The modernisation of China and the Chinese critique of *modernity*[1]

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Abstract / Resum / Resumen

The European brand of modernisation that was introduced to China by the force of arms in the 19th-20th centuries had some of its most basic origins in aspects of the traditional Chinese imperial system. This same system impeded China's ability to resist the imperialist aggressions of modernised "Western" powers and Japan, until the end of the 20th century. Contemporary Chinese culture studies and political, social and economic thought re-examine the "Western" model of modernity from a critical point of view and propose a new postcolonial, postmodern form of modernisation with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese critique of *modernity* is both a product of Chinese history and an alternative to "Western" paradigms.

La marca europea de modernització introduïda a la Xina per la força de les armes durant els segles XIX i XX tenia alguns dels seus principis més bàsics en aspectes del sistema imperial tradicional xinès. Aquest mateix sistema dificultava la resistència de la Xina front les agressions imperialistes dels poders modernitzats d'"Occident" i del Japó, fins a finals del segle XX. El pensament polític, social i econòmic i els estudis de la cultura xinesa contemporània revisen el model "Occidental" de modernitat des d'un punt de vista crític i així es proposa una nova forma postcolonial i postmoderna de la modernització amb característiques xineses. La crítica xinesa de modernitat és alhora un producte de la història xinesa i una alternativa als paradigmes "occidentals".

La marca europea de modernización introducida en China por la fuerza de las armas durante los siglos XIX y XX tenía algunos de sus principios más básicos en aspectos del sistema imperial tradicional chino. Este mismo sistema dificultaba la resistencia de China frente las agresiones imperialistas de los poderes modernizados de "Occidente" y de Japón, hasta finales del siglo XX. El pensamiento político, social y económico y los estudios de la cultura china contemporánea revisan el modelo "Occidental" de modernidad desde un punto de vista crítico y así se propone una nueva forma postcolonial y postmoderna de la modernización con características chinas. La crítica china de modernidad es simultáneamente un producto de la historia china y una alternativa a los paradigmas "occidentales".

Key Words / Paraules clau / Palabras clave

China, modernisation, modernity, postmodernity, postcolonialism, culture studies, cross-cultural transfer, comparative sociocultural studies, critique, paradigms.

Xina, modernització, modernitat, postmodernitat, postcolonialisme, estudis culturals, tranculturalitat, estudis socioculturals comparats, crítica, paradigmes.

China, modernización, modernidad, postmodernidad, postcolonialismo, estudios culturales, tranculturalidad, estudios socioculturales comparados, crítica, paradigmas.

History, discourse and ideology

In the social sciences, as practised in Europe, there is an important tradition of discourse analysis and its relation to power: Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony", or the control of information, as a counterpart to "institutional violence"; Michel Foucault's concepts of the "archaeology" and the "genealogy" of the discourse of power; Louis Althusser's concept of "interpellation"; Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concepts of dominant and subversive discourses, or Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere and the rules of civic discourse

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that construct it, among many others. In East Asia, especially in China, there is a new, alternative and developing tradition whose hypotheses and conclusions are waiting to be integrated into the European academic framework of applied discourse analysis and comparative socio-cultural studies.

In traditional Chinese political thought (Guo 1975; Hsiao 1979; He, Bu 1998; Lewis 1999), the establishment of an official discourse that could order society was a major concern of both thinkers and policy-makers alike, and the Chinese imperial examinations, designed to select the bureaucrats necessary for the administration of the government, created a system that combined intellectual and literary competence with the administration of power, creating a situation of complicity between intellectuals and policy-makers that continues to be important today. The construction of the modern discourse of power at the national and international level is being carried out both in government and in academic circles. In the absence of a highly developed and independent civil society, which is still incipient in China today, modernisation and the translation —or recreation— of "Western" *modernity* in the Chinese context is to a large extent the result of debates among intellectuals who are also advisers, such as Yu Keping, on politics, or Hu Angang, on economics, or Wang Hui, who takes a more historical and philosophical approach to the discourse of *modernity*, both "Western" and Chinese. Such members of the Chinese intelligentsia constitute a kind of default civil society.

Over the last two centuries the discourse of *modernity* that had been developed in "the West" has confronted the Chinese tradition, with traumatic and unequal results that still play a major role in China's perception of the EU and of the United States (as well as Japan). As a result, an analysis of the genealogy of the discourse of *modernity* that came from the "West" is a necessary first step in the process of making a comparative analysis of contemporary Chinese civic and political discourse.

Shifting paradigms in the current debate on *modernity* and international relations

Modernity in the "Western" context is a product of the historical and cultural forces that produced the Enlightenment, forces of European histories and cultures that were different from those of China. This European *modernity* was introduced into China's history and culture by the force of arms, provoking a traumatic experience that has lasted for more than a century and half, and it would be impossible to understand the Chinese reaction to modernisation and *modernity* without bearing this fact in mind. Something very similar happened in the case of Japan. Resistance to accepting the paradigms of European *modernity* as being "universal" is one of the consequences of Asia's colonialised past, and of Asia's postcolonial relationship with past imperial powers, that sparked off the debate about "Asian values". From the Asian point of view, the universality bestowed upon Enlightenment values by their authors became a justification of imperialism and its catastrophic consequences. As a result, a critical stance toward Enlightenment values has become a standard component of current Asian thinking.

