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Post-Isms and Chinese New Conservatism

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In the last twenty or so years during their ascension to predominance in Western cultural studies, the three schools of contemporary cultural studies in the West--poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism--have frequently been accused of being too radical. What is surprising is that the new trend of conservatism that has emerged in the last several years in Chinese intellectual circles has often called up those theories to its support. The Chinese new conservative trend has hardly won sufficient critical attention, and the paradox that it draws support from Western radicalist theories has so far remained unnoticed.

The teasing word hou xue (poststudies) can often be heard in Beijing's intellectual circles. Apart from all kinds of loan terms prefixed with post-, in China hou- has had an indigenous history of its own: Post-Misty poetry rose in 1984, and what is being written today is called Post-Post-Misty poetry; Post-Roots-Seeking fiction appeared in 1986, and 1992 saw the early Post-New Era literature, of which one of the major characteristics is the employment of postvernacular. But this new literature has fallen into the hands of postintellectuals or postliterati--the tycoons of the new cultural industry. As for the intellectuals, apart from engaging themselves in trivial postscholarship, they can only be languishing in post-tragic sentiment. For this is indeed an epoch of postrevolution, which, it is said, leads to not much more than a post-Utopia. 1

The word "post-isms" does not yet appear in Western languages, though the word "postpeople" appeared in Calinescu's book. 2 The fact that the three major schools of contemporary cultural studies are all prefixed in the same way can hardly be a coincidence. Some scholars have pondered whether this post- is the same as that post-. The answer in all cases seems to be "yes." 3

The coexistence of the three posts- is far from a compromise; they are almost the three sides of a unified theory. In fact each of the three could be said to be conditioned by the other two. "Post-colonialism is a concept intended to summarize the cultural-political characteristics of the non-Western world during the transition towards postmodernity"; 4 postmodernism is best "defined as European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world"; 5 and [End Page 31] "post-modernism needs its (post-)colonial Others in order to constitute or to frame its narrative or referential fracture." 6 Though poststructuralism concentrates on subverting the modernist project, this subversion leads by necessity to postmodernism, because of the death of the modernist project which "always upheld a vision of a redemption of modern life through culture. That such a vision is no longer possible to sustain may be at the heart of the postmodern condition." 7

If the triad of posts- is not a temporary alliance, the term "post-ism" could, I suggest, be allowed into currency in the West. There have been many posts- in modern Western history, but only as makeshifts, waiting to be replaced by formal terms. There have never been a group of posts- standing so firmly in Western thought. This cannot but be an era of the posts-.

The awakening of Chinese scholarly circles in recent years commands attention. The Chinese intellectuals, it seems have regained their voice after years of silence imposed on them since 1989, and tried to find a new foothold in a culture now quite different from that of the 1980s and never seen before in China. In the last two years we read in Chinese journals a series of debates on pressing issues in Chinese culture today, most of them citing explicitly Western post-isms as their support.

No Western doctrine, once put to use in China, can avoid being sinicized. This is by no means strange, with Marxism among the most prominent precedents. What interests us here is why so many Chinese scholars are capable of using post-isms to support their conservative arguments. Is it because they themselves should be blamed for reading their own ideas into Western theories? Or is it because there have been certain propositions in post-isms that naturally conduce to conservatism in China today? These questions lead me to a brief survey of four of the debates that have taken place in the last few years. My briefing is far from comprehensive since I have to bring into relief the parts relevant to our topic.

The criticism of the May Fourth Movement (the Chinese Enlightenment that took place in the late 1910s and early 1920s) as "excessively antitraditional," as some Taiwan-American scholars have insisted since the 1960s, did not seem to have been accepted by most mainland scholars in the 1980s. In May 1989 there were conferences in various Chinese cities commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement. Though diverse in views, they were the last-ditch battle of Chinese intellectuals insisting on an Enlightenment. Within weeks their papers were swept aside by the storm of the Incident. [End Page 32]

That was why I was extremely interested in the essay "Looking Back from the End of the Century: The Reform of Chinese Language and Chinese New Poetry," which was published in the May issue, 1993, of the official journal Wenxue Pinglun. The author of the essay was Zheng Min of Beijing Normal University, and a veteran "modernist poet." The essay gives the impression that the conservative Taiwan evaluation of the Chinese Enlightenment has already been accepted on the mainland. More surprising was that Zheng reaffirmed this old stand with new theories: Lacan's psychoanalysis and Derrida's deconstructionism.

