Chinese cyberspaces: Defining the spatial component of a “borderless” media

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Abstract: Can a common “Chinese cyberspace” be defined in terms of language, culture and policy, or would it be more appropriate to speak of several distinct “Chinese cyberspaces”? And in what way can the relation between offline local entities and the cyberspaces be described? This paper highlights the fragmentation and/or commonalities of Chinese cyberspace(s) through a detailed analysis of websites which are particularly involved in constructing or deconstructing Chineseness belonging to “Greater China.” “Chinese cyberspace(s)” will refer to cyberspaces which are either defined by language, or by content, or by the political dimension. The author concludes that the actual existence of a common language presents the most obvious argument for the existence of a Chinese cyberspace. This is, however, counteracted by technical limitations, by laws, in particular by the PRC, and by cultural boundaries all of which restrict Chinese cyberspaces very much to specific political entities. Thus, these cyberspaces are characterized by various types of constraints. Finally, elements of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and hybridity are tightly restricted by issues related to Taiwan’s nation-building.

This paper focuses on the issue of whether a common “Chinese cyberspace” can be defined in terms of language, culture and policy, or whether we have to consider the existence of several distinct “Chinese cyberspaces,” where even the term “Chinese” has to be questioned.

The horizon thus has to be broadened from viewing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the sole representative of China and the Chinese to encompass other “Chinese homelands” and the Chinese diaspora. The linkages and networks between the various “Chinese homelands” and the diaspora must also be taken into account: even from a historical perspective, the mass media, including Chinese language newspapers, have played a prominent role in linking the Chinese diaspora to the “homelands” and also in fostering various identities ranging from strong Chinese nationalist sentiments to the assimilation and acculturation of Chinese migrants in various host societies (Chan, 2006; Chen, 2002; Huang, 1955; Ng, 1999; Suryadinata, 1971; Zheng, 1953). More recently, new information and communication technologies, such as the Internet with its various, often interactive features, have become widely employed within the diaspora and the Chinese homelands. These new technologies have changed the relations between the diaspora and the homelands and within the diaspora itself to a hitherto unknown degree. The Internet, in particular, functions as the extension of a global network within the Chinese diaspora, offering an accelerated rate of communication and reinforcing the linkages to the homeland which have existed for centuries; it also provides unique features, which foster new diversity and hybridity.
within the diaspora, thus creating new structures in the globalized world of this new millennium.

Research questions

This analysis will be carried out from two different perspectives. Firstly, it will be asked whether a common element of "Chineseness" (Chambers, 1994; Clifford, 1994; Ong & Nonini, 1997a; Ong & Nonini, 1997b) can be found in a – first of all, hypothetically very broadly defined – Chinese cyberspace. In particular, "Chineseness", as opposed to recent processes of nation-building in Taiwan, that is "Taiwanization" accompanied by "de-sinification" (Lynch, 2004; Wang and Liu, 2004; Schubert, 2006; Shih, Thompson and Tremlett, 2009; Chu, in press) will be considered. The second perspective derives from the Internet itself which is no longer seen only in the context of a more or less borderless "cyberspace," but in terms of its inherent – or, as Lessig (1999) has demonstrated, not so much inherent as man-made – features (law, social norms, market forces, and architecture or code), and the question of whether a "cyberspace" can be framed by the borders dividing the existing system of nation states. The fragmentation and/or commonalities of Chinese cyberspace(s) will be highlighted through a detailed analysis of websites dealing with the questions of Chineseness, the Chinese diaspora and cross-Strait relations, that is, those websites which are specifically involved in constructing or deconstructing Chineseness. The websites under research are official, governmental websites belonging to the political entities involved which are commonly referred to as “Greater China” – such as the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and also the Chinese diaspora.

In general, when carrying out research on the Internet one can rely on the user side, that is, on forums and BBSs, and carry out a more systematic analysis of the content. In this study, the author follows the hypotheses that the discourse is defined by the content of the websites, rather than user responses, at least in the case of more official and political websites. In the future, it would certainly be helpful to try to bring together both lines of argumentation but this cannot be done in the small-scale study which is presented here.

Political and private websites

In this paper, I focus particularly on political websites because I am primarily interested in the role of government and government-oriented organizations, but, of course, the value of other websites for research purposes, such as online gaming, entertainment/celebrity websites, sports websites, should not be under-estimated. I follow the line of argumentation brought forward by Allen Chun, who argued provocingly in his article “Fuck Chineseness” that “the production of discourse is an integral part of the state’s exercise in legitimization” and vehemently denied that the discourse about shared values that define Chineseness emanate from the people but “are articulated by the state, intellectuals, and other vested interests, all of whom claim naturally to speak on behalf of ‘society as a whole,’” (Chun, 1996, p. 115). With regard to cultural and political identity, the basic question is then “Instead of asking how identity is constituted, one should also ask when and why identity is invoked.” (Chun, 1996, p. 132). Periphery and center are other important terms used by Tu Weiming (Tu, 1994b) and by Ang (Ang, 1998, pp. 234-5) which can also be seen on the Internet where the PRC is exercising a kind of “hegemony in questions of Chineseness” which is, however counterbalanced and opposed by the diaspora including Taiwan. Additionally, a closer look is taken at private/semi-private websites dealing with similar issues and at examples derived from the Web 2.0. The paper concludes that, for a variety of political, cultural and societal reasons, common expectations about a borderless Chinese cyberspace cannot be confirmed.

Greater China and Chinese cyberspace(s): possible definitions and theoretical approaches

The various features of the Internet, such as websites, forums, and BBSs are only, at first glance, residing and moving in a global and borderless space; for example, websites in the PRC have to be registered (MacKinnon, 2006), but national laws on state security, pornography, libel, hate-speech, etc., also apply to websites in those cases where official registration is not required; forums are monitored, either by special government agencies, or by the Internet providers themselves (Lyon, 2003; MacKinnon, 2008; Xia, 2008:...
Internet users also reside in a specific societal, political and geographically defined environment, have been brought up and educated on questions of identity and belonging, and are also accustomed to using certain languages and writing styles (Braman, 1996). In analyzing these relations, a very broad definition of the Chinese diaspora and of the Chinese "homelands" should be employed, resembling, to some extent, what has been called "Greater China," "Cultural China," the "Chinese World" and the "Sinosphere" (Harding, 1995; Meyer-Clement & Schubert, 2004; Tu, 1994a; 1996). The starting point of my research is then a geographically-oriented definition of a "Greater China" composed of four different worlds: firstly, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (without Hong Kong and Macao); secondly, Hong Kong and Macao as Special Administrative Regions of the PRC and as part of the PRC’s "one country, two systems formula," with a wide degree of political, social and cultural autonomy; thirdly, Taiwan/ROC, which until the 1990s regarded itself, from the Kuomintang (KMT) perspective, as the homeland for "all Chinese," but has, since then, started to focus more attention on the newly established Taiwanese diaspora (Damm, 2007; Meyer-Clement & Schubert, 2004, p. 6); and fourthly, the overseas Chinese communities, also called the Chinese diaspora. This diaspora would include various places all over the world where ethnic Chinese reside – according to any definition, be it self-perception as "Chinese from China" (Zhongguoren 中國人), as "ethnic Chinese residing outside China" (huaren 華人), as being "of Chinese descent" (huayi 華裔), as "nationalist Chinese outside China" (huaqiao 華僑), as someone with a "hyphenated identity, such as Thai-Chinese or Asian-American with Chinese background," or be it the perception of others, for example, the surrounding society, country of residence or the view of the "homelands." These overseas Chinese communities / the Chinese diaspora can thus be divided into several different areas: Singapore, the only country in Southeast Asia with an ethnic Chinese majority (approximately 77 percent ethnic Chinese); countries such as Malaysia, which have very distinctive groups of ethnic Chinese (24 percent) and a high degree of Chinese language ability within these groups; other Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand (14 percent), Indonesia and the Philippines, with strong minority groups of ethnic Chinese who are almost completely assimilated and have only limited knowledge of (written) Chinese; overseas communities found outside Southeast Asia (Pan, 1999); the newly-emerged communities where the so-called new migrants (Chan, 2005; Charney, Kiong & Yeoh, 2003; Wang, 2002) form a majority and where these migrants are supposed to show a great interest in their countries/regions of origin, particularly with regard to the PRC (Barabantseva, 2004; Sun, 2005; Ip, 2006).

