

**THEORY, HISTORY, CULTURE:
CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF THEORY IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA ***

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This essay inquires into the relationship between theory, culture and history as it appears from a perspective at the end of the twentieth century. The substance of the essay consists of analyses two attempts to "sinicize" theory: the Maoist effort of the Yan'an Period "to make Marxism Chinese," and an effort by Chinese sociologists in the early eighties to "make sociology Chinese." On this basis, the essay argues that the effort to confront theory by culture is by no means transparent, but has different meanings at different times. Such efforts may produce new theories, but any such production is likely to be quite ambivalent in its confrontation with culture, such changes are likely to qualify received theory but preserve it as the foundation for its modifications. Secondly, where culture acquires a strong voice in theory, the result is likely to be the disintegration of theory rather than its enrichment, or the broadening of its scope. This would seem to be the situation at the end of the century as evidence accumulates of the disintegration of received theories, which is articulated in postmodern/postcolonial questionings not only of theory and culture but of history as well. An idea such as the "sinicization of theory" may no longer be relevant, the essay suggests, both because it is increasingly difficult to speak of a "Chinese" culture in the face of a proliferation of Chinese societies with different historical trajectories, but also because such an idea is parochial in ignoring other cultural traditions making their claims on theory. History itself has been challenged in recent years as a particularly modern Western way of knowing the past. The essay concludes nevertheless that there is much to be gained from viewing theory, culture, and the interactions between the two, historically.

INTRODUCTION

Viewing the question of theory in twentieth century China from a vantage point at century's end presents an interesting problem. Theories of society, politics and culture imported from EuroAmerica, which are the theories under consideration here, have played an important part in Chinese politics for over a century. In their utilization of these theories to unlock the secrets of Chinese society, and to guide it toward a new future, Chinese intellectu-

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als, especially radical intellectuals, displayed the same confidence in the universalist claims of theory as the European and American thinkers who originally had formulated the various theories they drew upon. Their undertakings were to have momentous historical consequences.

In spite of brave assertions to the contrary, and the seeming invasion of politics and all areas of knowledge by theory at century's end, it seems to me that what is missing at the present moment is this faith in theory to do the job of guiding the present into the future-in China, or the world at large. Theory has lost its innocence, as its universalist claims have been deconstructed in one intellectual realm after another (including the natural sciences) to expose the hegemonies built into all theories. Scepticism toward the claims of theories to be informed by a rational grasp of the world that transcends the constraints of culture or history has also deprived theory of the role assigned to it earlier as a means to human transformation and liberation-which appears now as a cover for different, particularly modern, forms of domination. The consequences have been especially devastating for those theories, such as Marxism, that took human liberation as their explicit goal. The failure of these theories in practice to deliver on their promises has played no little part in generating scepticism toward the universalist claims of theory. But the scepticism is a more general one that calls into question all theories of modernity, including those that seek to universalize the claims of capitalism, or the nation-state. More than ever, perhaps, theory serves purposes of social and human engineering to overcome the contradictions that threaten existing arrangements of power. Few may take at face value the pretensions that social engineering is free of political and ideological motivation; but the recognition only confirms the conviction that the answer to the deployment of theory in social engineering is to be found not in the formulation of alternative theories, but in escape from theory.

The role theory played in the century-long revolution in China, and the fate of the revolution, is quite relevant to understanding this transformation in attitudes toward theory in general. So are the issues of history, culture and theory that were brought forth in the course of the Chinese revolution. It is these issues that I take up in the discussion below. The question of theory in twentieth century China has many facets to it. One could speak to the changing political circumstances that invited theory after theory into Chinese political life; one could speak to the reversal in the histories of theories whereby the most recently popular theories in EuroAmerica found their way into Chinese thinking, to be traced back to their origins with progressive advances in their appreciation; one could speak to the relationship between the unfolding of problems in Chinese society and the successive

appearance of theories of the state, of culture, of political economy and social theory, back to cultural theory; one could speak to the embroilment of theory in the relationship between war, revolution and culture; one could speak to the invasion of Chinese thought by theories of feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, etc.

I would like to focus in this discussion on one particular dimension of the question of theory that I think has been a lasting preoccupation of Chinese intellectuals: the relationship between theory and cultural identity.

In China, as in other societies that have experienced modernity as EuroAmerican colonialism or domination, theory has been called into question for the cultural assumptions that inform it; whether or not a theory that has been formulated out of one cultural situation may be applicable, in other words, to another, a completely different cultural situation. In some ways this is one aspect of a general problem presented by theory, especially to historians who have always been suspicious of the erasure by theoretical generalization of the complexities of history. There is also the problem of the historicity of theory; that theories, while they aspire to overcome history by pointing to transhistorical generalizations, are limited in their statements by the historical circumstances that produced them. Thinkers from Marx to Weber have acknowledged that theories were as good as the histories that informed them, even if they were driven ultimately by universalist aspirations. The question of the applicability of theory across cultural boundaries is in some ways an instance of these broader problems.¹ The historicizing of theory finds a logical conclusion in the break-down of assumptions of universality for theory; as is visible in recent tendencies to identify theory with national cultures—as in US theory, German theory, French theory, etc.²

The additional dimension raised by the question of culture in contexts such as the Chinese, however, goes beyond problems of history in theory, for what it suggests is the quite important question of the entanglement of theory in cultural imperialism; or at the very least, of the distortion or erasure of the characteristics of one culture by their subjection to the cultural assumptions built into theories formulated under alien cultural circumstances. That such transposition of theory has taken place under circum-

¹This question has been raised forcefully in the historiography of China in Cohen (1984).

²It is noteworthy that this break-down of theory into national cultures parallels the break-down of capitalism into national or (continental (such as Asian) capitalisms; in other words, the abandonment (in theory, at least) of universalism with the so-called globalization of capitalism. See, for instance, Charles Hampden-Turner and Alfons Trompenaars (1993). The counter-intuitive distinguishing of universalism from globalism is apparent in many areas of contemporary thought.

stances of unequal power adds to the significance of the question. The question of culture in theory raised under such circumstances have become an important issue at century's end in postmodernist or postcolonialist questionings of theory.

