

China and postcolonialism

Re-orienting all the fields

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The essays collected here for *InterDisciplines* are most welcome, not least because they *are* interdisciplinary and this is absolutely something that postcolonial studies must always aspire to be. The sheer scale, complexity, and historical diversity of modern colonialism and empire demand interdisciplinarity, and not only their effects on the colonized but also the responses of the colonized to empire—e.g., nationalism, Occidentalism, nativism, socialism, liberalism—call forth any number of theoretical or interpretive questions that are clearly imperative and fundamental for the study of history, politics, society, and for the global academy in general. Still more subtly, there is at work in these essays the central concern of postcolonial studies: the connections between the colonial or imperial past (or present) and the present moment or present context and events. While the field's buzzwords may be more immediately familiar (hybridity, orientalism, imagined communities, and so on) postcolonial studies is always, if often implicitly, a historical and comparative pursuit: how does that colonial or, say, anti-imperial past live on in the present, and to what effect? How to amend this through decolonization of »minds« and societies and polities, and is that even a worthwhile goal today?

And yet postcolonial studies has mostly developed outside of the interpretive social sciences (and outside China Studies), which represents a missed opportunity indeed. The postcolonial field needs them, and vice versa. This is one reason why this special issue is a significant one. What is especially noteworthy is a shared emphasis in these essays on certain internalizations or assimilations of colonial discourse and problems and on clear, if challenging, case studies about the impact and subsequent response of China to the West: the relation to a modern (faster) temporality

and, I would add, a catch-up mentality (Meinhof); the embrace of new weapon technologies and the *re-articulation* (my term) of violence as essential to sovereignty (Zhu); a certain competition with liberal political scientists to »claim« Chinese white collar professionals as their own (loyal to the PRC and not »democratic«) (Yan); and the difficult and protracted and demanding efforts to articulate a hybrid and individualized identity that subverts »Chineseness,« itself a »gift« that arises from contact with the diaspora and the foreign and hence the empire (Sandfort).

It is worth noting at the outset that the »post« in postcolonial does not signify a break with or end of colonialism, as if all its effects and remaking of worlds simply disappeared on the morning after liberation and the exit of the Caucasians or, say, the Japanese. That »post« is akin to a fencepost that quite crucially keeps both sides of an edifice or a territory intact; it partakes of both sides. »Post« as a break or end is exactly what is in question within postcolonial studies, itself in many ways a response to the failures of decolonization and national liberation in a new age of imperialism or globalization. This is admittedly a counter-intuitive usage (and many people think colonialism is in the past), but that emphasis on continuity and change is a productive one and is, one should think, ripe for historical sociologies. After all, what is Edward Said (via Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Giambattista Vico, and of course Palestine) doing in 1978's *Orientalism* if not offering a kind of sociology of knowledge, in empirical and concrete though not »scientific« terms?

Wide-ranging and moving from the theoretical or generally abstract to the concrete or empirical, the essays here are all effective interventions into the question of China and postcolonialism. The Introduction to this volume has usefully and lucidly explicated the essays and situated them in the larger field of the postcolonial. The essays do not seek to persuade us that the postcolonial turn needs to happen—a debate at any rate—in China and the social sciences or Sinology fields abroad, though taken together they *do* suggest that this is a ripe and fruitful prospect indeed. I would thus like to use the space allotted me here to reflect further on why postcolonialism matters, and why China matters for postcolonialism,

as well as to reflect on why the social sciences need a postcolonial turn (and vice versa, to be sure).¹

And yet for scholars working within the humanities and to a lesser extent within the discipline of history, my posing of these questions will sound somewhat dated: the postcolonial turn, immediately following other »theoretical« turns following structuralism and post-structuralism in the 1970s (notably the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and thence Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak) and the rise of multiculturalism and feminism, has transformed the study of literature and culture (including film) and—despite ongoing resistance in some quarters—history. At the risk of sounding triumphal (though surely this is all far more to the good than the bad), so self-evident is this academic transformation that there is no need to even debate the relevance of the post- or the full-on colonial to the study of national let alone world literature, culture, and history. One need only peruse the syllabi, course offerings, and publication lists and keywords of most sizeable universities and faculties across the world. Even the discipline of history, probably the most »resistant to theory« and interpretation of all the humanities fields, has long had a foot in the study of colonialism and empire, for the obvious reason that these last are arguably the major single story (»archive«) of modernity, alongside the rise of capitalism. Thus the subfield of world history has long had a small but brilliant, radical wing of scholars documenting the histories of the British and French empires, for example (Sydney Mintz, E.R. Wolf). Suffice it to mention, as well, names such as Walter Rodney and Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank and the world systems school, and many others.