With regard to the homelands themselves, the contradictory developments/trends between economic and political integration, however, have not yet been reconciled: strong economic integration between Hong Kong, Taiwan and southern parts of China ("Lesser China") (Wang, 1993) has been accelerating during recent years, while ongoing nation-building and state-building processes in Taiwan triggered increasing political tension between Taiwan and China in particular during the presidency of Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008) (Mattlin, 2006; Mengin, 2004). Furthermore, since the KMT was returned to power in March 2008, it has become clear that the KMT is pursuing an agenda of closer economic interaction and, arguably, integration across the Taiwan Strait, but does not intend to bring about unification at any time soon (DeLisle, 2008; Chu, in press; Schubert and Damm, in press). “Taiwanization” in the form of a political attempt to build a new nation-state is virtually non-existent, but the question remains as to whether Taiwanization as a broader cultural and societal phenomenon has been abandoned.

Definition of “Chinese cyberspaces”

In the following, I would like to build upon a rather broad provisional definition of “Chinese cyberspaces” before going into a detailed analysis. In this context, “Chinese cyberspace(s)” will refer to cyberspaces which are either defined by language, that is Mandarin Chinese (the problems of cyberspaces in Taiwanese, Hoklo, Cantonese and Tibetan, etc. will be discussed later), or by content, that is, cyberspace dealing with cultural questions of Chineseness and history, or by the political dimension of Chinese international relations and cross-Strait relations.

A first look, however, at some more recent media reports and academic discourses defining and dealing with “Chinese cyberspace(s)” shows that Chinese cyberspace is often equated only with the PRC; the vast numbers of users who access the Internet in Chinese outside the PRC are thus disregarded, and little attention is paid to the numerous websites oriented towards “Greater China.”. Examples of the above are
various news/press organs have developed into online news portals; the Web 2.0 provides specific diaspora: websites are offered by diasporic institutions, overseas Chinese organizations, and academia. Thus, the many features of the Internet are employed in various ways by the countries in Southeast Asia with limited and restricted access to the Internet and with an Internet user rate in 2009, however, still varies a great deal, from almost 70 percent in Hong Kong (CNNIC, 7/2010) and 50 percent in Macao to down to 32 percent in the PRC (CNNIC, 7/2010, p. 4). In short, the users are 421 million Internet users in the PRC, 15 million in Taiwan and almost 5 million in Hong Kong. The user rate for Singapore is 78 percent (3.6 million users) (http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/sg.htm), and for Malaysia, 65 percent (17 million users) (http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm). In addition, millions of Chinese-speaking users access the Net outside the areas mentioned. Nevertheless, a huge digital gap still exists between, for example, Asian Americans who are the most wired people in the United States and the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and urban Malaysia; a similar divide can be observed between the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Laos, where the number of users has increased exponentially in recent years, and the ethnic Chinese living in Burma and Cambodia, which are among the few remaining countries in Southeast Asia with limited and restricted access to the Internet and with an Internet user rate of less than one percent. Thus, the many features of the Internet are employed in various ways by the diaspora: websites are offered by diasporic institutions, overseas Chinese organizations, and academia; various news/press organs have developed into online news portals; the Web 2.0 provides specific...
Internet forums, BBSs, online chats and self-produced videos and clips from TV shows and films.

The Chinese language content of the Internet has also rapidly increased, today there are approximately 11 million registered domains in the PRC (CNNIC, 7/2010, p. 4). The problem remains that the registration of a cn-domain (or hk, tw or sg) does not necessarily mean that these websites provide content in the Chinese language or, indeed, any content at all.

Language as a defining component

Language is obviously one of the key factors which limit access to a common and borderless cyberspace. This was, however, not acknowledged when the Internet was first developed and when English was still the dominant language on the Net. In his book, The Virtual Community, Howard Rheingold, pioneer of theoretical approaches to cyberspaces, refers to the possibility of making friends via BBSs with people in France and Japan in a borderless world, but omits to mention that only English-speaking users can participate: “Wherever I’ve traveled physically in recent years, I’ve found ready-made communities that I met online months before I traveled; our mutual enthusiasm for virtual communities served as a bridge, time and again, to people whose language and customs differ significantly from those I know well in California (Rheingold, 2000, p. Introduction).” Today, however, it has become obvious that most of the communication via the Internet takes place in the user’s respective language, with the English language still playing an important role, but the importance of Chinese – and other languages – has been steadily increasing over the recent years. According to Internet World Stats (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm, accessed 18 October 2010), the situation in 2010 is as follows: English remains the top language on the Internet with 537 million users and Chinese (Mandarin) comes second with 445 million users. One of the reasons for this is the broader availability of the Internet, which is now less restricted to the economic, cultural and political elite of a country and has become a ubiquitous phenomenon, not only in the first world but, at least in urban areas, in many developing countries (Damm, 2004, p.: 7; Ho, Kluver & Yang, 2003; Damm, 2008; Zhao, 2008; Qiu, 2009).

