

Postmodernity, Postcoloniality, and Globalization:

A Mainly Chinese Cultural and Literary Perspective

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This essay is the author's continuous study of globalization. From a Chinese and Marxist perspective, the author offers his reconstruction of globalization: (1) as a way of global economic operation; (2) as a historical process; (3) as a process of financial marketization and political democratization; (4) as a critical concept; (5) as a narrative category; (6) as a cultural construction and; (7) as a theoretic discourse. To the author, only by observing globalization from the above seven, or even more, angles can one grasp the characteristic features of globalization in a comprehensive way. In the age of globalization, postmodernism should be and actually has more or less been redefined in regard to its critical and creative reception in some Oriental and Third World countries. Chinese postmodernity manifests itself in a way more and more closely related to the global post-colonial movement. Confronted with various challenges raised by globalization, Chinese intellectuals should use globalization in an opposite way, that is, to globalize Oriental and Chinese culture in the world. In this sense, they ought to have more communications and dialogues with the international community rather than maintain an oppositional attitude toward the West.

In current China, the issue of globalization in relation to postmodernity and postcoloniality has been attracting the attention of most literary and cultural scholars since the late 1990s.¹ Actually, the latter two topics have already become comparatively old-fashioned, for since the beginning of the 1980s, the issue of the postmodern or postmodernism has been attractive to some avant-garde Chinese artists, literary critics and scholars of cultural and literary studies. Through heated theoretic discussions, dialogues and even debates on various occasions, scholars not only from the East but also from the West

1 Since Fredric Jameson's visit to China in July 2002, Chinese literary and cultural studies scholars have once again started debating about the old issue of modernity in regard to postmodernity, largely due to their misunderstanding of Jameson's new interpretation of modernity through translation. Cf. www.culstudies.com.

have come to agree that postmodernism is no longer a unique phenomenon in the Western postindustrial society, for it has long gone beyond the limitation of historical periodization and generated some metamorphosed versions in those underdeveloped and developing Oriental and Third World countries, including China.² Although the prime of its life has become an immediate past along with the rise of postcolonial critical trends and the critical reaction to it in the context of Cultural Studies, postmodernism is still heatedly discussed in regard to its critical and creative reception in the Chinese context, along with the scholars' recent interest in the issue of globalization concerning the current Chinese practice.³ As we are now at the beginning of the 21st century characterized by globalization and transnational capitalization both in economy and in culture, I, therefore, offer my reflections on these phenomena mainly from a Chinese cultural and literary perspective from which some theoretic dialogues could be carried on at the level of postmodernity and postcoloniality in an age of globalization, and starting with which our cultural and intellectual strategies could be put forward in the face of the Western influence.

From West-centric Postmodernism to Global Postmodernity: A Critical Reflection

Now that postmodernism has become a historical phenomenon, Western scholars have thereby described postmodernism or postmodernity as an immediate past in different ways and from different theoretic perspectives. Paul Bove's summary of these descriptions is somewhat illuminative to us although to him the history of postmodernism is to be written by future researchers.⁴ For him, postmodernism as an international cultural and intellectual movement first comes from architecture and then quickly sweeps literature and other branches of art and

2 As for the historical mapping of postmodernism or postmodernity in China as well as its different versions metamorphosed in the Chinese context, cf. Wang Ning, "The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity", *boundary 2*, 24.3: 1997, 19-40.

3 It is really interesting and even paradoxical that although, according to the six volumes of *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (Roland Robertson and Kathleen White (eds.) London: Routledge, 2003), only two articles by myself out of 125 are included, and few Chinese scholars have published anything in English on globalization, the debate on this hot issue is the most frequently talked-about topic in recent years in the Chinese cultural and theoretical circles.

