

The Postmodern as the Postcolonial: Re-cognizing Chinese Modernity

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The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology, and its own unhappiness which is its very essence.

It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called in question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come.

FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*

IN CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL and theoretical discourses, the postmodern and the postcolonial may share certain similar manifestations of forms, themes, and concerns, yet the problematic relation between the postmodern and the postcolonial may be fundamentally indeterminate and ambiguous. It is not a matter, as Linda Hutcheon points out, of "the post-colonial *becoming* the postmodern" (151). Nor is it simply a matter of the postmodern becoming the postcolonial. For the postmodern may be seen as indicative of the end of Euro-American cultural domination, but it can also be taken as a sign of the postcolonial condition, symptomatic of another form of continuing Western hegemony, if now persisting under new forms of cultural imperialism.

Arif Dirlik has offered an analytical definition of the term "postcolonial," which encompasses three prominent uses:

(a) as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents, as in postcolonial societies or postcolonial intellectuals; (b) as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is

somewhat more abstract and less concrete in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term Third World, for which it is intended as a substitute; and (c) as a description of a discourse on the above-mentioned conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions.

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Since China was never strictly a colony of any Western empire, only the second and third of the above meanings or usages seem to apply to the Chinese situation. Yet Chinese intellectuals' lack of enthusiasm or response with regard to the notion of the "postcolonial" or "postcoloniality," or for that matter Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, though understandable in view of the peculiarity of modern Chinese history, may be puzzling if not disquieting. One of the main reasons for the apparent neglect of Western theoretical discourses on the postcolonial or Orientalist other, amid all the frenzied assimilation and appropriation of the latest theories from the West, is perhaps the fact that "modernization," whatever this term may mean, is still perceived to be the overarching project whose urgency has priority over the question of national identity or "postcolonial" subjectivity. The fear may be that a regressive nationalistic xenophobia or conservative political backlash in the wake of any heightening of "postcolonial" self-consciousness may yet again triumph over and jeopardize the project of modernization.

In the background of such anxiety, there may lurk a strong desire for political pathos and cultural allegory, for a synchronic globalism, which may be seen as complicitous with allegorical needs of the dominant metropolitan centre. This is of course the familiar narrative of First World postmodernity, which by now has become the putative ideal to be pursued by the Third World: the myth of the dominant West as centre is reiterated and reinforced, thus once again displacing the Third World, together with its traditions and histories, to the periphery. The Third World seems always caught in the gap between the emulation of the West and its own burden of tradition. The constitutive inferiority complex seems hardly assuaged by the desire to leap forward to the future or to catch up with the West. The intrusion of the West into a Third World culture should thus not be taken merely as a *conflict* between cultures or a clash of cultural values, since in reality the

impact or shock of the West conceals the one-way nature of this encounter.

Although China was never subjugated to any total colonization by any Western power, China was often characterized as a "semi-feudal and semi-colonial" society in the first half of the century; in Mao Tse-tung's oft-quoted formulation, the task of the Chinese revolution was to overthrow "the three great mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism." Since the 1960s, following Mao Tse-tung's reformulation of the "Three Worlds" theory, Chinese intellectuals have tended to see their country as belonging to the Third World, as a "developing" country. Within the last few years, there has been a slow response to the question of "Orientalism," particularly that formulated by Edward Said. However, it seems that it is the notion of the "postmodern" that has most engaged the attention of Chinese intellectuals in recent years. While the fascination with postmodernism or postmodernity betrays a certain "historicist compulsion" subscribing to the master narrative of "progressive ideology" (Derrida 472), "it is the fairly uncertain feeling of being 'post,'" as Xiaobing Tang observes, "rather than specifically 'postmodern' that delivers some comfort as well as a new space for the imagination." This compulsion amounts to a "conflation of a post-revolutionary ethos with postmodernist discourse" (Tang, "Residual Modernism" 7), symptomatic of "a historic anxiety that is, nevertheless, foreclosed as such" (8).