Language in the PRC

In the PRC, Mandarin, known as Putonghua, “the common language,” is the dominant language on the Net, even for speakers of Cantonese and Shanghainese, who are often unable to communicate efficiently in spoken Mandarin (Rohsenow, 2004). The written form of Putonghua employs simplified characters encoded in GB2312. In accordance with the PRC language law, websites in the PRC usually do not dare to promote other Chinese dialects. In Article 3, the language law states: “The State popularizes Putonghua and the standardized Chinese characters,” and in Article 4: “All citizens shall have the right to learn and use the standard spoken and written Chinese language. The State provides citizens with the conditions for learning and using the standard spoken and written Chinese language. Local people’s governments at various levels and the relevant departments under them shall take measures to popularize Putonghua and the standardized Chinese characters.” With regard to the written form, Article 10 advises the use of Putonghua and simplified characters: “Putonghua and the standardized Chinese characters shall be used as the basic language in education and teaching in schools and other institutions of education, except where otherwise provided for in laws.” It seems, however, that the use of dialects is not forbidden on the Internet, Article 14 only stipulates: “The standard spoken and written Chinese language shall be used as the basic spoken and written language in the following circumstances: (1) spoken and written language for broadcasting, films and TV programs; (2) written language for the facilities in public places; (3) written language in signboards and advertisements; (4) names of enterprises and other institutions; and (5) packaging and specifications of commodities marketed in the country.” However, the publication of websites which strongly promoted the use of local dialects would be a politically sensitive issue and would offend against the official language policy of the PRC. More recently, there have been reports of the efforts by speakers of non-Mandarin Chinese languages, in particular speakers of Cantonese, to fight for the public use of these languages in the face of strong official promotion of Mandarin. These street protests were mostly organized through the Internet as they faced a local media blackout (Ramzy, 2010).
A wide range of websites has been set up over the past few years specifically for the purpose of describing and explaining Chinese dialects (for an overview, see [http://www.hhqq.net/](http://www.hhqq.net/)), and there are websites for the learning of dialects such as Minnanhua ([http://www.520hai.com/mn](http://www.520hai.com/mn)), Cantonese ([http://www.cantonese.org.cn/ungoo](http://www.cantonese.org.cn/ungoo)), and Shanghainese ([http://blog.bcchinese.net/penpengao/archive/2006/03/28/61941.aspx](http://blog.bcchinese.net/penpengao/archive/2006/03/28/61941.aspx)). While the first CNNIC report ([CNNIC, 10/1997](http://www.cnnic.gov.cn/2000/200010/19971010_01.htm), p. 3) still lamented the lack of information available in Chinese, the PRC Chinese language content on the Net has dramatically increased since that time.

The establishment of more than 200 Confucius Institutes worldwide - and almost 30 million people learning Chinese as a second language - is certainly the most obvious symbol for these developments. Maintaining the close connections between the individual Confucius Institutes and China (and especially the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban)) is hardly imaginable without the use of the new electronic media. Teaching material, online courses, a standardized HSK examination for Chinese as a second language are all promoted and supported with the help of the World Wide Web, and new Confucius institutes are said to be developed which are operated on-line ([http://www.confuciusinstitute.net](http://www.confuciusinstitute.net)). “It is the right time for us to promote Chinese language and culture, as the country is having more international contact and cooperation,” said Wang Shenghong, president of Fudan University in Shanghai ([Xinhua, 19 July 2006](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2006-07/19/content_5533087.htm)). Xinhuonet openly declared that “Booming Confucius institutes enhance China’s soft power” ([Yang, 2 November 2008](http://www.china.com.cn/lgq/2008-11/02/content_11194819.htm)).

**Language in Taiwan**

The official language policy in Taiwan has been shifting towards the equal use of all “national languages,” namely, Mandarin (formerly called Guoyu, now often referred to as Huayu), Taiwanese (Hoklo 福佬), Hakka 客家 and the languages of the indigenous population. But although the KMT’s efforts to introduce Mandarin as the only official language have largely failed ([Hong & Murray, 2005](http://www.ces.hku.hk/publications/books_and_reports.html), p. 1; [Hsiau, 1997](http://www.520hai.com/mn)), Mandarin has de facto become the lingua franca in Taiwan. Websites in Mandarin employ traditional characters encoded in Big5, while additional characters may be added for language learners (usually Bopomofo for Mandarin) and Western alphabetic symbols for Hoklo. There is an increasing tendency to use Taiwanese (Hoklo) also as the written form on websites (see, e.g., [http://lomaji.com/pun-cham](http://lomaji.com/pun-cham) and [http://pektiong.org/wp](http://pektiong.org/wp)) and also in some articles in newspapers (for a list of articles published in the Liberty Times (Ziyou shibao 自由時報), see [http://iug.csie.dahan.edu.tw/khanbut/Chuiusipo/ci.asp](http://iug.csie.dahan.edu.tw/khanbut/Chuiusipo/ci.asp)). Articles written in Hoklo are not comprehensible to users who only understand Mandarin. Many websites offering news and information in Taiwanese also have a strong political bent and promote the use of Hoklo as a symbolic weapon to fight against the domination of Taiwan by the mainlanders. The World United Formosans for Independence, for example, provides an extensive explanation of the importance of Hoklo ([http://www.wufi.org.tw/taibun.htm](http://www.wufi.org.tw/taibun.htm)); the main part of the website, however, is written in Mandarin, which shows that a common written form of Hoklo has not been developed and even proponents of Hoklo usually have to employ the written form of Mandarin for their communications ([Klöter, 2005](http://www.ces.hku.hk/publications/books_and_reports.html)).

**Language in Hong Kong, Macao and the diaspora**

While most inhabitants of Hong Kong and Macao speak Cantonese, their standard written language is Mandarin, often combined with the use of specific Chinese characters unknown in other parts of the Chinese-speaking world (the so-called Hong Kong Supplementary Character Set HKSCS to Big5); there are some Cantonese websites in Hong Kong and Cantonese is said to be popular in chats and forums. In this connection, the website of the Association for the Cantonese Language (Yueyu xiehui 粵語協會) ([http://www.cantonese.org.cn](http://www.cantonese.org.cn)) should be mentioned. This site is hosted in the PRC, but employs Big5 encoding. Their slogan is “Let the ethnic Chinese (Huaren) all over the world work together to build the biggest site for Cantonese."

The situation in the Chinese diaspora varies a great deal. A distinction should be made between areas where Chinese (Mandarin) is taught regularly at school and where the main – offline –communication is –
partially – carried out in Chinese, and other regions, where non-Chinese languages are primarily used. Singapore provides the best example of one of the former areas: Mandarin, known as Huayu and written in simplified characters, is the official language for the majority of the ethnic Chinese population in Singapore; this also is true to a lesser extent for Malaysia where a complete Chinese school system up to secondary level exists, partly privately funded, and it can be assumed that approximately 90 percent of the Chinese children go to a Chinese primary school (Pan, 1999). The official government website of Singapore, SinGov (http://www.gov.sg), however, employs English as the general language and offers only limited information in the other official languages. Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee’s “May Day Rally Speech 2007,” for example, is offered in the following language versions: “Speech in English,” “Speech in Chinese,” “Speech in Chinese (English Translation)” and “Speech in Malay” (see http://app.sprinter.gov.sg/data/pr/2007050103.htm, http://app.sprinter.gov.sg/data/pr/2007050105.htm, accessed 20 June 2008).

Depending on the specific political and societal situation, the rest of the Chinese diaspora employs various other languages in addition to Chinese. A general and comprehensive Chinese education does not usually exist (or is only available in private schools to various degrees), thus knowledge of the written form of the Chinese language is very limited; the World Huaren Foundation provides the following statement on their website regarding the language situation (http://www.huaren.org/Text/1124691084613-6097/Chinese-Communities, accessed 20 June 2008): “At ‘Huaren’ we understand that some of us, for example, those living in Indonesia or Thailand may not have a Chinese name. They were discouraged or legally banned from studying the Chinese language. We know that even in countries such as Europe, U.S., Australia or New Zealand not many second generation ethnic Chinese could speak Mandarin or a dialect.” Many websites oriented towards the Chinese overseas community are therefore multilingual or in English, just to give a few examples: the Chung Wah Association of Western Australia provides only an English language page (http://www.chungwah.org.au, accessed 20 June 2008), while the Chinese Australian Service Society provides their service in English, Chinese, Korean, and Indonesian (http://www.cass.org.au, accessed 20 June 2008). Huaren Online, a service with a registered website in Germany, presents their service only in simplified Chinese (http://www.huaren-online.com/default.asp, accessed 20 June 2008).