In sum, while specific academic disciplines are always, as disciplines, resistant to paradigm shifts and new rules of discourse, some few but noteworthy scholars working within global historical or world-spanning

1 Parts of this response draw on my forthcoming book *Illiberal China* (Palgrave) as well as Vukovich (2015).

studies never needed a postcolonial *turn*. They were already there. In fact post-colonial studies has always been remarkably open about what and who can be included under its umbrella—Rodney and Amin and all of the above, surely, and even the productive critics of the field such as Timothy Brennan. Even Edward Said always insisted that what he was saying about the impact of orientalism as a field of knowledge-power had long been known, if unremarked and made invisible, and the critique had long been made by others before him (e.g., Abdel-Malek). (I leave to one side here the historians who have themselves helped constitute the field of postcolonial studies, e.g., the Subaltern Studies historians of South Asia). None of this should be taken as a rebuke of postcolonial studies as a mere fad (and it is a few decades old now in any case), but as confirmation of the field's point, as against how universities typically organize and produce knowledge: the modern colonialism and empire are, and should be seen as foundational to almost everything we know about »the world« and »world history« as well as what we now call globalization, from the rise and spread of capitalism, to the flows of people and goods and problems and riches and ideas in and out of societies. In other words postcolonialism is not just an academic »thing« but a *worldly condition*, in fact a set of conditions and traditions bequeathed by a long history of modern empire and »globalization.« And it must also be said that postcolonial studies, as opposed to, say, more conventional historical or political economic work (as invoked above), represents a more theoretical and generalizing project.

China *as* postcolonial

Within China, as the authors of the Introduction note, »postcolonialism« as a critical or at least theoretical term is widespread, with hundreds of citations in, say, 2016. (In my own experience, the term itself and critique of the West are less popular in China's two former colonial enclaves, Macau and Hong Kong, or get inverted to mean critique of the Communist Party-state's otherwise undeniable sovereignty; this no doubt speaks to a certain attachment to the Western/liberal/colonial worldview stemming from the former era's educational apparatuses and political culture as

well as to China's difficult and epochal rise.) They also aptly describe postcolonial discourse in China as »vast and heterogeneous,« and I would like to amplify that a bit here. The mainland intellectual political culture (to use a phrase from Said) is itself in many ways postcolonial in two fundamental senses. It is deeply concerned with »becoming-the-same« as the modern, advanced West (if not outperforming it and »winning«) and with never forgetting—via education and propaganda institutions—the era of national humiliation, that is, the era of near-colonialism, the collapse of the dynastic system, disunity and chaos, and Japanese invasion. China's encounter with modernity came in the form of a very real imperialism, a professed and then militarily demonstrated Western »superiority« (as the contribution by Lilli Zhu makes clear to us). There simply would be no PRC and Chinese communist revolution without this; thus the typical liberal injunction to stop talking about imperialism in favor of the PRC's lack of democracy (»free elections«), liberalism, human rights, and so on in China always misses the point of continuing Chinese nationalism and the mainland's resistance to Western intellectual »aid.« That the »never forget the era of humiliation« slogan is indeed propaganda (a propagated truth sanctioned by the state and political mainstream) does not make it false, or less than true. It must also be said that anti-imperialist consciousness is strong in China even today, if in less political (internationalist, Marxist) and more starkly nationalist terms than some might like (including the present author). Given the sanctioned ignorance involved, the spread of the global/foreign media (English- and Chinese-language alike) in China has if anything only made nationalism more intense. »Imperialism and Chinese politics,« to borrow a famous title from the late »official« historian Hu Sheng, is still a real discourse and active historical narrative in the mainland, and in this sense China is arguably more connected to its anti-imperialist past than, say, India or many countries in Africa that typically count as the representative places of postcolonial studies (since they were completely colonized and lost sovereignty).

