social order required the sociological embodying of Confucian principles. The nuclear family in its modern form had hardly existed in China where smaller kinship units were always in principle incorporated into larger kin groups—lineages where these existed (and they were far from universal, even in south China from where most migrants came) and certainly surname or clan temples, which were necessary to memorialize the dead properly (Watson and Rauski 1988).

The reinvention of Confucianism thus meant not only the imposition of a set of 'values' but also the invention of a tradition to which many or most Singaporean Chinese did not belong, as well as the stimulation or fabrication of 'memories' of Chinese culture and of descent patterns where they did not in fact exist (Clammer 1993b)—a tradition which incorporated patriarchy as its fundamental principle. The problems this might create in a modern Singapore in which many women worked and in which very many (those recalcitrant graduate brides or non-brides) were highly educated did indeed occur to the engineers of these new policies; and the visiting experts were asked to address the problem of producing an acceptable version of Confucianism when the whole system was well known to be sexist, hierarchical, and not at all liberal in respect of social change or political development except in a very statist direction. How, then, was Confucianism to be made digestible to a modern, well-travelled, and materialistic contemporary Chinese population?

Several factors (apart from the government propaganda machine and the tame press) suggested that this could be done. The first was the emergence of China as a force to be reckoned with economically and politically in the region and, with its own rapid progress (or regression) towards capitalism, as a market and trading partner, no more the communist ogre. This major shift in regional geopolitics made a looking-towards-China policy possible and indeed culturally desirable. The second was the emergence of what might be termed Overseas Chinese triumphalism. Some time in the late 1980s many diaspora Chinese and many non-Chinese commentators on the Asia–Pacific region, as East Asia was now coming to be called, had begun to note the extensive economic and social networks of the overseas Chinese and their role in promoting investment, trade, and industrialization throughout the region. Many emerging multinational companies in Asia were overseas Chinese ones. From being a somewhat neglected minority, both envied and despised as entrepreneurial enclave-dwellers amidst much larger Muslim (in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei), Theravada Buddhist (in Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma), Catholic (in the Philippines) or historically hostile (in Vietnam) host populations, the Chinese have suddenly become visible. With the rapid expansion of economies like that of Vietnam, in which both indigenous Chinese and overseas Chinese have played a major, if not the major, role, this marginal community has become a central one, a fact which has promoted an upsurge of pride and publications. And naturally the question has arisen as to what has made the economic resurgence of both China (at least of coastal south China) and the overseas Chinese

possible. Predictably the answer is Confucianism, although a Confucianism that the sage himself would probably not recognize. This neo-Confucianism has two main characteristics: it does for the Chinese what, according to Weber, the Protestant ethic did for the British, namely allegedly provide the value system that makes capitalism possible; and it constitutes a system which not only links Chinese to one another through language and culture (making business relations easy) but which is also based on the primacy of the family. At the root of Chinese economic success in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and throughout Southeast Asia is the patriarchal family, descent system, and pattern of domestic relationships which, in the last analysis, is what Confucianism represents. Patterns of saving, capital accumulation, long working hours, socialization into an entrepreneurial lifestyle—all, according to this theory, are ultimately related to Confucianism (the literature on this question is now large and confused and extends even beyond the Chinese to encompass the neo-Confucianism of Korea and Japan; for a good sampler of this genre, by one of the experts much consulted by the Singapore government, see Tu 1996).