Current geostrategy is being debated from the point of view of different paradigms in different contexts. Some situate the "new world order" in a post-Cold War framework, others in postcolonialist or postmodern frameworks. Some "Western" voices speak of "a shock of civilisations" which threatens "the end of history" which they consider to have been achieved

by the societies that had inherited the "universal" values of the Enlightenment. Even so, the transatlantic conflict provoked by the war in Iraq has revealed serious discrepancies between Europe and the United States about how to interpret this common heritage (Golden 2004).

Things are very different from the point of the view of the rest of the world. What appear to be profound differences between the EU and the US may not seem to be so profound from the point of view of postcolonial societies that see the EU and the US as one large block of shared interests, coordinated by NATO in accordance with the hegemonic interests of the US. A very large proportion of the world's population cannot view these values as "universal" because they have suffered the consequences of an imperialism which justified itself on the basis of these same values and principles, which have acquired semiotic connotations as a result: they have become symbols of a kind of discourse that attempts to justify a geopolitical strategy which defines itself as idealistic, but whose practical consequences contradict that idealism. What is important is not the content of what is being said, but rather the source of what is being said; and what is being judged and responded to are the actions that accompany the words, or their consequences, not the words themselves, or their contents.

It is in this postcolonial context that any analysis of Asian values and their geostrategic implications must be situated, and such an analysis must necessarily deconstruct some of the paradigms that justify the "realist" Cold War/post-Cold War framework, that had been based on the containment of communism —seen to have been a threat to the common heritage of the Enlightenment— at any price. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the USSR, and in view of the current modernisation of China and Vietnam, there is hardly any communism left to contain, and the phantom that stalked the "Western" world has been defeated. But the paradigm based on the containment of a clearly dangerous adversary, easily identified and therefore well-defined, still remains, so much so that some neoconservative strategists try to convert China into the future and inevitable rival/enemy of the US, thus provoking a standoff between the two that could convert the interpretations based on this paradigm into self-fulfilling prophecies; despite the fact that international terrorism, which is the actual enemy, is much less easy to identify or to respond to (Shambaugh 2004; Umbach 2004).

The Cold War paradigm represents a vision based on a relatively short period of modern history; it is also a vision that prioritises the interests of the former imperial powers. Postcolonialism is a different paradigm, which forms part of a much longer period of history: the processes of imperialism, from colonisation through decolonisation and its consequences. From the point of view of this paradigm, the Cold War forms part of the colonialist/ postcolonialist process. But there is another important distinction as well: postcolonialism prioritises the interests of the former colonies, not the former metropolises. One of the most fundamental consequences of this shift in paradigms is a critical analysis of the values and principles that imperialism used to justify itself in the past, an analysis that includes the deconstruction of the values of the former metropolises and the recuperation of native values.

In the best of cases the nativist recuperation applies critical analysis and deconstruction to the former native values as well; in the worst, it represents a simple rejection of any "alien" value in favour of a simplistic non-critical glorification of any native value, an atavistic retrocreation of "native" values that never really existed (Anderson 1987). Inevitably, the mere fact of deconstructing the values of the former metropolises intrinsically and radically questions their "universality", and were this deconstruction to be admitted, it would open a relativist breach that would be incompatible with the Cold War paradigm, and therefore unacceptable to

defenders of the "universality" of Enlightenment values. This incompatibility could provoke an intolerance of the diversity of values that would become an ethnocentrism inimical to the ethnodiversity defended by the postcolonialist paradigm, aggravating the risks of "a shock of civilisations". In addition to being incompatible, the postcolonialist deconstruction of supposedly universal and justifiable Enlightenment values converts them into the very cause of many of the ills the rest of the world has suffered at the hands of the inheritors of the Enlightenment.

A third paradigm that can be used to situate this debate is the concept of *modernity* as a process of consolidation of capitalist market economy and liberal parliamentary democracy as models for economic, social and political modernisation. In this sense, both *Les Droits de l'Homme* and *laissez-faire* are products of the Enlightenment. As Karl Polanyi said, "The origin of the [World War] catastrophe lay in the utopian endeavour of economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market" (Polanyi 1944).

