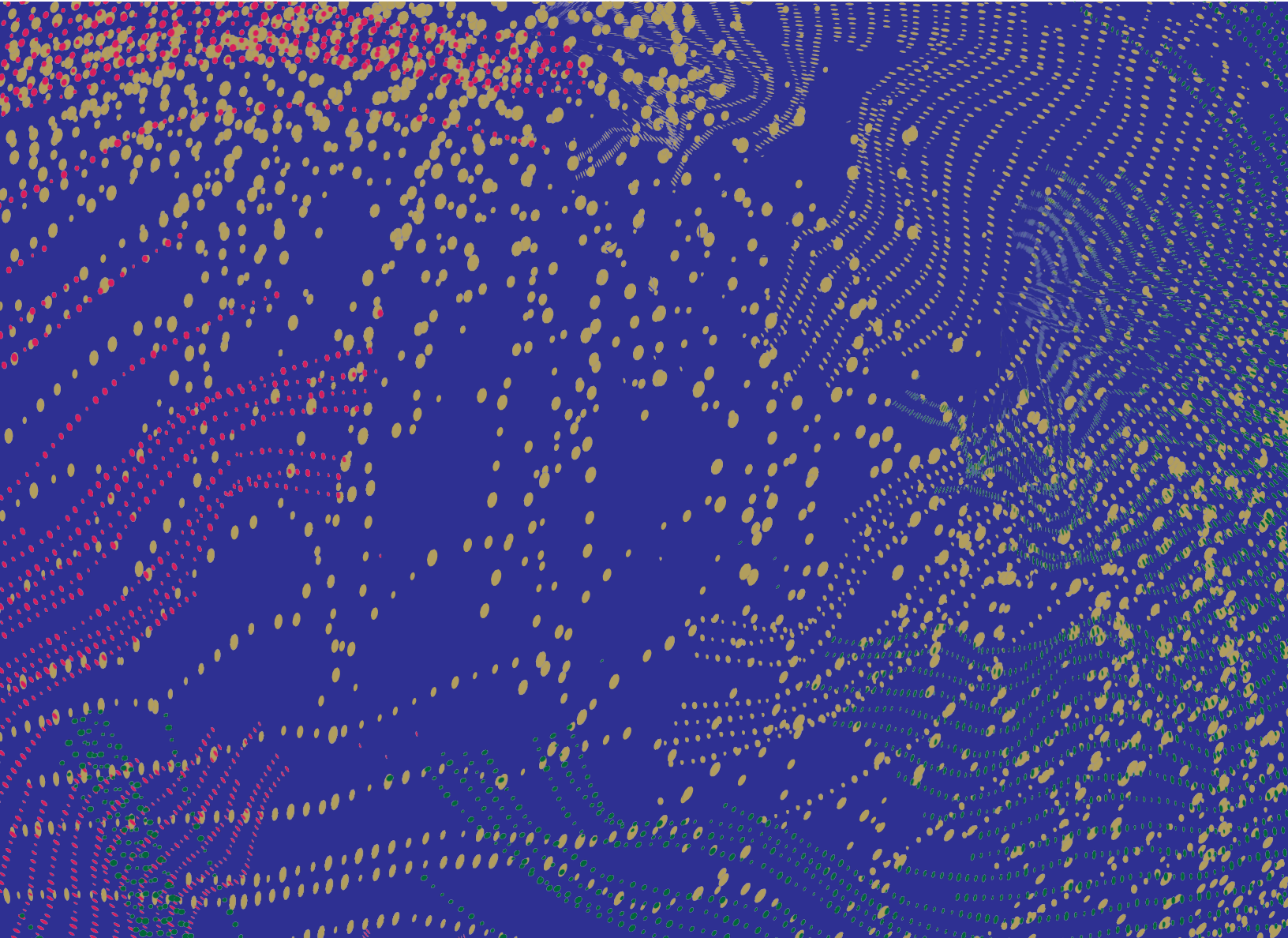


The World Humanities Report

Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies in China

Dai Jinhua



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Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies in China

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The forty years surrounding the turn of the twenty-first century present another period of history in which Chinese society underwent radical transformations. During the 1980s and 1990s, the humanities played the important role of initiating and propelling these social changes. We can trace this back to the intermediary years of the 1970s and 1980s, when literary and artistic movements—the Tiananmen Square poetry movement of 1976 and scar literature or roots-seeking literature—unleashed drastic changes in Chinese society.¹ The highly politicized position of intellectual practice and imagination occupied by humanities scholars at that time distills for us the process of establishing new disciplines. The formation of comparative literature as the first new discipline in the humanities is a representative example, but the significance of the discipline extends far beyond its individual case. It might even be said that during the initial stage of its history comparative literature exceeded its own disciplinary boundaries to constitute a special trajectory in Chinese intellectual history.

¹ The Tiananmen Square poetry movement was prompted by the death, in January 1976, of Premier Zhou Enlai. Mourning Beijing citizens, disregarding the government's ban on public memorials, rushed to Tiananmen Square to lay flowers, as well as post and read aloud elegies they wrote for the occasion. Similar gatherings happened in other cities around China, forming an unprecedented civil protest movement since 1949, which became a precursor to the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The so-called scar literature emerged in 1977, right after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and focused on the societal violence and personal tragedies during the ten-year period (1966–76). It was a cultural prelude to significant social changes in China. The term “scar literature” came from the title of a work by a young author, Lu Xinhua, representing this literary and intellectual movement.