That the PRC has also been adamantly and enthusiastically embracing free, global trade for decades now does not actually contradict this, at least in the PRC's own terms and presumably many of its citizens' terms, even if

it defies conventional Marxist thought. That one place's contradictions or paradoxes (or even hypocrisies) may not be another's may not be understood or interpreted the same way, may sound a cliché, or alternatively, like a bad relativism in the face of certain universal truths. One version of this is a certain debate that will be familiar to anyone following media or even »expert« reports on contemporary China: »China has its own tradition/system/culture« versus »The CCP is an illiberal regime that only seeks to keep itself in power at any cost.« Neither side of this gets specific enough, and both present a number of monoliths (*the* tradition, *only* self-interested). But postcolonial studies must be defined as working against universalisms; this is in many ways the point of the field as a whole, and where it intersects with, say, post-structuralist theory, with radical historicism or pragmatism, and of course, a rather ancient and therefore fundamental and unavoidable—and compelling—debate over universalism versus particularism. While individual scholars may differ, naturally, the field as a whole does militate against universalisms (liberal, humanist, or otherwise) in no small part because colonialism itself always presented itself as a beneficent civilizing mission or, alternatively, as a white man's burden to help or contain the darker, different races (races being defined as universally true and actually existing). Provincializing Europe, as Dipesh Chakrabarty memorably put it years ago now, is the mandate but—as often goes ignored—that goal is also meant to be seen as an incredible challenge that is by no means easy to actually think. As with orientalism—think of the many lives and afterlives of notions of Chinese cruelty and Asian »despotism«—these structures of knowledge production do not just blow away with some corrosive wind from the mind.

Hu Sheng's work (which naturally became less radical over a very long and productive career) may represent an official academic line of some type (Hu was a significant Party member throughout his life) and a nationalist history; it may therefore scare off those Westerners who loathe the state on principle. But as any reader could see (his work has existed in English for decades), it is also serious, reputable scholarship. His massive two-volume study *From the Opium War to the May 4th Movement* (1991) is a monument to PRC (or Chinese Communist Party) political-

intellectual culture and academe, which is often thought, wrongly, to be akin to the former Soviet Union at its worst (e.g., Lysenko). That readers (of English) worldwide know, for example, Eric Hobsbawm—a genuinely great historian, to be sure—but not Hu, or have wrestled with the foreignness and complexities of, say, the Indian Subalternists but not Tsinghua's Wang Hui, is an index of Eurocentrism and the dominance of the Western academy, and is moreover something of a problem for a world that is quickly becoming multipolar again in some sense, with China a global factor and presence far beyond cheap exports and capital flight. Why *is* China in such a competition with the West, even as it embraces trade and US dollars, and why does it keep »resisting« or »not forgetting« the wars, hot and cold, of the past? Is it simply brainwashing and communist colonizations (to invoke two actually current terms amongst the Hong Kong intelligentsia)? That was a rhetorical question, if it needs said, and the point is that we cannot understand the PRC or its politics without recourse to the impact of and reaction against the West. In fact an awareness of not only this general imperial history – one that removed China from being at the center of the world system and its »intellectual political culture« to its periphery—but of Western intellectual and political arrogance (sanctioned ignorance) is practically common sense among many critical Chinese intellectuals and citizens (of course not all). This brings us to the Chinese left intelligentsia, new and old, and their lack of a comparable impact—as yet—within global academe.

If China were ever to have a globally influential school of historical and theoretical discourse akin to India's subaltern studies project (itself influenced by Indian Maoism/Naxalites at one point) or Western/French post-structuralism, then past works such as Hu's and older Maoists' as well as contemporary works—broadly leftist or heterodox if non-liberal-dissident writing—would be the starting point. It makes for a striking comparison. The Chinese experience involves Marxist intellectuals and »national« historians concerned with the relations between imperialism, the last dynasty, and the early Republic as well as rebellion and growing class and national consciousness, culminating in the rise of the Communist Party and eventually the 1949 revolution. One then has an actual revolution