John Gray has elaborated on this idea:

> The achievement of a similar transformation [to the rupture in England's economic life produced by the free markets that operated independently of social needs] is the overriding objective today of transnational organizations such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. In advancing this revolutionary project they are following the lead of the world's last great Enlightenment regime, the United States. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx never doubted that the future for every nation in the world was to accept some version of western institutions and values. A diversity of cultures was not a permanent condition of human life. It was a stage on the way to a universal civilization. All such thinkers advocated the creation of a single worldwide civilization, in which the varied traditions and cultures of the past were superseded by a new, universal community founded on reason….
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> A single global market is the Enlightenment's project of a universal civilization in what is likely to be its final form. It is not the only variant of that project to have been attempted in a century that is littered with false Utopias. The former Soviet Union embodied a rival Enlightenment Utopia, that of a universal civilization in which markets were replaced by central planning….
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> Even though a global market cannot be reconciled with any kind of planned economy, what these Utopias have in common is more fundamental than their differences. In their cult of reason and efficiency, their ignorance of history and their contempt for the ways of life they consign to poverty or extinction, they embody the same rationalist hubris and cultural imperialism that have marked the central traditions of Enlightenment thinking throughout its history. (Gray 1998, 1-3)

If the term *modernity* serves to describe this historical process that appeared to have been consolidated, and therefore terminated, when Francis Fukuyama wrote, "What we are witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or a passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1989), what processes would or should follow? If nothing were to change, the following period would be a simple continuation of *modernity*, but if the coming times were to

represent a break with the values and practices of *modernity*, this *postmodernity* would have to represent a model that would be alternative to and different from *modernity*. What Fukuyama had proposed was that the consolidation of the model of *modernity* made it unnecessary to look for any alternative model; what remained to be done was to extend this model to the rest of the world, an idea that accompanied what came to be known as "the Washington consensus". As a result, for *postmodern* theoreticians, *modernity* could not serve as a model for the modernisation of the developing nations of the former colonies, nor should it be maintained in developed societies. *Postmodernity* represents a critical revision of *modernity* from the point of view of the classes that had been disadvantaged by the development of market capitalism in the former metropolises as well as from the point of view of the peoples who had been colonised as a result of the imperialism which was an intrinsic part of the same process.

For many contemporary Chinese thinkers, China should modernise without repeating the process of *modernity*, should leap over the system of values established by the Enlightenment that seemed to justify imperialism, and develop an economy and institutions that would serve to create wealth and to raise the standard of living of the population, without imposing values that are advantageous to a "West" that is already wealthy. They have identified a cultural dissidence within developed societies that advocates the values of *postmodernity* as a way of rejecting the values of *modernity*. In this context, they advocate the possibility of modernising their society without having to accept the imposition of values that originated in societies that have already begun to question them. In this way, China could reach *postmodernity* in a relatively short period of history without having to pass through the traumas that characterised the development of modernity in the "West" over a period of centuries (it would be difficult not to discern echoes of Mao Zedong's "Great Leap Forward" in this Chinese versions of the postmodernist paradigm).

The irony of China's role in the Enlightenment creation of *modernity*

The Jesuit mission in Beijing became a Sino-European cultural bridge that overlapped the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties (1644-1911), linking both sides until the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773 closed a channel of communication that had provided intellectuals on each side with largely reliable information about the other. The Order was not restored until 1814, and by that time the priority of influence in Sino-European relations had fallen into the hands of the East India Company and similar imperialist enterprises. Their pursuit of economic monopoly by any means, including the force of arms, replaced the Jesuit policy of demonstrating intellectual prowess and showing respect for Chinese culture. Trade missions and diplomatic missions began to replace religious missions in importance.

While European intellectuals had access to reliable information from the Jesuit mission in Beijing, China and her culture fascinated such leading figures as Leibniz (1646-1716), Montesquieu (1689-1755), and Voltaire (1694-1778), inspiring their visions of enlightened despotism, of a civil service based on merit, and of a natural theology or secular culture. *Chinoiserie* became the rage. China rode high in esteem. When access to reliable information was cut off, and the profit to be gained from contact with China became purely economic rather than cultural, the image of China declined to the point where her dismemberment and colonization became the aim of European imperialism. In European eyes, China became a symbol of obsolescence and decadence, the "Sick Man of Asia." At both ends of this timescale of Sino-European relations, translation policy played a major role, favourable in the case of the Society of Jesus, unfavourable in the case of the East India Company, and in both cases it was a source of controversy.

In 1601 two European Jesuits reached Beijing, the capital of the Chinese empire, to establish a mission. The presence of the Jesuits in China opened the door to an unprecedented cultural exchange that would be very significant for both China and Europe (Golden 2000). Over a period of one and a half centuries, the Jesuits translated the canonical works of Confucianism into Latin and their publications influenced intellectual debates and discourse in Europe. They also maintained correspondence with leading European intellectuals such as Leibniz and Voltaire. On a number of occasions Montesquieu interviewed Arcadio Huang, a Chinese man who had arrived in Paris to study for the priesthood, but decided to marry instead, and became the librarian of the French king's Asian collection.

These interviews influenced *L'Esprit des lois*. Voltaire was inspired by the descriptions he received from Jesuits in Beijing of the Chinese political system and the imperial examinations designed to select "Mandarins" on the basis of their own merits as demonstrated through public examinations to invent the modern concept of the civil service. Jesuit descriptions of the Chinese Kangxi emperor, who took active part in controversial debates about Christian doctrine and Confucian practices inspired the Enlightenment idea of the enlightened despot. The Art of War by Sunzi was translated into French in the 1780's by Joseph-Marie Amiot S.J. and quickly went through five editions, one of which quite probably reached the hands of the young officer Napoleon Buonaparte.