The roots-seeking literature was a literary trend between 1983 and 1985. Many young writers, under the banner of “historical and cultural reflection,” engaged in critical writing with real political significance by critiquing traditional culture and community life. Nearly all significant Chinese writers of the following four decades emerged from this movement.

The Emergence of the Discipline and a Specific Historical Moment

We could trace the disciplinary lineages of Chinese comparative literature to the beginning of modern Chinese history and to the early stages of the humanities in the modern Chinese university system. However, in the specific situation of China during the 1980s, comparative literature not only acquired the defining characteristics of a “new discipline,” but also provided a template for other new disciplines within the humanities. Moreover, it became a proponent, participant, and specific signpost for the radical changes in Chinese society in the early 1980s.

Yue Daiyun of Peking University is regarded as a founder and leader of the new discipline of Chinese comparative literature during the 1980s. The trajectory of her academic life and scholarly practice bears clear traces of a particular history. A victim of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in the 1950s, Yue Daiyun was forced to leave her university post, and twenty-three years would pass before she fully resumed her scholarly and teaching career. In the late 1970s, as a “returner” to the Chinese intellectual and cultural sphere, she was among the first Chinese scholars to begin frequent academic visits and exchanges with European and American universities in an unofficial capacity. She began to call for and conceive of comparative literature as a new discipline introduced from Europe and the United States. At the time of its inception, the field of comparative literature carried with it symbolism that exceeded and obscured the introduction of its norms and paradigms as a new discipline. For much of the 1980s, the term “comparative literature” was something of a cultural signpost, indicating a historical shift in China’s vision of the world away from its acquiescence to the bipolar order of the Cold War. The scope and method of comparative literature, with a high degree of self-consciousness, became a systematic effort to locate the cultural position and significance of China as a modern nation-state among the “forest of world nations.” In fact, Chinese comparative literature in its infancy was not so much a new disciplinary prototype as a rallying cry for young Chinese scholars and students throughout the country from all disciplines adjacent to comparative literature to come together. If “going global” was a social consensus in China during the 1980s, then comparative literature was the door that swung open. As a result, comparative literature, together with the then-emerging Academy of Chinese Culture and the *Toward the Future*

series,² formed the frontier of Chinese thought and together triggered the phenomenon of “cultural fever” in Chinese social theory.

In 1981, under Yue Daiyun’s facilitation, Peking University took the lead in establishing the Center for Comparative Literature Studies and began to organize the translation and publication of scholarly works on comparative literature. At that time, *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue tongxun* [Chinese comparative literature newsletter], an internal publication created by the center, became a vehicle for transmitting new knowledge of comparative literature to universities nationwide and a space for future scholars to gather and communicate. In subsequent years, more than ten universities across the country established institutions similar to the center, some local cultural organizations established scholarly groups devoted to comparative literature, and many universities began to offer basic courses in comparative literature.

In August of the same year, Yue Daiyun attended the 10th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in New York. Then, in 1983 the Sino-American Symposium on Comparative Literature was held, and in 1984 the first Chinese journal of comparative literature, *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* [Comparative literature in China], was launched at Shanghai International Studies University under the editorship of Xie Tianzhen.

An important episode in the history of comparative literature in China explains how its establishment as a new discipline overlapped and was inscribed with the vectors of radical change in late twentieth century. In 1985 Yue Daiyun was recruited by Shenzhen University to establish the Department of Chinese Language and Literature and become its first chair. Founded in 1979, the city of Shenzhen became the first special economic zone in 1980 during China’s era of reform and opening up. As a new city rising out of the former countryside, it served as an experimental zone and a window onto China’s great transformation throughout the 1980s. It was also the place where comparative

² The Academy of Chinese Culture was founded in Beijing in October 1984 as a private academic research and teaching organization by scholar Feng Youlan, together with several professors from Peking University’s philosophy department, and in connection with Peking University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Renmin University of China, Beijing Normal University, and Tsinghua University, as well as many other scholars from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and throughout the world. The *Toward the Future* series was edited by Jin Guantao and published over a period of five years (1984–88), by the People’s Publishing House [Sichuan renmin chubanshe]. The series covered a wide range of social and natural sciences and included both translations from other languages and original works, with seventy-four titles published in total. The authors of the series were emerging intellectuals in the 1980s considered to be at the forefront of the emancipation of Chinese thought at that time.

literature, along with other new disciplines and new disciplinary knowledge, took root.

The year 1985 would become an important year for the establishment of the discipline of comparative literature in China. That year, under Yue's leadership, a comparative literature conference was held for the first time in China, and the Chinese Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) was established, with Ji Xianlin of the Department of Eastern Languages at Peking University as honorary president, Qian Zhongshu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as advisor, Yang Zhouhan of the Department of Western Languages at Peking University as the first president, and Yue Daiyun as vice president and secretary-general. In the same year, Peking University obtained approval to establish the Institute of Comparative Literature of Peking University as an academic research institution, with Yue Daiyun as its director. Under Yue's leadership, the institute became the first master's degree-granting institution for comparative literature in China. Finally, also in 1985 more than forty universities began offering courses in comparative literature.