"Postmodern," "postcolonial," "Third World," "Orientalism": all these labels as applied to the Chinese situation are for various reasons inadequate and unsatisfactory and in an important sense, distortive. Their usefulness as cognitive and critical categories is doubtful, beyond the limited heuristic value they may have, since they are all fundamentally totalizing and homogenizing, standardizing disparate historical and cultural experiences of very different cultures and societies. The cultural conditions that these labels are meant to evoke have become so consensual and standardized that "the very world of cultural difference and plurality" which they "allegedly [bring] to visibility" is simultaneously named and closed off (Connor 9-10). Hence the paradox of postmodern "consensus" that "there is no longer any

possibility of consensus"; at the same time, "a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable" accompanies "the authoritative announcements of the disappearance of final authority" (Connor 10). Insofar as the postmodern condition is, as Robert Young observes of Orientalism, symptomatic of "an internal dislocation within Western culture, a culture which consistently fantasizes itself as constituting some kind of integral totality, at the same time as endlessly deploring its own impending dissolution" (139), totality may indeed seem inescapable, since the very demarcation of the same by simple opposition to the other would "already be a part of a totality encompassing the same and the other" (Levinas 38). The point of totality is to articulate and specify the historical determinations that have produced any present cultural formation.

Stephen Slemon has specifically linked postmodernism to its appropriation of the Other(s): "Like modernism, postmodernism *needs* its (post-)colonial Others in order to constitute or to frame its narrative of referential fracture. But it also needs to exclude the cultural and political specificity of post-colonial representations in order to assimilate them to a rigorously Euro-American problematic" (14). If postcolonial discourses call for a recontextualizing and historicizing of the West's own modernity and postmodernity, then this Western problematic is precisely what the postcolonial discourse must seek to contest and redefine. While postcolonial criticism challenges the dominance of any particular, relativized narrative (for example, Western postmodernism), it also at the same time wants to assert a counter-discourse or counter-narrative against the West's continuing hegemony. Yet this counter-discourse may also be under pressure from the metropolitan centre to satisfy its universalizing assimilative impulse; as Bhabha notes, there may be a foreclosure of the Other in Western theoretical discourses, since it is an "other" culture's "*location* as the 'closure' of grand theories, the demand that, in analytical terms, it always be the 'good' object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination" (31).

Discursive relations of power and domination are of course central to Edward Said's notion of Orientalism. As Aijaz Ahmad

notes, there are many difficulties with Said's *Orientalism*, difficulties of "definition, conception, periodization, theoretical position and political uncertainty" (186). Said's concern with the problem of representation does not yield any conceptual clarity, and he is finally unable to decide whether the Orientalist discourse is "a system of representations, in the Foucauldian sense, or of *misrepresentations*, in the sense of a realist problematic" (Ahmad 185-86; see also Bhabha 72). There is also the problem of the exact relationship between Orientalism as a discourse and colonialism as a historical process. Said is profoundly ambiguous about whether Orientalism is the transhistorically constitutive element of "the European imagination," or whether colonialism itself is a product of the Orientalist discourse (Ahmad 181).

According to Said, Orientalist discourse is "a form of cultural praxis, a system of opportunities for making statements about the Orient." This discourse is not necessarily "a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence," but rather "operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (Said, *Orientalism* 273-74). Xiaomei Chen has proposed the notion of "Occidentalism" as its Oriental (that is, Chinese) counterpart. As the reverse-image of Orientalism, a similar logic of synchronic essentializing is at work in the discourse of Chinese Occidentalism. Occidentalism as "a form of political, cultural praxis" no doubt functions strategically within given historical contexts. But as an essentializing discourse, Occidentalism is no less monolithic and coercive than its much criticized counterpart Orientalism. Occidentalism fits obversely into a distorting framework of allegorical displacement as much as Orientalism. It would be grossly reductive to consider the question of Chinese Occidentalism solely with reference to contemporary Chinese politics, within a narrowly circumscribed frame of contemporary political topicality. The controversial television series *He Shang* (River Elegy), as a prime example of Chinese Occidentalism, is symptomatic of the inherent contradictions of modern Chinese history. Its historical revisionism and utopian projection of desire unto an idealized Other or an elsewhere should be seen for what they are: as a politically expedient intervention and at the same

time an escapism from underlying problems of modern Chinese politics and culture. Modern Chinese intellectuals have been constituted as “modern” intellectuals by the very discourse of Occidentalism which they have constructed. It is both an enabling discourse and one of distortion and displacement, in short, an ideology. As Ricoeur has argued, such utopianism is “a way of fleeing the contradictions and ambiguity both of the use of power and the assumption of authority” (17). Inscribed in the utopian desire of the *He Shang* phenomenon is the logic of what Gregory Jusdanis has termed “belated modernity.” In the Chinese projective imitation of the West, there is internalized a fundamental structural deficiency in the very “incompleteness” of the modernization project. Utopian future is temporalized as the present already realized by the contemporary West. Jiwei Ci’s analysis is here compelling: “The future is at once a temporal and a conceptual construct. Where the only urge is to make the self like the other, there is no conceptual future but only a temporal future, because the temporal future will at best unfold a conceptual future that has already been realized, namely, as the present of the West. In the meantime, all you can do is to imitate, to make yourself like someone else” (253-54).