During this period, which came to an end with the suppression of the Jesuits in the middle of the 18th century, China's image in Europe was totally positive. It was the period of *chinoiserie*. Once the bridge of cross-cultural transfer that the Jesuits had established was cut off, different actors came to the fore, such as the East India Company, which would conquer India and force the traffic of drugs on China with the support of the British and French governments, through war.

One extremely important consequence of this change of affairs was its effect on the discourse applied to China in Europe and on the very image of China. Far from being the great model that had inspired Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire, a new metaphor was applied to China: "the sick man of Asia". The major thinkers of the later Enlightenment period, such as Hegel —whose idea of History formed the basis for Fukuyama's (in)famous declaration of the end of history in 1989— or Kant or Marx portrayed China as a completely negative model, without History (Hegel), without Reason (Kant), with antiquated and fossilised modes of production (Marx). A new process of the social construction of reality had begun that World justify military aggression and partial colonialisation throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century by the European imperialist powers, as well as the USA and Japan.

During the transitory period between *chinoiserie* and "the sick man of Asia" still another Enlightenment thinker, François Quesnay (1694-1774), leader of the Physiocrats, came to be known as the European Confucius. His text *Despotisme de la Chine* (1767) proposed reorganising the French economy on an agricultural basis as China did. He saw the exercise of power by Mandarins in China as a living example of Plato's Republic, and his admiration for what he perceived to be a minimalist approach to government intervention in the Chinese economy inspired the Physiocratic concept of *laissez-faire*.

Both enlightened despotism and the civil service, on the one hand, and the *laissez-faire* concept of the free market, on the other, are constituent elements of the heritage of the Enlightenment that gave rise to *modernity* that had their origins in a traditional Chinese model. *Les Droits de l'Homme* and *laissez-faire* are equally part of the inheritance of the Enlightenment

common to "the West", but in this case they might be seen as the seeds of an important internal contradiction of the philosophy that would subsequently proclaim itself to be the source and the author of "universal" values.

Once the metaphor of "the sick man of Asia" had taken hold, and even though Napoleon warned that this sick man would shake the earth when he recovered, European modernity was introduced into China by the force of arms. The current attitude of Chinese society toward this brand of *modernity*, as well as their own version of *postmodernity*, cannot be understood without taking this fact into account.

On the one hand, this attitude is a result of the consequences of the catastrophes that China has suffered over the last century and a half, and on the other, of the Chinese desire to make up for lost time, to modernise the economy and to improve the standard of living.

Even though the Chinese tradition includes a series of elements that inspired the Enlightenment that modernised Europe, these very same elements impeded the modernisation of China. The traditional culture, socioeconomic and political structures, and social psychology that constituted the traditional system of values and ideology impeded an adequate response to the ambitions of the modernised imperialist powers when the time came. As a result, China suffered an interminable series of disasters that have lasted right up to the end of the 20th century.

In the mid-19th century, China lost two Opium Wars to the United Kingdom and France, with the resulting humiliation caused by the imposition of extraterritoriality and the progressive loss of territorial sovereignty and of the management of the large infrastructures of transport and customs. The Taiping Rebellion controlled the southern half of China for almost fifteen years until it was put down by an international expeditionary force at the request of the imperial government of a Qing dynasty in full decay. The foreign powers intervened out of self-interest. As Manchus, the Qing were considered to be foreigners by the majority of the Chinese population. Their very weakness in government favoured the interests of the foreign powers.

During the alter half of the 19th century there were a series of popular uprisings, many of them inspired by ethnic conflict, especially in the northwest. In 1895 China suffered a humiliating loss in a war with Japan. At the end of the century the Boxer Rebellion broke out as a xenophobic reaction to the privileges that extraterritoriality had granted to the Christian missions and the foreign concessions, as well as the inability of the Ping dynasty to prevent foreign exploitation. This rebellion provoked yet another intervention by an international military expedition, and further humiliating and economically disastrous conditions were imposed on China as a result.

In the early 20th century, a republican revolution led by Sun Yat-sen brought down the last dynasty in 1912. The lack of a democratic tradition made it impossible for the newly implanted parliamentary and electoral system to work before the country disintegrated into a series of interprovincial skirmishes between competing warlords with their own private militias. In the mid-1920's a civil war broke out between the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang*) that Chiang Kai-shek had inherited from Sun Yat-sen, and the newly formed Communist Party (*Gongchandang*) that would eventually be led by Mao Zedong, a civil war that would last until 1949, when the *Guomindang* retreated from the mainland to occupy the island province of Taiwan, creating a source of conflict that still festers. In th early 1930's Japan invaded China, occupying Manchuria and eventually conquering the entire eastern region of the country, until the end of

World War II in 1945. In 1949 Mao proclaimed the creation of the Peoples Republic of China and took advantage of the moment to declare the "the sick man of Asia had finally risen to his feet".