To complicate matters further, the questioning of theory is accompanied by equally fundamental questioning of culture and history that problematize historical or cultural readings of theory which have been informed in the past by the location of culture and history in the nation. Indeed, it is the coincidence of questions pertaining to theory with those on history and culture that may distinguish our times from earlier questionings of theory, that deprive questionings of theory from their anchoring in history and culture. The repudiation of earlier assumptions concerning the coincidence of culture with identifiable national boundaries, in other words assumptions of national cultural homogeneity, also calls into question notions of "cultural imperialism," as it is no longer quite evident whose culture we speak of at either the sending or the receiving end of imperialism.³ Theory here appears as a problem not just in its entanglement in relations of domination between nations, but more immediately in its implication in relations of domination within nations.

History presents equally troubling questions. As in the cases both of theory and culture, the universalist assumptions of historical thinking have been called into question on the grounds that history as it has been practiced over the last century has been complicit in relations of domination within and between nations. This is apparent, as in the case of theory, in the breakdown of historical practice into national traditions; but also in the repudiation of the nation as the unit of history, which erases the complexity of the histories encompassed in national histories. On the other hand, even more fundamental challenges to history have been voiced by postcolonial intellectuals who argue that history, as a cultural artefact of EuroAmerican modernity, not only has been used to justify colonialism and domination, but even more fundamentally, to erase by its teleologies alternative ways of thinking about the past.⁴

Theory, history and culture, then, appear in contemporary thinking in immensely complicated relationships. The relationships are, on the one hand, deconstructive; with theory deconstructing the claims of culture and history, history deconstructing the claims of theory and culture, and culture

³John Tomlinson (1991) provides an important discussion of the problems associated with the idea of "cultural imperialism."

⁴For a discussion of this problem with reference to the Indian thinker, Ashis Nandy, see Dirlik (forthcoming).

deconstructing the claims of history and theory. On the other hand, theory, history and culture also appear in their complicity in relations of domination between and within nations; where theory reinforces the claims of history and culture, history reinforces the claims of theory and culture, with culture performing the same task for history and theory. In either case, what these intellectual developments have brought forth with relentless insistence is that it is no longer possible to think of any of these concepts outside of politics, or more specifically, the politics of modernity. The "repudiation of metanarratives," which for Jean-Francois Lyotard represents the fundamental intellectual characteristic of "the postmodern condition" holds equally for contemporary attitudes toward theory, history and culture (Lyotard, 1984).

Chinese attitudes toward the relationship between theory and cultural identity have ranged from outright rejection of foreign theories in the name of cultural integrity to the erasure of all considerations of culture in the name of theory, as exemplified most prominently in two movements that are also revealing of the political and ideological orientations that shaped those attitudes: the New Life Movement of the 1930s, and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. More interesting in their intellectual implications, however, are those efforts to reconcile theory and culture; what has been called "sinicization" or "sinification" of theory.

I will examine below two such efforts that are widely different in political context and intention, that in spite of their differences are revealing of some of the problems involved; problems, I should note, that anticipate contemporary problems of theory, history and culture. One is the "sinicization of Marxism" (Makesi zhuyide Zhongguohua) undertaken by Communists during the Yan'an Period, credited to Mao Zedong but more likely the product of the joint effort of Party intellectuals clustered around Mao.⁵ The other is a discussion in the early 1980s by Chinese social scientists of the possibilities of "sinicizing sociology" (shehuixue Zhongguohua) (Cai and Hsiao, 1985) that its participants described as a "sinicization movement" in sociology. In juxtaposing these quite different instances of the confrontation between theory and cultural identity my goal is, on the one hand, to point to concerns in Chinese thinking that cut across temporal and political divides, and, on the hand, to show that these concerns themselves are historical, subject in their articulation to changing historical circumstances.

⁵See Wylie (1980). See also Dirlik (1997, 1983). My remarks on the "sinicization of Marxism" below are drawn from these articles, which discuss in much greater length the theoretical questions presented by "sinicization."

MAO ZEDONG: MAKING MARXISM CHINESE

In his famous essay, "On New Democracy," Mao wrote that, in applying Marxism to China, Chinese communists must fully and properly integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution or, in other words, the universal truth of Marxism must be combined with specific national characteristics and acquire a definite national form (Mao, 1965-1967: 380-81).

"On New Democracy" was the crowning achievement of the "sinicization of Marxism," or perhaps even the intended goal to achieve which was the motivation underlying it. "New Democracy" referred to an economic and political formation (a mixed economy to facilitate economic development, and an alliance across classes-under Communist leadership-in the pursuit of national liberation) suitable to China's immediate needs; but more significantly it also represented the insertion of a new stage in historical progress (between capitalism and socialism or, possibly, as a parallel to them) appropriate to all societies placed similarly to China in the world. Its premises were: (a) that the Chinese revolution was part of a global revolution against capitalism, (b) that it was, however, a revolution against capitalism in a "semi-feudal and semi-colonial" society to which national liberation was a crucial task, and, (c) that it was also a national revolution, a revolution to create a new nation, and a new culture, which would be radically different from both the culture inherited from the past and the culture imported from abroad-including the culture implied by a universal Marxism. It is important to note, however, that even at the moment of asserting the importance of the nation in the midst of War, and a rephrasing of the goals of a Communist Revolution which made the latter sound like an updated version of Sun Zhongshan's Three People's Principles (*sanmin zhuyi*), which was not quite unintentional, Mao should reaffirm the universal claims of Marxist theory.