4 As for the historical evolution of the international postmodernism debate, cf. Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

culture, “Culminating in the magisterial work of Fredric Jameson”, who “has also provided us with carefully discriminated analyses of many schools of thought about postmodernism, linking these schools to various ideological attitudes and positions within postmodernism itself.” (Bove 1995: 1) Just as Bove has correctly pointed out that of all the definitions and theoretical descriptions about postmodernism, Jameson’s is most influential, especially to the discussion and debate on postmodernism in the Chinese context.⁵

Inspired by Jameson’s dialectical methodology in regard to the status quo of the Oriental and Third World countries, quite a few Chinese scholars and critics, including myself, have long been involved in this debate by referring to the Chinese practice of postmodernism in the English-speaking world.⁶ Since I understand that postmodernism should be redefined on different stages, especially in the age of globalization, I have on several occasions offered my new observations of postmodernism and descriptions of its characteristics based on my further understanding of this world-wide phenomenon.⁷ I now still hold that although postmodernism is first of all a cultural phenomenon in a highly developed Western postindustrial society, we should not negate the fact that it could also appear in different forms in some developing countries or regions, such as China and some other East Asian countries or regions, where economy develops in an uneven way, and where the powerful mass media in the age of globalization could quickly bring you the most recent information about any theoretic debate or academic research being carried on in the West. On the other hand, in these places, the appearance of postmodernism is often mixed up with more elements of national or regional cultural tradition and critical constructions and reconstructions. In this way, to

5 Cf. Jameson’s Foreword to Lyotard’s book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, vii-xxi. On his public lecture in Beijing on July 31, 2003, Jameson pointed out that “modernity cannot be significant without being associated with postmodernity.”

6 Cf. Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong (eds.), *Postmodernism and China: a Special Issue*, in *boundary 2*, 24.3: 1997, in which the essays written by both domestic and overseas Chinese scholars as well as by some sinologists in the West deal extensively with Chinese postmodernity and its different practices. This undoubtedly serves as the precious firsthand references for scholars to deepen their research in an international way.

7 As for my detailed discussion on postmodernism and its different practices in China, cf. Wang Ning, “The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity”, *boundary 2*, 24.3: 1997, 19-40. As for my previous description of postmodernism, cf. Wang Ning, “Constructing Postmodernism: The Chinese Case and Its Different Versions”, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 20.1/2: 1993, 49-61.

my new consideration of postmodernism transcending my previous observations, I have realized that the phenomenon of postmodernism in China and other Oriental and Third World countries is closely related to the decolonizing efforts made by the people in their struggle against neo-colonialist penetration both in politics and culture. In these countries or regions, especially in China, Western influence is always mixed up with domestic tradition and cultural convention, as Chinese culture has a long and stubborn tradition of Confucianism whose revival in China and other Chinese-speaking areas in the form of Neo-Confucianism in recent years has undoubtedly appeared as a new version of postcolonialism against the Western values and their dominance over the rest of the world. So it is quite natural that in an age of globalization, there is always the other force juxtaposed with the globalizing process, which is the effort of localization, without which everything will be homogenized and by which the national and local identity or identities will be lost.

It is no doubt that to evolve from the concept of postmodernism, marked with the strong sense of West-centrism to the more conclusive concept of postmodernity, not only depends on the internal attempt within Western academic circles at deconstructing and decentralizing the modernist totality, but to a greater extent, on the unrelenting efforts made by the Oriental and Third World intellectuals to highlight their own national and cultural identity

We might well agree that there are actually three types of postmodernism on a global scale: the poststructuralist postmodernism as an intellectual deconstructive attempt, the avant-garde revolt against the old-fashioned modernism and the challenge made by contemporary popular culture and even consumer culture. All these three types are more or less echoed in the Chinese context in regard to the postcolonial debate and cultural decolonization in the current era known as globalization. Furthermore, the rapid development of world economy, the function of mass media in a cyber era and the storing and transmitting knowledge by computers have all the more promoted the advent of cultural globalization characterized by the boundless expansion of mass media and increased shrinkage of the elite cultural market and the production of canonical literature. As Jean-Francois Lyotard pointed out over a decade ago, "If this were the case, communicational transparency would be similar to liberalism", and one "could similarly imagine flows of knowledge travelling along identical channels of identical nature, some of which would be reserved for the 'decision makers', while the others would be used to repay each

person's perpetual debt with respect to the social bond."⁸ Obviously, the condition of knowledge in the postindustrial society has thus laid a foundation for culture and knowledge to become global consumer goods.