Milestones followed in the following years. In 1986 the Institute of Comparative Literature at Peking University and a dedicated editorial committee put together and published the *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue nianjian* [Chinese yearbook of comparative literature]. In 1987 Yue wrote and published *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue yuanli* [Principles of comparative literature in China] and presided over the writing, translation, and publication of the twenty-six-volume *Beijing daxue bijiao wenxue yanjiu congshu* [Peking University comparative literature research series]. And in 1989 Yue Daiyun became the president of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association.

The Multiple Social Meanings of Comparative Literature

The significance of comparative literature to China in the first half of the 1980s was not so much in the introduction of a new discipline as in the introduction of new intellectual resources and different reference points for the humanities at that time. In step with the overall orientation of this particular era, comparative literature both initiated and shaped the new social and cultural order. Its concrete, effective, and large-scale humanistic action was like a wide-open window or broken-down door that let in gusts of western winds. Euro-American culture, literary theory, and scholarly concepts poured into Chinese universities. In the early 1980s Yue Daiyun took the lead by introducing a variety

of twentieth-century Euro-American literary theories in her academic lectures around the country: New Criticism, structuralist narratology, structuralist semiotics, psychoanalysis, reception aesthetics, hermeneutics, feminism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and so forth. Her lectures set the tone for a vision whose scope far exceeded the needs and limits of the discipline of comparative literature itself. At the same time, she invited many representative foreign thinkers and literary theorists to lecture in China through the Institute of Comparative Literature at Peking University and published collections of their lectures, which had an immeasurable and far-reaching impact on the evolution and reconstruction of the humanities in China.³

The establishment of the comparative literature discipline had a number of functions. First, unlike the disciplines of philosophy, history, and cultural anthropology, which undergirded the aesthetics and cultural studies “fevers” of the 1980s, comparative literature provided critical resources for the repoliticization of Chinese thought and scholarship in the 1990s. Whereas Euro-American thought and scholarship provided one path for the *depoliticization* of Chinese society and culture in the 1980s away from Marxist doctrine, in the 1990s that same body of thought, especially the highly politicized and critical works of the 1950s and 1960s, also became part of the array of intellectual resources to draw from during the *repoliticization* of scholarly inquiry.

Second, the new discipline of comparative literature cemented the concept and method of comparison for the humanities and social thought and stressed the importance of interdisciplinarity. During the 1980s comparative literature in China was synonymous with comparative studies. In the second half of the 1980s, the Academy of Chinese Culture, which interacted closely with the new discipline of comparative literature, offered fifteen volumes of *Comparative Literature* and *Internal Reference Readings for Teaching* to students in a number of lively workshops throughout the country. The fifteen volumes included not only translations and essays on comparative literature, but also comparative history, comparative philosophy, comparative politics, comparative sociology, and comparative economics. The social vision and aspirations of comparative literature at this time went so far beyond literature and humanities that it became a

³ One prominent example is *Houxiandai zhuyi yu wenhua lilun: Fu Jiemuxun jiaoshou jiangyan lu* [Postmodernism and cultural theory: Lectures by professor F. Jameson], trans. Tang Xiaobing (Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1987), a series of lectures by the American scholar Fredric Jameson at Peking University in 1985. In multiple editions, this book became an important work of cultural theory in China while serving as an index of Marxist literary theory in post-war Europe and America.

conscious interdisciplinary and translingual concept and scholarly practice and a tool for social critique.

Furthermore, Chinese comparative literature has become the instigator and vital new force behind another round of “the eastward movement of Western learning,” also known as “grabbism” (“stones from other mountains can be polished into jade”). However, the establishment of comparative literature’s disciplinary in mainland China was different from that in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which were still on the other side of the Cold War divide. In those two cases, comparative literature was established within university foreign (or Western) language departments so that it naturally became part of “foreign” literary theory and “foreign” cultural studies. Comparative literature in mainland China, in contrast, was located in the Chinese language and literature departments of universities from the very beginning. This origin in Chinese language departments is directly related to political cultural practices of the state in the history of the People’s Republic of China. The state-sanctioned restructuring of university departments in 1955 established the prominence and special position of the Chinese language and literature department within the cultural landscape and tasked it with the role of making a new socialist and Chinese national culture. Exemplary texts of Chinese comparative literature studies—Yue Daiyun’s article “Nicaid yu Zhongguo xiandai wenxue” [Nietzsche and modern Chinese literature] (1981), the translation and compilation of *Guowai Lu Xun yanjiu lunji* [A collection of foreign studies on Lu Xun] (1981), and the monograph *Bijiao wenxue yu Zhongguo xiandai wenxue* [Comparative literature and modern Chinese literature] (1987)—demonstrated the equal weight given to Euro-American theories and Chinese writers and texts, but a research approach that took Chinese literature and culture as its objective was guiding them. In the research coordinates set by Chinese comparative literature, the primacy of Chinese culture and literature was presupposed. Therefore, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, on Chinese society’s main cultural stage, the cultural, artistic, academic, and intellectual practices under the labels of “cultural fever,” “historico-cultural reflection,” or “cultural roots-seeking” all shared a tone reminiscent of the cultural themes of the May Fourth era, focusing on critical reflection and even negative assessments of Chinese culture, though the practical meaning and social aspirations were very different from those of the May Fourth. Comparative literature was unquestionably the disciplinary field that postwar Euro-American literary and cultural theories poured into and operated in, but it was also the space where the subjective consciousness of Chinese culture and