In the early 1950's China suffered great losses in the war on the Korean peninsula, entering into direct combat with the USA. Then began a series of mass Maoist campaigns of class struggle that would prevent the consolidation of the modernisation of the Chinese economy until the 1980's: various purges, agrarian reform campaigns, the "anti-rightist" campaign, the "Great Leap Forward" (that provoked a major famine that lasted for three years), and the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution". Throughout this period the Cold War policy of the USA and its allies applied an economic and diplomatic blockade to China. The Chinese refusal to accept Soviet hegemony led to a traumatic rupture of Sino-Soviet relations and the threat of a Soviet nuclear attack on China. The traumas of the Cultural Revolution did not end until after the death of Mao in 1976, and the process of economic reform and the opening up of the economy promoted by Deng Xiaoping after 1978, that created the sustained very high rates of growth that the country has experienced over the last quarter century, was interrupted by the violent suppression of demonstrators in Beijing in 1989.

As a result of this state of permanent instability throughout the 19th-20th centuries, the vast majority of the Chinese people, with the exception of today's younger generations, have known neither peace nor stability nor prosperity until the last fifteen years.

The Opium Wars and other military invasions of China over the last two centuries served the interests of private business firms and imperialist powers, but they did not serve Chinese interests in any way. This process truly was a "shock of civilisations", a violent and traumatic shock of the cultural values, socioeconomic and political structures of traditional Chinese society with the values of a European and American Enlightenment that accompanied and inspired the structures of power that constructed the empires of the capitalist world order. While they conquered the world in their own interests, the heirs of the Enlightenment unilaterally proclaimed their own values to be self-evident and therefore universal. This very universality served to justify their economic and geopolitical conquests.

Chinese postcolonialism and postmodernism and the critique of modernity

Two new schools of thought have flourished in China since the 1990's: 後現代主義 *hòuxiàndàizhuyì* "postmodernity" and 後殖民主義 *hòuzhímínzhuyì* "postcolonialism". Their popularity is such that a new term has been invented that combines both into a single tendency — 後學 *hòuxué* post-studies— described by Xu Jilin:

> To consider the factors internal to epistemology, [the "anti-Western" theorists of the 1992] all had begun by accepting the mainstream discourse of the Western intellectual genealogy. They believed that Western modernist thought should and could contribute to China's modernization adequate intellectual resources and patterns for action. As a consequence, the deeper their previous commitment, the more they were able to discover that the supposed universals of modernist theory were really nothing more than particular products of Western history/culture and were separated by a great gulf from the discourse of China's contemporary culture and historical tradition. This gap between western theory and Chinese discourse made it impossible for them not to shift their gaze from Western mainstream discourse and toward marginal discourses such as postcolonial cultural theory, analytical Marxism, and so forth. They hoped to find there inspiration for

> a pattern of modernization that would fit Chinese conditions.... Unlike previous cultural conservatives, these scholars' plan was not to "confront Western learning with native learning", but rather to "use aliens to control the aliens", to use Western marginal discourses to resist Western mainstream discourse.
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> From the external, sociological perspective, the anti-Western trend is closely connected to a series of changes in the environment at home and aboard. Following the sudden takeoff of the Chinese economy, the national strength of China grew enormously; and the first reaction of a disfavored people that is emerging from its disfavored status is to say "no" to those privileged peoples it has long been attempting to overtake. In the 1980s, China's contacts with the west were limited, conflicts of interest were rare, and intellectuals had a flattering image of the West, so that Westernization had a suitable psychological support. But from the beginning of the 1990s China began to enter into the international political-economic system, and conflicts between China and the West became more and more direct: the opposition of the Western countries, particularly the United States, to China's joining the WTO and hosting the Olympic Games, trade frictions, the Yinhua incident, and a series of other events caused Chinese intellectuals to lose a great part of their faith in the West. Behind their beautiful Western discourse, they discovered ugly relationships of power, and an unequal power relationship that the Western countries were determined to force onto China. Thus the nationalistic feeling of Chinese intellectuals was greatly awakened, so that anti-Westernism had a deep psychological foundation. (Xu 1996, 100-101)

According to Zhang Yiwu, *hòuxué* thinkers insist on differentiating their approach from that of western postcolonial and postmodern thinkers:

> This exploration tries, first, to find a new position: "the Other of the Other". While seeking to transcend the old condition of "Otherness" and refusing to take either side of the oppositions of universal/particular, classic/modern, it reflects on both in the context of contemporary culture and offers new insights. Second, it implies participation in contemporary culture --it implies the Gramscian role of the "organic intellectual". It neither stands apart from culture, nor tries to transcend culture, but seeks theoretical advances from within the dialectical thought of transformations in society and culture. It maintains a critique of Western cultural hegemony, but this critique does not imply a decisively nativistic conservative perspective. This new perspective allows a new grasp on the "condition" of hybridity in contemporary China. This grasp was made possible by an appropriation of Western theories, but this appropriation does not imply the use of theory to advance interpretations of the Chinese context; rather, it recognizes that the transcendence of theoretical hegemony is dependent on reflection about and critique of theory. This requires the use of theory to critique theory, using contemporary Chinese conditions to reflect on theory, and using theory to match contemporary Chinese conditions, so as to produce a two-sided hermeneutic and gain a new cultural imagination and creativity. (Zhang 134-135)