and Sinified Marxist/Maoist movement that succeeds and must then get on with state building and reconstructing the national economy, preserving borders, and even somehow continuing the revolution—and supporting global anti-imperialism—after 1949. There was precisely no script for this, the Soviet and American paths having been declared off-limits by the late 1950s. But the South Asian project is in many ways writing *against* national histories and official (and Eurocentric) Marxisms and reductionist class analyses. They are concerned with colonialism's (and modernity's) *lack* of impact among the rural masses (»dominance without hegemony« in Ranajit Guha's phrase). The new Chinese intellectuals, after their revolution, were very much interested in modernizing and developing not only nationalism and class analyses/politics but also with transforming the countryside away from backwardness and feudalism and toward some egalitarian future. Both »schools« can in theory be construed as founts of postcolonial theory and post-orientalist historiography.

Yet while both are deeply informed by a Marxist-Maoism (more powerfully in the Chinese case), it is only the latter, South Asian-based work that has had an impact in global academe. And regardless of one's specific evaluations of such work, whether one agrees with e.g. Guha or Dipesh Chakrabarty in all the details, the bringing in of South Asian history and social and political problems, and the development of theoretical debates in response, has only deepened and widened the academic conversation in welcome ways. Maoism itself certainly had a great impact on Third World radical movements and thus on actually existing, anti-imperialist national liberation movements; it also impacted certain French Marxists such as Louis Althusser and Alain Badiou, as has been amply discussed elsewhere. But Maoism, as an explicit ideology and set of political-economic practices, has also been overthrown in the PRC for three decades now, and the former Chairman himself has been vilified in most academic and pulp biographies and histories. So while one might think that, for postcolonial theory, Mao Zedong might serve as a Chinese or »Asian« Franz Fanon, this has not been the case, certainly not outside of China at all. And yet, that anti-imperial, revolutionary discourse nonetheless lives on in a »Chinese« insistence that it can or is taking an alternative

path to liberal democracy of the Western type (a point also made here in the Introduction).

The New Left and other heterodox thinkers—including some version of neo-Confucian or neo-traditional thinking—in Chinese academe today, as lively and serious as they are, are likewise not well placed to have a Subalternist or British-historian, Hobsbawm-like impact on Western intellectual production. At least not yet. While it is true that they do not invoke postcolonial terms as much as other academics, and for that matter are, in contrast to the Western academy, more rooted in the social sciences, I would argue that they are nonetheless a significant, postcolonial or counter-Eurocentric development. They are best understood as both an indigenous Chinese intellectual movement or »scene« and a subtle but firm riposte to a political orientalism that demonizes the Chinese revolution in general and Mao era socialism in particular. This is precisely what is at stake in their equality-based or egalitarian and communitarian critiques of the reform era and the hyper-marketization (or privatization or commodification) of the Chinese economy. Both that »liberal« economic turn of the state away from state socialism and the global discourse of political liberalism as what China lacks and needs are the objects of their critique. Outside of a small but not insignificant number of scholars based in Western academe, it is only the new left (broadly defined) that is making such a critique of the reform era as such and China's turn to capitalism. Importantly, much of the Chinese new left also breaks with a major political plank in Western and global political thinking: it is resolutely pro-state and seeks to retain and enhance, not cut back or avoid, state capacity. Neo-liberalism, that American- and Austrian-based product, is of course anti-state in the name of the just and spontaneous order of the market, but this also resonates all too clearly with the general anti-statism of—it must be said—that very same French-inspired post-structuralism and quasi-anarchisms that inform the Western »left« intellectual political culture.

From a global standpoint, this pro-»statism« is as close to an older European social-democratic tradition as to a Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

But in any case it represents a welcome challenge to current state-phobic doxa nearly everywhere else. Yet one must note that theirs are not just economically or even sociologically based arguments (though they are that); they are also aimed at universalism and Eurocentrism, as the work of Wang Hui in particular makes clear.