Said wants to expose and dismantle the structures of cultural domination involved in the duality of “the Occident” and “the Orient,” but he himself repeats and reinforces such dualistic thinking. The relation between the inside (the Occident) and the outside (the Orient) remains rigidly polarized. As Young points out, what is neglected in Said’s account is any notion of “an inner dissension” (140) in the West’s construction of an Orientalist discourse. As a result, Orientalism as a symptomatic representation of “the West’s own internal dislocation” is instead “misrepresented as an external dualism between East and West” (140), “the West’s own dislocation from itself” is “presented, narrativized, as being outside” (139). This description can be transposed to apply to the Chinese fantasy about the West. In the Chinese construction of an “Occidentalist” discourse, the same inside/outside dichotomy is at work: China’s own dislocation from itself is presented, narrativized and projected as being outside, as being an externalized conflict between Chinese tradi-

tion and modern West. The notion of "Chinese essence," proposed by conservative culturalist apologists since the second half of the nineteenth century, became as a result integral, totalistic, and at the same time relativistic, merely "traditionalistic," as Joseph Levenson notes, "not an absolute conviction" (Levenson, *Revolution* 20).

The Chinese fabrication of the "Occident," "Occidentalism" as a discourse, could be dated back at least to the second half of the nineteenth century. The binary oppositions (tradition/modernity, China/West, old/new, inside/outside) have exerted their powerful dominance precisely because they have been internalized, deliberately or unconsciously. They are not mere impositions from the outside, from Western imperial powers. Rey Chow has called attention to the imbrication of the issues of modernity and modernism in Chinese culture in the pressures and processes of Western imperialism, and calls into question the facile equation of the "modern" with the "new." Chow asks the pertinent question about China's supposed progress from cultural backwardness to Western enlightenment: could it in fact be seen as "the process whereby all such concepts are parochialized as they are confronted with a culture that seems persistently subversive of their recognized rhythms of development?" (*Woman and Chinese Modernity* 35-36). As Paul A. Cohen argues, the simplistic opposition between tradition/modernity, which posits the two as "mutually exclusive, wholly incompatible systems," also owes its power and dominance to the epistemological authority exerted by the West, through its theory of modernization paradigm. China was in effect denied any self-generated initiative for change and instead needed "for its transformation the impact of a 'force from without' " whose carrier was the West (81). This may be seen as an "Occidentalism" imposed from the West. The dichotomy "modernity/tradition" does not acknowledge the necessarily historical and specific character of a given culture; indeed the dichotomy itself is imported and internalized. Such a dichotomy is not only emotionally and intellectually traumatic; it also elicits sentimental stock responses.

In a fundamental sense, Chinese intellectuals are still very much concerned, as Said says of Arab and Islamic artists and

intellectuals, “with *modernity* itself, still far from exhausted, still a major challenge in a culture dominated by *turath* (heritage) and orthodoxy” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 329). If in the West “the main thrust of modernism today is hardly aimed at tradition as such, but at an instrumental rationality that is seeking to incorporate even the disruptive forms of its opposition” (Eysteinnsson 241), then Chinese modernism is something different: its main thrust is aimed at Chinese tradition. Almost any term can be pitted against what is taken as “tradition.” In the Chinese context, as Xiaobing Tang observes, “modernism as a general label, no matter how vague and unspecified, plays the revolutionary role of producing new energies and imaginings. In effect, modernism has been valorized and cherished as the opposite of dogmatic traditionalism at the same time that it has been officially condemned” (Tang, “Lu Xun’s” 1225).