The discourse of political leaders often runs parallel to the intellectual debate on postmodernity in China. Many leaders and “official” intellectuals have co-opted the terminology of the “post” theories. Wang Yizhou, Deputy Director of the Institute of World Politics and Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, made the following reply to an Internet debate on the NATO missile attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrado:

> "What is NATO's Strategy?"
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> First, from a defensive military organization it is becoming a tool for expansion, first to all of Europe, then to the whole globe (...). Second, NATO's new concept demands that NATO no longer stay within its traditional geographical bounds: it will expand to wherever it is needed. For example, the first step was a peaceful eastward expansion with the entry of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic; the next step is to press on toward the Mediterranean and North Africa; it may be that step three is to expand to the other nations of the world in order to realize NATO's goal of replacing the U.N.
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> Third, in the past NATO was a strictly military alliance, and now it is moving in the direction of military government, so that, for example, it will no longer be concerned with security alone but will take on human rights issues, refugee issues, drug issues, criminal issues, etc. This is NATO's ambition of global expansion.
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> The speed of China's modernization is sure to disturb the present international political and economic order and insensibly threatens U.S. and Western leadership. So we will certainly become the object of more and more attacks. The rest of the world will come forth with all kinds of excuses and pretexts for limiting or cornering China --human rights, the environment, non-proliferation, guided missile technology, trade deficits, etc. By setting impossible requirements, they hope to limit China's development, confine China to a frame set by themselves (...).
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> About the "anatomy of U.S. hegemony" and the United States's use of theory to shore up their hegemony: (...) American hegemony, apart from its military and political aspects, is a cultural or conceptual hegemony. This is a much more complex, much craftier form of hegemony. Think of Hollywood movies or the global position of the English language, or American inventiveness in the field of ideas.
>
> We can point to any number of examples to show how U.S. hegemony gets various kinds of theoretical support. The first and most famous is the "clash of cultures" theory, which is a plan to give the United States the dominant role in determining the value of every people, every culture, every civilization (...). Another aspect is what is called "peace and democracy". Here the plan is to tell every country in the world: if you follow the pattern of the Western "democracies", you'll have peace and security, but if you refuse Western "democracy", you'll meet the same fate as Yugoslavia (...). Another means is the famous principle that "human rights take precedence over national sovereignty"". (Wang 1999; Saussy 2001, 135)

This kind of deconstruction of "Western" geostrategy has also been extended to "Western" culture by authors such as Zhu Majie, Deputy Director of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies:

> Western civilizations rose from the same origin, though, their respective development differs, and the levels of development in different historic periods are not the same. However, they share the following common features:
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> **Firstly, a salvationist spirit and sense of mission**. With self-arrogance this runs all through the history of the West, led by the United States. This spirit came from Christianity. …. As a paramount subject for worship, God dominates human being's thought, freedom, customs and ideas. This Christian doctrine engenders a universal spirit among its followers, so that saving the world becomes their mission. In the past, the soldiers of the West marched out to conquer the world "for God"… Today, Western

leaders stress the importance of taking the leading role and feel an obligation to defend the free world and to promote and strengthen democratic values in the world as their "Holy Mission". …

Secondly, expansionism. Western civilization constantly expanded outward in the process of modern social development and therefore is labelled the "blue civilization". The color of blue symbolizes the ocean which attracts to adventure, aggressiveness and conquest. In modern history, Netherlands, Spain, Britain and the U.S. successively have dominated the world. At the peak of Western capitalist development, many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America were reduced to being their colonies or semi-colonies. The Western lifestyle, ideology and social system were also spread there. Westerners used gunboats to open up new frontiers, and the Bible to spread God's will. They took new markets with the force of goods and advanced science and technology. Therefore, the history of the Western civilization is also the history of expansion. …

Thirdly, individualism. The most important value of Western civilization is individualism, which is one of its most prominent marks. Individualism was an ideological weapon used by the rising European capitalist class to oppose autocracy and the oppression of the feudal nobles. In the West, people advocated independent struggle and the pursuit the rights of individual emancipation, individual choice, and individual freedom and happiness.… Western individualism has now become a standard of morality. In the United States, individualism has become a highly evaluated moral virtue: the cowboy who can do whatever he wants is a heroic image. The mentality of self-importance, unrestricted behavior and an aspiration for outlaw conduct have become an important component of the nation's ideology.

Fourthly, liberalism. Individualism and liberalism are the twins of the Western civilization. The concept of freedom is the main ideology and pillar in Western society. One of the flags used by the capitalist class to fight against the feudal nobles was to strive for freedom. They flaunted the freedoms of faith, speech and pursuit of property. … Francis Fukuyama said that the two world wars in the last century and the following revolution and the great turbulence "forced Europe and North America, which are at the forefront position of human civilization, more progressively to carry out their freedom."… In the economic area, the West also stresses the importance of such freedoms as free market, free trade and free competition. Fukuyama believes that the fundamental change that took place in the 20th century was the victory of "economic and political liberalism". From now on, liberalism dominates the material world, … and apparently is regarded as its most representative feature of Western civilization.