Glocal Postcoloniality as a Metamorphosed Version of Global Postmodernity

In discussing the issue of globalization in the Chinese context, scholars usually like to quote Roland Robertson's popular book *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* as it is one of the earliest translated books on this topic.⁹ But Robertson, along with his recent research on globalization mainly from the cultural and sociological perspective, is more and more interested in using the terms "globality" and "glocalization" rather than "globalization": "It is of great importance to recognize the intimacy of the relationship between the motifs of humanity and globality, which were brought closely together during the European Renaissance and were to come even closer, up to and including, the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. This involved, again, an enrichment of the conception of humanity and an even broader and more concrete extension of the ideas concerning global variety. Consciousness of the latter was not often explicitly expressed via the specific concept of globality, this being a latent rather than a manifest theme."¹⁰ If we easily find the homogenizing tendency in globalization in economy and politics, then in culture and literature, we would have the two juxtaposed tendencies: both cultural homogenization and cultural plurality or diversity, with the latter more and more apparent in the contemporary era. As the evolution of the concept postmodernism or postmodernity in China is closely related to the advent of globalization and later of globality, I will deal with the two aspects of postmodernism in culture and art: the avant-garde intellectual rebel (continuity with and transcendence over canonical modernism) and popular

8 See *The Postmodern Condition*, note 6.

9 The book was translated by Liang Guangyan as *Quanguihua: shehui lilun he quanqiu wenhua* and published by Shanghai People's Press in 2000. What is more important is that the six volumes of *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (Roland Robertson and Kathleen White (eds.), London: Routledge, 2003) will soon also have the Chinese translation as the negotiation about the Chinese copyright is being conducted between the Renmin University of China Press and Routledge.

10 Quoted from Roland Robertson's public lecture "Globality: A Mainly Western View" given at Tsinghua University on November 26, 200

culture (reaction to and challenge against modernism and even critique of the elite sense) oriented, for both of the two postmodern versions find embodiment in Chinese culture and literature and are relevant to the issue of postcoloniality.

To my preliminary observations, apart from the insightful ideas put forward by Jameson and other Western scholars, there might be two other important factors in the particular Chinese context: the prevalence of popular culture and even consumer culture as a direct consequence of China's practice of market economy since the beginning of the 1990s on the Chinese part, and the indirect impact of the international postmodernist movement which has paved the way for some Oriental and Third World countries, including China, to undermine any type of domestic social, political and cultural hegemony. So in this sense, a sort of postmodernity in Chinese characteristics is certainly associated with the question of postcoloniality, although China has never been a totally colonized country, which has in recent years attracted the attention of quite a few scholars and cultural critics. As for the latter issue, I will discuss that later on.

Obviously, in the past decade, great changes have taken place in world politics, economy and culture, so postmodernism as a global phenomenon is more and more related to the rise of contemporary consumer culture. It has always been a serious task for Western Marxists in their cultural critique and cultural studies to criticize postmodernism and its direct consequence: consumer culture. Scholars of postmodernism in China usually observe the inter-relations between postmodernism and Chinese avant-garde literature and art, instead of approaching its closer relations with current consumer society and consumer culture. To them, modernism, especially in the historical development of Western literature and art, seems more advanced than realism and romanticism, so postmodernism should undoubtedly be more advanced than modernism, which manifests itself particularly in experimentalist poems and novels produced by the Chinese avant-gardists in the late 1980s. The other possibility is perhaps due to the very influential Jamesonian postmodernist construction characterized by literary periodization of realism, modernism and postmodernism. It is true that in a lecture entitled "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" from 1980, Jameson points out that apart from observing the various characteristics of postmodernism, one "can also come at the break from the other side, and describe it in terms of periods of recent social life. [...] A new kind of society began to emerge (variously described as post-industrial society, multinational capitalism, consumer