Chinese students of Mao's thought, following his example, have conventionally described the "sinicization of Marxism" as "the integration of the universal principles of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution." (Shu, 1989: 6) This seemingly straightforward formulation conceals the complexity of, not to say the contradictions presented by, the procedures of integrating universal principles (or theory) with revolutionary practice under particular circumstances. Stuart Schram has described "sinicization" as "a complex and ambiguous" idea (Schram, 1971: 112), which is evident in the conflicting interpretations to which "sinicization" has been

subject. At one extreme, "sinicization" appears simply as the "application" (yunyong) of Marxism to the revolution in China, with no implications for theory; which would seem to be confirmed by Mao's own metaphors in later years of Chinese society as the "target" for the "arrow" of Marxist theory, or a "blank sheet" upon which theory could write its own agenda. At the other extreme it represents the absorption of Marxism into a Chinese national or cultural space, irrevocably alienated from its origins in Europe. In between are of interpretations which hold that while "sinicization" left Marxism untouched at its basics, it brought to Marxism a Chinese "air" or "style." (Mao, 1976: 260-61)

It is arguable that Mao's Marxism accommodated all of these different senses of "sinicization." In the end, "the sinicization of Marxism" did not achieve an "integration of the universal truth of Marxism of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution," if by that we understand a seamless synthesis which dissolved Marxism into China's circumstances, or integrated China's peculiarities into the existing conceptual framework of Marxist theory. Mao's Marxism did not consist of merely applying Marxism to China's circumstances (which suggests too passive a role for what is Chinese in it, that is contrary to his insistence on the project of "sinicization" in the first place), or of just developing it (which, while arguable, is misleading to the extent that it suggests the absence of any disjuncture between Mao's Marxism and Marxism in general). The very tortured way in which Mao presented the project of "sinicization" may offer the most persuasive clue that the "sinicization" of Marxism entailed an effort to "integrate" what might not be integratable in the above sense of the term. It is worth quoting at some length the passage in which Mao used the term "sinicization" for the first time (which is also one of the fullest descriptions of what he meant by it of which I am aware) to convey a sense of the reasoning that, rather than argue out the logic of the project it presupposes, seeks instead to suppress the contradictions of the project by the force of its metaphors:

Another task of study is to study our historical legacy, and to evaluate it critically using Marxist methods. A great nation such as ours with several thousand years of history has its own developmental laws, its own national characteristics, its own precious things. ... The China of today is a development out of historical China. We are Marxists historicists; we may not chop up history. We must evaluate it from Confucius to Sun Zhongshan, assume this precious legacy, and derive from it a method to guide the present movement. ... Communists are Marxist internationalists, but Marxism must be realized through national forms. There is no such thing as abstract Marxism, there is only concrete Marxism. The so-

called concrete Marxism is Marxism that has taken national form; we need to apply Marxism to concrete struggle in the concrete environment of China, we should not employ it in the abstract. Communists who are part of the great Chinese nation, and are to this nation as flesh and blood, are only abstract and empty Marxists if they talk about Marxism apart from China's special characteristics. Hence the sinicization of Marxism, imbuing every manifestation of Marxism with China's special characteristics, that is to say applying it in accordance with Chinese characteristics, is something every Party member must seek to understand and resolve. We must discard foreign eight-legged essays, we must stop singing abstract and empty tunes, we must give rest to dogmatism, and substitute in their place Chinese airs that the common people love to see and hear. To separate internationalist content and national form reveals a total lack of understanding of internationalism (Mao, 1976: 260-61).

The tortuousness of this passage is partly a consequence of its politics. Raymond Wylie has suggested that the project of "sinicization" was part of intra-Party politics, whereby Mao asserted his leadership against his Soviet-trained rivals who were more adept at Marxist texts than he; and one can almost hear in this passage Mao's efforts to best his rivals by resorting to "the Chinese airs that the common people love to see and hear," not to speak of his reference to "foreign eight-legged essays" (Wylie, 1980: 76-99). But this is taking too narrow a view of the politics involved. By the time we reach the essay, "On New democracy," slightly over a year later, the politics also included, as I have already suggested, the project of capturing for the Communist Party the mantle of Sun Zhongshan's *sanmin zhuyi*. Even that, however, does not go far enough in capturing the political stakes involved because it still remains within the realm of the strictly political, ignoring the issues raised by "cultural politics." The intellectuals surrounding Mao had been involved in the mid-1930s in the politics of culture which was of urgent concern to Chinese intellectuals during that decade; too much preoccupation with the myth of the May Fourth Movement in the historiography of modern China has distracted attention from the fact that by far the most interesting and sophisticated discussions of culture were conducted in the 1930s, when Chinese intellectuals confronted the cultures of modernity, including Marxism, with serious questionings;⁶ it is possible even to assert that the discussion of culture as a problem achieved an unprecedented maturity in these years, when the concept of culture itself became the object of inquiry. Communist intellectuals were fervent participants in the discus-

⁶See, for example, the discussions in the collection published under the title of *Xian jieduande Zhongguo sixiang yundong* (Yiban shudian, 1937).

sions.

Even more fundamental were the questions raised by a Communist movement that had been forced into the countryside out of necessity, that had to confront differences within Chinese society; not only urban-rural differences, but differences between one locality and another. The problem to a significant extent was empirical; the empirical complexities of an agrarian society that could not be contained easily in the categories of a theory formulated out of the characteristics of urban industrial society, and a politically and culturally quite different one at that. The categories of Marxism such as class had to be drastically modified to account for other categories (such as gender or ethnicity), or contingent factors of concrete localities, if they were to serve the cause of revolution rather than throw obstacles in its way. Dogmatic loyalty to the categories of theory ignored the fact that in reality attitudes toward the revolution were shaped not just by class interests but by the whole web of social and political relationships that defined social and political location. The categories concealed in other words the fact that political and social orientations were "overdetermined" by the conjuncture of a multiplicity of social relations, of the past and the present, and of material circumstances and intangible cultural legacies. Mao's recognition of these problems is evident in his well-known own on-the-spot investigations of local situations.⁷ If recognition of the historicity (in both a temporal and a spatial sense) of categories was necessary to revolutionary survival, however, they also created a predicament for revolutionary teleology. The "confrontation with the concrete," which brought the messiness of everyday life into theory, also threatened to fragment theory and its categories into so many empirical contingencies, depriving theory of its ability not only to make sense of the immediate environment but to guide the revolution into the future. If theory must be historicized to guide practice, history had to be overcome by the theory.