Familialism (of the patriarchal variety), while being the fundamental plank in this explanation of entrepreneurial success—especially as contrasted with the Malay peoples of the region (the vast majority from southern Thailand through Malaysia and Indonesia and on to the Philippines), with their bilateral kinship patterns, matriarchal families, and even in some cases (the famous Minangkabau people of Sumatra are a conspicuous case) matrilineal descent—is not the only factor at play. For there is also an internal link between the promotion of Confucianism on the one hand and the promotion of ideas derived from sociobiology on the other. I have already suggested that 'race' in Singapore parlance is understood or represented officially as a set of biological qualities transmitted over time within a fairly discrete breeding population. Descent in this model has two meanings: first a purely biological concept of genetic continuity, and secondly a notion of sociological descent—a notion, that is, of lineal continuity ensured by marriage and inheritance practices. Significantly it is only the Chinese who have a patrilineal descent system of great depth reinforced by a patriarchal authority system within the family (in theory—there are exceptions such as the *chin choe* or in-marrying or adoptive son-in-law, or the *san po tsai* system of transferring young girls from their natal households to those of their future husbands). As I have said, Malays practise bilateral or matrilineal kinship; for Indians the primary focus of kinship is caste rather than the descent group in the institutionalized Chinese sense; and Eurasians tend to have simple nuclear families with shallow notions of descent closer to those of the modern European or North American family system. Furthermore, for Malays and Indians, ethnicity is not primarily a matter of race but of culture, and it is possible for a person not born Malay to become one through, for example, adoption (particularly of Chinese girls at one time), marriage, or religious conversion.

For the Chinese, however, ethnicity is primarily racial, and so one can neither become nor cease to be Chinese in the way that Malays or Eurasians potentially

can. One is Chinese by *descent*, understood in the twofold sense (biological/ sociological) mentioned above. This helps to explain two things. One is why the Baba or Peranakan Chinese—arguably the most genuinely Singaporean culture in the country, with their unique combination of Chinese descent, Malay culture and language, and European political attitudes—never became a model for the society as a whole: they are too Malayanized, probably with intermarriage in the distant past, and they practice *chin choe* patterns of marriage too frequently. The other is why interethnic marriage among the Chinese is largely confined to marriage between Chinese women and men of other races (especially Europeans), not vice versa. Women marry out by definition in a patrilineal system and are lost to the patrilineage: sociologically they do not count, and the children of an ethnically outmarried woman will not be Chinese. Indeed, it is official policy in Singapore that children of mixed marriages follow the 'race' of the father and cannot either choose which race to identify with or choose an alternative identity. Subtly hidden in the Singaporean race and sociobiology models is the assumption that, while formally a child naturally inherits genetic material from each parent equally, in reality it is the male genes that somehow predominate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the resulting policies are rife with ambiguities. Women are encouraged to enter the workforce and to hire maids to look after their children while they are at work, but are then criticized for turning over the up-bringing of their children to foreigners (most maids are Filipinos, sometimes Indonesians or from the PRC). The educated ones are criticized for not marrying and breeding enough (intelligence being, as we have seen, officially transmitted genetically), yet it is subtly insinuated that it is the male genes that are really important (in families with 'too many' female children, it is the husband who will be blamed in the local folk model for having 'weak sperm'). Confucian 'ethics' has to promote seemingly universal values while actually arguing for the subordi-nation of women and the primacy of 'the family'—which has never actually been defined in Singapore public discourse, though it is, of course, both axiomatic and unspoken that it is the 'Confucian' one. What population policy, with its roots in sociobiology, actually says about women is hardly encouraging: they are for breeding intelligent consumers. Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew is on record as saying that he regrets the social policies that made education so widely available to women, a remarkable statement given that it is internationally thought that one of the most positive aspects of Singapore's development policies has been to educate both genders equally (in many departments of the two universities, women indeed predominate: under government direction, the medical faculty at the National University established a quota system deliberately to keep down the number of female medical students, as they were becoming a majority; in most fields female students do better than males academically).

Singapore women, of course, are not unaware of what is going on, and even as their Chinese sisters in the past resisted patriarchy through a variety of strat-egies, so they do today—through not marrying at all, through education and inde-pendent careers, through ethnic out-marriage, and through consumption, migration,

and conversion to Christianity, with its egalitarian ethos. Significantly, there are far more Chinese Christian women than men in Singapore churches, and a high percentage of these women are well educated: it is not only *graduate* women who are not marrying, but graduate *Christian* women, a factor that may well have influenced the government's relative turning against Christianity—which it had previously looked upon benignly as promoting desirable family and moral values— and its quiet but visible encouragement of much more 'Asian' varieties of religion such as Soka Gakkai. Many women even choose their own personal names, usually ones of a European or European-derived nature, by which they are known among their friends, although they do not always inform their fathers of the *de facto* abandoning of their Chinese given names, especially if those names are derived from the *hanyu pinyin* syllabary now used in the PRC for romanizing the script rather than from the traditional dialect names. There has, in fact, been a quiet 'feminization' of culture in Singapore, as women have begun to dominate religion, such social movements as exist, teaching, wide areas of medicine, and some key areas of the bureaucracy.