On the one hand, Chinese “modernism” is opposed to “tradition”; on the other, it is also seen as inseparably linked with “Westernization.” The “West” as a value is both positive and negative. “Westernization” as a label becomes formalistic and abstract, often deployed negatively: liberal intellectuals use it to counter against cultural conservatives who insist on “Chinese essence” or “national essence”; oppositional intellectuals use it to oppose official ideology and to project utopian desire onto the West as the Other; official discourse uses “Westernization” (often in the code formulas “spiritual pollution” and “bourgeois liberalism”) to contain opposition and consolidate its own legitimation in the name of Chinese nationalism or patriotism. It would be no exaggeration to say that the history of modern and contemporary China is a history of discursive and ideological battles waged under the sign of the “West.” The West (America and Europe) has been China’s *appointed* Other: this choice itself bespeaks China’s subjugation to the dominance of Western power. The problematic of Chinese modernity is born out of its confrontation with the West as Other.

“Modernity,” or “postmodernity,” while often defined as a predominantly Western or Euro-American phenomenon, is now increasingly seen as dependent upon the West’s dialectical relation to the alterity of the non-Western. The colonizer and the

colonized are mutually imbricated. Dirlik suggests that "if a crisis in historical consciousness, with all its implications for national and individual identity, is a basic theme of postcoloniality, then the First World itself is postcolonial," since "the end of colonialism presents the colonizer as much as the colonized with a problem of identity" (337). In postcolonial or postmodern discourses, there must then be an imperative need to articulate self-reflexively the phenomenon of what has been called global capitalism as it affects both the First and Third Worlds. In Fredric Jameson's influential view, the postmodern condition "can be accounted for in classical Marxist terms, as indices of a new and powerful, original, global expansion of capitalism, which now specifically penetrates the hitherto precapitalist enclaves of Third World agriculture and of First World culture, in which, in other words, capital more definitively secures the colonization of Nature and the Unconscious" (Jameson, "Foreword" xiv). However, the antinomy between the advanced postmodern Western world and the "Third World" may finally collapse into the appropriation of the Other into the Same, for this antinomy provides Jameson with a narrative of the regeneration of the First World by the Third World taken as "Nature" and "the unconscious." As Martin E. Gloege forcefully argues, Jameson's rhetoric of postmodernism makes the "Third World" cultures into "theoretical and abstract ideas": thus the binary opposition between "the advanced world" and "the third world" can be rewritten as "the advanced world versus Nature and the unconscious," further as "the advanced world versus itself" if the unconscious is also part of the advanced world. Jameson's "Emersonian narrative of the regeneration of America by Nature" can thus be seen as a "narrative of the regeneration of late capitalism by its own unconscious (from within) and by the third world (from without)" (Gloege 66).

Jameson argues that under imperialism and colonialism, metropolitan experience "can now no longer be grasped immanently; it no longer has its meaning, its deeper reason for being, within itself." The national literature formed on such experience "will now henceforth always have something missing about it" and there will always be something "which it constitutively lacks,

and which can never be made up or made good" (Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism" 51). We can transpose Jameson's argument to the Chinese case: "the formal contradiction," the lack and incompleteness of the Chinese modernity project (being peripheral to the Western centre) is precisely what Chinese modernity tries to solve. The very content of the national literature or culture itself "can now no longer be grasped immanently"; it no longer has its meaning *solely* within itself, but only in relation to the metropolitan centre. It is thus deeply ironic for Jameson to assert that in the Third World the concept of the postmodern seems "to authorize the end of a Eurocentrism now primarily mediated by the US itself," or "the end of the reality of such domination": "On this view, postmodernism is the wedge whereby the older Eurocentric paradigm is broken up, and along with it the teleological master narrative of the modern. Postmodernity thus comes as something like the declaration of independence of hitherto subordinated (third world) cultures" (Jameson, "Introduction" 420-21). Jameson speaks as if postmodernity is not *itself* a new teleological master narrative circulated from the metropolitan centre. As Jameson himself admits, the term and concept of a "third world postmodernism," enabling as it is, might also be "the object of a certain suspicion, as yet another possible poisoned gift of a European/North American (if no longer exactly Eurocentric) theory" (Jameson, "Introduction" 422).