The problems presented by revolution in the countryside were not only empirical "sociological" problems, but were also deeply cultural. If Communism was to be "indigenized," the Communists had to learn to speak the languages of the many cultures they encountered. The "Sinicization of Marxism" ultimately had to vernacularize the very language of theory, without losing sight of the theory itself because, as Mao insisted, following Lenin, there could be no revolutionary practice without a revolutionary theory. The contradictions presented by this task should be obvious. Theory was intended to unlock the secrets of social situations that in their very

⁷A striking example is *Report from Xunwu* (Thompson, 1990)

complexity revealed the limitations of theory; on the other hand, theory was to be articulated in many local languages without losing the integrity of its own language, which was almost unavoidable unless it was policed through organizational discipline, which would oversee the absorption of local dialects into theory, sort of to speak, to guarantee that the confrontation between theory and culture led not to the dissipation of theory but to a theory enriched by the confrontation, and broader in its ability to account for the cultural diversity of its environment. The cultural confrontation between Western theory and Chinese culture was to be played out at many levels, not just at the level of an abstract national culture but the many local cultures that constituted the national culture but also suppressed in its abstraction.

The "Sinicization of Marxism" is best grasped, I suggest, as the creation of a vernacular Marxism in the course of revolutionary praxis. We may recall that the appearance of a concern among Marxist intellectuals with language as a problem in revolution followed on the heels of Communist retreat to the countryside, that required new modes of communication and cultural activity to mobilize the Party's rural constituencies.⁸ The "sinicization of Marxism" was the culmination of these new requirements, recast in the language of "national form" in response to rising nationalist sentiment through the thirties. Mao's Marxism may be viewed at two different levels. First, the national level; where he sought to "naturalize" Marxism by arguing that while Marxism as theory might have been formulated abroad, it was as natural an expression of Chinese society and history as it was of any other society in the world; in fact that the universal principles of Marxism could only be confirmed through their different embodiments in different historical situations. At the same time, he rephrased Marxism in a Chinese language, almost literally, so that his discussions of Marxism, richly dressed in their allusions to historical events and parables, might have been incomprehensible to a foreign Marxist while they would have been readily comprehensible to his various audiences in China, intellectual or otherwise; to use his own metaphor, he endowed Marxism with "Chinese airs" (Sichuan Social Sciences Academy, 1982). We must not overlook, however, translation is not a one-way process; Marxism may have acquired new characteristics as it was translated into a Chinese idiom, but that also brought the world-views imbedded in Marxist concepts into the language of translation, also trans-

⁸One of the first to draw attention to the problem of language was Qu Qiubai. See Pickowicz (1981). A good discussion of Communist cultural activity may be found in Ellen Judd (1983). Indeed, some Chinese authors, on the basis of Mao's revolutionary practice, carry the origins of "sinicization" back to the early thirties.

forming it in the process. What made Mao's Marxism authentically radical (and not just an excuse for nationalism) was not his nationalization of Marxism, which after all his far less radical successors share with him, but his localizing of Marxism within the nation at the level of everyday life-indigenizing it, in other words; to the point where Marxism appeared as a natural growth from Chinese soil. In the same issue of Chinese Culture where Mao published "On New Democracy," an essay by Ai Siqu, one of Mao's close collaborators in the project of "sinicization," wrote that,

Marxism is a universal truth(yibande zhengquexing)not only because it is a scientific theory and method, but because it is the compass of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat ... That is to say, every country or nation that has a proletariat or a proletarian movement has the possibility (*keneng xing*) and necessity (*biran xing*) of giving rise to and developing Marxism. Marxism can be sinicized (*Zhongguohua*) because China has produced a Marxist movement in actuality (*shiji*); Chinese Marxism has a foundation in the internal development of Chinese economy and society, has internal sources, it is not a surface phenomenon. ... The Chinese proletariat has a high level of organization and self-awareness, has its own strong party, has twenty years of experience in struggle, has model achievements in the national and democratic struggle. Hence there is Chinese Marxism. If Marxism is a foreign import, our answer is that Marxism gives practice (*shijian*) the primary place. If people wonder whether or not China has its own Marxism, we must first ask whether or not the Chinese proletariat and its party have moved the heavens and shaken the earth, impelled the masses of the Chinese nation to progressive undertakings. The Chinese proletariat has accomplished this. Moreover, it has on this basis of practice developed Marxist theory. ... These are the real writings of Chinese Marxism, the texts (*shujue*) of Chinese Marxism. ... Marxism cannot but assume different forms depending on the different conditions of development of each nation; it cannot assume an international form globally. Presently, Marxism must be realized through national forms (*minzu xingshi*). There is no such thing as an abstract Marxism, there is only concrete Marxism. The so-called concrete Marxism is Marxism that has taken national form (Ai, 1940: 31-32).

The Marxism that Chinese Communists inherited was a Marxism that had already been deterritorialized from its original terrain in European history. Ai's statement metonymically recognizes the difference of Chinese Marxism from an international Marxism, but in the process also restates the relationship between Chinese and European (or any other) Marxism as a part-part relationship within a Marxism that that as a whole has now been removed from any territorial associations. Synecdochically, he reterritorializes

Marxism upon a Chinese terrain, by asserting that Chinese Marxism is “intrinsicly” as representative of a whole Marxism as any other. In this simultaneous recognition of a global Marxist discourse as a pervasive unity and the discursive appropriation of Marxism in Chinese terrain is expressed the fundamental essence and the contradictoriness of the structure of Mao’s Marxism, and the procedure of “sinicization” of which it was the product.

Mao did not come to Marxism as “a blank sheet of paper, and there are tantalizing traces in his thinking of various traditions in Chinese thought.⁹ Recognition of these traces, however, is quite a different matter from assigning to them a determining power, which in the end serve only to capture him in a Chinese cultural space, without having to account for what that space might contain. Mao’s dialectic with its insistence on everything containing everything else is often reminiscent more of certain currents in Buddhism and Daoism than the dialectic of Hegel and Marx—especially with its refusal to recognize an end to history. It is important to recognize nevertheless that these traces are mediated by and refracted through the problematic of revolution not just as a political but also as a cultural problem. This is neither to deny Mao’s nationalism, nor the legacies of the past that may have entered his thinking as formative moments; but it is to foreground the revolutionary activity that guided both his nationalism, and his appropriation of historical legacies to that end. It is also to stress the contradictions (in the sense both of unity and opposition) between theory and history, the past and the present, and, between narrowly national and broadly national liberationist goals.