society, media society and so forth) [...] – these are some of the features which would seem to mark a radical break with that older pre-war society in which high modernism was still an underground force.”(Foster, 1983: 124-125) Here Jameson implicitly suggests the term postmodernism, which might be more effective and more appropriate to describe such postwar phenomena. Undoubtedly, consumer culture was for a long time ignored by scholars of strong elite sense, for it primarily points to popular things, the value of which has not been examined by history and cultural canonization, so they cannot be evaluated together with canonical works of art. It is not surprising that in such a highly hierarchical country like China, consumer culture has almost no position even for theoretic observation in the scholarly domain. Secondly, consumer culture belongs among the categories of popular culture, which is undoubtedly mixed up with some elegant but even more ugly features and which is regarded as being unrepresentable. Therefore, it has long been excluded from the theoretical analysis of cultural studies scholars. Thirdly, consumer culture makes the always sublime and elegant “aesthetic” marked with commercial economy, thus losing its independent value of beauty and sublimity. In general, consumer culture was never treated seriously in China or even in the West for a long period of time. Toward the latter part of the 1980s, along with the rise of cultural criticism and Cultural Studies in the Western academic circles and their gradual dominance, a number of prominent scholars and cultural critics have gradually touched upon popular culture from their own perspectives of Cultural Studies. They analyze this phenomenon on the level of cultural critique, making it as one of the important issues for current scholars of cultural criticism and Cultural Studies. Just as Jean Baudrillard puts in one of his books, “Simulation is precisely this irresistible unfolding, this sequencing of things as though they had a meaning, when they are governed only by artificial *montage* and non-meaning. Putting a price on the event up for auction by radical disinformation. Setting a price on the event, as against setting it in play, setting it in history.”(Baudrillard, 1994: 14) In the postmodern consumer society, everything is thus of certain value; similarly, everything is thereby of no value. Meaning could be arbitrarily constructed through one's dynamic and creative interpretation; but the constructed meaning could also be deconstructed in the same way. Such is the so-called “interpretive cycle”. And this is probably a necessary consequence caused by the plurality-oriented postmodern society.

Now it is necessary to observe the case of contemporary Chinese society. Since the beginning of the 1990s, China has gradually been in the process of market economy in a broader context of global capitalization, which could not but have affected our studies of culture and art. In the face of the strong impact of market economy as a direct consequence of economic globalization, the culture characterized by being manufactured, commercial and consumptive undoubtedly loses elegance and sublimity. The attempt to redefine culture appears now and then in some scholarly books of humanistic spirit, but the attention given to consumer culture in China is strikingly different from its being attached great importance to in the Western academic circles. It is not long since consumer culture and literature began to attract the attention of eminent Western scholars and cultural critics, thus becoming one of the most important issues for current Cultural Studies scholars. While popular culture, or consumer culture, has been severely criticized as something unhealthy and something rebellious against the traditional humanistic spirit in current Chinese critical circles.¹¹ But actually, it has indeed permeated our daily life and even academic research and cultural production, challenging our elite and canonical sense of literature and art. Scholars of literature and art cannot but be confronted with such questions: how to face the severe challenge raised by the rise of popular culture? What will be the future of canonical literature and art since we are in the age of globalization when information is spreading very swiftly without boundary? At the beginning of the 1980s, Jameson analyzed postmodernism from the perspective of Marxist dialectic between base and superstructure. To him and many others, the rise of consumer culture in the postindustrial society makes elite culture and canonical literature and art severely challenged, but on the other hand, after the impact of postmodernism, people have obtained a new way of observing things beyond the “either/or”-mode. This is perhaps what postmodernism could bring to us.

In current Chinese cultural context and intellectual life, some scholars of humanities and critics are very much worried about the prevalence of consumer culture and art in recent years, trying to be

11 It is a good beginning that a journal called *Wenhua yanjiu* (*Cultural Studies*) has been published twice a year by Tianjin Social Sciences Publishing House since the summer of 2000, which will not only introduce to the Chinese scholars the most recent advances made in Western Cultural Studies but make theoretic analysis of contemporary Chinese cultural phenomena, especially concerned with social community and media's effect on people's lives and cultural markets.