Fifthly, utilitarianism. The search for effectiveness and self-interest is the ethical concept of Western civilization. In the West, especially in the United States, utilitarianism is presented sometimes as "idealism" and sometimes as "pragmatism". To seek utility and to be bent solely on interests is a typical feature of the Western bourgeoisie. In the West what must be maintained is interest, rather than principle: there are no friends but only interests; these become the paramount object of worship.… Focusing on utility and interest is both a norm of conduct and value orientation in the West. The U.S.-led Western countries' handling of international affairs is a clear demonstration of the ethical concept of utilitarianism. Their "utility" lies in the desire to dominate the world, and their "interest" lies in the desire that their demand for self-interest be met. Whether the human rights issue is linked with the trade issue, or whether sanctions are imposed on other nations, or whether aid is given to other nations, the most fundamental criteria by which they make these judgments is their interest. (Zhu)

Although "post" thinkers in China emphasise the differences between their version of postmodernity and the "Western" version, there are critical voices in the "West" that also deconstruct Enlightenment values by comparing them to Asian values:

> The deeper differences between Asia's capitalisms and those in western countries will not diminish over time. They reflect differences not only in the family structures but also in the religious life of the cultures in which these diverse capitalisms are rooted. The greatest sociologist of capitalism, Max Weber, was right to link the development of capitalism in north-western Europe with Protestantism.
>
> Western social thinkers and economists are mistaken in supposing that capitalism everywhere will come to resemble the highly individual economic culture of England, Scotland and parts of Germany and The Netherlands. It has not done so in France or Italy. In our time, capitalism in post-communist countries whose religious traditions are Orthodox will be unlike that in any 'western', Protestant or Catholic, country: neither the institutions of secular society, nor the limited state of such western countries has developed in any Orthodox culture. Russian capitalism, like capitalism elsewhere in the Orthodox world, will be *sui generis*.
>
> The same goes for the capitalisms of Asia. Indian capitalism will never converge with that of countries whose principal religious inheritance is Confucian, Buddhist or Muslim. Its caste system may be the world's stablest system, having survived challenges from Buddhism, Islam and Fabian secularism, and it will surely condition profoundly the growth of an indigenous capitalism.
>
> The new capitalisms in eastern Asia do not carry the western burden of doctrinal dispute over the merits of rival economic systems. This is partly because most of the religious traditions of east Asia make no claim to exclusivity. This freedom from sectarian claims to unique truths goes with a pragmatic approach to economic policies….
>
> In Asian cultures market institutions are viewed instrumentally, as means to wealth-creation and social cohesion, not theologically, as ends in themselves. One of the appeals of 'Asian values' is that they avoid the western obsessions that make economic policy an arena of doctrinal conflict. That 'Asian' freedom from economic theology allows market institutions to be judged, and reformed, by reference to how their workings affect the values and stability of society….
>
> A monolithic 'Asia' is as much a chimera as 'western civilization'. The inexorable growth of a world market does not advance a universal civilization. It makes the interpenetration of cultures an irreversible global condition. (Gray 1998, 191-193)

One of the consequences of Chinese *postmodernity*, which is a kind of *antimodernity* with reference to the "West", is the growing role of Chinese nationalism. Chinese leaders perceive the unipolar geopolitics of the US to be a threat, and promote the reconstruction of a multipolar world, in which EU-China relations would have to play a major role. This consideration brings us back to the relationship between words and sovereignty that lies behind contemporary Chinese geopolitical discourse.

The Chinese critique of modernity

> Article 51. It is agreed that, henceforward, the character "[yí]" 夷 [barbarian], shall not be applied to the government or subjects of Her Britannic Majesty in any Chinese

> official document issued by the Chinese authorities either in the Capital or in the Provinces. [Treaty of Tianjin, 1858] (Liu 2004, 32)

The imposition of European modernity on China in the 19th century by force of arms, unequal treaties and extraterritoriality, required Chinese thinkers to import new terms and new ideas by way of translation. The wholesale importation of new terminologies and new concepts occurred in a historical and cultural context that was quite different from the context that had produced the European Enlightenment. As a result there were very few precedents or cultural equivalents that could serve to foster mutual comprehension. The fact that an international treaty could censor the words that Chinese officials could use in official documents is a blatant example of an asymmetrical relationship between a Chinese society with a millenarian culture and the brave new world (or new world order) of European, American (and shortly thereafter, Japanese) expansionism, which would create difficulties both for translation and for understanding. The construction of modernity under duress in China is now one of the most important topics of research among Chinese scholars, both at home and overseas (Wang 2003; Liu 1995, 2004; Chow 1993, 1998, 2002; Liu & Tang 1993; Louie 1986, 2002; Louie & Hodge 1998; Saussy 2001; Fewsmith 2001).