In Thailand and in Indonesia, countries where, for very different reasons, Chinese is not encouraged, Thai and Bahasa Indonesia are used: for example, IndoCina, as a large forum for Chinese Indonesians (http://www.indocina.net), uses English and Bahasa Indonesia, and the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce (http://www.thaiccc.or.th) only provides information in English and Thai, not in Chinese.

Regarding language, “Chinese cyberspace” could thus be defined as the Internet applications where Mandarin is used in its written form, in either simplified or traditional characters. As the written form of Cantonese or Taiwanese (Hoklo) cannot be understood by Mandarin users, I do not include these specific websites in the definition of a common Chinese cyberspace.

**Culture and politics of Chineseness**

Culture and politics are also important features in the definition of a common Chinese cyberspace. Official and private websites on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are often explicitly oriented towards either cross-Strait relations or to questions related to the (non)-existence of Chineseness and to Chinese and Taiwanese nationalism. For example, the official websites of the PRC and Taiwan today are deeply involved in constructing and de-constructing “Chineseness” and Chinese history narratives. The Internet has become “a privileged tool for acting, informing, recruiting, organizing, dominating and counter-dominating” in the Chinese world and this is essential with regard to the question of how Taiwan and China’s communication and information policies have dealt with the cross-Strait relations (Batto, 2004).

The analysis of these websites presents the researcher with two fundamental problems: firstly, without large-scale empirical research, it is hardly possible to clarify the influence of these websites on the users coming from various “Chinese” places: who exactly are the users, why do they visit these websites and which other websites are usually frequented? From a content analysis of these websites, from the way the websites are constructed and from the different language versions provided, some basic conclusions regarding the users can be drawn. That is to say, websites in English, or even in Spanish, French, German and Arabic, are probably directed towards an international audience, while Chinese websites
offering information in traditional characters and Taiwanese websites offering information in simplified characters, are meant for the “other side.” Secondly, the question of censorship should not be omitted: the PRC is known for heavily filtering cyberspace (Zittrain & Edelman, 2003), in particular for information coming from Taiwan and related to Taiwan. Thus, at least if the results obtained from The Great Firewall of China (http://www.greatfirewallofchina.org) are trustworthy, almost all the Taiwanese websites analyzed below are censored and blocked in the PRC and only accessible to technical savvies within the PRC, or to Chinese residing outside the PRC.22

Websites in the PRC

In general, official PRC websites are eager to present a picture of Taiwan as an essential part of China and Batto (Batto, 2004, p. 105) remarked that www.china.org.cn (in Big5 encoding, directed towards the audience in Taiwan and Hong Kong) and www.china.com.cn (in GB encoding, directed towards the PRC audience), look identical in all ways and do not give the issue of Taiwan any special attention, while the English, French and German language versions of these websites frequently feature speeches and communiqués dealing with cross-Strait relations. This is also holds true for the official website of the Central People’s Government of the PRC (http://www.gov.cn) which offers information only in simplified Chinese. One very interesting example of a website directed at the Taiwanese doing business in China is the website of the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots (http://www.tailian.org.cn). This official organization was established in 1981 in Beijing, and according to its self-concept, it is an “association for Taiwanese compatriots residing in mainland China.” Its vision is described on the website as “a patriotic mass organization for promoting the peaceful unification under the ‘one country two systems’ formula.” This organization also scrutinizes relations in the fields of economy, science, technology, culture, academia, and sports; practical services and information are also offered (http://www.tailian.org.cn/jianjie/tljianjie.asp). On the website, there is a link to a version in traditional characters.23 The homepage offers links for practical information for the Taiwanese living in China, such as a “Compass for Taiwanese businessmen for investments,” “Information on how to school Taiwanese children,” “Laws and regulations,” and “Rules and regulations concerning marriage.” With regard to Chineseness, Chinese culture and cross-Strait relations, “Travel in Chinese Culture” (Zhonghua wenhua zhi lü 中華文化之旅), starts with a highlighted statement referring to the ethnic and cultural similarities of the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait: “The Chinese people have created a bright Chinese culture during the 5000 years of their history. The compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait all belong to the same great Chinese nation-family; the culture on both sides has been constructed on the common foundations of Chinese culture, and it is linked by the Chinese spirit. Both sides of the Taiwan Strait share the same heritage and bring honor to the Chinese nation through their outstanding cultural tradition” (http://www.tailian.org.cn/wenhua/index.asp). In “General and specific polices,” PRC policy is explicitly summarized in two FAQs on “One China” and on “One country, two systems” (http://www.tailian.org.cn/jianjie/tljianjie.asp, accessed 10 October 2008) with questions such as:

“Why can the status quo not be prolonged forever?”

“Will mainland China really employ military force, when the Taiwanese authorities announce ‘independence’?”

“Why does the mainland motherland emphasize ‘peaceful unification’ by ‘one country, two systems’?”

“The living conditions on both sides of the Strait differ from each other, how can peaceful unification thus take place?”

“Does peaceful unification amount to ‘using strength to bully the weak,’ ‘and the big swallowing up the small’?”

“Will Taiwan’s freedom of the press be restricted after unification?”

“What will change in Taiwan’s culture after unification?”
The answers could be summarized as follows:

- China will use force if “necessary” and if the “will of the whole Chinese nation is not respected;”
- All in all, Taiwan will enjoy at least as much freedom and independence as Hong Kong;
- There will be few changes in Taiwan; and finally,
- Unification will bring “honor and glory” to the Chinese nation.

This website, specifically oriented towards Taiwanese businessmen living in China, thus combines political propaganda and practical information. It might be assumed that due to the large amount of useful information, the propaganda sections are also read by Taiwanese, and even if the Big5 version does not – always – work, the Taiwanese living in China are most likely able to read and understand simplified Chinese characters. This website is obviously intended to construct a common sense of Chineseness within people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, but it also, without doubt, serves as an official propaganda tool for the PRC.