opposed to its challenge by “saving the crisis of the humanistic spirit”.¹² This is not hard to imagine. But consequently, it might well intensify the existing opposition between high culture and popular culture. Since the beginning of the 1990s, China’s socialist plan economy has been shifting to market economy, and the country has been in a transitional period of politics, economy and culture, with different forces and discourses coexisting and complementing each other: some scholars are still exploring cultural theory proper and its value in the academic circles, toward a conscious construction of Chinese cultural theory; international cultural exchange has made it possible for Chinese-Western academic communication and theoretic dialogue to be carried out; the production of lofty cultural products is operated in the form of literature and art under the condition of market economy, with the avant-garde sense more and more fading; the rise of consumer culture, which is developing in a pluralistically-oriented direction, challenges traditional elite culture and the humanities. But on the other hand, some publishing houses still try to publish excellent canonical literary works in perfectly designed form; that is, serious literature and art could still be produced in a popular way, but the effect is not always conspicuous. To all this, what strategy should we adopt? This is what we cultural critics and literary scholars should confront at the beginning of the new century.

Exploring Globalization: A Marxist (Re)Construction

From a cultural and literary point of view, we usually view contemporary postmodernity as a result of globalization in culture. Here I will make a further exploration into this controversial phenomenon. According to the published research results, globalization is by no means a mere contemporary event¹³, but rather, a process started long before

12 There was a heated debate on the issue of the crisis of the humanistic spirit in 1995-1996, launched by a group of scholars in Shanghai round the journals of *Shanghai wenxue* (*Shanghai Literature*), published in Shanghai, and *Dushu* (*Reading*), published in Beijing. Dissatisfied with the rise of popular culture and prevalence of postmodern theory in the academic circles, these scholars tried to recover the old tradition of humanistic spirit, something like a sort of new humanism. But this debate came to an end without any result.

13 As far as researchers on globalization are concerned, I’ll just mention a few books, largely from the perspectives of postcoloniality and cultural studies, which I have read: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), Roland Robertson and Kathleen White (eds.), *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (6 volumes,

the latter part of the 20th century. In this aspect, it is worth re-reading what Marx and Engels, as two of the earliest theorists dealing with this issue and anticipating its appearance in the latter part of the 20th century, described more than one and a half century ago in their monumental *Communist Manifesto*, where the growth of the world market economy interacts with local social and cultural economies:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country [...]. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (Marx & Engels, 1999: 66-69)

Obviously, the last sentence of this passage clearly indicates that a sort of world literature, the very early stage of comparative literature, comes out of such a process of economic and financial globalization and thus has close relations with the latter. In order to highlight the function of literary and cultural studies in the current era of globalization, we should certainly have a comparative perspective and international view on which we could achieve some new advances in our research. If we have a clear idea from the above quotation of how globalization started in the West and then travelled eastward, then we could naturally regard it as a “travelling process”, travelling from the West to China, in the process of which it is metamorphosed and subjected to various constructions and reconstructions. Since different

London: Routledge, 2003), Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (eds.), *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), George Raudzens, *Empires: Europe and Globalization 1492-1788* (London: Sutton Publishing, 1999), Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2000), Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

scholars have constructed such concepts as those of modernism, post-modernism, Orientalism, and globalization in the Western context, why shouldn't we Chinese scholars make some reconstruction of this "constructed" concept? In the following part, I, inspired by my Western colleagues, especially by Marx and Engels and some Neo-Marxists, would like to offer my own theoretical construction of globalization by referring to its characteristics in the Chinese practice.

(1) Globalization as a way of global economic operation.

Undoubtedly, economic globalization is marked by the fact that all the countries develop their economy according to a "homogeneous" rule formulated by a certain international organization like the IMF and WTO. The global capital expansion has certainly caused the formation of international division of labour. To avoid unnecessary repetition in production, some widely known commodities could be sold world wide under the cruel law of "survival of the fittest". It not only stimulates those backward national industries to innovate in their technology, but also ruthlessly resolves the established system of national industry. In this way, it is not surprising that globalization is largely opposed to both in the developed countries as well as those underdeveloped countries.