Her essay was responded to by Fan Qinlin in the March 1994 issue of Wenxue Pinglun, and Zheng's "Response to the Response" also appeared in that issue. Two months later, in the July issue, the same journal published "The Historical Dimension of Cultural Radicalism" by Xu Min of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In the September issue, Zhang Yiwu of Beijing University published his essay "A Re-Evaluation of Modernity and the Controversy of Chinese Written Language," which tries to support Zheng's critique of May Fourth antitraditionalism on the postcolonial argument.

The May Fourth cultural reformers in the early years of the century suggested abolishing the millennia-old wen yan (classical Chinese written language) as the language of the culture and replacing it with a modern Chinese based on the vernacular. Their success was so immediate and so complete that modern Chinese literature, including poetry, began to be produced in a manner totally different from traditional poetry and more like those translated from the West. Zheng Min accuses the "vernacular movement" of being "impetuous," "biased," "metaphysical," "completely negating the heritage in both form and content," thus "severing itself voluntarily from Chinese classics." One of its devastating results is that "Chinese poetry has not made sufficient achievements in this century."

Why should modern Chinese language be blamed for all this? First, Zheng insists, it committed the mistake of phono/logocentrism that Derrida attacked as the fundamental fault of Western culture developed from its phonetic writing systems, to which Derrida extols the Chinese ideogrammic writing system as a great exception. Regrettably, modern written Chinese, more in keeping with speech, is now less exceptional. Secondly, Zheng accuses those who were pursuing an "easier to understand" language of ignoring the unscalable bar that, as Lacan points out, separates the signifier and the signified, and thus of chasing only after a "false transparency."

Fan and Xu's responses are generally an apology on historicist grounds, that is, the reform of the language of Chinese culture was [End Page 33] inevitable in the twentieth century, as classical Chinese had remained unchanged for too many centuries and had become indeed too inconvenient. To their argument I want to add only one point: what modern Chinese poetry was to inherit at the time was not the Chinese poetry of its golden ages of the Tang and Song dynasties (8th to 14th centuries A.D.) but of that of Ming and Qing (15th to early 20th centuries A.D.), the latter of which, for more than six hundred years, had produced just too few comparable good poems. The Great Tradition had long been exhausted. On what ground should one believe that had Chinese poets of this century continued to write in archaic Chinese and in keeping with classical prosody, they could have made greater achievements?

What Zheng Min was lamenting (as many postcolonialist theorists do) was the loss of the natural seamlessness of the native language before the point at which "colonialism transports a language" and "a

fractured, indeterminate semantics becomes the necessary medium for verbal and written practice" (MLP 7). Indeed, whenever we are using Modern Chinese, which is an indigenous mixture of vernacular Chinese, classical Chinese and loan elements from other languages, we put ourselves in a nexus of China-West relations. The tension is unavoidable and, in my view, does not deserve much regret, as it has given the best of modern Chinese poets (let alone novelists, scientists, or any other users of the Chinese language) an opportunity to cope freshly with a not necessarily plain language.

The editor of Wenxue Pinglun added a note before Zheng Min's second essay, to the effect that what is being discussed was not in fact a reevaluation of history but an argument on some current issue of cultural politics: "Though there are old and even obsolete aspects of tradition that do not meet the need of the time, nevertheless the tradition or its improvement can satisfactorily answer the need of modernization. On the face of it, modernity seems to be best for modernization. However, some kind of modernity, under certain conditions and in certain time, can be a hindrance to modernization." 8 This sounds commonplace, but what it implies is understood by every Chinese reader. What is surprising is that the insistence on the sanctity of the May Fourth Movement, which had all along been the official stand held by Party ideologues, is now being carefully put aside, in order to take advantage of the practical benefit of conservatism.