cultural self-awareness emerged. The method of comparative studies chosen by its pioneers—to reexamine Chinese culture and literature from theoretical/Euro-American theoretical perspectives—reveals the rationale of recognizing difference, rather than comparing which is better or worse and which came before and after. In other words, the cultural moment when the discipline of Chinese comparative literature was launched had become a retrospective combining-through of the modernization process of Chinese culture, as well as a search and mapping of the multiple genealogies of the entry, influence, and internalization of Euro-American thought within the corpus of Chinese literary texts.

From 1985 onward, comparative literature has come to be not only a prominent field of study in Chinese humanities research but also the frontier of Chinese academic thought. In the late 1980s, the Chinese Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) grew to be the largest academic organization in China with more than five hundred secondary associations covering various intellectual, humanist, and artistic fields, becoming the incubator and birthplace of new ideas and disciplines. Among them, a special secondary association integral to academic and intellectual exchanges and disciplinary construction was the American Chapter of CCLA, which revealed and continued to shape an important historical lineage. In the early years of the discipline, scholars of Chinese studies in America, especially those who were ethnically Chinese, played a crucial intermediary role between the discipline's pioneers, the Academy of Chinese Culture, and the international scholarly exchanges known as “going out and inviting in.” They acted as intermediaries of cultural exchange, and the work they had done in the specific postwar context of American area studies began to be showcased in various ways as a “scholarly template” for Chinese humanities. The establishment of the American Chapter of CCLA led to the coming together of young scholars from mainland China who had gone to the United States to pursue doctoral degrees in the humanities. Prior to this, a majority of ethnically Chinese scholars in American (or European) humanities, especially those in Chinese studies or Sinology, had been from Hong Kong and Taiwan. These young scholars from mainland China, who initially came together under the banner of Chinese comparative literature, began to infuse American Chinese studies, and even American humanities more generally, with their specific historical experiences, identity consciousness, and scholarly aspirations. Through the American Chapter of CCLA, they grew increasingly intent on introducing cutting-edge Euro-American scholarship to China and on translating Chinese scholarship for Western scholars. As these young scholars’

teaching appointments in Europe and the US continued, their scholarly work began to reshape the contours of American Chinese studies, and Chinese translations of their work signified a new international model of scholarship in the Chinese academy. The existence of this scholarly community, under the rubric of Chinese comparative literature, brought into relief a specific trajectory of global mobility, theoretical transmission, cultural identity, and institutional reorganization in which the Chinese participated toward the end of the twentieth century.

Rapid Disciplinary Development

During the last decade of the twentieth century, Chinese comparative literature entered a period of rapid disciplinary development. In 1990 the *Yanjiusheng peiyang xueke mulu* [Catalogue of disciplines for graduate training], jointly issued by the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the State Education Commission, formally included comparative literature as an independent discipline in graduate training programs. Since then, comparative literature has formally entered the national systems of education and scholarship, and its domain has expanded into comparative poetics, Chinese and foreign literatures, cross-cultural studies, Chinese diaspora literature, literary anthropology, imagology, translation, literature and religion, and other established and emerging fields. In 1993 the Institute of Comparative Literature at Peking University was approved to establish the first doctoral program in comparative literature in China. In 1995 the number of colleges and universities offering courses in comparative literature increased to more than 120. In 1997 and 1998 the *Putong gaodeng xuexiao benke zhuanke mulu he zhuanke jieshao* [Catalogue and introduction of undergraduate majors in general higher education institutions] was released, and the Degree Office and the Ministry of Education merged comparative literature and foreign literature into the second-level discipline of comparative literature and world literature and officially listed comparative literature as a major concentration in Chinese language and literature. Various new textbooks of comparative literature were published one after another, which have been widely adopted by universities across the country. In 2020 twenty-six colleges and universities were enrolling doctoral students in comparative literature; ninety-four colleges and universities were enrolling master's students; more than hundred and sixty schools were offering

comparative literature courses; and comparative literature courses had reached STEM majors as well as high school classrooms.

Late twentieth century was a period of rapid disciplinary development and institutionalization for comparative literature in China. Comparative literature played a special role of igniter, fan, and fuel in Chinese society and culture, influencing the renewal and reorganization of Chinese humanities, society, and culture with a new international perspective; the ideological path of comparative studies; and the critical and deconstructive consciousness of Euro-American postwar theory. With disciplinarization, the work of Chinese comparative literature scholars began to focus on the construction of disciplinary categories and norms. Their research has continued in numerous directions, including Chinese and foreign cultural relations, comparative poetics, Chinese diaspora literature, translation studies, literary anthropology, literary imagology, and literature and religion.