Wang's work on the problem of Tibet as well as his volumes on Chinese modernity are particularly salient here. Wang argues that the Western fascination with Tibet and freeing Tibet from China is partly rooted in orientalism, a claim that is surprisingly controversial or somehow irrelevant to conventional China »experts.«² Moreover, the resolution of the crisis—and it is one, for Tibetans and China alike—would be better approached not through independence and modern (and Western) nation-state borders for Tibet, but through the Mao-Zhou Enlai formulations (from the 1950s) of relative autonomy under a more traditional, empire-era form of suzerainty. (This is not at all what the contemporary state has been doing, but rather the opposite: a type of de facto, planned assimilation through »development« and Han migration across a tight border.) There are historical or contextual grounds for this Mao-Zhou strategy as well as a more general or »theoretical« argument that it is precisely those modern notions of discrete, authorized borders, and of the illusory ideals of full autonomy and »real« sovereignty, not to mention the logic of purity and monoculture that subtends modern nation-states, that create as many problems as they solve in such situations of complex, overlapping territories. Wang's views on Tibet and on orientalism (or Western chauvinism) are fairly common within Chinese intellectual circles, though they are sure to bother others who would, in turn, speak for Tibetans in Tibet and who also want to gift them a sovereign, modern nation-state of their own. But Wang's focus on empire and suzerainty is nonetheless a challenge to what is undeniably a modern Eurocentric view of the necessity and normativity of modern nation-states

2 See for example Sebastian Veg's (2009) review of Wang Hui's essays on Tibet.

as opposed to empire states or civilizational states. China and its peripheries are no doubt a mix of both such entities, old and new, and therefore its socio-political solutions and forms must follow suit. What if the former, modern paths, in this Chinese case at any rate, create more problems than they solve? As for modernity, or proto-modernity, Wang locates it in the Song dynasty (960–1279).

He also posits Maoism as »an anti-modern modernity«—part of the global or world-historical movement away from ancient regimes but also against a universalizing capitalism and against the erasure of China's own specificities and differences. This was the Maoist break with Stalinism after all, even if Stalin had to remain a proper name of the pantheon. This is to say, then, that the critique of universalism is alive and well in some spheres of Chinese intellectual political culture, beyond official pronouncements of the Chinese dream and the like. All of this is what makes it part of the general postcolonial world even if the specific keywords are not always in play. In sum, if one wants to truly engage China—the PRC, as opposed to its peripheries and the diasporic spaces which, however important, tend to dominate the conversation—then the postcolonial dimension, the ongoing encounter with the West, the historical baggage, the attempts to decolonize or counter Western discourses—has to be part of that engagement.

To the social sciences?

But if the postcolonial turn has happened in much of the humanities and to many historical inquiries, and if China is actually a compelling example of the historical and »actually existing« condition of postcoloniality, it remains nonetheless true that most of the social sciences (even the interpretive ones) as well as China Studies or Sinology have largely avoided that turn and kept to their traditional paths: a certain practice of (or claim to) »science« and objectivity, on the one hand, and a basis in language proficiency and empiricism on the other. As I have been suggesting, the fact of that turn does not suggest mere trendiness or faddishness but a useful, if rightfully contested and debatable, mini-paradigm shift about the impact and scope and scale of the colonial and

imperial encounters on the West as much as on the former colonized and the Third World. There are indeed such things as academic fashions and fads, or certain formations of discourse or knowledge that are not compelling or enduring. But the postcolonial turn, especially but not only its critique or »provincialization« of universalisms, seems more akin to something like feminism and the analysis of gender: a »discovery« far too large, and far too connected to the world as it was and remains, as well as too widely adopted already, to be usefully resisted by any one discipline for any good, as opposed to gate-keeping, reason.

But my point here is not to badger or browbeat China studies and the social sciences. The point I wish to make is that the postcolonial field sorely needs the social sciences as much as it needs to know more and do more with China. (One can say as well that the Chinese academe and intelligentsia need more engagement with the rest of the world, including Asia as opposed to the West; more postcolonial and global studies all around then.) The division between the humanities and the social sciences is a very powerful but also a very unfortunate and debilitating, ultimately arbitrary one. Speaking impressionistically as a long-standing literature, film, and humanities professor, I believe that all the texts have in a sense been more or less worn out, with diminishing returns in regard to the endless production of readings or studies or commentaries. (This may also explain a return, away from »theory,« to more formalist and arts-appreciation modes of textual analysis, as well as the influence of strictly empirical studies like those of Franco Moretti.³) The basic game in recent years has been to return to formalism and aesthetics as opposed to theory and cultural studies and critique, in addition to »discovering« non-canonical and »hidden« writers, film-makers, and so on. (The latter is indeed worthwhile and welcome, but often bibliographic more than anything else.) This downsizing of ambition is understandable as at the end of the day the truly compelling questions and pressing problems of the present and recent past—I am thinking of political and social ones