While in the case of the Internet, it seemed for a long time that English would continue to play the dominant role, this perspective has definitely changed during recent years. The use of Chinese, in particular, as the language spoken by more native speakers than any other language in the world, has increased dramatically on the Internet. The importance of the Chinese language should, however, not only be attributed to the sheer quantity; two major – interwoven – factors should also be considered. First of all, the opening of the PRC to the world, which has been accompanied by astonishing economic growth and an increase in Chinese engagement in world politics starting in the early 1980s, accelerating in the 1990s and the new millennium, has also led to a stronger interest in the Chinese language worldwide – not only in Southeast Asia where Chinese always had played an important role although it never achieved the role of a lingua franca such as English, but as a global trend. Secondly, the Chinese government has been actively promoting the Chinese language worldwide since 2004, thus linking up language and culture as part of what has been called the soft power strategy of the PRC. Not only the increasing number of Chinese websites online, but also in particular government related websites concerned with culture and language, might be put in the context of the much broader attempt by the PRC to spread the Chinese language (Putonghua) as a form of cultural outreach worldwide. There is a strong governmental imperative to use electronic media to “make Chinese culture accessible.***

### Websites in Taiwan

Looking at the official websites in Taiwan during the rule of Chen Shui-bian from 2000 to 2008, two fundamental differences to the PRC websites have to be taken into account: first of all, Internet controls set up by the PRC prevents PRC users from visiting most official Taiwanese websites. For example, the Government Information Office website – [http://info.gio.gov.tw](http://info.gio.gov.tw) – was blocked in 2008, but is accessible now; the President’s website – [http://www.president.gov.tw](http://www.president.gov.tw) – and private websites “promoting” Taiwanese independence – such as the website of the World United Formosans for Independence, [http://www.wufi.org.tw](http://www.wufi.org.tw), the Peng Foundation for Culture and Education [http://www.hi-on.org.tw](http://www.hi-on.org.tw), the website of the newspapers with the largest circulation in Taiwan, the *Liberty Times*, [http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/index.htm](http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/index.htm), and the website of the blogger Billy Pan (Pan Jianzhi 潘建志), [http://www.wretch.cc/blog/billypan101](http://www.wretch.cc/blog/billypan101) are blocked PRC-wide. Secondly, the issue of (re)-unification versus the independence of Taiwan is a topic of hot debate in Taiwan itself. In the democratic and pluralistic society which has developed in Taiwan during the last few decades, there is no official restriction on discussions of this topic; thus, besides the official statements, many privately owned websites can be found offering diverse opinions.

The official Government Information Office site ([http://www.gio.gov.tw](http://www.gio.gov.tw)) – analyzed in 2007 - offered information in English and Chinese (Big5, traditional characters) and also in many other languages, such as Spanish, French, German, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Czech and Brazilian
Portuguese. This website was then very much focused on creating an image of Taiwan as totally unconnected to China; the homepage, for example, presented a map of Taiwan without showing any other countries, and the term “China” was only mentioned once in the imprint at the bottom, “Government Information Office, Republic of China (Taiwan),” while the term “Taiwan” appeared 14 times (10 May 2007) on the English site, which is the standard page. On the Chinese (Big5) site, the term “Taiwan” did not appear, but terms such as “domestic” and “international” were used, which can be translated literally as “inside and outside the state” (guonei 内 and guoji 外). Only in the links to the news section, did we find the word “Taiwan” with regard to the international status of Taiwan, such as Taiwan’s appeal to the international community for support in her efforts to join the WHO. Batto carried out her research in 2004, but the websites were restructured during the last term of President Chen Shui-bian’s rule (2004-2008). A comparison of the websites in 2007 with the websites in 2004 shows the following results: a separate e-government portal had been established (http://english.www.gov.tw) which was aimed more at serving Taiwanese local needs and offered its services only in traditional characters. The official website of the President (http://www.president.gov.tw/) at that time, Chen Shui-bian, offered identical content in simplified and traditional characters in Chinese, and a slightly different version in English, mostly focusing on foreign relations and official speeches made by the President, but also including other topics, such as gender mainstreaming, statistics and news releases. The homepage was now in Chinese (Big5) and the news headlines focused on the WHO topic; the links to the constitution of the ROC (Taiwan) were highlighted. The website entitled “Brief explanation of the national condition of the ROC (Taiwan)” 中華民國(台灣)國情簡介 (http://www.president.gov.tw/1_loc_intro/roc_intro.html), offered a construct of Taiwanese identity based not on a primordial understanding, but on the “constitutional patriotism” described by Habermas (1994) (“Verfassungspatriotismus”). The particularities of Taiwan were described at length: Taiwan is being shaped by democratization, globalization and economic liberalization in the 21st century and it is the task of the President to support Taiwan’s steps forward into a glorious future. The Japanese era was described as a colonial time; the rule of the KMT which followed, as authoritarian. The people of Taiwan (Taiwan renmin 台灣人民), as the rulers of Taiwan, (that is, opposed to the idea that all “Chinese” must decide the future of Taiwan) were mentioned several times, and it was stressed that “my government” (in the view of the President) had effective jurisdiction over Taiwan, Penghu, Matsu, Kinmen, the Dong-sha islands and the Nan-sha islands.

With regard to the population, the majority of the Han, including ethnic subgroups, was mentioned, and also the influence of the indigenous peoples. Taiwan was then described in the next paragraph as a society shaped by immigration characteristics: “In the several hundred years of Taiwan’s historical development, the various ethnic groups have competed with each other and cooperated, which has finally allowed the development of the innovation and vitality necessary for the multicultural society of Taiwan today.”

In 2007, the websites of the Mainland Affairs Council (http://www.mac.gov.tw) and the Straits Exchange Foundation (http://www.sef.org.tw), in particular, were linked to the issue of cross-Strait relations. Any references to a possible unification were carefully avoided: Taiwan and China were described as two independent nations, and preference was given to the term “Taiwan” rather than “ROC.” “The two sides of the Taiwan Strait have since been governed as separate territories and have developed separate identities. As the ROC’s largest island, Taiwan is also the home of the nation’s capital. The ROC is more commonly known throughout the world as ‘Taiwan.’” President Chen was quoted as saying: “The Republic of China is an independent, sovereign state; Taiwan’s sovereignty belongs to the 23 million people of Taiwan; and only the 23 million people of Taiwan can decide their future” (http://www.gio.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=32656&ctNode=2586). The Mainland Affairs Council offered information in English, in traditional (Zhongwen zhengti ban 中文正体版) and simplified Chinese. Both the Chinese and English versions focused on opinion polls regarding the future of Taiwan, stressing the democratic nature of Taiwan’s government. The Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission (OCAC), as an official organization in Taiwan, offered their website in traditional Chinese and in English (http://www.ocac.gov.tw). The educational website of the Overseas Compatriots Association offered links to websites on various languages, such as Chinese, Taiwanese and Hakka (in the Chinese version: 濟蓋華語文、閩南語 (Taiwanese) and 客語 (Hakka) (http://edu.ocac.gov.tw/home_en.htm).
Thus, during the reign of Chen Shui-bian, the official websites on both sides of the Taiwan Strait were eagerly competing to construct a different Chinese cyberspace which had an indisputable advantage for China, as almost all websites from Taiwan which deconstruct Chineseness and create the image of a particular Taiwanese identity and history were—and still are—inaccessible in the PRC. Both sides offered their information in many different languages in order to gain international recognition for their views.

**Private/Semi-Private websites and the plurality of opinion in Taiwan**

The official websites on both sides of the Taiwan Strait give a clear presentation of the official view of the respective government, while there is a certain plurality of opinion in the various news sections of Taiwanese official websites. The results of the opinion polls show that Taiwan is divided on the question of “Chineseness vs. Taiwaneseness” and on the ensuing practical implications for Strait politics. In Taiwan, however, a great variety of private websites or websites offered by non-governmental organizations and political parties deals with the relationship between Taiwan and China, the Chineseness of Taiwan, and also the relationship between Japan and Taiwan. It has to be admitted that the audience is limited as most of these websites are blocked in the PRC and are thus only available to users in Taiwan or to overseas Chinese. As the topic of Taiwanese independence is one of the “taboo” topics in the PRC, there are no permanent web pages in China which are pro-Taiwanese independence, but there are occasional postings on forums which offer opinions directed against PRC official policy, for example, in the “Strong Country Forum,” offered by the *People’s Daily* (http://www.people.com.cn/).