Cultural Studies in China

The last decade of the twentieth century was one in which the Chinese social system shifted gears and underwent rapid transformations. After a decade of debate over ideology and how to choose a political path and direction for the future, the 1990s turned to more fundamentally economic concerns: the deepening of systematic economic reforms; the restructuring of large- and medium-scale state-run enterprises; the change of ownership systems, marked by the shift from state-run to state-owned; profound changes in the class structure of Chinese society that were revealed and initiated by the shock wave of unemployment; the emergence of China's role as the "world's factory" and the attendant domestic movements of massive migrant labor. It was also in the 1990s that Chinese society and economy became directly and profoundly involved in the globalization process following a series of "accession negotiations" over China joining the World Trade Organization. During this period, private capital and transnational capital flowed (with some difficulty in the case of the latter) into cultural institutions and public media, which had previously been entirely supported by the state. First came the rapid marketization of book publishing, followed by the explosive growth of television, and then the internet arrived in urban centers and spread throughout the country. Chinese society rapidly evolved and reorganized itself within a new multifaceted and dynamic structure. For Chinese scholars in humanities and social sciences, still absorbing the drastic changes and aftershocks of the 1980s in China and in the world, the

1990s were an incredible experience. New structures, unexpected transitions, and unfamiliar situations posed a great challenge to Chinese scholars and to the formation of Chinese thought and scholarship. Fittingly, cultural studies arose from within this historical moment.

There is no doubt that the significance and impact of cultural studies in China in the end of the twentieth century went far beyond the arrival of a “new discipline” in China. In retrospect, the changes in Chinese thought and scholarship associated with cultural studies mark the emergence of an important turning point in Chinese society and culture. The emergence of cultural studies revealed another ideological split in twentieth-century China. The comprehensive economic restructuring that began in the 1990s was highlighted by sharp social divisions on the most immediate level of social phenomena and experience. The former industrial working class within the state-run system fell to pieces, and migrant workers on the move began to form a new social underclass, with enormous social wealth emerging in the process of capitalization of the real economy and rapidly clustering around a small minority of people. At the same time, the social consensus that began in the 1970s and took shape in the 1980s—denying and rejecting the official ideology and discursive system of the Mao era—rendered people speechless in the face of the radical changes that were taking place, causing an enormous and nameless hatred to surge and flow in society. In the face of a social reality that takes one by surprise, the consensus formed by the Chinese intellectual community at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, based on classical liberalism, gradually shattered. Ideological differences in the understanding of the nature and primary contradictions of Chinese society eventually split the intellectual community, and a confrontation between the so-called liberals and the New Left surfaced. The emergence and initial implementation of cultural studies in China was the early arena in which the so-called New Left came onto the scene. During this period, the Chinese-language publication of Wang Hui’s “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity”⁴ and my own *Invisible Writing: Cultural Studies in China in the 1990s*⁵ became representative works.

⁴ First published in 1994 in the Korean journal *Creation and Criticism*. The Chinese version was published in the magazine *Tianya* [Frontiers] in 1997 and immediately sparked a debate in China. An English version of the article was published in *Social Text* in 1998, and a Japanese version was published in the magazine *World* in 1999.

⁵ Dai Jinhua, *Yinxing shuxie—90 niandai Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* [Invisible writing: Cultural studies in China in the 1990s] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1999). Taiwanese

Once again, the emergence of cultural studies in China happened against the background of postwar British cultural studies. In the British case, the emergence of the Birmingham school of cultural studies as a “counter-discipline” was closely linked to, and partially overlapped with, the arrival of the European New Left, which had gathered around the journal *New Left Review*. Chinese cultural studies in the mid- to late 1990s, in contrast, revolved around the reorganized literary magazines *Dushu* [Reading] and *Tianya* [Frontiers]. The birth of the New Left in Britain and Europe was based on the Cold War order, which is the key to understanding the functional role of the Birmingham school; whereas Chinese cultural studies emerged at the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the post-Cold War historical period, when China, as the last major communist-led country, was rapidly becoming a frontier of globalization and developmentalism. The inner impetus for those working under the rubric of cultural studies was to respond to and identify this particular mottled reality with forward-looking, alternative modes of thinking and social practice in the face of global capitalism, while at the same time consciously attempting to recognize the Chinese revolution as a direct and important historical legacy.

Chinese cultural studies is not just another example of the travel of Euro-American critical theory. Since the 1990s China and Northeast Asia together have become the most dynamic arena and fertile ground for cultural studies to develop into a political cultural practice. Its localized characteristics have made Chinese cultural studies a direct path of dialogue, critique, and construction with Chinese social reality and culture. However, just as cultural studies emerged and developed in postwar Britain, cultural studies in China has been full of tension from the very beginning. Is it inevitable that cultural studies, just like comparative literature, will emerge and develop as a new discipline within the academy as a means for confronting and managing revolutions in technology and media and the explosion of information, including the advent of the culture industry and mass culture? Or is it also possible that it may become a counter-disciplinary intellectual domain within the academy characterized by stated positions, the production of political ideology, critical interventions in social practices, and interdisciplinarity?

traditional-character edition *Jingcheng dixing tu* [Topographical map of mirror city] (Taipei: Lianhe wenzue chubanshe, 1999).