The debate between Liu Kang of Pennsylvanian State University and Zhang Longxi of the University of California, Riverside, started in early 1993 in the American journal Modern China with Liu's essay "Politics, Critical Paradigms: Reflections on Modern Chinese Literature Studies." The editor asked Zhang Longxi, Michael Duke, and Perry Link to [End Page 34] respond. Before long the two Western scholars dropped out while Liu and Zhang's debate spilled into the Chinese magazines Jintian (Today) and Ershiyi Shiji (Twenty-First Century), and eventually involved mainland critics.

Liu Kang made two major challenges to the Western scholarship of modern Chinese literature: first, "until very recently, modern Chinese literature studies in the West have been little affected by the contemporary theoretical debates about literary criticism itself"; second, "Western students of modern China tend to view modern Chinese literature as essentially a type of documentary evidence for their broad sociological and historical findings," thus neglecting their artistic value.

I am in full agreement with Liu on these two sharp observations. What caused controversy, however, is Liu's supporting argument. There are two passages in his first essay that are actually the focal points of the debate. First, about the relationship between the Maoist politics on literature and Western theories:

as the Foucaultian revelation concerning the complicity of power and knowledge, as well as the politics in the discursive formation of historical or aesthetic texts, have been touted as powerful critique of the liberal humanist myths dominating the humanities in the West, one tends to forget that, for good or ill, Mao's conception of the relationship between politics and aesthetics might in fact have inspired Foucault's radical critique of Western liberal humanism. The fact that Mao considered these matters from the angle of political strategy and the power struggle certainly makes his views prone to repressive cultural policies. But this does not alter the fact that politics always permeates, in various forms, every cultural formation and institution. 9

Another passage concerns C. T. Hsia's evaluation of the Korean War novel A Thousand Miles of Lovely Land (Sanqian Li Jiangshan), a novel now hardly anyone remembers, as indeed most other novels in the 1950s, in his well-known book A History of Modern Chinese Fiction (1971). According to Hsia, the only worth of the novel is the author's "deliberate or perhaps unselfconscious importation of a bit of fantasy in favor of domestic and individual happiness in a novel designed to glorify the other-directed Communist heroism." 10 Liu, then, accuses Hsia: "The hidden message to be extracted by the critic is that a bourgeois domestic fantasy undermines Communist heroism. The novel is thereby dissected allegorically into at least two chunks of political allegories. . . . A History applies an allegorical reading to modern Chinese fiction, only to find that the major part of this body of literature does not meet the expectation of symbolic representation" (PCP 16). So, according to Liu, since even Foucault argues for the complicity of any art with politics and power, straightforward propagandist novels of the 1950s should not be [End Page 35] read in a different way from, say, Chinese avant-garde fiction since the late 1980s. Both are, anyway, not "two chunks" but one piece knitting art with politics. Indeed Liu points his finger at the latter: "The avant-garde writers and critics of the late 1980s tried to counter the Maoist political dominance in literature by a cultivation of the aesthetic object of language or artistic form. But this very act of aestheticization is in itself political. It attests to Mao's view of the political nature of cultural and literary activity, rather undermining that view" (PCP 14). Chinese writers' and critics' efforts to depoliticize literature in the late

1980s might be an illusion. But isn't Liu here providing support for the Western scholar's "sociological" reading of modern Chinese literature which he himself arraigns in his essay? His self-contradiction hints that the road back to Mao via Foucault would be seriously problematic, as the apparent similarity hides a huge number of politico-cultural differences.

In the second and third essays written in Chinese that continue the debate, Liu warns that "in post-Cold War world politics and culture, a new kind of Cold War ideology is emerging. In studies and discussions about China, we have to maintain a sober understanding of the situation." 11 That is radicalist enough in the West, and adequately postcolonialist. But what does it actually hint in present-day Chinese cultural politics?