The lack of cultural equivalents has been a difficulty in the dialogue between Europe and China since the late 16th century, when the first Jesuit missionaries, who were the first serious European Sinologists, began working in China (Golden 2000), but their attempts to introduce Christian concepts and Catholic doctrine through a policy of accommodation to Chinese cultural values was substituted by gunboat diplomacy in the 19th century, accompanied by a much more aggressive and less tolerant version of Protestant missionary activity, both of which would provoke xenophobic reactions that were the precursors of current Chinese nationalism. When Yan Fu (1854-1921) translated the leading works on Darwinism, Social Darwinism and other branches of the social science into Chinese he had to use Chinese terms that did not have the same connotations as the Western terms he was translating. For lack of any native cultural equivalent, the term Nation became 群 *qún* "herd", for instance, while "(political) Party" became *dang* "faction", neither of which could convey an equivalent sense of what these terms meant in their European context..

Lydia H. Liu has provided many significant examples of the consequences of the imposition of sovereignty on words.

> One of the key concepts to emerge in the political discourse of modern China can be traced back to the neologisms invented by [W.A.P] Martin and the Chinese translators of *Elements of International Law.* The concept I have in mind is *quanli* [權利], or right, which, like *zhuquan* [主权] (sovereignty) and many other nineteenth-century coinages, no longer strikes us as strange or un-Chinese because it has been naturalized in the history of Chinese (and Japanese) political discourse and through repeated usage over nearly a century and a half. The situation was perceived differently, however, by those who lived in the mid-nineteenth century. This was duly documented by the translators themselves fourteen years after the fact, as they continued to feel a need to defend their unwieldly coinage. In a headnote to the 1878 translation of Woolsey's Introduction to the Study of International Law, known in Chinese as *Gongfa bianlun*, Martin and his Chinese collaborators describe how they had coined the neologism *quanli* to render the meaning of right. Their tone was clearly apologetic:

> International law is a separate field of knowledge and requires special terminology. There were times when we could not find a proper Chinese term to render the original expression, so our choice of words would seem less than satisfactory. Take the character *quan*, for example. In this book the word means not merely the kind of power one has over others, but something every ordinary person is entitled to. Occasionally, we would add the word *li* [to form a compound], as, for example, in the expression *quanli*, meaning the born "rights" of the plebeian, etc. At first encounter, these words and expressions may seem odd and unwieldy, but after seeing them repeatedly, you will come to realize that the translators have really made the best of necessity.
>
> Indeed, as I have suggested, the noun *quan* commands a broad spectrum of meanings associated with "power,"" "privilege," and "domination" in the Chinese usage, much as the word *li* brings to mind "interest," "profit," and "calculation." Lurking behind the renderings of "rights" and "human rights," these banished meanings can always come back to haunt the super-sign and unwittingly open up the word "right" or "human rights" to its suppressed "other" meanings such as "privilege" and "entitlement." The subtext of "excess" signification thus glosses the self-evident meaning of the English word "right" with something more than it ostensibly says. This is not to say that the translators were incapable of comprehending the true meaning of "right." On the contrary, the "excess" signification seems to heed the historical message of "rights" discourse in the practice of international law only too well, because it registers the fact that the idea had been brought into China by the nineteenth-century representatives of European International law who had asserted their "trade rights" and the "right" to invade, plunder, and attack the country. Their language of "rights" cannot but convey a loud message of threat, violence, and military aggression to the Qing government at the negotiation table and to the Chinese population at large. (Liu 2004, 124-131)

Since the mid-1990's there has been a very lively debate about *modernity* in China (Wang 2003; Fewsmith 2001, Saussy 2001) that has followed various lines of inquiry. A "New Enlightenment" movement tends to defend the introduction of "Western" modernity into China in its manifestation as Capitalism as a means of creating free markets, eliminating government interventionism and promoting democracy. A "New Left" movement deconstructs "Western" modernity, including its manifestation as Socialism, as a means of criticising the abuses of power and corruption that have accompanied the marketisation of the Chinese economy, society and politics, while advocating transparency and social democracy. A "New Right" movement advocates the use of the apparatus of the Party-State to impose market conditions, without extending transparency and democracy. As a result of this lively state of debate, contemporary Chinese historians and social scientists are re-examining both the origins and consequences of "Western" *modernity*, and the introduction of *modernity* into China, with special attention to the concepts of *modernity* held by Chinese intellectuals and reformers in the late 19th-early 20th century and after the 1980's (Liu 1995, 2004; Wang 2003). This inquiry, and the debates it inspires, benefit from the postcolonial and postmodern situation of a younger generation of Chinese scholars coming into their own in the early 21st century, most of whom have received postgraduate training in the social sciences in "the West", and are ideally placed to be able to use both "Western" theories and methodologies of analysis and inquiry, as well as Marxist inspired theories and methodologies of analysis and inquiry, to deconstruct both "Western" and "Asian" grand narratives and conceptual frameworks. The rise of China that Napoleon foresaw during the Enlightenment benefits from these modes of inquiry that should also, sooner or later, come to influence "Western" modes of analysis and inquiry into *modernity* and *postmodernity.*

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