The Name of Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice

The arrival of cultural studies in China brought about the formation of a new social stance, critical approach, and practical path. It also integrated new intellectual resources from Europe and the United States with local historical resources through conscious and creative interpretation. And, perhaps most importantly, it once again opened up the possibility for a certain kind of Chinese academic intellectual to make connections between a radically changing China and global realities and to intervene in social practice with a critical yet constructive posture. In the 2000s and beyond, at the beckoning of the socially stigmatized New Left, a multidisciplinary group of critical intellectuals in the Chinese humanities and social sciences began to gather initially around the magazines *Dushu* and *Tianya* a publication series by Cultural Studies Workshop at Peking University and then later around the journal *Shijie* [Perspectives]. This multidisciplinary movement did not emulate the approach advocated by British cultural studies, but rather worked at the frontier of thought created by the historical circumstances of contemporary China. In the name of cultural studies, Chinese intellectuals in the humanities thought through political economics, while those in the social sciences considered the sociocultural parameters of historical analysis. Rather than aiming at an interdisciplinary cultural experiment, they directly confronted, responded to, and intervened in the radical changes going on around them. In short, cultural studies was a renewal and reorganization of thought and a conscious process of social and cultural repoliticization. In the name of cultural studies, but far beyond the Birmingham school or the Euro-American cultural studies of the 1980s, the cultural studies that took place in China at the of the twentieth century, had a profound impact on the rewriting of China's intellectual landscape in the twenty-first century and on the scholarly decisions and directions of humanities and social disciplines. It has created an open, organic, and alternative field of sociocultural practice.

The three major axes of cultural studies—class, gender, and race—brought unexpected vitality to the analysis of Chinese social realities. In the 1990s the reappearance and reorganization of class-based society were the most prominent social realities in China. However, theories of class analysis were rejected and kept secret because of China's specific historical context—namely, the continuity of political parties and political power amid the radical changes and ruptures of political and economic systems, and the internalization of and identification with Euro-American Cold War thinking and logic that had

occurred in the 1980s. Cultural studies' interest in class reactivated and renewed the ideological resources of Marxism embedded in Chinese society and culture, which provided a path of critique. But the arrival of cultural studies in China was not a simple return to the parameters of class in the Marxist conceptions of history. It also revealed the social conditions and political dilemmas in China in late twentieth century. In addition, it involved a review and reconceptualization of the class theory dominant from the 1950s through the 1970s. This, too, was not only a rational analysis from a new social-critical standpoint, but also a reencounter with the social emotions of former socialist culture, through one of the key concepts of cultural studies—emotional/perceptual structure.

Perhaps even more important, cultural studies unleashed an enthusiasm among humanities scholars for real-world interventions, drawing out social, cultural, and scholarly practices both inside and outside the academy. During this period, Wang Hui's "Restructuring and the Historical fate of China's Working Class"⁶ and many social and cultural analyses published in *Dushu* magazine began to directly and indirectly influence new public policies in favor of workers. Many scholars of cultural studies engaged closely with the late 1990s literary "writing from below," migrant choirs, migrant schools, and the new rural construction movement. Their research on the working-class culture of the former northeastern industrial base during the socialist period—the "national protagonists" of the 1950s through the 1970s and the multiple dialogues between them and the related literary and cinematic productions that followed—created a vibrant sociocultural space outside both mainstream social trends and the operations of disciplinary cultural studies.

Similarly, the theory and practice of gender in cultural studies were different from existing Chinese women's and gender studies, which had taken their lead from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women and from international NGOs. Instead, the cultural studies scholars were focused on connecting with women at the grassroots level to summarize and disseminate their alternative social practices. For example, in 2005 the Thousands of Women Worldwide for the Nobel Peace Prize, organized with the participation of Chinese cultural studies scholars, became a special gender and cultural studies initiative in China. This cultural action, explicitly focused on workers and activists, was a lasting

⁶ "Gaizhi yu Zhongguo gongren jieji de lishi mingyun—Jiangsu Tongyu jituan gongsi gaizhi de diaocha baogao" [Restructuring and the historical fate of China's working class: An investigation report on the restructuring of Jiangsu Tongyu Group Co., Ltd.], *Tianya*, no.1 (2006): 27–46.

effort to document, compose, and disseminate the life stories of grassroots women. From then to now, a social network between the women and cultural studies scholars came into being, and they continue to visit, support, and encourage each other. The project inspired the reassessment of cultural studies in the academy.⁷

The racial dimension of cultural studies included an expansive new vein of study that took account of China's ethnic minorities as part of the global discursive field. It recognizes the history and contemporary conditions of China's ethnic minority regions and embraces a multifaceted dialogue with Euro-American postcolonial discourse.