The panel discussions with Chen Xiaoming as the chair, Zhang Yiwu, Dai Jinhua (both of Beijing University), and Zhu Wei (editor of Shenghuo) as the panelists, and serialized in the literary magazine Zhongshan, is probably the most interesting and the sharpest cultural discussion in the last two years. The pity is that it continued for only two sessions: "Orientalism and Postcolonialism" in no. 1, 1994, and "Cultural Control and Cultural Masses" in the next issue. In compensation for the discontinuation of their discussion, some participants subsequently wrote essays since they had not said enough in the discussion, for instance, Chen Xiaoming's "Fill Up the Gap, Draw the Borderline" and Zhang Yiwu's "Toward a Post-Allegorical Era." 12

The four panelists seem to be in agreement with the observation of the drastic changes that have taken place in Chinese culture since 1989: "Elitist control is no longer able to stay in the driver's seat of cultural production and propagation. The new network of cultural control is taking shape. . . . In a sense this is a cultural revolution similar to the industrial revolution. . . . [To high culture] this cultural reorientation is fatal." What should intellectuals do in the face of this fatal revolution? Zhu Wei insists, "A large number of intellectuals used to the obsolete cultural stance (of the 1980s) still hold on to their elitist stand, unable to accustom themselves to the change of the reorientation period. . . . They [End Page 36] want to stand out to defend a mode of elitist culture." Zhu stresses: "I think this is sheer absurdity." 13

Zhang Yiwu's words are even more caustic as he points out that the commercialization of culture is indeed what the intellectuals called for as part of liberalization, but once it came, they despaired. "The other classes all find that they have a certain position in this culture, except the supposed representatives of culture" (Zh 182). The situation being so laughable, the protest they are uttering is nothing but "mad cries of Don Quixote." Chen Xiaoming goes a step further to envisage a way out for the intellectuals. He argues the since postmodernist theorists of the West are all agreed that the gap between high culture and low culture in the West is supposed to have closed, high culture in China should identify itself with the market and go with the flow of mass culture. He observes that "recently some intellectuals have been trying to deepen the gap again," but he dismisses this as "not only futile but detrimental," and predicts "The near future will see the two wallow in the same mire."

The panelists, then, regard themselves as another kind of intellectual, the non-Don Quixote type. They insist what they want to do is only "postcritique." While any critique is inevitably a form of control, postcritique does not criticize, thus refraining from exercising any control. According to Chen Xiaoming, their stand is very similar to the "postmodernist knowledge" promoted by Jean-François Lyotard, which is only "to heighten our sensitivity to differences and increase our tolerance of things without a common denominator." 14 Therefore, post-critics are only "onlookers." They themselves might refuse to "wallow together," but they also laugh at anyone who tries to stand above the "mire."

Among the panelists Dai Jinhua alone expresses some uneasiness about the prevalent contemptuous tone toward high culture, as she acknowledges, "In my reflection I still recognize my elitist stand," and she feels with horror "the current rapid desertization of Chinese culture." 15

The movement of "Re-Writing Literary History" was proposed and begun by Chen Sihe (Fudan University, Shanghai) and Wang Xiaoming (Shanghai Normal University) in 1988, but now is carried on largely by mainland scholars abroad. It persists, nevertheless, on the mainland, but with their banner furled.

In the January issue of Shanghai Wenxue (Shanghai Literature) Chien Sihe published another example of "Re-Writing": "The ups and downs of folk appeal, a tentative interpretation of literary history from the War of Resistance to the Cultural Revolution" (Mingjian de fuchen, dui kangzhan dao wenge wenxue shi

de yi ge changshi xing jieshi). 16 In the "Critics' [End Page 37] Club" column of the September issue of the same journal, ten Shanghai critics gathered to discuss the essay. Chen Fumin, one participant in the discussion, argues that the main method employed by Chen Sihe is "deconstructionist strategy." Chen Sihe himself, in the introduction to his essay, states that he takes as reference the studies of "the civil society that emerged in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe," but he quotes no Western scholars.

Chen Sihe holds that in twentieth-century China "scholarship and culture are split into three parts: ideology supported by state power, the Western-mode culture with intellectuals as its main supporters, and the popular cultural mode preserved in the society of common people." In different periods two of them may form a sort of alliance, but generally in this century popular culture has been pushed aside by both the government and intellectuals. Chen Sihe's main effort in his essay is to extract the folk subtext from the texts of modern Chinese revolutionary literature. The folk, according to him, not only attracted some intellectuals-writers, but even dissolved the power of the state as it successfully penetrated into revolutionary novels or revolutionary "model opera," forming an "invisible structure" within the texts (such as the bandit story in the novel The Forest in Snow, or the war of wit between the male and female characters in the revolutionary opera Shajia Bang.) 17 Based on this extremely interesting subtextual analysis, Chen Sihe gives folk culture very high praise: "It fills the most brilliant space of creativity of this period," with "complete freedom as its most fundamental aesthetic style."