I suggested above that the “sinicization of Marxism” is traceable to the social and cultural problems presented to theory by guerilla warfare in the countryside from the early 1930s, and that it was recast within the problematic of the nation only later in the decade, in response to the demands of the anti-Japanese War. It is appropriate at this point to draw attention to a problem in this whole idea of the “nationalization” of Marxism, which may shed further light on Mao’s relationship to the Chinese historical legacy. In the discussion above, I have employed the term “sinicization” even though it is quite misleading in its implications. The terms “sinicization” and “sinification” suggest the assimilation of others to Chinese ways, biasing interpretation to a culturalism that has long nourished off dehistoricized notions of Chineseness, with a long-established tradition that swallows up all challengers in a Chinese cultural space. It is important to underline that unlike

⁹See, for examples, Wakeman (1975); Metzger (1977); Schwartz (1965); Liu (1971).

other terms such as *tonghua* (making same) or *Hanhua* (making Han) which the Latinized "sinicization" has been used to translate in the historical literature, the term employed in the case of the "sinicization of Marxism" is *Zhongguohua*, literally "making Chinese," with the clear implication of "nationalization." Marxism, in other words, was not being brought simply into a Chinese cultural but a Chinese national space, with significant implications, because it is quite clear from the texts discussed above that *Zhongguohua*, while it referred to an existing Chinese national space, also implied that the culture defining this national space was in the process of creation. When Mao stated in "On New Democracy" that the new Chinese culture must be national, popular and scientific (the latter a stand-in for Marxism), he obviously was not referring to the textual traditions of Confucianism, or other aspects of high-culture that earlier had been the referent for "sinicization," but to the culture of the people at large, as it would be transformed by Marxism. The concept of nation involved here is not a culturalist but a historical one, the nation as ongoing historical creation in which theory, history and culture, as I have discussed them above, would all be participants. What is at issue here is not assimilation of the Other to the culture of the self, but the transformation of the self in the process, launching a new historical trajectory the point of departure for which is the concrete present, in which the past and the West (in the forms of capitalism and Communism) are copresent in a contradictory relationship (that, if I may refer to the analysis at the beginning, coexist in a deconstructive as well as a constructive relationship).

The same contradictoriness applies to the status of imported theory in its relationship to indigenized practice. The urge to bring concretely Chinese circumstances, a Chinese "structure of feeling," or a Chinese voice into theory is expressed in the procedures of sinicization in the elevation of "practice" to an equal status with theory, as stated clearly in the quotation from Ai Siqu, where the practice of revolution serves as "texts" of Chinese Marxism, equal in their claims to the literal texts of theory. Theory provided new insights into Chinese society, and new ways of grasping its workings, but it did not provide either a thoroughgoing analysis or a clear-cut guide to *praxis*; on the other hand, *praxis*, which revealed the limitations of theory, nevertheless could not do without theory which provided it with its teleology, a teleology that was not just ideological but bound up with China's placement in the world of capitalism. Here theory and practice appear once again in a contradictory relationship, which for its resolution requires the presence of the interpreting agent to read any particular situation with the aid both of history and theory. Historicized to account for concrete circum-

stances, theory can no longer be taken as the formulation of universal laws, that could anticipate the consequences of its application, but as a tool of interpretation, a hermeneutic instrument, that was itself subject to reinterpretation at all times in its confrontation with practice. Statements about the universal claims of Marxism to the contrary, we are all aware of the priority Mao assigned to practice, which has made his Marxism suspect, but which was in fact a consequence of his very Marxism as a revolutionary operating in circumstances that had not been anticipated in theory, who had to deal with theory not as an abstract problem but as a social and cultural problem as well-at its most basic, as a problem of language. Teleology in Mao's Marxism is not a theoretical teleology, but a teleology that is willed by the interpreting agent, who holds on to the promise of theory while abandoning the faith that theory in fact offers any such promise.

SINICIZING SOCIOLOGY

The "Sinicization of sociology" (or more literally, making sociology Chinese, *shehuixue Zhongguohua*) initiated by intellectuals in Taiwan, around 1980, but bringing together sociologists from Hong Kong, Singapore, The People's Republic of China and the United States, shared with its Communist predecessor little more than an urge to bring a Chinese voice into theory, this time sociological theory.¹⁰ It had none of the urgency of a revolutionary struggle, or the political stakes that involved getting the better of political rivals of one kind or another. It was, moreover, an undertaking of scholars who viewed it more as a proposition to be considered than a

¹⁰According to the accounts of this movement, "sinicization" was already in the air in Taiwan in the late seventies, but that the movement got under way with a conference in 1980 organized by the Institute of Ethnology of the Academia Sinica, "Shehui yu xingwei kexuede Zhongguohua" (The Sinicization of Social and Behavioral Sciences." It was followed up by a conference at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1983, "Xiandaihua yu Zhongguo wenhua" (Modernization and Chinese Culture), which included Chinese scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and the People's Republic. While the conference was broader in scope, "sinicization" apparently became a hot topic of discussion. The concern reached the United States the same year, when at the Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies in Tempe, Arizona, a round-table discussion was held on the subject of "Sinicization of Sociology: A Collective Portrait of Some American Trained Chinese Sociologists." The Institute of Ethnology Conference issued in a volume, *Shehui ji xingwei kexue yanjiude Zhongguohua* (Sinicization of Research in Social and Behavioral Sciences), edited by Yang Guoshu and Wen Chonggyi (Taipei: Zhongyanyuan minzu suo, 1982). American sociologists published their own volume, *Shehui zhuyi Zhongguohua* (hereafter, SHXZGH), that offered Chinese American sociologists' take on the issues involved. Cai Yongmei's introduction to the latter volume gives a personal account of these conferences and publications. For similar concerns for "indigenizing" sociology in Korea, see Park and Chang (1999).

task to be accomplished at all costs, or one that required the suppression of opposing voices. It is remarkable, then, that it should have encountered problems of reconciling culture and theory that are quite similar to the ones discussed above. Part of the answer may be that the sociologists who were involved faced questions of translating universal theory into everyday practice, not dissimilar to their Communist predecessors except in its politics; unlike, say, historians, they were intensely aware as professionals both of the universal demands of theory, and sensitive to the problems of encompassing diverse social and cultural realities in one grand theory.¹¹ This time around, however, the discussion was carried out under vastly different circumstances of what it meant to be Chinese, and an ideological and analytical openness that shed light on the earlier effort discussed above. On the other hand, this discussion, too, suppressed contradictions that were brought forth by the confrontation of theory with culture, which come into relief against the backdrop of its predecessor.