The most specific and prominent rationale and stance in Chinese sociocultural practices was the political study of history and memory: historical writing, memory and forgetting, and the cultural and intellectual practices that revolved around Chinese history, especially contemporary history. The theme of history and memory in contemporary Chinese history is highlighted because the history of the twentieth century (i.e., modern Chinese history) is itself a discursive field full of ruptures. The narrative of twentieth-century history was a direct extension of Chinese sociopolitical practice. Therefore, in the broad arena of cultural studies—the multidisciplinary and multifaceted rediscovery and re-narration of contemporary history—critical reflection on history and memory was not a historical turn within the humanities but more of a repoliticization of the humanities and social sciences disciplines or even a cultural battlefield in a Gramscian sense. The main historical narrative choices of the 1980s began with the era of reform and opening up and connected back to the history of Republican China before 1949, leaving out the history of the 1950s through the 1970s. Against this montage of historical narratives and the conventional strategy of creating a continuous and coherent history of twentieth-century China within the narrative logic of the nation, the work of cultural studies on history and memory began with the sorting out of the relevant historical facts of the Chinese revolution and then seeing the Chinese revolution as the key to understanding the Chinese way. At the same time, this work also included arguing that the Chinese revolution and the practice of socialism in China are an important historical legacy, not a debt, for the twenty-first century and the future. Cultural studies work on history and memory was not only a contestation over

⁷ Chen Shunxin, ed., *Duocai de heping—108 ming funü de gushi* [Colorful peace—108 stories of women] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2007).

historical narratives, but also an intervention in the ongoing cultural-political construction of a future China.

This reassessment and recuperation of the Chinese revolution and socialist practices between the 1950s and 1970s colored the discussion of culture and reproduction under the class proposition of Chinese cultural studies. The work of cultural studies on history and memory also summoned China's world map between the 1950s and 1970s: to the cultural memories and emotions of the countries and peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America it added the conditions and struggles of the Global South in the midst of international discussions of globalization and anti-globalization. It once again opened up for question the world filled and dominated by Europe and the United States. Scholars who held and shared the position, vision, and method of cultural studies analyzed the resistance of the Nepalese people, pursued and studied the semiotic guerrilla warfare of the Indigenous subjects in Mexico, and visited and discussed popular movements, community building, alternative politics, economic and cultural practices in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁸ But at the same time, they also attempted to provide a new vision and framework for Chinese society and culture in the twenty-first century.

The significance of cultural studies in China in the end of the twentieth century is not fully captured by seeing it as yet another imported discipline. Cultural studies' positions, concepts, and methods constituted a multifaceted, multi-perspectival, multidisciplinary response and force for intervention. Through cultural studies, a new kind of critical social stance was established in Chinese thought and scholarship, and it succeeded in producing a wealth of constructive contributions.

The Disciplinarization of Chinese Cultural Studies

The establishment of cultural studies as a new discipline within the college system has a clearer and simpler lineage. In 1995 the Cultural Studies Studio (also called Cultural Studies Workshop) was formally established at the Institute of Comparative Literature at Peking University, and at the same time cultural studies was set up as a concentration for master's students at the institute. The head of the workshop, Dai Jinhua, began offering the course Theory and

⁸ Dai Jinhua and Liu Jianzhi, eds., *Mengmian qishi—fusiling Makesi wenji* [The masked knight—the collected writings of vice commander Marcos] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006); Liu Jianzhi and Samir Amin, eds., *Dikang de quanqiu hua* [The globalization of resistance], 2 vols. (Beijing: Remin wenzue chubanshe, 2009).

Practice of Cultural Studies for students of the institute and the Department of Chinese Language and Literature. In 1998 the Cultural Studies Association of Taiwan (CSAT) was established in Taipei. And in 1999 Lingnan University launched Hong Kong's first bachelor's program in cultural studies, and the following year it established the Department of Cultural Studies, which also offered master's and doctoral programs in cultural studies. In April 2000 two important journals were launched: *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, an English-language academic journal in Taiwan edited by Chen Kuan-hsing and Chua Beng Huat, and *Cultural Studies*, edited by Tao Dongfeng, Jin Yuanpu, and Gao Bingzhong. Also in 2000 the Institute of Comparative Literature at Peking University established a doctoral program in cultural studies. And in November 2000 the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), affiliated with the College of Liberal Arts of Shanghai University, was established, with Wang Xiaoming as its director.

In 2002 Shanghai University launched the first academic website for cultural studies in China. Soon thereafter a number of universities, including Nanjing University, Sichuan University, Shandong University, Capital Normal University, and Shanghai Normal University, were allowed to open a second-level discipline of cultural studies in their Chinese departments or colleges of arts and to offer cultural studies courses at the graduate level. Since September 2003, Lingnan University has been offering a two-year part-time MA in cultural studies, of the sort of "amateur education" that the Birmingham school advocated, taught by cultural studies scholars from mainland China and Taiwan. In July 2004 the Program in Cultural Studies of Shanghai University was established, becoming the first cultural studies educational institution in mainland China.

An important fact related to the occurrence of cultural studies in China may help to describe and locate the special functional significance of cultural studies for late twentieth-century China. Unlike the comparative literature in China, the genesis of cultural studies was accompanied by the emergence of a new interregional linkage that took as its foundation an anti-capitalist and anti-global consensus. The interactions among scholars of cultural studies from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan forged a connection among left-wing scholars in Asia. Scholars from mainland China and Hong Kong not only attended the inaugural conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Taiwan (CSAT) in 1998, but they also participated in the planning and running of the conference. (The membership of CSAT, with the exception of a small

minority from the social sciences, had come close to a “collective relocation” of the original Comparative Literature Association of Taiwan. That they had become part of this new group of leftists from around the region marked a change in academic culture and, at the same time, the formation of a new intellectual and cultural landscape in the post–Cold War era.) Perhaps more important than the cultural studies field “bridging China” was the creation of the English-language academic journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. Dependent upon universities in Singapore and Taiwan (edited by Taiwanese scholar Chen Kuan-hsing and Singaporean scholar Chua Beng Huat), the founding editorial board of this academic journal not only brought together left-wing cultural studies scholars from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but also closely associated itself with an Asian social movement group ARENA (Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives). The journal was prepared and edited by a number of former scholars from Asian universities and social movements who were leading the fight against capitalism. The journal was initially titled *Yundong* [Movements] to emphasize the social and practical orientation of cultural studies, but was later renamed (for academic reasons), keeping the English word “movements” as the background element on the cover design of the journal. The development of cultural studies directly led to the connection and interaction among left-wing scholars and critical intellectuals in Asia.