In the discussion held a few months after the publication of the essay, most discussants fail to agree with Chen Sihe, because, I presume, they shuddered in the shadow of the present aggressive onrush of popular culture. Chen Fumin, the most acute critic of Chen Sihe's essay, pointed out that folk culture or popular culture in general "has all along been in a perfect harmony with official ideology in an alliance against intellectuals." But Gao Yuanbao supports Chen Sihe from another angle. "For intellectuals, the folk is not only a temporary support but their last home, their last foothold. To turn from the intense interest in ideology to the broad land of folk appeal is not only the development of the 1980 and 1990s. It can be said to be the spiritual awakening of Chinese intellectuals by the end of the century." 18

Thus to save themselves, genuine intellectuals should refuse to be agents of "foreign Western culture" any longer. Chen Sihe, in his essay, mentions those intellectuals, though he acknowledges that in the period he discusses, they were only "a small number of conservative intellectuals" (remaining members of the literati) who "quietly guarded the fragments of traditional culture scattered among the common folk." [End Page 38] Their effort, according to him, is highly praiseworthy. Gao Yuanbao pushes the argument further, thinking that these "conservative few" are examples that all intellectuals should follow. Gao's proposal of returning to the "only home" is identical with Chen Xiaoming's "wallowing together," except that Chen Sihe and Gao Yuanbao are talking more about peasants' culture, while Chen Xiaoming more about commercialized culture. The two, however, have been rapidly merging.

One fact that surfaces most obviously from these essays is that there has been a powerful build up of a new conservative movement in Chinese intellectual circles. The new conservatism demonstrates itself first in the intellectuals' repentance of their own follies, the so-called "Culture Fever" of the 1980s. Recently Wang Meng, the leading Chinese writer, refutes the supposition of the loss of the "spirit of humanities." 19 He asks, "Has there ever been 'humanism'?" (He used the English word "humanism" instead of the Chinese word in question, renwen jingshen. Thus his answer is but a very natural "no.") "The possibility of recalling the spirit of the Italian Renaissance or the spirit of Lincoln, Jefferson, Franklin, or Emerson can only be zero."

I believe Wang Meng was playing innocent, as he should know perfectly well that the "loss" the Chinese intellectuals feel so much sorrow about is that of the dynamic and vigorous cultural reawakening in the 1980s, comparable in Chinese history only to the May Fourth Movement early in this century. Gao Ruiquan, one discussant for Chen Sihe's paper, reminisced on the cultural situation in the 1980s: "After Mao, a large number of students with higher grades poured into departments of literature, history and philosophy; many classics were reprinted and foreign classics translated. People were once again convinced of the value of knowledge, the significance of thinking, and that human beings should not be insulted. All these made China look like Europe in the time of the Renaissance. Now it is apparent that the motivation behind the movement have been lost, which worries many. This is the particular situatedness that makes us call for the return of the 'spirit of humanities.'" 20 By contrast, departments of humanities in Chinese universities, even the first-class universities, today have only low-grade applicants to choose from, and suffer from a shortage of postgraduate students. During Mao's reign young people eschewed humanities knowing that they were dangerous political traps. Nowadays they try their best to

avoid humanities because they know the humanities scholars and teachers are not only among the poorest paid but also the least needed in commercialized and technocratic society.

No wonder Xu Ming, one of Zheng Min's respondents who offers a defense of the radicalism of the May Fourth Movement, mentions the [End Page 39] 1980s with a twinge of conscience. "In the 1980s we all participated in a typical historical farce (huoju) of cultural radicalism." 21 Gao Yuanbao offers a more detailed description of the "farce": "The generation that rose in the 1980s faced first of all a huge area of debris thrown out by the volcanic eruption after a long repression of voices. They were cast into a sea of discourses. They followed suit and started speaking dizzily even before they knew where they were, and were unable to stop once they had started. . . . Now that they are exhausted from talking, it is time to listen attentively." 22 He has already told us what to listen to; he suggests, as mentioned above, that popular culture is the "only home" for intellectuals.