One of the inadequacies of the Singapore government's own analysis of what it itself has created is its failure to understand the nature of capitalism. There is rather strong resistance to any such analysis, not only because it smacks of Marxism, but also because the government has committed itself to a form of state capitalism in which in theory the market governs (it does not, of course: the state does, except when the economy is doing badly, as it did during the recession of the mid-1980s, significantly the period from which many of these latter-day social policies also stem). In reality the social policies of the last two decades have caught women constantly on the wrong side not of trends of their own making, but of shifts in official policy. In the late 1970s and mid-1980s population was to be kept down and women were strongly encouraged not to have children. By the late 1980s this policy was reversed and (Chinese) women blamed for not having sufficient children. Women were encouraged to enter the work force in large numbers during the same period as the first phase of the population policy; then they were criticized for displacing domestic responsibilities on to maids, to neglecting their (Confucian) responsibilities to the aged, and, during the economic downturn, for taking jobs from men, who were the 'natural' breadwinners or, rather, fillers of rice-bowls. Encouraged to consume and thus to promote the expansion of the domestic economy, women were then accused, by the very architects of high growth, of materialism and of losing their 'Asian' values. While many of these fluctuations were simply the outcome of flip-flopping policies (known in Singapore polit-speech as 'pragmatism'), they were actually the result of modes of social relationship habitually unleashed by capitalism. The government, sensing that it could not have its cake and eat it and unable to think of a way forward that would not seriously compromise its own political vision and techniques, fell back on to the past, reinventing Confucianism with a dash of sociobiology for extra flavour.

Race, descent, and patriarchy are thus conflated, a distinctively gendered view of history is generated, and until very recently (e.g. Chiang 1994, Warren 1994) the experience and contribution of female migrants to Singapore was discounted. Within this male-biased world-view Chinese descent itself was seen as male-dominated and its paradigm—the patrilineage—seen as the essence of a Confucian social order, despite the absence of empirical lineages in the social backgrounds of many Singaporeans and the extensive evidence of variations in actual marriage practices throughout south China (Jaschok 1984, Watson 1991). As suggested elsewhere (Clammer 1996), the 'Confucian' model requires, and where it is successful it produces, docile bodies. Women in this view *are* essentially bodies, reproductive organisms whose emotions, if they are recognized at all, are entirely secondary. Women are to be presented and packaged according to patriarchal expectations of propriety, to be concealed or exposed according to whims not of their own making, and to be controlled through the establishment of norms, in some cases enforceable by law, about acceptable dress, gesture, habits, and public comportment. There is a whole sociology of the body waiting to be written from the perspective of the ideology and practice of Confucianism (for some hints about how this might proceed, see Zito and Barlow 1994). The memories, experiences and expectations of women—the possible roles, the preset limits of careers and responsibilities, position and duties within the family—are consequently set not by the expanding dynamics of a naturally evolving society, but by the constricting influence of a politically generated Confucianism, designed to limit the very gains that Singaporean Chinese women had made in the years since independence.

The earlier mention of Soka Gakkai, in origin a Buddhist-based Japanese 'New Religion' which grew very rapidly in Singapore in the late 1980s and 1990s, should alert us to the extent that Japan and Japanese Confucianism as well as the Chinese variety were used as models in Singapore. Japan was seen during the 1980s as a model not only of economic growth but also of social order—peaceful labour relations, politics dominated by a single party, and a hierarchical social structure (Stanley 1988). Here, however, a somewhat ahistorical and confused sociological approach prevailed, since the Confucian virtues that were extolled (obedience, service to the state, duties to parents) were rather more characteristic of pre-war Japan than of the contemporary situation, particularly since, if there is any one institution that is in a state of quiet crisis in Japan, it is the family. But then the emotions and quality of relationships within the family are not the primary concern of Singapore's policy-makers: what they are concerned with is structural attributes. The modern Confucian family is understood as being led by a male, with responsibility for child socialization residing with the wife and with what is called in Singapore a 'three-tiered family' structure, in which parents, children, and grandparents comprise a single residential unit. New public housing units were built to accommodate this extended-family type, and priority in the allocation of public housing units was given to three-tier rather than nuclear families. Conversely, the ranking of single-person or single-parent households, especially those headed by a woman, was made so low as to make it extremely difficult for such

