[Text in italics was added by hand to these preliminary prepared remarks just before or during the event.]

Our topic today is "How Chinese is it" ? And the idea is to apply this question to the diaspora. It pushes us to think about what Chineseness signifies. This is also a question of representation. How China and Chineseness have been represented both in China and in the West, popularly and scientifically.

As to the importance of the notion of diaspora — my understanding of Chinese diaspora is more specific and personal than Arif's —, historical memory and marginalization, I think we can address in depth during the discussion. I should just say that for me, the Chinese diaspora also signifies a reality of lived experience of ordinary people, of men and women, who have settled around the world who have lived through the real problems of immigration, racism, and economic hardship, and whose history has gone largely untold. As for the category "transnational" applied to culture, we need perhaps to interrogate whether *national* cultures really exist, or whether they are merely ideological constructs.

But let me first make a few brief remarks about the sense, the meaning of "Chineseness"*.*

WHEN ? HISTORY 19thC - pre-modern, ancient

20thC

The sense Chineseness necessarilyis embedded in specific moments. There is no timeless, immobile China.

WHERE ? (Spatial question)

	Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Diaspora, the new Diaspora (Hong Kong, Canada)	
WHAT LANGUAGE ?	Chinese, what dialect ? Chinese American, British Chinese English-speaking Chineseness ? German speaking Chineseness ?	
HOW MUCH? *Chineseness*	AUTHENTICITY, TRADITION	*Is there an "authentic", "genuine" culture? Is there only one? Is the tradition"natural" or invented?*
LIKE WHAT ?	Formerly Taiwan claimed to represent and protect China's cultural tradition. Now that "People's" China has abandoned Utopian politics and the Universalism inspired by Marxism that associated Chineseness with "New China", the mainland Chinese authorities claim they are the spiritual and real inheritors of mythical emperors and the unifying vision of the Qin emperor (220 BC).	

According to the official discourse Chineseness arises from

1) living within the confines of the borders of China from Tibet to Hong Kong regardless of

ethnic origins.

2) having Chinese blood – being of Han Chinese ancestry wherever you live in the world.

For mainland Chinese authorities the test of Chineseness is loyalty to the regime.

For the scientific academic world the test of Chineseness lies somewhere else:

A. For the traditional sinologist, authentic Chineseness is to be found in the past, in antiquity, before the adulteration "contamination" by non-Chinese cultures. Chineseness is embedded in elite cultural practices – writing, philosophy, printing, and sometimes the valorisation and nationalization of folk culture (which by definition is always local). For the traditional sinologist, modern Chinese practices are not properly Chinese whether they be elite or popular. They are tainted by hybridity, by métissage, they are unauthentic. This is a typical Orientalist discourse (Said).

B. For the social scientist Chineseness is self-evident, a function of contemporary geo-politics.

C. At the other extreme is the postmodern academic for whom we are in a stage of post-history and even post-culture. But even this ideological position knows divisions.

    i) There are the transnational scholars informed about China, or of Chinese origin, who live often in the USA for whom hybridity at the level of culture is to be celebrated as liberatory. The post-colonial moment for the post-modernist is emancipatory because we can forget history. Whatever we say about colonialism in China it's only a story, among others.

ii) The second postmodernist tendency operates under the spectre of a traditional imaginary of China.

One could mention the respected (or at least respectable) French postmodern sociologist Maffesoli. For Maffesoli history has stopped and there is no future. We live in an eternal present. 'We' (and we for generalists of whatever discipline is always a eurocentric white *we*) need to learn form the Orient. For Maffesoli, the Orient is China, China is antiquity, and antiquity is oriental philosophy which in turn is reduced to a simplisticly apprehended Daoist-Buddhist amagalm. We must accept all that comes our way. "Il faut être Zen" (you must be Zen, passive, calm) as almost everyone in France says nowadays. This representation of China and Chineseness is reactionary on a number of counts. It ignores the whole modern history of China , it ignores the role of colonialism in its construction, and it ignores the present of China. Furthermore it is inspired by a populist and naïve understanding of the history of Chinese thought.

So how should we try to re-think, to re-imagine Chineseness?

Well, for me,

1) history is paramount. Both China (its authorities, its historians, its people) and those who imagine China from afar need to rethink their vision of Chinese history.
2) In spatial and societal terms we must recognize the multiplicities and plurality of Chinese identities.
3) As for authenticity, it is always a myth. Traditions are always invented and reinvented. There is no pure culture.

Without being an advocate for postmodern hybridity, the reality of lived, experienced cultural metissage must be admitted and respected in China, in Hong Kong, in Taiwan, in Canada, and elsewhere in the diaspora. In the diaspora, this is not as it is in China a question of whether we find it offensive that Peking boasts a hundred McDonalds and that the American Starbucks café chain has set up within the walls of the formerly Forbidden City. No, in the diaspora, it becomes a question of everyday survival. For the third generation Chinese fish and chip shop worker, the German Chinese restaurant waiter, the crucial questions are of petty racism and economic survival.

In conclusion, what needs to be seriously addressed is: our lack of historical knowledge and worse, the constant repetition of historically ingrained racist representations of China and Chineseness.

This is not mere academic discourse.The recent 'foot and mouth' epidemic in Britain illustrated once more how stereotypes of Chineseness at best only ever lay dormant. Of all the possible causes for the epidemic the one the newspapers preferred was that of contamination by Chinese food sold in Chinese supermarkets and restaurants. The spectre of Fu Manchu and the dubious contents of chop suey contaminating the West just like the Asian economic "contagion" of several years ago.

The claim was retracted days later but the damage was done.

So much threatening disease invading us from the East.

My conclusion, then, is that those of us responsible for spreading knowledge and information about China and Chineseness still have a great deal of work to do.