If postmodernism can be seen as signifying the end of Eurocentrism, the end of Eurocentric universal "History," postmodernism in Jameson's terms, as Young notes, "would then be orientalism's dialectical reversal: a state of dis-orientation" (117). He notes that "The Third World seems to offer a dialectical opposite to the postmodernism of the First World so that both can be transcended in the name of the utopian future of socialism" (114-15). Young has advanced one of the most sophisticated accounts of the Hegelian problematic of historical consciousness in poststructuralist and post-Marxist theories. According to Young, "Hegel articulates a philosophical structure of the appropriation of the other as a form of knowledge which uncannily simulates the project of nineteenth-century imperial-

ism; the construction of knowledges which all operate through forms of expropriation and incorporation of the other mimics at a conceptual level the geographical and economic absorption of the non-European world by the West. Marxism's standing Hegel on his head may have reversed his idealism, but it did not change the mode of operation of a conceptual system which remains collusively Eurocentric" (3). This is the "ontological imperialism" of which Levinas speaks, which is traceable to the roots of Western thinking in ancient Greece and finds its recent expression in Heidegger (13). Young offers a definition of contemporary Western postmodernism as "European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world," a self-conscious awareness of the West's "historical relativity" which "also involves the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History" (19). Yet, paradoxically, the Western account of History is still regarded by many contemporary Chinese intellectuals as the universal model of modernization and teleological progress.

As the Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty points out, "Europe works as a silent referent in historical knowledge" (343), a profound "theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world" (344). Especially dominant in Third World historical discourses has been Marx's model of historical progress from feudalism through capitalism to socialism and communism, a "transition narrative" of development, modernization and capitalism, within whose problematics are written most modern Third-World histories (345). Chakrabarty calls for a project of "provincializing 'Europe,'" a *dual* recognition that "Europe's acquisition of the adjective *modern* for itself is a piece of global history of which an integral part is the story of European imperialism" and that Third-World modernizing nationalisms "have been equal partners in the process" (363). On the one hand there is the collapse of grand narratives (Hegelian theodicy of European or Western history); on the other hand there is the postmodern circulation of proliferating images and narratives. But it is doubtful whether the Hegelian master narrative of universal progress has finally lost its dominance. The Chinese critic Chen Maiping's argument may be taken as typical

of the thinking of many contemporary Chinese intellectuals when he argues that the notions of “modernism” and “post-modernism” cannot be confined to a geographical context, but must be defined “only as a historically progressive text” (87). This “historically progressive text,” in which “modernity” is opposed to “tradition,” is identified with the “process of modernization” in the West which “was successively completed by means of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Revolutions in England, France, and the US, and finally by means of the Industrial Revolution” (88). The influential and dominant scheme of evolutionary progress or historical laws, derived from Marxism to explain cultural and historical development, stipulates an iron law of necessary development based on economic and productive forces of social formation. Chinese intellectuals’ tacit acceptance of the official programme of “socialist modernization” is in this context meaningful: it subscribes to the universalizing project of progressive global modernization. Thus Chinese modernity has to be *re*-inserted into history, into the history of Western modernity as a universalizing, “civilizing” process. Colonial or postcolonial intellectuals, as Frantz Fanon observed long ago, caught between two cultures and nationalities, tend to “gather together all the historical determining factors which have conditioned them and take up a fundamentally ‘universal standpoint’” (218).

The Opium War may be seen retrospectively as the historical marker of the birth of “modern” China, or of the instauration of Chinese modernity (see Ci 26; 248-49). China embarked on the path to modernity under the pressure of Western impact, of Western colonialism and imperialism. The modern Chinese nation-state was as much a product of colonialist and imperialist pressure as an expression of intrinsic nationalist consciousness. As Yü-sheng Lin observes, “Acceptance of Western ideas and values was by and large predicated on Chinese nationalism, which in turn emerged as a direct response to the challenge of Western intrusion” (10). Yet the notion of “Western influence” cannot explain why Chinese intellectuals of the New Culture movement all adopted what Lin terms the “cultural-intellectualistic approach,” because many of these intellectuals,

while assimilating certain Western ideas and values, refused to accept forms of intellectualism or idealism within the Western tradition itself (50). Under pressures of change, Chinese “iconoclastic nationalism” “transformed the prevailing social Darwinian theory of change into an ideology for change” (63), which led to the “notion of the complete incompatibility of the old and the new” and “scorned the past ideas and values not only of Chinese tradition but of any tradition” (63n).