cases to gain access to public housing at all. So current legislation, while making divorce possible and relatively simple, also makes it very difficult for women who initiate divorce proceedings (as an increasing number do) subsequently to form a viable economic or residential unit with their children or even with other women in the same situation.

So today television advertisements promote the delights of having children, pre-university students are taught the desirability of marriage, a Social Development Unit has been set up to promote romantic meetings between unmarried graduates, and very material incentives, particularly through the tax system (paradoxically, given that real Confucianism teaches disdain for materialism), are given to graduate couples who have more children. But then the whole policy is riddled with ambiguities, and Confucianism in Singapore is fundamentally paradoxical in its promotion of patriarchy and the hierarchical family on the one hand, while leaving untouched the individualism and materialism that characterizes the actual operation of the society. As Jenner has argued (1994), Confucius was in reality someone who could not even accept the changes taking place in his own (somewhat precapitalist) times and who set his face towards the distant past as the model for contemporary relationships. In fact the 'plastic Confucianism' (as Jenner aptly calls the Singapore variety) invented by visiting experts is actually a highly selective culling of elements taken out of context and repackaged as an apparently coherent set, while leaving the actual operation of capitalism (which the sage would have abhorred) untouched. But then the family, not the economy, is the target, and in theoretical terms correctly so, since there is no historical evidence of any positive connection between Confucianism and rapid economic growth.

Patriarchy and the Narratives of Culture

Chinese society has long had profound difficulties with women and with women's sexuality. Women as wives and mothers is one thing, but powerful women, free women, or women who begin to determine how reality is to be conceptualized is another matter altogether. Despite legislative changes in marriage, divorce, and custody laws throughout the Chinese-speaking world, practice has for the most part been different from theory, especially in a cultural universe where the pull of the past (often encapsulated in the idea of Confucianism) is so strong (Croll 1995). The struggle, rather than the accommodation, between women and Confucianism appears in many forms and is reflected perhaps most clearly in modern and contemporary Chinese fiction in which Hu Ying sees a narrative trajectory in the following terms: 'Metaphorically, then, the ability to sire sons is similar to the ability to tell a story, the authority to narrate. Even more than the siring of sons, the telling of stories confirms the patrilineage retrospectively...one might even say that it is an act of paying homage to one's forebears, an act of filial piety' (Hu

1996: 55–6). What fiction (and film also) illustrates and should alert the anthropologist to is the construction of patriarchal narratives, stories which, through their emphases, selections, and suppressions, edit out the history of women. I have already suggested that the writing of Singapore history already does this and as such is not only ideological politically, but also in respect of gender (for example, see the recent history of Singapore edited by Chew and Lee 1991). Neo-Confucianism has the same effect: it imposes on reality a reading of history and of social causation which privileges patrilineality and places patriarchal narratives in the foreground.