The most important characteristic of the new conservative trend is the intellectuals' abandonment of their independent stand while turning to commercial mass culture. In the four debates briefly described above, Zheng Min proposes a return to the traditional but does not seem to know how; Liu Kang tries to illustrate that Maoist discourses have either aesthetic or theoretical values; all the rest, to different degrees, praise the mass culture which has been flooding all of China. What is paradoxical is that almost all of those apologists of commercialized culture can hardly hold back their contempt when they discuss a particular work of popular art or literature. The participants in the Zhongshan discussions offer serious opposition to recent internationally acclaimed films by directors Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and others, calling them Hollywood kitsch. They describe popular TV successes like The Chinaman in New York as trashy fun. They also laugh at the stunning success of some Chinese writings in English, such as Wild Swans or Life and Death in Shanghai, as "selling exotic shows" (qiguan). 23 What they praise, then, seems to be only "the unstoppable trend" those works represent.

This confusing paradox is a logical result of the postmodernist position occupied by scholars who are overwhelmed by the sheer quan-tity of modern cultural reproduction. When it comes to the appreciation of individual works, the well-read scholars show differentiating ability. Their often sharp analysis, however, does not extend from individual texts to the whole contemporary culture. Some scholars regard the triumph of commercialized popular culture as an event of historical dimension. Zhu Wei argues that "The special background of 1989 helped the establishment of civil space after all. . . . I feel that this was an important revolution in culture" (192). If turning to the popular is a revolution, it is by no means the first one in twentieth-century China. It was suggested by Mao in 1942 and put into practice by the Communist government for three decades, with disastrous results. Only this time the [End Page 40] "turning popular" looks more spontaneous and more powerful, capable of uprooting and sweeping away Chinese culture that has survived repeated suppression.

In the 1980s when Fredric Jameson "discovered" China as a new land for postmodernist theory to conquer, and made several lecture tours, Chinese intellectual circles were impressed by his New Marxist methodology. The term postmodernism did not catch much attention. It was not until the early 1990s that Chinese scholars began to be keen to know more about postmodernity, but as late as 1992 the term was still greeted with more ridicule than serious discussion. By 1993-94, however, it was no longer considered to be solely a loan word and alien idea. Gradually it has dawned on Chinese critical circles that it is no longer impossible to claim that Chinese culture could skip the period of modernism as well as the headache it causes, and dive directly into the postmodernist whirlpool. We even hear suggestions such as: "Almost without any hurdle, postmodernism walked into our field of art and literature. It seems that Chinese embrace postmodernism without the reluctance they showed in dealing with modernism. The postmodernist elements in Chinese literature today, upon their first appearance, are mature and sophisticated. Why has the [China-West] cultural gap not caused much difficulty in transmission? It is because there are certain cultural genes in Chinese tradition that are capable of connecting more or less directly to the concept of postmodernist culture." 24

The "cultural reality" here denotes the rapid commercialization of Chinese culture; the "cultural genes" are supposed to be found in Chinese indigenous subculture. Both of them are said to be compatible with Western postmodernism. As can be observed by every visitor of Chinese cities today, Chinese popular culture is not only totally commercialized, as in most countries, but it is a unique mixture of Hollywood-type film, Japanese karaoke, Hong Kong pop music, gongfu novels, mahjong gambling, qigong cult, Yijing fortune telling, fengshui geomancy, and so forth. The Western technique of representation serves as a newly powerful vehicle to make Chinese popular culture "visibly" postmodern. 25 Official

ideologues may well hate such non-Marxist ideas; nevertheless, between this postmodernist mixture and the intellectual culture, the government art officers prefer the lesser evil. There is indeed hardly any hurdle in China for postmodernist intrusions.