Searches with Google and Yam (http://www.yam.com) provide an infinite number of websites on Taiwanese independence and Taiwanese history, while the number of pro-unification websites based in Taiwan is significantly smaller. Some selected examples to demonstrate the construction process of this new Taiwanese narrative which accelerated after Chen Shui-bian from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected President in 2004 are:

- **TaiwanVic.com** (http://www.taiwanvic.com) presents the following slogan on its homepage “When Taiwanese subjective identity and national identification have been created, everything in the world will be perfect” (Taiwan zhuti yishi ji guojia rentong jianli hou yiqie haiqiu tiankong 臺灣主體意識及國家認同建立後一切海闊天空). This website offers forums and links to various national and international news articles which are pro-Taiwanese independence. The website is more interested in politics than in history and culture, and tries, in particular, to de-link any attempt by the “blue camp” (the KMT and the People First Party PFP) to connect democratization in China with Taiwan’s future (the site is blocked in China).
- **The website of the Goa-Seng-Lang Association for Taiwan Independence (waishengren Taiwan duli zujinhuì外省人台灣獨立促進會, Mainlanders for Taiwanese independence, http://www.1949er.org) formulate** their mission statement thus: “We do not oppose the ‘one China principle,’ but we do not agree at all that Taiwan belongs to China, and we also firmly reject the idea that Taiwan can represent China: the Taiwanese are not Chinese. We should not regard Taiwan as part of China … The territory belongs to the Taiwanese, who love it and protect it.” Their arguments are based on geographically-defined territory, thus disregarding the perspectives of primordial ethnicity and race which formed the basis of Taiwanese nationalism in the 1970s and 1980s.
- **The Taiwan Nation (Taiwanguo 台灣國) website offers historical explanations to substantiate the argument that Taiwan does not belong to China** (http://www.taiwannation.com.tw/inside028.htm). One forum specifically opposes the interpretation of the “return” of Taiwan to the ROC in 1949 which is shared by the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), arguing instead in favor of Taiwan’s becoming a member of the UN as an independent new state.

One of the few examples of a cross-Strait dialogue is found in the PRC forum “Peace of China Forum – Reunification of the Motherland” (中國和平論壇 / 祖國統一, http://forum.china.com.cn/ciicbbs/read.php?tid=97631), where a Taiwanese user gives a detailed explanation of the pro-Taiwanese independence position, arguing for that position. Taiwanese users apparently have the opportunity to visit PRC forums to offer their interpretations of history, but it is hard to predict how long their statements
opposing the official PRC view will be allowed to remain on a PRC forum.

The United Formosans for Independence propagate Taiwanese/Hoklo as the mother tongue for a “New Republic of Taiwan.” The site itself is offered, however, in Mandarin, English and Japanese, with many links to articles and web-pages in Taiwanese. All in all, a wide range of information is offered, all related to the aim of the Alliance: “WUFi is dedicated to the establishment of a free, democratic and independent Republic of Taiwan in accordance with the principle of the self-determination of peoples. We are committed to the fundamental freedoms and human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and therefore repudiate all forms of foreign dominance and interventions that run counter to the interests of the 23-million Taiwanese people.” Many links offered on their homepage refer to the construction of a Taiwanese identity such as “Nation-building forum,” “Understanding Taiwan,” “The correct name of Taiwan,” “Special column for Taiwanese,” “Taiwanese authors and works,” “Open forum of Taiwan (台灣e廣場),” and “Security of Taiwan.” As the two other languages offered are English and Japanese, it is obvious that the website is primarily targeting the Taiwanese and has only a lesser focus on the international community, including Japan, which is regarded as the only Asian “super-power” which – partially – supports greater Taiwanese independence for historical reasons. In addition, there are numerous other websites which emphasize Taiwan’s close relationship with Japan (see, for example, the site “New Taiwan” (http://www.newtaiwan.com.tw). On these pro-Japanese websites, the period from 1895 to 1945 is usually referred to as “the Japanese period” (Rizhi shiqi日治時期) instead of the previously widely-used phrase: “the period of Japanese occupation” (Riju日據). (For example, the website of the Taiwan Database for Empirical Legal Studies, http://ltcsd.lib.ntu.edu.tw/ or the website of the Archives of the Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica http://ithda.ith.sinica.edu.tw/.) 31 The Japanese period is constructed as a time of modernization and usually compared favorably with the years of Chiang Kai-shek’s rule which is described as anti-modern and more colonialist than the Japanese period: “By the 1930s, … the Japanese had already succeeded in setting up a functioning road and railway system, and completed an infrastructure for the supply of electricity, telegraphy and water; the streets were now orderly. … To summarize, it can be said that the Yi-lan area had been thoroughly modernized (http://media.ilc.edu.tw/history_data/history/h03/h01-3.htm, accessed 20 June 2008, own translation).” Evidence of a cultural proximity to Japan (which is accompanied by separation/alienation regarding China) can also be found on the website on Shimenting西門町, the trendiest shopping area in Taipei for teenagers and young people (http://www.shimen-walker.com). This site offers many features on Japanese aesthetics and information on Japanese culture (and is blocked in China). An overview of the history of Shimenting presents, in fairly neutral terms, a description of the first boom in the Shimenting district during the Japanese administration, mentions the economic and cultural highlights of both the Japanese period (that is 1935) and the 1950s, when “a great number of mainlanders rushed into Shimenting after the end of the World War II.”

On the other hand, there are a few websites which specifically promote the unification of Taiwan with the PRC (these are, interesting enough, also blocked in China), such as the “Alliance for the Reunification of China” (http://www.onechina.org.tw). This association was established in 1988 and gives unqualified support to the “one country, two systems” of the PRC; the founding members of the organization, such as Chen Yingzhen 陳映真, the famous Taiwanese writer of nativist literature, were former opponents of Chiang Kai-shek, and only later became ardent supporters of the PRC. Other pro-unification forums are offered by the People’s First Party (http://forum.pfp.org.tw/viewtopic.php?=&p=251886), the opposition party which, with the New Party, is most inclined towards unification. The party’s website offers forums where, usually, supporters of the party meet; their tone is strongly “anti-green,” but direct support for the CCP is much less in evidence here than it is in the above-mentioned onechinaorg.tw. Thus, Taiwanese cyberspace reflects clearly the complex ethnic and political affiliations within contemporary Taiwanese society.