Interestingly this observation needs to be placed in a rather special context: that of the virtual absence of either feminism or a movement for homosexual rights. There is a small women's movement dominated by educated, upper-class women, which is not at all a voice for the average Singaporean female and which, despite its undoubted positive effect, has done nothing to challenge the political suppression of feminist discourse. One might suppose that patriarchy would be entirely compatible with male homosexuality, which would, after all, remove women from the arena entirely. But in Singapore this is not the case, and at the 1993 United Nations Human Rights conference in Vienna, Wong Kan Seng, the Singapore Foreign Minister publicly stated that 'Homosexual rights are a Western issue and are not relevant to this conference' (cited with commentary in Berry 1996: 159). The problem for Singaporeans is a complex one which appears to encompass the suppression of the concept of human rights, their replacement by 'shared values' (which emphatically do not include either women's or homosexual rights) and a politics of regional difference—the West is Other/the East is Us—and the belief that this 'East' is unified by its adherence to 'Asian' values. The Foreign Minister's statement is also interesting for its characteristic ignorance or suppression of alternative, non-statist histories, for there is ample evidence of extensive homosexuality in Chinese culture (Hinsch 1990). What it fundamentally seems to reflect, consistent with the ruling party's deep puritanism, is a fear of sexuality, especially any 'deviant' form which challenges the order of the patriarchal family. Indeed, speaking of Singapore, two well-known local critics and writers argue that 'women and all signs of the feminine, are by definition always and already antinational' (Heng and Devan 1991: 356). State fatherhood and the empowerment of women are not compatible and, as in pre-war Japan, the Confucian family is the means to ensure the reproduction at the microlevel of the macro-level of the state itself. The discourse of Confucianism becomes the mechanism linking the political to the personal, but it also justifies a particular collectivist conception (or non-conception) of human rights (Berry 1996: 175).

All this points to levels of analysis not always attained in intellectual discourse within Singapore, with its positivist assumptions and modernist mentality, which has prevented, for example, debates about patriarchal familialism from occurring such as have occurred in Japan in the context of postmodernity or possibly even being conceivable (see, for example, Heine 1995), despite the fact that both are seen as being rooted in Confucianism. One of these levels involves the manage-

ment of the body and the constitution of the self. It was suggested above that Confucianism, at least in its Singapore version, promotes a particular view (or non-view) of the female body. Similarly it carries with it certain images of the self, not only those based on the achievement of righteousness and nobility, but of such virtues encapsulated entirely within a system of hierarchical relationships. They are not in fact abstract virtues at all but highly contextualized ones, set within the five fundamental relationships of ruler/subject, parent/child, older sibling/younger sibling, husband/wife and older friend/younger friend and traditionally underscored by the mourning grades and the extensive ramifications and extreme hierarch-ization of kin terms in classical Chinese. The 'humanism' of Confucianism is by no means universal but is set within a pattern of relationships in which male precedes female, older precedes younger, and ruler precedes subject. Significantly, Singapore's policy-makers have never in any way drawn on the other major traditions of Chinese thought—Taoism for example, or the egalitarian philosophy of Mo Di, who lived only a century after Confucius.

What has emerged in modern Singapore, then, is a fascinating contemporary example of bio-politics in the setting of a rapidly developing Asian economy, one, moreover, which is attempting to practise and to keep alive ancient Chinese statecraft, historiography, and kinship at the end of the twentieth century. In this sense, despite its putative multiracialism, Singapore is a deeply Chinese polity, and many of the things that can be said about modernizing China—for example, the equation of race (*zhongzhu*) and culture (*wenhua*), the selective use of Western ideas of eugenics, the attempt to create authoritarian modernization or 'capitalism with Chinese characteristics', and the suppression of both democracy and femin-ism—can equally be said about Singapore, to the extent that it is no longer clear which state is borrowing ideas from which (Ong 1996).

If woman is the 'primitive'—the bearer of both (non-political) wisdom and chaos—then her position is dangerous to the state, whether in China or in Singapore. As Rey Chow puts it:

> If the conception of 'woman' was in the past mediated by women's well-defined roles within the Chinese family, the modern promotion of the nation throws into instability all those traditional roles.
>
> How are women's sexuality, social function, economic function, contribution to cultural reproduction, and biological reproduction to be conceived of outside of the family and in terms of the nation? This is the historical juncture when, in what appeared to be a sudden 'liberation' of the traditional constraints on women's identity, romantic love became a leading social issue.
>
> For what is 'romantic' about romantic love is not sex, but the apparent freedom in which men and women could choose their sexual partners, in a way that differed from arranged marriage.
>
> And since the traditional family system was paternalistic—that is, resting on the sexual stability, chastity, and fidelity of women while men were openly promiscu-ous or polygamous—the new freedom meant first and foremost the production of a new female sexuality. In other words, because the conception of the nation

sought to unify the culture regardless of sexual and class difference, it left open
many questions as to how women's sexual identities, which were carefully differ-
entiated and monitored within the kinship system, should be reformulated.