Similar to the process of disciplinarization of comparative literature, and unlike the emerging cultural studies in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which were mostly located in university departments of foreign languages, cultural studies in mainland China also took place and grew within the disciplinary constructs of Chinese language and literature departments. Yet, the radical changes in Chinese thought and scholarship that emerged in the name of cultural studies—and occurring in multiple fields, dimensions, and forms—had effected a convergence: socially organic reacquisition of left-wing positions of social critique, political economics, alternative interventions, and critical intellectuals. The discipline of cultural studies, rooted within the academy, had from the very beginning presented a distinctive and even centrifugal force because the disciplinary construction of cultural studies in China differed from others within Chinese departments—comparative literature, modern contemporary literary studies, and literature and art. Moreover, the disciplinarization of cultural studies in China was driven by the urgent need to respond to rapid changes in Chinese society. As China developed new internal divisions—metropolitan China versus rural China, coastal regions versus inland China—the gap between

developed and underdeveloped regions widened continuously, and people's social positions brought with them vastly differing perspectives within the discipline.

In the meantime, in the process of its disciplinarization cultural studies had revealed problems shared by the humanities, social sciences, and the entire intellectual community in China after 1980. In these four decades, China had absorbed yet another wave of foreign scholarship and theory. This most recent wave of postwar Euro-American scholarship reached a peak in the early 2000s—the era of the arrival and development of cultural studies in China. However, as is often the case, the focus had mostly been on the theoretical texts themselves, largely neglecting inquiry into the dynamics of the social reality in Europe and the United States that gave rise to these theories. In the process of disciplinary evolution, cultural studies had lacked historicization and contextualization. Therefore, even if we put aside the “Euro-American centrism” or “Western worship” inherent in Chinese culture in the twentieth century, the landing of Euro-American theories stripped of their history and discursive contexts encouraged a tendency to absolutize or universalize these theories. For cultural studies, a field of thought and scholarship that is in fact highly local and interventionist, the problem with universal theories is particularly pronounced. By ignoring the history and social structure of postwar Britain, research on ethnography, everyday life, and subcultures cast aside the prerequisite of focusing on working-class communities; by ignoring the international status of postwar America as the historical condition for the social formation of a middle-class subject, it was difficult to grasp the “revisionism” of cultural studies—as discussed by media scholars John Fiske and Henry Jenkins, respectively.

Thus, within the disciplinarization of cultural studies, although there was sociocultural analysis that emphasized and valued the historical materialist and political-economic vein, it was dispersed among the more abundant responses and descriptions of the media explosion and technological revolution—especially the restructuring of the social ecology and cultural landscape of contemporary China by digital technologies. As a result, material culture and everyday life, urban space, fan culture, auditory culture and sound studies, medicine and the body, posthumanism, science fiction, and digital media technologies have become self-selecting foci within the discipline of cultural studies, and most have adopted a highly approving, even protective stance toward them.

The establishment of cultural studies as a discipline, in a sense, alleviated the “poverty” of humanities, successfully expanding the authorship, textuality, and

aesthetic center of the humanities to address processes of cultural production, production mechanisms, social institutions, and media technologies. However, the attempts at historicization mostly failed to meet the proposition of politicization.

As the second decade of the twenty-first century begins, the challenges and dilemmas facing cultural studies, both inside and outside the academy and the discipline, are becoming more and more pronounced. In the United Kingdom, where cultural studies originated, and in Europe and America, the left-wing stance of social critique in cultural studies has been attacked, repressed, and rejected by conservative forces from around the world. More directly, the movement toward a globalized academy and disciplinary system, as well as the establishment of disciplinary evaluation systems, is rapidly closing off and inhibiting interdisciplinary thought and academic practice, blocking or even eliminating the paths and spaces for social interventions called for by cultural studies. Accompanying the fervor and prosperity of cultural studies among humanities disciplines in colleges is the fading of cultural studies' distinctive ideological and scholarly repoliticization due to disciplinarization. Related but not limited to the ideology and social practice of cultural studies is the social and cultural practice of identity and identity politics. On the one hand, the socio-political connotations of identity are suppressed and torn apart, while on the other hand, identity politics and affective politics are effectively appropriated by populism or nationalism with right-wing overtones.

Perhaps the creative role of cultural studies in humanistic thought is passing into history, but there is no doubt that the thirty years of its emergence and development have changed the original appearance of the humanities as a whole, as well as their intellectual and scholarly genealogies. In the future, cultural studies may collapse into a discipline with clear boundaries, norms, and methods, or its spirit and aspirations may be revived under another name or banner.

Translated from the Chinese

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