Indigenous culture was thus hypostatized into a homogeneous unity which is then pitted against the antinomy of tradition/modernity. Then the choice must be made between the two. It is a forced choice of course, because the indigenous or the native is already fractured, split by internal contradictions, dependent upon a totality which exceeds its historically sedimented cultural formation. If the break with the past is construed as unique, its uniqueness must be constantly recapitulated by positing an absolute discontinuity with the past. This is the aporetic consciousness of modernity which has lost its capacity to place itself in history, in relation to history. The atrophy of historical consciousness may indeed entail the ahistorical projection of desire which posits absolute origins and beginnings and may finally result in the projective self-exoneration from historical reflection. The negativity of tradition thus constituted in the historical imaginary is then projected onto what might be called a futural present whose own negativity would be transcended through being re-situated in a teleology of progress and universalization.

The modern West as universal value, as universality itself, has been internalized deeply in the collective consciousness of modern Chinese intellectuals during the May Fourth period and after. The West came to be identified with its Enlightenment rationality which was seen to endow the West with power and wealth. The total iconoclastic rejection of Chinese tradition in the name of the Enlightenment spirit can also be seen as the indirect result of European colonialism and imperialism, to the extent that Chinese intellectuals forced themselves to assume the subject-position of the colonized both in relation to European imperial powers and in alienating themselves from their cultural identity and tradition. Tu Wei-ming has described the dilemma

faced by the May Fourth intellectuals in the following terms. "As Confucian humanism (their own value system) became ridiculed and the Enlightenment mentality (the value system they were determined to import) became instrumentalized, they could neither tap into their own indigenous resources nor take seriously what the West could offer" (117). This is the story told by Joseph Levenson in his *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*. Chinese intellectuals were forced to choose between the West and the Chinese past, that is, between modernity and tradition, between the new and the old. The choice of the West caused tremendous emotional trauma for many intellectuals, but intellectually they were forced to acknowledge and accept the universality of Western values. Thus the Chinese past or tradition was radically historicized and relativized. Marxism came to fill the traumatic gap left by this antagonistic choice because it offered a teleological narrative of social development and modes of production, which could (re)insert China into the global narrative of progressive transition.

This dilemma persists in present-day China, where intellectuals have hardly come to a recognition of the double nature of the Western Enlightenment legacy. This is partly due to the deeply entrenched Marxist belief in dialectics and teleology, Marxism's "complicity in the modernization model with its relentless drive toward industrialization, urbanization, and technological rationalization" (Dallmayr 3). Thus the double task facing postcolonial intellectuals today, as Fred Dallmayr urges, is "a struggle with and against Hegel (or with Hegel against Hegel) and more broadly with and against the enlightenment legacy, that is, an endeavor to transgress the triumphalism of reason and the self-enthronement of spirit, without abandoning Hegelian insights or the demands of enlightened reason" (2).

One of the main tasks of enlightened reason today would be the articulation of cultural and historical determinations and sedimentations as they pertain to the question of self-identity. Fanon was among the first to observe that the (post)colonial subject as the other may be unable to assume the presence of the self. Inevitably it is not a problem of finding an "original," authentic voice for the self, but one of hybridization. Among

present-day postcolonial critics, Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural "hybridity" has been influential (58). Yet hybridization does not dispose of the question of "authenticity" as self-identity and self-recognition. Authenticity can be taken in the sense proposed by Thomas Langan as "achieving the fullest possible self-understanding and self-control so as to be able to respond to the needs and possibilities of the situation" (11). Authenticity should not be conceived merely as anti-colonial resistance, nor it cannot, as Chow says, "simply be imagined in terms of a resistance against the image—that is, *after* the image has been formed—nor in terms of a subjectivity that existed *before*, beneath, inside, or outside the image" (*Writing Diaspora* 51). It is to become aware of the disjunctive temporality of cultural identity.

As a parallel to (post)colonial "hybridity," Bhabha proposes the notion of "colonial mimicry" as "the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (86). This is also true of the colonized insofar as the colonized reform the self as the other, as the image of the other, in the image of the other. Mimicry is thus "the sign of a double articulation" (86); it is both the appropriation of power and the inappropriable difference. On the one hand, it is necessary "to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" (Hutcheon 151). On the other hand, we should equally realize that the reaffirmation of alienated subjectivity may be a profoundly negative enterprise, because what is to be affirmed is precisely a sense of the self as disjunctive, alienated, dislocated, and hybridized. Any emancipatory politics must start with the affirmation of self-consciousness, yet necessarily with a positive awareness of its alienation.