(2) Globalization as a historical process. According to Marx and Engels, this process started with Columbus' discovery of the Americas and the consequent global capital expansion. This historical process culminates in the stage of transnational capitalization in the 1980s, when capitalism entered into its late sphere. But it does not mean that capitalism will come to an end, but rather, it will probably develop in two orientations: either coming to its natural end, to its internal logic, or reviving itself after readjusting its internal mechanism. The current prosperity of world capitalism is certainly an indispensable consequence, but from a long-term point of view, the productive means of capitalism will sooner or later be replaced by a more advanced means of production, and capitalism will finally come to an end. At the moment, we should clearly realize that this transitional period is by no means a short one, but rather a long one that develops step by step.

(3) Globalization as a process of financial marketization and political democratization. Along with the appearance of globalization, the flow of capital has a free outlet, with the free trade largely replacing the old way of government intervention in foreign trade. Thus globalization has become a "hidden God" crossing the boundary of nations and countries and functioning both at the center and periph-

ery.¹⁴ Unlike the aggression made by old imperialism, this sort of economic imperialism and cultural imperialism usually intervenes in other countries by gradual penetration, in the process of which political democracy is naturally realized when economy has developed onto a certain stage.

(4) **Globalization as a critical concept.** The issue of globalization heatedly discussed in the international humanities and social sciences is also viewed as a critical concept, with which scholars try to deconstruct the old-fashioned concepts of modernity/postmodernity. That is, globalization has deconstructed the artificial opposition between modernity and postmodernity by overlapping the two, thereby breaking through the Eurocentric mode of thinking. But on the other hand, since the imperial centre has moved to the United States along with the advent of globalization, the critique of Eurocentrism should thereby be pointed to a sort of American-centrism.

(5) **Globalization as a narrative category.** Just as Homi Bhabha points out that nation in a sense is also a sort of narration, the same is true of globalization as a narrative category, for it not only represents people's expectation for a bright and beautiful future, but also embodies the global expansion of an imperial notion of value. Globalization is therefore a grand narrative, according to which traditional boundary of nations and countries is deconstructed. A sort of economic globalization and marketization is taking the place of the power of government, which also finds embodiment in the penetration of strong cultures into weak cultures. National and cultural identity is becoming more and more obscure, with single identity replaced by multiple identities. As a result, people in the age of globalization are suffering from a sort of identity crisis.

(6) **Globalization as a cultural construction.** Globalization in culture undoubtedly demonstrates that it is also a cultural construction like its precursors modernism and postmodernism. In discussing this issue, scholars from different fields cannot but make their own constructions or reconstructions. In this way, it is their goal to construct a culture of globalization. For us scholars of literary and cultural studies, observing our research objects in a broad global context and communicate with our international counterparts on the same level will undoubtedly broaden our horizon and endow our theoretic debate with more liveliness so as to make some theoretic innovation.

14 Cf. Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*. Especially cf. its "Preface".

(7) **Globalization as a theoretic discourse.** Now that more and more scholars of the humanities are involved in the discussion on this issue, globalization has gradually become a polemic and theoretic discourse. I agree with Roland Robertson that in theorizing cultural phenomena, we could use the concept of globality instead of globalization, for the former appeared much earlier than the latter, and the former more appropriate for describing the orientation and development of culture and literature.¹⁵

In my view, only by observing globalization from the above seven, or even more, angles can we grasp the characteristic features of globalization in a comprehensive and precise way. And only by realizing its multidimensional significance can we Chinese scholars carry on equal dialogues with the international scholarship on the issue of globalization and utter our unique voice in international theoretic debate.

Globalization and Localization: Opposition or Dialogue?

After my theoretic construction, let us come back to the Chinese literary and cultural debate about the relationship between globalization and localization which has been a fashionable topic in recent years.¹⁶ Since we live in an age of globalization, we cannot but be in such a process of global economy and capitalization. In this globalization process, everybody should be more or less restricted to the cruel “law of jungle” as globalization has made most people marginalized, politically, economically and even culturally. It is especially true of those intellectuals of the humanities: shrinking of cultural market and cut of research funds and even corporation of departments in universities. So it is not surprising that it is resisted by another strong and stubborn force: localization, which finds particular embodiment in the fields of social science and the humanities. In China as well as in Asia, the revival of Confucianism might well serve as an oppositional force against the challenge of globalization. In this context, some Asian intellectuals have been trying to search for an Asian national and cultur-

15 Cf. Roland Robertson’s public lecture “Globality: A Mainly Western View” given at Tsinghua University on November 26, 2002.