**Conclusion**

My preliminary results are as follows: at first sight, the actual existence of a common language (Mandarin, also called Putonghua, Guoyu or Huayu) seems to present the most obvious argument for the existence of a Chinese cyberspace shaped by a common language, that is, Mandarin, whether Putonghua, Guoyu...
or Huayu. Problematic issues, such as the use of simplified and traditional characters (and encoding problems), have increasingly become less important as computers today are usually based on Unicode systems which can show both characters simultaneously, and helper programs also exist which can easily convert the characters. This cyberspace has its equivalent in a geographically-defined Greater China composed of the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. Several other arguments, however, have to be taken into account. Today, in Taiwan, and also to a lesser extent in Hong Kong, many forums employ localized variations of Cantonese and Hoklo, which render these sites incomprehensible for Mandarin users. The Taiwanese government has even put forward a proposal to equalize the use of all mother tongues, which would foster the increased usage of Hoklo and Hakka; some of the larger newspapers in Taiwan have started to increase the number of articles published in Hoklo. If we extend the concept of Greater China to encompass Southeast Asia and the Chinese diaspora in general, even greater language diversity is found, such as, Thai, Bahasa Indonesian and English, since most of the ethnic Chinese living abroad, are unable to read, let alone write Chinese.

An essentialized version of Chineseness is widely used in the politicized web-space of the PRC as part of an official state discourse, but only on a few websites in Taiwan and in the Chinese diaspora. The PRC here plays identity politics concerning the definition of the “Chinese nation,” and “tries to monopolize power of interpretation about who are ‘Chinese’ and what it means to be Chinese” (Wu 2007, p. 299). This version of Chineseness is, however, especially in Taiwan counterbalanced by numerous websites of official organs and private organizations which deconstruct the existence of a primordial Chineseness and a common Chinese history. Two other points deserve mention: firstly, the technical limitations and laws, which present obstacles to a free and borderless Internet: the PRC, in particular, hinders communication between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait by blocking not only all the official Taiwanese websites, but also the Taiwanese pro-communist websites engaging in cross-Strait issues. Secondly, cultural boundaries seem to exist: people like to go to places where they feel comfortable. Empirical research carried out in Taiwan (Liu, Day, Sun & Wang, 2002) mentions that 85 percent of Taiwanese users remain almost exclusively within the Taiwanese cyberspace, and that the number of users visiting foreign websites (English and Japanese) is still greater than the number visiting other Chinese cyberspaces (5.9 percent). The results of earlier research on the Internet and the Chinese Diaspora, for example, are thus thrown open to question and Loong Wong’s claim that “The Internet has become a new global phenomenon, enlarging new democratic discourse and has helped to foster new empowerment and learning experiences” (Wong, 2003) cannot be substantiated. Although the Chinese cyberspace is obviously global and reaches out, to some extent, beyond national borders, it is characterized by various types of constraints (Lessig, 1999), such as PRC censorship. In the case of the fragmented Chinese cyberspace(s) (Damm, 2004, 2007; Keane, 2001), elements of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and hybridity are tightly constrained by issues related to Taiwan’s nation-building. To summarize, the existence of a Chinese cyberspace without borders or boundaries could not be confirmed and my analysis of the Chinese cyberspace(s) reveals the deficiencies in existing theories, such as the once popular proclamation of the Internet as a borderless space (Caimcross, 1997; Rheingold, 2000).

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Notes

1 For problems related to the terminology, see Damm (2007, p. FN 1) and Ge (2001).

2 The World Huaren Federation (http://www.huaren.org) even talks about “Huaren-Governments” (PRC, ROC, Hong Kong Government, Macau Government) which is rather strange, considering that the term “huaren” is most frequently used to refer specifically to people who accept a third homeland as their homeland (Wang, 1993).

3 This has been severely criticized by Dai (2007).

4 CDP describes his research activities as follows: “Research, visiting fellow program and technology development. CDP researches and publishes on, among other subjects, the rise of participatory media in Chinese cyberspace and its interplay with China’s media and politics. CDP will establish a ‘China Digital Fellows’ program, which will engage in activities such as developing distributive blogging tools, promoting open culture and building an information network on the development of technology and society in China.”

5 In more detail, this article deals with the important portals: SINA (http://www.sina.com) is described as “The most popular Chinese-language portal. Backed by Goldman Sachs, it targets global Chinese from bases in Silicon Valley, Taiwan, and Hong Kong;” SOHU (http://www.sohu.com) as “Founded by MIT graduate Charles Zhang with backing from Intel and Dow Jones;” CHINA.com, as “A July IPO in the U.S. raised $84 million. Its mainland following is small, but it has portals in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Backed by AOL, Xinhua;” NETEASE (http://www.163.com) as “A portal owned and run by a private Chinese entrepreneur. It is growing fast and is tied to Cable & Wireless. Pioneering online auctions;” and ZHAODAOLA (http://www.zhaodaola.com/), “A latecomer, this Beijing-based portal is backed by televangelist Pat Robertson and a Malaysian conglomerate.”

6 In Taiwan, the term “Guoyu” is regarded by the green-camp as being too “Chinese,” and has partly been replaced by “Huayu,” which was formerly used only in Southeast Asia The national language development bill (國家語言發展法草案) as proposed on the 2 February 2007, did not mention specifically which national languages in Taiwan would be accepted; it seems, however, that Mandarin, Hoklo, Hakka and the languages of the indigenous people would be included (see also Hirsch, 2007). In general, the draft talks only about national languages (国家语言) and lingua franca (通用语), but does not mention a “State language” (Guoyu) or a “common official language” (Guanfang yuyan 官方语言); (published online as http://www.cca.gov.tw/elandapp/autocue/upload_techdoc/1170386245768/%B0%Ea%BB%y%A8%A5%B5o%AEi%Aak%AF%F3%AE%D7.doc; accessed on 24 March 2007).

7 In Chinese, a Google search returns terms such as “中國虛擬空間,” but does not give any results for “華語虛擬空間,” and “中文虛擬空間.”
For the economic integration of new information technologies within Greater China in general, and China and Taiwan in particular, see Naughton (2004) and Sum (2004).

Of course, only about three-quarters of the Singaporean users and only one third of those in Malaysia are ethnic Chinese; it can also be assumed that many users in these countries access the Internet in English and, in the case of Malaysia, also in Malay. Http://global-reach.biz/globstats/details.html (accessed on 7 May 2007) states that approximately 2.9 million users in Malaysia and 2.1 million users in Singapore use Chinese online.

According to a survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (quoted in Saunders & Ding, 2006, pp. 269-70).

The situation in Vietnam has changed since these observations were made by Ann Shu-ju Chiu (2005, p. 352); the Internet penetration rate today stands rather higher, at about 27 percent, and is thus even higher than in China and Thailand (see http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#vn); Laos has an Internet user rate of 7.5 percent (see http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#la); all internetworldstats.com sites accessed on 18 October 2010).

Other widely used languages are Spanish, Japanese, German, French, Portuguese, Korean, Italian and Arabic. The users of all other languages total 203 million. That is to say, fewer than 30 % of all users worldwide are English speakers, and 12% are Chinese speakers.

The problem of a digital divide, however, still remains. In China, the user rates differ widely among the provinces, and between urban and rural areas. See Giese (2003).

For the encoding of Chinese characters, see the Unicode Han Database and the explanations at http://unicode.org/Public/UNIDATA/Unihan.html, accessed 20 June 2008.


The websites were accessed on 10 May 2007.