3 See for example Moretti (2013).

around new forms of power famously illustrated by Michel Foucault or Pierre Bourdieu, of things like the »Anthropocene,« of all the political failures in the current global conjuncture, the degradation of liberalism since the 1970s, the impact of immigration, the rise of terrorism, the demonization and failures of the state in general, and so on—are simply not best revealed or illumined through, say, the study of film and literature.⁴

What is needed, in other words, is what C. W. Mills (1959) enduringly theorized as the sociological imagination, just as, put another way, some of these big, interpretive, political problems and questions must also be empirical questions. The empirical (or concrete) materiality is precisely the Achilles heel of humanistic inquiry, which either expresses great disinterest in the empirical and broadly contextual (in favor of aesthetics and formalism and timeless truths) or which dismisses the social sciences as rationalist and narrow and »non-theoretical.« Let us take a quick Chinese example or two: the dissident figure or artist, be it the famed performance artist (and tax evader) Ai Wei Wei, the blind human rights lawyer (and devout Christian) Chen Guancheng, the blogger Han Han (never really a dissident but decidedly middlebrow), and so on. When such figures are singled out by humanists—their texts, or their personages as texts—they represent the PRC and what is wrong with it, and what it was and is really like. The critic or journalist only sometimes says as much explicitly. But regardless, the texts/figures simply *must* seem so in order to do the work they do as *representative* Chinese or China. Ai is certainly an adept and successful artist, but he is neither especially popular or especially controversial or compelling within China itself, and he speaks so much and so contradictorily that it would in fact be hard to make a coherent social critic or thinker out of him. Not unlike Andy Warhol, perhaps, but with Chinese and »global civil society celebrity

4 With notable exceptions of course (certain film-makers and novelists who are intensely interested in such things), that would in my mind only prove the general rule I am invoking.

human rights« characteristics. A liberal propagandist such as the novelist Yan Lianke—to take another example—can write a volume about the »great« famine of 1959–61 (*The Four Books*), and be celebrated abroad for great bravery and truth-telling, without any readers outside of China being aware of an intense debate in the mainland over the extent and scale of the famine as well as its causes (death estimates by Chinese academics range from 4 to 35 million).⁵ They stand for the truth of the PRC as revealed through »texts« of very particular individuals. This is in fact an old story, as when the anti-Maoist, pro-Dengist filmmakers of the 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou) made memorable but historically tendentious and fantastical epic films decrying the Mao era as so much despotic feudalism and unmitigated misery. These were then taken by audiences abroad as directly representing recent Chinese history.

The postcolonial or anti-orientalist critique of such gestures can be done at the level of representation (that they do not represent the whole or the one truth, are not especially popular or subversive, and so on). But what is needed is also the sociological and contextual analysis and more empirical detail: what are the consensus views about the Chinese government by Chinese citizens, for example? Does China lack »rule of law« and »human rights« or does it have some other system by which it operates consistently and more or less coherently? What really happened during the Great Leap communalization to lead it into famine, how big was that disaster, and relatedly, why are Western academics and audiences so invested in making the death numbers as large as possible? In short, how can we characterize Chinese society now or in the recent past, and what does, say, the variety of nationalisms and attitudes toward the legitimacy of the government tell us about the encounters with imperialism?

5 See the discussions in Vukovich (2012) and Chun (2013) as well as Sun (2016), in addition to the more well-known high estimates by, e.g., Yang Jisheng (2013) Of course the foreign media and commentariat see the lower estimates as mere propaganda.

Some type of historical sociology seems imperative for not only understanding Chinese society in general but also Western societies' responses to the rise of China, and China's responses to Western dominance. These are not merely conceptual or speculative matters—they need to be researched in a social-science way but brought into the comparative and postcolonial problematic or frame. One can even go so far as to say that sociological or other empirical work is needed to test or falsify any number of postcolonial or other theoretically driven inquiries and concepts. But with the added proviso that social science—I am thinking of a field such as politics in particular—needs to drop its scientific pretenses. As if there really were objective and universal truths or »facts«—shorn of interpretation and evaluation/judgment, no less—to questions and problems of politics and society! If Max Weber were writing today, one can guess that he would engage the postcolonial problematic.