That the political stakes involved in the earlier discussion were absent from this later one does not mean, therefore, that there were no politics. The politics of culture in theory was still there, voiced with even greater sophistication than would have been possible for Chinese intellectuals in the thirties. While the practical problems of the sociologist was one element in the calls for "sinicization," the political conjuncture of the late 1970s and early 1980s played an even more important role. Accounts of the emergence of the problem by the participants point to the "maturing" of sociology in Taiwan in generating practical questions of research and theory. These practical questions derived their urgency, however, from changes in the politics

¹¹Bringing a Chinese voice into scholarship has been a concern in recent years in many disciplines, most prominently in history. The concern in the latter case, however, has been almost exclusively with "historiographical traditions" of high culture, that follows civilizational divides reminiscent of Orientalist mappings of the world. Orientalism may be a misnomer here or conversely, be particularly pertinent, because Chinese historians do the same. See, for example, a report on a conference on the crisis of history, "Shixue wang nali zou?" (Whither History?), in *Jindai Zhongguo* (April 30, 1989: 1-14), in which the distinguished historian from Hong Kong, Du Weiyun, was the keynote speaker. The speech is devoted exclusively to the accomplishments of historical high culture in China, and how its ideals might be reconciled to "Western" historiography. This question has dominated historiographical discussions in conferences in which I have been a participant. It avoids, needless to say, the changes experienced by Chinese populations everywhere. Sociologists, on the other hand, like anthropologists, draw attention to everyday experience in their dealings with the confrontation between theory and culture-which incidentally may have something to say about the classification of disciplines into nomothetic and idiographic categories. The intrusion of disciplines into the discussion of the relationship between culture and history is also an indication of how much things have changed since the 1930s.

of identity in East Asia that accompanied the re-opening of the People's Republic of China, the withdrawal of US recognition from Taiwan, the flourishing of East Asian economies that not only brought forth new social problems but also brought scholars from various Chinese societies into closer contact with one another. The re-opening of China meant in this case the re-opening of China to sociology, which had been closed out since the early fifties by the monopoly of state-sponsored Marxist ideology; sociologists of Chinese origin who were invited to help re-establish sociology became more aware in the process of the special needs of Chinese society, and the insistence of PRC sociologists on the necessity of "Chinese characteristics" (which included the continued centrality of Marxism). The withdrawal of US recognition from Taiwan made Taiwanese sociologists more aware of the need for "self-reliance," which was reinforced by a growing awareness of a specifically Taiwan identity that appeared in the seventies, accompanying rapid economic growth that brought forth new social problems, but also the beginnings of democratization (Lin 1985; Hsiao, 1985a).

We may add here two further considerations. First is the newfound empowerment of Chinese societies in East Asia with economic development, that may have contributed to the self-assertiveness implicit in calls for "sinicization." Hsiao Hsin-huang, for instance, applies "world-system analysis" to argue that Chinese sociology suffered from a peripheralness vis-a-vis the United States core that paralleled the economic relationships between the capitalist core and the East Asian periphery; "sinicization" represented the self-assertion of the periphery. How this came about requires further consideration, as the self-assertion of sociologists coincided temporally with the Confucian revival that got under way these same years, and overlapped with the "movement" in sociology. Secondly, self-conscious or not, there is some parallel between Chinese intellectuals' self-assertions against US domination of sociology, and the growing protests in the realm of culture against the complicity of disciplines such as history, anthropology and sociology, not to speak of area studies scholarship, in US domination of the world, that has since then issued in the cultural deconstructionism of postcolonial criticism. The parallel needs to be taken seriously especially since the younger generation of Chinese sociologists involved in the "sinicization movement," like the other intellectuals of Third World origins involved in postcolonial criticism, had been educated in the United States (and Great Britain) in the sixties and seventies. The volume to issue from US scholars is almost inescapably a product of the 1970s in its attentiveness to issues of world-system analysis, feminist concerns, etc.¹² The references to "borderlands" sociologists and "borderlands" sociology may indicate fur-

ther affinities with postcolonial discussions getting under way at this time; ironic in a movement to nationalize sociology, but also indicative of the problems it faced (Cai, 1985: 9-10).

According to Lin Nan, whose essay led the volume of US sociologists' contributions to the discussion, the "sinicization of sociology" was intended "to blend (rongna) Chinese social and cultural characteristics and national character into sociology."¹³ It was different from the creation of a "Chinese sociology," with scholarly and professional goals, or the application of sociology to Chinese society. The level of sinicization was to be determined "by the extent to which sociology acquired Chinese social and cultural characteristics and a Chinese national character." But "sinicization was an undertaking that transcended regional and national boundaries; social and cultural characteristics and national character entailed structures, relations between the group and individual, and different layers in society, which could all be blended into theory and method" (Lin, 1985: 32-33). As examples of Chinese social and cultural characteristics that sinicization might entail, Lin specified family and kinship relations, centralized power which affected relations of hierarchy at all levels, the value systems and practices that bolstered the system, the consequences for society of a unified script, factors involved in China's development in an East Asia context that might offer different views on development than, say, in world-system analysis. Bringing forth new kinds of evidence in these areas, and the reformulation on that basis of theory, might, according to Lin, effect a theoretical revolution that might resolve the "paradigm crisis" in sociology. This required, he suggested following Thomas Kuhn, a community of scholars working to this end-which was an opportunity for Chinese scholars.

While Lin's discussion stressed structural factors, other contributors to the volume, especially those working with specific areas such as social psychology, alienation, women's sociology, etc. placed greater emphasis on everyday values that needed to be brought into the process of "sinicization." Taiwanese sociologists in particular, according to Hsiao who conducted surveys among them, thought it was necessary to bring into consideration Chinese ethical values, as well as the concepts in which those values were imbedded; such as the "transmission of the Dao" (daotong), humanness (ren), Heaven (tian), propriety (li), *yinyang*, etc. (Hsiao, 1985a: 307).

In either case, however, whether dealing with structures or cultural val-

¹²See Zhou (1985), where the author stresses the centrality of women's issues, but also qualifies, as with other Third World feminists, the claims of a universalist feminism.