Postmodernism, being a panoramic description of contemporary culture, refuses to harbor a value judgment for any product of the culture. Anything that takes place today is by definition part of postmodern culture. This sounds good until one has to compile a postmodernist anthology. Should it be a sample book of all the cultural [End Page 41] products of today's society? If not, then what value judgment can be taken as the criterion of selection?

The only possible stand left for the postmodernist theorist is to affirm the status quo. Zhang Yiwu summarizes this stand in an unequivocal tone: "[Postmodernist/postcolonialist theory] means to participate in current culture. . . . It refuses to stand opposite to current culture, nor does it try to transcend it." Postmodernism has actually turned itself into a conformist theory in China which serves to justify the institutionalized mainstream culture.

Since Foucault's theory is the starting point of postcolonialism, 26 it is but natural for postcolonialist theorists to regard the intelligentsia in non-Western countries as the main channel for the Western cultural invasion. 27 Their knowledge is, to follow the Foucaultian argument, associated with Western power, as it is more Western than native.

Postcolonialism is not a pure theoretical speculation: it imposes a bearing on the direction in which the non-Western countries are heading, or rather, on what kind of non-Western country the Western postcolonialist theorists want to see--a country with indigenous discourse and values, and a "pretourist" culture in its uncontaminated, fundamental state. Whether this kind of culture is beneficial to the people of non-Western countries seems to be beyond their concern.

Postcolonialist critics establish themselves in the Western academic institutions as "radical thinkers" at the expense of non-Western intellectuals. Non-Western intellectuals are now under much pressure to meet the requirements specified by the post-isms of the West in order to redeem their guilt; they should deconstruct the thin layer of humanities using poststructuralist theories; they should reaffirm the rationale of the dominance of popular culture with the help of postmodernism; they should advance nationalism with the support of Western postcolonialist theoreticians. Faced with this three-sided demand, Chinese intellectuals have had to retreat to the margins of society. Yet they are still accused by Western theoreticians of being "comprador intelligentsia," who are "nostalgic for colonial times," or "agents of (Western) narration," or, in the words of some Chinese critics, they are merely "an old gramophone uttering queer sounds while the people are marching forward." 28 No wonder that although "Re-Writing Literary History" continues both within and without China, many Chinese critics have changed the target from institutionalized official literary history to the history of mistakes on the part of intellectuals in their century-long effort to usher modernity into Chinese culture. 29

There has never been a pessimist who predicted a culture like the current one in China, a culture without orientation, without depth, [End Page 42] without a sense of history; a carnival of the pop. I do not want to conceal my unpopular insistence on an "elitist" stand on the current situations of Chinese art, literature, and culture. Jingying--the Chinese equivalent of the word--has been besmirched in China by the hard-liners in 1989, and the word "elite" sounds snobbish and ugly in the West too. Before we can find a cleaner word, however, I regard the label as a thorny laurel that an intellectual with a sense of responsibility has to wear. In this age of aphasia, it takes courage even to hold onto a mere word.

It is conceivable that the repeated failure of the modernist project in China has inflicted a deep "historical trauma" in the minds of Chinese intellectuals. But this is no reason for the present self-recrimination. Even though values in China, as supposedly in any postmodern society, have been so relativized that they are not worth arguing for, at least on one point intellectuals can be proud of themselves, that is their ability to conduct conscious self-reflection and self-criticism. Because of this, the cultural critique they provide from the margin of culture keeps alive the possibility of building a consensus with the rest of a fragmented society.

In the present essay, I have tried to limit my discussion to the situation in China, but I believe that what I describe in this essay could be found more or less in other developing countries, from Venezuela to Vietnam: intellectuals are being pressured by the cultural status quo and the borrowed ideas of Western

post-isms to turn their back on the modernist project, which has hardly won a foothold in the culture of their nations let alone been oppressively institutionalized. The values attached to the project are said to be already deconstructed; the whole project is said to be suspiciously colonialist, out-datedly utopian, and detrimental to the national tradition, whatever it is. Third-World countries are now encouraged to leapfrog into a criticism-free cultural conformation which is happily called postmodern.

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Notes

1. Most of the above "post-" terms are taken from the recent essays by Chen Xiaoming of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Zhang Yiwu of Beijing University. It is difficult to provide footnotes for the first appearance of each term.