As for China studies, its institutionalization in the US and outside of Europe as »area studies« has, as is well known, been overwhelmingly social scientific, with the added »bonus« of linguistically defined areas and a certain fetish or cult of language as a skeleton key for immediate access through all the doors and gates of China. (This also belies a strident if unspoken liberal humanism or universalism: know the language and know the other.) This makes it almost by definition opposed to postcolonial and post-structuralist or other forms of anti-universalistic, anti-liberal critique. In this sense, Europe is to be commended for keeping an older Sinology alive, that is, a more generalist non- or anti-discipline, of course still based in language and a long view of Chinese history and »culture,« that lacks the scientific pretensions of area studies. But of course the old Sinology was precisely the type of writing and knowledge production that Edward Said, among others, posited as orientalism. It too was self-defined as a field by being not-colonial or not-imperialistic but part of some universal human connection, as if the encounters between East and West, and not just specific individuals, were entirely innocent or happenstance. It would now be hard to convince too many mainland intellectuals of this.

At any rate, much of this ground—the problems with area studies and China studies—has been debated before and I lack the space to add to it here.⁶ But there is one imperative that I think bodes well for the future of postcolonial studies as well as for the interpretive social sciences. This is not just the inexorable march of interdisciplinary studies, as individual disciplines realize their limits or run out of things to say and publish, nor the slow but sure dissemination of »theory« into all but the most resistant departments.

The real imperative is the rise of China, not least as expressed through mainland immigration into Western/global universities and greater intellectual and »knowledge« flows between the PRC and the rest of the world. What this inevitably brings with it is that historical postcolonial condition—and contact, and »clash«—of China and its own others (including but not limited to the West of course). This is not necessarily going to be a sweet meeting of minds and a calm and harmonious conversation of mankind, thankfully, but it will most certainly—insofar as it resists the forces of homogeneity and conformity—continue to be

6 There is also a growing literature on the social sciences and postcolonialism broadly defined. See for example Miyoshi and Harootunian from way back in 2002, though many of the pieces are not postcolonialist. See also Julian Go (2016) and the *Postcolonial Politics* series at Routledge Press. Systematic critiques of China studies specifically are relatively rare, as opposed to, say, South Asian studies or African studies, and so on. Again the China field has so far mostly avoided its postcolonial moment aside from critiques of an alleged Chinese colonialism of its own others and despite some others' best efforts (and publications). For the latter see, in addition to the present author, Adrian Chan and for a proper historian's approach to such questions, the work of James Hevia. More typical is the response that the China field needs to be even more social scientific. For that argument see for example Walder (2002). For a confused, ethnically-based argument that China studies does not need Said or postcolonial studies and theory, yet does still need to talk about orientalism, systematic misrecognition, Western imperialism, and othering—but somehow not in a political but only a »Chinese« way that excludes the rest of the world, see Gu Ming Dong 2015.

interesting and productive of knowledge. Unless China and its intellectuals and students just suddenly decide to stop insisting on their particularities and differences (in understanding any number of things, from Mao Zedong to democracy to Tibet to religion to...), or unless China decides to just »become-the-same« as the normative US-West, there almost *has* to be a postcolonial »moment« for China studies and the social sciences. If so, it may well displace—supplement—the past, chiefly South Asian and »bourgeois national liberations« that have largely made up the historical contexts and bases for postcolonial studies to date, alongside the chiefly British (and to a lesser extent French) empires. The USA has tended to get lost in that formulation of the postcolonial field, just as much as the PRC. The rise of a more multipolar intellectual, political, and cultural world—of a China that is if anything bigger and more complicated and multifarious than »the West«—also bodes well for the eventual weakening of the scientific and methodological universalism of much of traditional social science. This can in the end only be a good and productive thing for the academy in general and not just the social sciences. Alternatively there could be a return to an older form of orientalist knowledge production: a dominance of hostility and Sinophobic writings and sentiment, even beyond the general, political anti-communism of the foreign China field.

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