See “The Revised Language Development Bill” (國家語言發展法草案), from 2001 (http://www.cca.gov.tw/elandapp/autocue/upload_techdoc/1170386245768/%B0%EA%AEa%BBy%A8%A5%B5o%Ak%AF%F3%AE%D7.doc, accessed 20 June 2008): “Under the revised Language Development Bill, Taiwan will stop defining Mandarin Chinese, the lingua franca of China, as the ‘national language.’” For the use of Hakka in globalized cyberspace, see also Damm (2001). Instead, it will list Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, Hakka and Taiwan’s aboriginal tongues as its national languages, Chiu Chuang-liang, director of the cabinet’s council for Cultural Planning and Development, said (“Taiwan to stop calling Mandarin Chinese its national language,” Mar 20, 2007, 8:11 GMT, Monsters and Critics, http://news.monstersandcritics.com/asiapacific/news/article_1280035.php). This policy has not been changed under the Ma administration. See, for example, the discussion on textbooks for middle schools: “In Taiwanese Textbooks ‘Guoyu’ will be Changed to ‘Huayu’: The Ministry of Education Denies ‘Desinification’” (台灣·教科書“國語”改“華語”·教育部否認去中國化). Sin Chew Daily, 26 September 2010 (http://www.sinchew.com.my/node/174110, accessed 18 October 2010).

There is, of course, an increasing tendency to use the traditional characters included in Unicode.

There is no official written form of Hoklo. One of the first forms was developed by Presbyterian missionaries in the 19th century and is usually known as Peh-oe-jí. Alternatively, Han characters are used, sounds are often borrowed randomly and some Western alphabet and non-standardized characters are
added in colloquial writing. Other forms are: the Taiwanese Language Phonetic Alphabet (TLPA), Modern Taiwanese Language (MTL), Phośti Daibuun (PSDB) and Tongyong Pinyin. There was also a Taiwanese orthography, based on the Japanese Kana system during Japanese rule, and in Bopomofo, during the KMT rule (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese_(linguistics) accessed 10 June 2008; see also Klöter, 2005).


21 Although the first waves of Chinese migrants (1850 – 1920) derived from various Southern Chinese provinces, and the all of these migrants spoke Chinese languages unintelligible to Mandarin, the situation in Southeast Asia today has changed completely: in Singapore and Malaysia only Mandarin is taught in schools, and languages such as Hakka (Kejia), Teochiu (Chaozhou) and Hokkien (Minnan) are only spoken by a disappearing minority of elder people. The written form non-Mandarin languages is rarely used; the exception is Cantonese (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantonese which has the most well-developed written form of all Chinese languages besides Mandarin and is often used in Hong Kong.

22 This website is maintained by private and academic staff in the Netherlands; it is not clear how the status of a website in China is checked. In 2002 and 2003, a project at Harvard University (“Documentation of Internet Filtering Worldwide” conducted by Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman; see http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/) showed more clearly how website status in China was checked, but this website has been down since 2003). Singapore also censors “sensitive” websites, but “Internet Filtering in Singapore in 2004-2005: A Country Study” (http://www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/singapore/) only mentions a very small number of websites (pornography, drugs, religious sects etc.) as banned.

23 This version was not available from 1 May 2007 to 15 May 2007. However, Patricia Batto (2004, p. 107), stated that it was accessible during her research period.

24 The presidential website under research had received a makeover in 2000, when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came into office. It had been set up in 1996 under then-president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝). On 29 June 2010, the presidential website received a new makeover featuring the current president Ma Ying-jeou.

25 There is a wide range of Western literature on Chinese censorship; for a theoretical overview of how censorship works, see Tsui (2001); for a critical analysis of the Western obsession with Chinese censorship, see Damm (2007); for technical solutions to overcome censorship, see Chase, Mulvenon & Hachigian (2006).

26 Most research states that Taiwan has become a consolidated democracy; see, e.g., the “Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2007, Taiwan” (http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/fileadmin/pdf/en/2006/AsiaAndOceania/Taiwan.pdf), which states:

This report will show that throughout the review period Taiwan has made progress in economic transformation and enjoys a consolidated democracy that has withstood the latest test of sharp domestic polarization and critical cross-strait relations after two elections of a pro-independence president in 2000 and 2004. The positive accomplishments of Taiwan’s political transformation after the 1986 to 1987 period – such as a high degree of state coherence, meaningful elections, the absence of undemocratic veto powers, stable democratic institutions and a vibrant civil society – have been preserved, the unresolved issue of national identity notwithstanding.

27 The observations regarding Taiwanese official websites refer to 2007, the last year of President Chen-Shui-bian’s rule. After Ma Ying-jeou was inaugurated, changes occurred and, at present, the content is much more focused on the new policy.
See, for example, the explanation given in “The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue” (http://www.gwytb.gov.cn:8088/detail.asp?table=WhitePaper&title=White+Papers+On+Taiwan+Issue&m_id=4, accessed 22 June 2008) by the (PRC) Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council. "the phrase ‘sovereignty belongs to the people’ refers to all the people of a state, and not certain people or the people of a certain area. The sovereignty over Taiwan belongs to all the Chinese people including Taiwan compatriots, and not to some of the people in Taiwan.”

The official press in the PRC, such as the People’s Daily, in both their English and Chinese versions, offer online information about the Taiwanese independence movement and the discourse in Taiwan. The basic line of argumentation could be summarized as follows:

The independence movement is a top-down movement by the Taiwan authorities. “In 2004, the Taiwan authority has doubled its efforts in pushing ahead its ‘Evolving Taiwan Independence’ which has ‘roused strong protests from all walks of life in the Island and so the year of 2004 featured the louder opposition and resistance to Chen Shui-bian’s ‘Cultural Taiwan Independence’ in the Taiwan Island.’

Many of these articles indirectly illustrate the intensity of the discussions on independence in Taiwan, when, for example, the president of the Examination Yuan is quoted as saying: “Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) is a foreigner.” See “2004 ‘Cultural Taiwan Independence’ Rouses Strong Protests in Taiwan” (http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200501/01/eng20050101_169373.html; published 1 January 2005; see also in Chinese e.g. http://www.people.com.cn/GB/news/9719/9720/3002481.html, http://www.people.com.cn/GB/32306/32313/32330/3272559.html, http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1025/2981850.html, all accessed 20 June 2008). For the increase in online public opinion in the PRC, despite the existing propaganda and censorship, see also Lagerkvist, 2005.

This was described by Neder as a specific form of “Blut- und Bodenideologie” (Blood and soil ideology) (Neder, 2003).


Whether the emergence of new information technologies and the Internet have led to a convergence of the two “cultures” on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, is highly disputed. (Hung, 2004, p. 136) writes that “(w)ith the continuing deep-rooted economic freeform and especially Internet diffusion in recent years, the convergence of two distinct cultures [of Taiwan and China, J.D.] is now emerging in many respects. Pop culture is no doubt one of them.” A similar view is offered by Curley & Liu (2002). For the strong influence of Japan on Taiwan, see Le Bail (2002). For a more essentialist model, which sees Taiwan shaped by “Chinese culture,” see also Weller (2001). Hwang (2006) employs a Foucauldian perspective to describe in detail how, during the last decade, Taiwanese identity has been politically and historically constructed.

I do not know of any comparable research for the PRC.