¹³Lin (1985: 32). This essay was delivered initially at the Tempe meeting.

ues, scholars involved in the discussion for the most part agreed that the goal of "sinicization" was not to divide Chinese sociology from the world, but to enrich sociology world-wide. According to Hsiao's survey, scholars in Taiwan were divided almost evenly on the question of whether or not it was desirable to create a national sociology (Hsiao, 1985a: 301). Hong Kong and Singapore sociologists for the most part were not interested at all in the question of "sinicization." US scholars, on the other hand, viewed "sinicization" as a form of "indigenization" (*bentuhua*), which was little more than a means in the long run to "globalization" (*quanqiuhua*). The most adamant about "sinicization" were scholars from the People's Republic, who displayed a chauvinistic (*shawenzhuyi*) attitude even toward their Chinese compatriots in their affirmation of Chinese characteristics (Hsiao and Li, 1985: 315-16).

In this case, too, in other words, "sinicization" covered a broad ground: from the transformation of Chinese society through theory, to the outright rejection of national differences in theory (which perceived difference only as a matter of the circumstances to which theory was applied), to the opportunistic uses of theory for national ends (*yang wei zhong yong*, making the foreign serve the Chinese) at the hand of mainland scholars, who saw no further cultural significance in theory, to the conviction especially of US sociologists that theoretical formulations to emerge from "sinicization" that would produce a paradigm revolution in sociology. With the possible exception of mainland scholars, "sinicization" meant to Chinese sociologists not the capturing of sociology in a Chinese national space, but to bring into sociology Chinese voices, sentiments, and the social and cultural characteristics of Chinese society in order to create a more cosmopolitan and globalized sociology; to use a word that has become popular since then, a multicultural and multiculturalist sociology. They were anti-Eurocentric in a sense since they knew that sociology bore upon it the stamp of its origins in nineteenth century industrial Europe, but their specific focus was on the contemporary hegemony of US sociology, which provoked national claims on sociology in Europe as well. Even in the case of PRC sociologists with their "chauvinism," we need to recall that the national characteristics they claimed also included as a formative moment the legacy of the "sinicization of Marxism." There were other Chinese sociologists, referred to by Hsiao, who may have perceived a possible contradiction between "sinicization" and the universal claims of sociology, but this was largely muted-especially for US sociologists who referred to themselves as border sociologists, and outsiders as such to the workings of sociology in the PRC and Taiwan, and whose identification was primarily with their professional bases in the US.

The contradictions presented by “sinicization,” ironically arose more from a conflict between concretely Chinese and broadly universalist theory, but rather from the problems Chinese societies presented to the project of “indigenization.” The differences in historical context between this discussion and the earlier, Maoist, project of the “sinicization of Marxism” are nowhere more evident than in the meaning of “Chineseness.” Mao’s vernacularization of Marxism, I suggested above, proceeded at two levels; the national level, and the level of everyday life which presented a much more complex picture of Chinese culture than at the level of the nation. These internal differences, however, could be interpellated into one national culture in the process of formation.

The situation in 1980 was vastly different, as war, revolution, colonialism and migration had by then created vastly different Chinese societies that called the very notion of Chineseness into question. The different implications of indigenization (in addition to *Zhongguohua*, *qiyuhua* or regionalization, and *difanghua* or localization, all of which are encountered in the discussions) could hardly be contained in one conception of a Chinese nation or culture shared by all the participants.¹⁴ Strangely enough, a general discussion of the problems of “sinicization,” such as that offered by Lin Nan, did not even refer to the question, possibly because his self-image as an “outsider” made him reluctant to take up an issue of great sensitivity. It was brought up by Hsiao Hsin-huang, who referred in his concluding essay to the volume to “four Chinas” differences among which needed to be respected (Hsiao, 1985b: 339). The question came up also in Hsiao’s discussion of sociology in Taiwan, a discussion of national minorities in China addressing issues of assimilation, and in the discussion of women’s sociology, referred to above, where the author suggested that differences between the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan provided an opportunity for comparing women’s status in Chinese societies with different economic systems (Hsiao, 1985a; Guo, 1985; Zhou, 1985: 122-23) The only one discussion to meet it head on was a discussion on alienation by Ma Liqin. What he had to say is worth quoting at some length:

In determining the objectives of reasearch, we must use a definition of “China” that is open-minded and broad. What is the “China” in the term sinicization (*Zhongguohua*)? The China here needs to be taken China in a

¹⁴In the course of the eighties, as attention turned to Taiwanization, *Zhongguohua* was downplayed whereas *bentuhua* became more prominent in the thinking of Taiwan social scientists, with a specific focus on Taiwan. I am grateful to my student, Chuang Ya-chung, for pointing this out to me. Chuang was a graduate student in Taiwan in the late eighties.

broad sense, including Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and all the societies of Chinese Overseas. This broad understanding of China has great significance for research into alienation. First, [the idea of]China must take as its main assumption Chinese, and Chinese cultural life; so that wherever there are Chinese and Chinese culture there is Chinese society, and wherever there is Chinese society there is China. This way, we are not limited by politics and its territorialities ... Secondly, giving priority to Chinese society over the state in defining China, we have [an idea of China] that is richer in its dynamism, transformations and variety (Ma, 1985: 206).

Ma concluded his essay by observing that to make China more dynamic and democratic, it might be better to help Chinese understand the workings of society, in other words to emphasize "the sociologization of China" (*Zhongguo shehuixuehua*) (Ma, 1985: 209).

CHINESENESS, THEORY AND HISTORY

What do these two instances of sinicization have to tell us about the more general problem of the confrontation of theory with cultural identity? The most obvious, and the most fundamental, answer is that "sinicization" is not a transparent term, but is subject to different interpretations under different circumstances, and in accordance with different political motivations. This also renders highly problematic the idea of the cultural transformation of theory (conceived itself as culturally bound) that is implied by the term. Culture and theory, too, are subject to historical change in the problems they present and in the different ways in which they are understood at different times. The question involves both the changing fortunes of theory, and the way in which theory and culture are deployed in describing the interaction between the two, as well as the outcomes that may be expected from their confrontation.