Commenting on the work of the Indian Subaltern Studies group, Spivak urges that the task of postcolonial criticism is "to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern." Spivak advocates "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (205). Yet the interest need not be *merely* political, since the subaltern identity must of necessity be worked out through the aporias of disjunctive temporalities and geographical positions which often constitute the totality within which any subaltern identity has

come to be, within a regime of “the epistemic violence that constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialists’ self-consolidating other” (209). Lisa Lowe has further developed Spivak’s insight: “it is possible to constitute specific signifiers of otherness, such as Indianness, for the purpose of disrupting the discourses that exclude Indians as Other while simultaneously revealing the internal contradictions and slippages of ‘Indianness’ so as to ensure that the signifier *Indianness* will not be reappropriated by the very effort to criticize its use” (198).

In the Chinese context, *Chineseness* or *Chinese experience* inevitably contains within itself historical signs of Western mediation, at least on two levels: the direct or indirect coercive pressures, in all their material forms, of Western colonialism and imperialism, of Western postmodern capitalism, and the mediation of Western “theory.” Thus “Chinese experience” is not a concept in search of pristine authenticity, but one of hybridized identity. On the one hand, “Westernization” has become an acknowledged part of modern Chinese history; on the other hand, the negotiation with cultural self-identity has yet to be historically articulated. Chineseness as a signifier needs to be situated and substantiated within the discursive practices of national and individual identity in relation to both “tradition” and “the West,” that is, in relation to both the modern Chinese historical imaginary and social and cultural fantasy about the experience of otherness. If modern Chinese culture is, as Chow claims, “caught between the past as culture and the present as realpolitik” (*Writing Diaspora* 133), then what need to be redeemed are “the experiences of uneasy translations between cultures, translations that are mediated by the possession and lack of power” (141).

Dirlik has suggested that “postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism” and that the question for the “global intelligentsia” is not whether one “can (or should) return to national loyalties but whether, in recognition of its own class-position in global capitalism, it can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product” (356). Said similarly advocates the project of rereading the “cultural ar-

chive," "not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said, *Culture* 51). The task of postcolonial intellectuals would be to reinscribe their political and cultural identity and to "rechart and then occupy" their subaltern position "self-consciously" (*Culture* 210).

Modernism or postmodernism should not be merely equated with socioeconomic modernization but must be regarded as the mode of cultural consciousness on the part of intellectual elites in postcolonial cultures to project the hybridized and disjunctive temporalities into the space of global progress defined by the West. The historical nature of hybridization is closely related to the sedimentation of disjunctive temporalities in the cultural unconscious, which simultaneously compels and permits the recognition of the Other within the Self. This return of contingent temporality or historicity, in the postmodern as the postcolonial, in what Bhabha reformulates as the "postcolonial contramodernity" (175), can thus be "revalued as a form of anteriority . . . whose causality is effective because it returns to displace the present, to make it disjunctive," because it creates for "the politics of cultural difference" the space of articulation and "the inscription of cultural incommensurability where differences cannot be sublated or totalized" (177). The "anteriority" is not the primordial or timeless past or tradition which may be transcended or simply disposed of; rather it is "a mode of 'negativity' that makes the enunciatory present of modernity disjunctive" (238). "The time-lag of postcolonial modernity moves *forward*, erasing that compliant past tethered to the myth of progress" (253). This time-lag "*keeps alive the making of the past*" (254), and functions "to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its 'gesture,' its *tempi*, 'the pauses and stresses of the whole performance'" (253).

Johannes Fabian has pointed out that what are opposed in the "tradition/modernity" antagonism are "not the same societies at different stages of development, but different societies facing each other at the same Time" (155). The complex, hybridized, nonsynchronic identity of postcolonial cultures is complicated

by the synchronic vision of culture in the West, because, in Kumkum Sangari's analysis, "the synchronic time of the modern and of the postmodern in the West is an *end* product of the now discredited linear time of modernity and progress" (160). Sangari further points out that the epistemological problem is itself a historical one: "The double disjunction of a hybrid simultaneity and of the economic and ideological deformations of neocolonialism is the condition within which the real is perceived" (161). Postmodernist erasure of real differences in an ever disseminating, displacing network of pluralist discourses may be seen to legitimate a new form of colonization, in that postmodernism tacitly legitimizes the erasure of historicity and conceals the global power-relations of late capitalism in the form of economic, political, and cultural domination and hegemony. As Slemon notes, "The universalizing, assimilative impulse that carries itself forward in the name of postmodernism" continues "a politics of colonialist control" (14).