This is why, one could say, the Chinese woman suddenly became a newly dis-
covered 'primitive'—a body adrift between the stagnant waters of the family,
whose oppressiveness it seeks to escape, and the open sea of the nation, whose
attention to 'woman' is only such that her sexual difference and history become
primarily *its* support [i.e. become erased]. (Chow 1995: 67–8)

In Singapore we see an attempt to recover these traditional roles and to force
even romantic love to submit to the requirements of the state in the interests of its
own brand of control and its own version of Chinese capitalism. Indeed, Chow
goes on to argue, in a passage that exactly fits Singapore if one substitutes the
word 'capitalism' for 'communism' and the phrase 'post-1983 developments' for
'cultural revolution' (1993 being the year in which Lee announced his new eugen-
ics policy in the light of falling graduate birth rates):

In the aftermath of the cultural revolution, the affirmation of traditional family
values comes as an attempt to mask the lack created by the bankruptcy of commu-
nism *and* nationalism, even though nationalism may persist by reinscribing itself
in traditional forms. The main point is that the central roles played by the family
and village community are here signs of the *dismantling* of the modernist revol-
ution from 'family' to 'nation'. 'Woman' is now caught between the bankruptcy
of nationalism and communism, in which the sexes are 'equal' and women's
problems do not exist, *and* the resurgence of older patriarchal forms of community,
in which female sexuality is strictly managed for purposes of kinship reproduction.
(Ibid.: 70, original emphasis)

This is not only true of Chinese societies (witness the pro-family *and* pro-
capitalist rhetoric of the New Right in Europe and the Moral Majority in the
United States), but it does indicate an important sociological and theoretical point:
that modernity unleashes forces that it itself cannot fully comprehend, which, once
they become visible, are managed by treating them as the Other within, as stigma-
tized and marginalized outsiders to the 'real' processes and purposes of the mascu-
line state—women, ethnic and sexual minorities, artists, the handicapped, all who
threaten order not through what they do but through what they are (see especially
Bauman 1995: 143–8), who threaten degeneracy by their very being. They are,
as it were, ontologically unsound unless co-opted and reincorporated into the
patriarchal state. When Deng Xiaoping sends a delegation to Singapore (as he did
in 1993) to study its state capitalism and state Confucianism, something interesting
is clearly happening, especially when it is conceded that this new Confucianism,
when actually explored historically, is, if not the product of the Jesuits in China,
at least in part the brainchild of such Western scholars as Peter Berger and Herman
Kahn (Dirlik 1996).

Singapore represents one of the many strategies of nationalism, and particularly of cultural nationalism, in the modern world, and is an interesting variation on the issues of public culture and state hegemony. But while Gellner, in his major work on nationalism (1983), argued that nation-building must be forward-looking in nature, Singapore demonstrates the co-existence of forward-lookingness in technology and economy and a decidedly backward-looking stance in many aspects of social policy. In trying to overcome ethnicity as primordial sentiments and to replace it with 'corporatism' and a notion of shared values, social policy has attempted to resurrect a patriarchal and largely mythical version of the Chinese past and to create an identity out of a reinvented Confucianism (Chun 1996) and a dash of sociobiology. What is particularly revealing about recent Singapore cultural discourse is that as element after element of policy was seen not to work (only 17.8% of students enrolled for Confucian ethics, less than the number enrolled for Bible Knowledge, during the decade of moral education in schools; there was fierce opposition from many quarters to the incentives for graduate women; the National Ideology concept was received with less than total enthusiasm) and as its electoral base was slowly but surely eroding, the strategies changed, but not the basic theme. Quietly the new Confucianism has been maintained; what is significant is the way in which it has been refocused from the realm of public values to private ones, from politics to patriarchy. But patriarchy proves to be politics by other means, the point at which the politics of gender, culture, history, and the state finally come together.

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