16 Although Western scholars know little about the debate on the relationship between globalization and localization, it is easy to find that in almost all the Chinese media, including newspapers, academic journals and TV programs, this is one of the most frequently talked about topics.

al identity, which is undoubtedly an Asian version of postcolonialism.¹⁷ Paradoxically, the Chinese government does not prevent economic globalization from coming into the country, for it might well help stimulate the rapid development of Chinese economy; but culturally, it does try to prevent its culture from being “globalized” or “homogenized”, which finds particular embodiment in the high respect showed to Confucius, the symbol of traditional Chinese culture, who was severely castigated during the May 4th period and later in the Cultural Revolution but who is now used to highlight the Chinese cultural spirit and tradition.¹⁸

Cultural products cannot be equally evaluated in comparison to the production of consumer goods. Its value cannot be judged according to its reception in market and the quantity of its production. So in this way, we should revise our cultural theory with which we used to analyze various social and cultural phenomena and make it as perfect as possible and applicable to explain the unique phenomenon marked with the “postmodern” of the postindustrial society.

In the age of globalization, postmodernism should be and actually has more or less been redefined in regard to its critical and creative reception in some Oriental and Third World countries. Just as Jameson points out in talking about the reception of postmodernism in China, that apart from the Western influence and Chinese scholars’ conscious introduction and creative reception, the prevalence of postmodernism and the appearance of the various faces of postmodernity in China and other places also depends upon three other factors: the operation of transnational funds, the global capitalization and the advent of the cyber era.¹⁹ All the above three factors, especially the rapidly developing media industry, put together form a powerful force that pushes cultural globalization forward, moving from centre to periphery and functioning both at the centre and periphery. Even the strongest mechanism of national culture cannot resist this lash. But in another aspect, postmodernism or postmodernity would not always bring about negative things. It has broken through our one-dimen-

17 Cf. Arif Dirlik, “Culture Against History? The ‘West’ in the Search for an East Asian Identity”, a keynote speech delivered at the Symposium on Globalization and the Construction of Chinese Culture held on September 25, 1999 at Beijing Language and Culture University.

18 This could easily be seen in the grand commemoration of the 2550th anniversary of the birth of Confucius in Beijing and Shandong, his native place.

19 Jameson offered this insightful idea in his remarks on my lecture on Chinese postmodernity at Duke University on October 18, 1996, which has certainly given me some revelations.

sional mode of thinking, making our reflections on the problems of the age more sophisticated and our pursuit of value standard beyond the either/or mode of thinking. It is true that in the current Chinese context, postmodernism is viewed as a powerful deconstructive way of thinking which always stimulates us to be suspicious of the appearance of things and endow us with a sort of critical thinking. Therefore, Jameson writes: "In the most interesting postmodernist works, however, one can detect a more positive conception of relationship, which restores its proper tension to the notion of difference itself. This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving; more often it takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness." (Jameson, 1991: 31) Now that the plurality-oriented mode of thinking could endow us with an endless exploring spirit, we should try to turn the unfavourable to the favourable in the new condition. Only in this way can we do our work better.

At this moment globalization is sweeping China's economy and finance, which is a historical trend beyond anyone's expectation and resistance. It will also influence and perhaps has already influenced the establishment of Chinese national and cultural identity. Economic and financial globalization has undoubtedly brought about a good opportunity for China to catch up with and even surpass the advanced Western countries, thus making China involved in the world's economic circulation as early as possible. It has actually brought us with both positive and negative effects, that is to say, both challenge and opportunity. If we face the challenge in a critical way and make full use of the opportunity to develop our national culture in a broad international context, we will most probably highlight the Chinese national and cultural identity and make it known to the international community. In this sense, stubbornly resisting this trend by taking a postcolonial stand will only lead to another opposition between China and the West. At the moment, cultural globalization has already given rise to the enlargement of our research field, which David Harvey describes as a sort of phase of reduction of time and space. (Harvey, 1989: 84) This shift of time and space is also a direct consequence of cultural globalization. The newly rising "postmodern geography" is a branch of postmodern study dealing exclusively with cultural globalization and our strategy to it. Undoubtedly, as Third World intellectuals, we have at various degrees perceived the impact of this current on our national culture, which makes some of us puzzled. For instance, a