Under the signs of postmodernism and global capitalism, the problem of hegemonic politics today assumes new forms and dimensions. Postcolonial or developing societies are "today challenged in their self-conception and habitual life-worlds more radically than ever before" (Dallmayr 2). As Zygmunt Bauman further notes, postmodernity is apt to be regarded "as the tendency of *contemporary culture* (without qualifications)," while its causes are usually explained as unique to certain advanced societies, "with no reference to the unique position of such societies in global arrangements." Bauman suggests that there is "a distinct possibility that the advent of postmodernity in one part of the world is precisely the effect of such an unique position; both the erosion of the universalistic ambitions that part of the world entertained in the past, and of the still considerable privilege this part enjoys in the world-wide distribution of resources" (Bauman 59). The dangers of more subtle and pervasive forms of colonialism or neo-colonialism, or what has been called cultural imperialism (see Thompson) must not go unnoticed. As David Spurr observes, "To see non-Western peoples as having themselves become the standard-bearers of Western culture is in some ways a more profound form of colonization," since "the object of appro-

priation" may be "the very nature of reality in the Third World, now seen in its potential as an image of the West" (36).

In contemporary postcolonial and postmodern debates, the question of cultural otherness has also often been posed as the antinomy of cultural universalism versus cultural relativism, an antinomy inherited from the European Enlightenment. But both may be excessive, as Tzvetan Todorov warns. "Excessive universalism" which erases all difference and specificity, can often be just "unconscious ethnocentrism," while "excessive relativism" denies any shared ground of common humanity (374). This is no doubt a salutary warning. Yet the legacy of the Enlightenment may also be a paradoxical one, as Terry Eagleton argues, in that while the Enlightenment believes in the "abstract universal right of all to be free, the shared essence or identity of all human subjects to be autonomous," "the only point of enjoying such universal abstract equality is to discover and live one's own particular difference" (30). "Concrete particularity," in today's world of proliferating postmodern simulacra, may be difficult to achieve. If Western culture has become a "metaculture" whose "elements cease to be 'ethnic' and become internationalized as intrinsic components of a world shaped by Western development" (Mosquera 531), then cultural self-autonomy or resistance under unequal power-relations may remain paradoxical. As Immanuel Wallerstein notes, the assertion or reassertion of "particular cultural values that have been neglected or disparaged in order to protest against the imposition of the cultural values of the strong upon the weaker" would entail the necessity on the part of the weaker cultures to prove the validity of the (re-)asserted values "in terms of criteria laid down by the powerful" (100). There seems no escaping from the "concept of universal values," which is in effect (re)legitimized in the very "assertion of some particular culture" (101).

However, cultural oppositions and polarities are by no means rigid and fixed. The universal/particular binarism, like that of self/other, must be suspended, without privileging either of the two terms, since both are mutually imbricated and constitutive. It is thus important, as Zhang Longxi urges, to dismantle the "binary opposition of totality and difference," and to adopt a

critical, self-reflexive stance toward both “the traditional Western discourse of a universal human nature” and “contemporary Western theory of an irreducible difference” (66). The contemporary Chinese desire for recognition in a new global order must be seen in relation to its deference to the standard of “universality” and to a desire to participate in global culture precisely by finding its own voice and identity rooted in history and geography. Recognition of one’s own historical experience is at the same time recognition of spatial and temporal distance. If a narrative of cultural identification, in the form of “national identity” or “national allegory,” is now deemed too restrictive or undesirable, then the problem of cultural authenticity needs to be reconsidered as one of alterity, in relation both to the Other as Self and to the Self as Other. The positive potential of a Chinese postmodernist cultural self-consciousness may thus be to subvert the essentializing and totalizing allegorization of national identity, positive or negative. This means that the spatial encounter with other cultures is compounded with the ceaseless confrontation and negotiation with one’s own historical alterity of disruption and discontinuities. We must realize, as Judith Butler conjoins, that “the claim of universality will no longer be separable from the antagonism by which it is continually contested”: “recognition will no longer be a matter of finding oneself in the Other but precisely a matter of *not* finding oneself in the Other—the preservation of a difference recognition cannot overcome” (6).

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