2. Matei Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity (Durham, N.C., 1987), p. 209.

3. See, for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the same Post- in Postcolonial?" Critical Inquiry, 17 (1991), 336-57.

4. Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post," in Past the Last Post, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Hertfordshire, 1993), p. 18; hereafter cited in text as MLP.

5. Robert Young, White Mythology: Writing History and the West (London, 1990), p. 19.

6. Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutor," Critical Inquiry, 15 (1989), 9.

7. Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), p. 152.

8. Editor's Note, Wenxue Pinglun, no. 2 (1994), 56.

9. Liu Kang, "Politics, Critical Paradigms: Reflections on Modern Chinese Literature Studies," Modern China, 19, no. 1 (January, 1993), 13; hereafter cited in text as PCP.

10. C. T. Hsia, A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1971), p. 554.

11. Liu Kang, "Zhongguo xiandai wenxue zai xifang de zhuanxing" (The transformation of Chinese literature in the West), Ershiyi Shiji, no. 5 (1993), 126; my translation.

12. Chen Xiaoming, "Tianping hongguo, huaqing jiexian," Wenyi Yanjiu, no. 2 (1994); Zhang Yiwu, "Zouxian hou yuyan shidai," Shanghai Wenxue, no. 8 (1994); hereafter cited in text as Zh.

13. Zhu Wei, "Wenhua kongzhi yu wenhua dazhong," Zhongshan, no. 2 (1994), 185.

14. Quoted in Chen Xiaoming, "Tianping hongguo, huaqing jiexian," 55; no footnote providing the source of the quote. My translation.

15. Dai Jinhua, "Wenhua kongzhi yu wenhua dazhong," Zhongshan, no. 2 (1994), 185.

16. The essay was first printed in the Chinese literary magazine in exile, Jintian, no. 4 (1993), 121-44.

17. This, of course, reminds us of the "symptomatic reading" advanced by Louis Althusser and Pierre Macherey, but Chen Sihe never mentions them in the essay.

18. Gao Yuanbao, "Minjian wenhua, zhishi fenzi, wenhua shi," Shanghai Wenxue, no. 9 (1994), 56.

19. "Demoralization in the Humanities" was the topic of a series of discussions printed in the cultural journal Dushu (Reading Monthly). Wang Meng's essay is printed in the magazine Dong Fang (The Orient). Those newly-founded periodicals--so many of them are springing up in China--are not available in libraries. I quote from the shortened version in Zhongshi Zhoukan (Hong Kong), no. 153 (4 December 1994).

20. Gao Ruiquan, "Renwen jingshen xunsilu," Dushu, no. 2 (1994), 21.

21. Xu Ming, "Wenhua jijin zhuyi de lishi wendi," Wenxue Pinglun, no. 4 (1994), 58.

22. Gao Yuanbao, "Daotong, xuetong yu zhengtong," Dushu, no. 5 (1994), 16.

23. This is Dai Jinhua's view. Zhongshan, no. 1 (1995), 134; hereafter cited in text.

24. Zhu Binglong, "Dangdai wenxue de houxiandai zhuyi bianti" (The postmodernist mutations in contemporary Chinese literature), Caoyuan, no. 4 (1994), 71.

25. The "making visible" function of Western representation technique for non-Western culture was first discussed by Edward Said (Orientalism [New York, 1978], p. 22), though he did not mention that this is especially true with non-Western popular culture.

26. Andrew Milner points out, "For Said, orientalism is a 'discourse' in the Foucaultian sense of the term," Contemporary Cultural Theory (London, 1994), p. 58.

27. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, argues that neocolonialism already employed "the exportation of the values of knowledge, politics and institution" (Gayatri Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," in Literary Theory Today, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Beyer-Ryan [Ithaca, 1990], pp. 219-44).

28. Chen Xiaoming, "Tianping honggou, huaqing jiexian," 54.

29. For instance, Wang Xiaoming holds that "Postcolonialism could undoubtedly shed new light on many issues," Ershiyi Shiji, no. 2 (1994), 140. But I have to point out that there are still some critics, with Liu Zaifu as the representative, who insist on the rewriting of the "official history" of modern Chinese culture.

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