Transnational Social Practice from Below: The Experiences of a Chinese Leneage
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Part Three:

Intervening in the Transnational Practice:
Government and Middleman
In any examination of the government's role in transnational social space and practice, there are basically two opposite views. One sees transnationalism as an expression of a subversive popular resistance "from below" and "transnational practices" by migrant entrepreneurs are depicted as conscious and successful efforts by ordinary people to escape control and domination "from above" by capital and the state (Smith and Guarnizo 1998: 5). Because of the popularity of this view, the transnational social space constructed by migrants has been seen as a domain emancipated from government's regulations. In this realm, the government's controlling power is seen as enormously weakened. Recently, another view on the government's role has attracted attention which questions this liberating character of transnational practices. Some scholars emphasize the fact that "states and nations seeking statehood have often kept the transnational connections of their oversea diasporas alive" and that the sending countries have made various kind of efforts to "actively promote" transnational reincorporation" of migrants into their state-centered projects' (Smith and Guarnizo 1998: 7-8).

I would like to take the latter argument further. We should not understand the state as a reified, homogeneous entity. At least we should distinguish between a Central State and local government. Compared with the efforts of the Central State, local government takes much more initiative in China. As a component of government, but standing in peripheral position, a local government expresses herself, on one hand, as a representative of authority from above, but on the other hand, as a financially independent institution. It is a self-managing subject and a site of power. Therefore local government can be more dynamic in its search for and mobilization of actual and potential resources in order to develop the local economy. Consequently, the participation of the local governments in the aforementioned transnational social
space reveals more vividly the process of reworking of "multiple modernity". That is to say, such a body has a greater capability and aptitude to associate with the hybridity and flexibility of late capitalist accumulation. Certainly, one can argue that there is a tension between "two competing discursive systems: the modernist imaginary of the nation-state (emphasizing essentialism, territoriality, and fixity)" and "the modernist imaging of entrepreneurial capitalism (celebrating hybridity, deterritorialization, and fluidity)" (Aihwa Ong 1997: 172). However, this study as well as that of Ong shows that local modernity has been produced more from cooperation and negotiation between local power and capitalist forces than from struggle and competition.

Chapter 6 focuses on the fact that in the migrants' actions, the local government is not an external factor, but an active participator in the transnational space. From sending delegations overseas from time to time to organizing worldwide general meetings of fellow townspeople; from making use of non-government organizations for the purpose of conducting propaganda to offering various kinds of conducive and rewarding conditions, the Yongchun government tries in every possible way to induce, guide and push the transnational practices of its migrants overseas, transforming the practice into a dynamic resource for local development.

In this process, regionalism is rising. On the one hand, this is a strategy of the local government that makes use of sentiment and of cultural and regional identities to mobilize the enthusiasm of overseas migrant communities; on the other hand, in the course of re-incorporation, in imagining their "community", the overseas communities have a strong tendency to identify themselves with the region South Fujian rather than with China as a whole and this is growing distinctively and steadily.
Connected with the dynamic involvement of government are the activities of the middlemen. To a great extent, the presence and the function of middlemen have strengthened the intervention of government in the transnational migrants’ practice. Two key characteristics of middlemen presented in this study contribute to this function. One is that they are either patriotic or are imbued with a strong regional identity that motivates them to involve themselves enthusiastically in the effort to build up connections between migrants and the hometown region. Second is that they have established their social networks solidly in the structure of this space, hence they are able to fulfill their role as intermediary. The process of the operation of these middlemen reveals a picture in which Chinese migrant transnational practices have been carried forward through delicate and historically cultivated networks. This also helps our understanding of the cultural logic.