conspicuous oppositional strategy is to put forward the concept of Third World culture and localism, a metamorphosed version of post-colonialism,²⁰ which is not only prevailing in the mainland of China, but in Hong Kong, Taiwan and other overseas Chinese communities. Obviously, there are two kinds of postcoloniality in China although it was never a totally colonized country in the past. It is true that many of the contemporary Western postmodern and postcolonial scholars are interested in Oriental and Third World culture. In recognizing the unique value of non-Western culture, they try to find from it some revelations which might well help them get out of the “crisis of representation”. Jameson once tried to prove through his reading of Lu Xun's “The True Story of Ah Q” (“*Ah Q zheng zhuan*”) that all the Third World literary texts could be read as certain national allegories.²¹ Edward Said, who has some Oriental background, also admits that is “very interested in Third World literature. In many of the gestures made by writers, but not all certainly, there's a quite conscious effort to re-do and re-absorb the canon in some way.”(Sprinker, 1992: 255) They strive to undermine and even de-construct at the very center of the imperial empire its cultural and linguistic hegemony, struggling for the First World intellectuals to know about the Third World better. In China, we cannot but be confronted with the dilemma: on the one hand, China's openness to the outside world and economic reform in the past decades have made its economy rise rapidly, but on the other hand, as China is vast in space and great in population, it always develops in an uneven way, with different elements of the “primitive”, “premodern”, “modern” and “post-modern” mixed up in the same country. In such a large country, anything could happen beyond one's expectation. Undoubtedly, the consequence of postmodernity in China has also helped re-periodize Chinese culture and literature after 1978: the New Period (*Xin shiqi*) and the Post-New Period (*Hou xin shiqi*). The former is characterized by a political event and the latter by a sort of cultural politics known as cultural transformation, which to some extent results from the in-

20 Apart from Jameson's influence, those Chinese critics advocating Third World culture and localism are Zhang Yiwu, Wang Yichuan, Zhang Fa and Wang Gan. See some of their essays published in *Wenyi zhengming* (*Debate on Literature and Art*) and *Zhongshan* (*Purple Mountains*) in the late 1990s.

21 In a recent interview with Zhang Xudong, Jameson, in discussing such important issues as the historicity of theory, Marxism and late capitalism, dialectical thinking and Cultural Studies and locality, refers to the Chinese intellectual situation now and then. See Xudong Zhang, “Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson”, *New Literary History*, 29.3: 1998, 353-383.

ternational postmodernist movement and cultural globalization.²² Thus Chinese postmodernity manifests itself in a way more and more closely related to the global postcolonial movement. Confronted with various challenges raised by globalization, I think that we would rather use globalization in an opposite way, that is, we could globalize Oriental and Chinese culture in the world in such an age of globalization. And in this sense, we ought to have more communications and dialogues with the international community rather than maintain an oppositional attitude toward the West. To preserve some characteristics of national identity is certainly necessary, but any attempt of overemphasis on localization at the expense of excluding foreign influence will easily give rise to an inadequate nationalist sentiment and result in an unfavorable condition in China's stable external surroundings. In the face of the current of cultural globalization, we Chinese intellectuals should have practical strategy: first of all to conform to it without sacrificing our national cultural identity, and then, to expand our cultural communication and academic dialogue with the international community.

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22 As for the change of literary and cultural dominance from that of the New Period to that of the Post- New Period in current China, cf. Wang Ning, "From Psychoanalysis to Schizoanalysis: Reflections on Current Chinese Literary Cultures", *Social Semiotics*, 7.3: 1997, 323-334.

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