It is possible, as Lin Nan suggested, that the confrontation of theory with a Chinese social and cultural situation may reveal sufficient anomaly to force a "paradigm change"; in other words, produce a richer, more all-emcompassing theory. The sinicization of sociological theory, which one author described as a "long and arduous process," (Guo, 1985: 163) may yet issue in such a paradigm change; but that I think is a moot question. The evidence of the "sinicization of Marxism" would suggest that the confrontation of theory with an anomalous situation is just as likely to lead to the fragmentation of theory as to its enrichment-which may in fact generate new theories, but to the detriment of the universalistic claims of theory. This

is also suggested by developments in postmodern and postcolonial criticism which have called into question theoretical claims to universality, as well as the relationship between theory, culture and history. I would like to reflect here on the politics of theory that may lead us to one or another conclusion.

There is little reason to think, other than a privileging of Chinese-Western or Chinese-US relationship why such confrontation of theory with its cultural others should be restricted to sinicization; in other words, to a Chinese confrontation of theory. Social and political theories of various kinds originating in Europe and North America have already undergone significant transformation or breakdown in their confrontation with non-Western societies, including China: examples range from the appearance of Marxism-Leninism early in the century, to the emergence of "dependency theory" and "world-system analysis" in the 1970s, to contemporary questionings of development and globalization in which there are visible traces of the legacy of the Chinese Revolution. Indeed, the movement to sinicize sociological theory may be viewed as one instance of proliferating cultural contradictions between EuroAmerican and postcolonial societies that account for the current problems of culture, theory and history (Robertson, 1992: 19-20).

Why "sinicization" should be endowed with a privileged status in these contradictions is an important question, as it is also bound up with the particular mode in which it was expressed in the discussion of the eighties. We have little *prima facie* reason to assume that sinicization must issue in the enrichment of theory rather than in its break-down; that, having indigenized theory in Chinese circumstances, it will then return to theory to render it more global, and to enhance its claims to universality. Placing it against the backdrop of the earlier effort to sinicize Marxism may be quite revealing in this regard.

It is difficult to argue that the sinicization of Marxism produced a new theory; one that could dislodge or transcend the universalist claims of Marxism. The idea of "new Democracy" was a genuine innovation in the Marxist conceptualization of historical stages on the way to Communism, and would have some appeal in Third World societies placed similarly to China (Dirlik, Healy and Knight, 1997). Mao's vernacularization of Marxism gave his Marxism a populist cast that may account for the appeal of his Marxism in the revolt of the 1960s against not just capitalism but Soviet-style Marxism (Meisner, 1982). His rendering of Marxism into a hermeneutic implicitly challenged the scientific assumptions of theory, and suggested that Marxism might be applicable under a diversity of social circumstances which opened up new frontiers for revolutionary activity, even if it also introduced a serious problem into Marxism in divorcing political action

from its social moorings in the theory.

On the other hand, if these innovations make it possible to speak of a "Chinese Marxism," this Marxism remained as a special national case of Marxism, which retained its status as a general theory. Nor did Maoists suggest at any one point that questioning the status of Marxism was their goal. Mao's "populism" was contained ultimately by his insistence on the ultimate priority of class. Having historicized Marxism in the name of the exigencies of revolutionary practice, Chinese Marxism nevertheless reasserted the universal scientific claims of theory, evident most readily in a refusal to question the teleology of theory even when most evidence pointed to the absence of such a teleology in the workings of Chinese society. This may not be surprising, given that the leadership role assumed by the Communist Party in China could be justified only by this teleology; what is important is that considerations of Party power also limited the extent to which theory could be deconstructed through the agencies of history and culture.

Sinicization of Marxism may have achieved an "integration of universal theory with the concrete circumstances of Chinese society" in the practice of revolution; what it produced at the level of theory was not a new theory, but a predicament for it: the predicament of the dissipation of theory into so many national and local situations, which was far more fundamental in its implications than the production of a new theory, for it questioned the fundamental assumptions that made universalistic theory possible. Some theorists of Western Marxism have credited the French Marxist Louis Althusser with breaking down "the ontological and epistemological foundations of western thinking—destabilizing the oppositional hierarchies of positivity/negation, necessity/contingency, importance/inconsequence, reality/representation" (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 28). What they often ignore is the direct debt Althusser acknowledged to Mao's Marxism for inspiring his work (Althusser, 1970: 90-94). The "sinicization of Marxism" would have far-reaching consequences, through the influence of Althusser, on the breakdown of theory globally.

While Mao and his colleagues continued to insist on the priority of theory, in their elevation of practice to the level of theory, they created at least the possibility that theory was open to endless interpretation. Perhaps more significantly, sinicization insisted on the importance of introducing a Chinese voice into theory that would have lasting consequences. As a reflection on Chinese society through the language of Marxism, and a simultaneous reflection on Marxism through the social and cultural circumstances (and even the language) of Chinese society, Mao's Marxism may be viewed best as what Jurgen Habermas has described as a "practical discourse"

(Habermas, 1973: 2, 10-16). The notion of practical discourse recognizes Mao (and the Chinese practitioners of Marxism) as the subjects who reflect on Marxism; their relationship to a global Marxism then appears not as a subject — object relationship, but as an inter — subjective one. Thus, theory may retain its universality, but it is made available to interpretation by the revolutionary subject. Teleology could contain the dissipation of theory; on the other hand, there is no reason why teleology itself could not be appropriated for a nationalized Marxism. What is in the end, a Chinese-style Communism, as Maoists called it in the heyday of their power, or socialism with Chinese characteristics, as Mao's successors prefer? In sinicization were the seeds of the disintegration of socialism into so many historical trajectories, which in subsequent years were to sprout into as many different socialisms as there were socialist nations. In the case of China, Marxism has been rendered gradually into a Chinese national tradition; as is evident in the formulation adopted by the Communist Party under Jiang Zemin's leadership since the Fifteenth National Congress in 1997: *Malie zhuyi-Mao Zedong sixiang-Deng Hsiaoping lilun* (Marxism — Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought-Deng Hsiaoping Theory). It may be noteworthy that in this formulation "theory" appears also in its interpretive function (with Jiang Zemin as its practitioner?).

As Mao and his colleagues tried to contain the dissipation of theory into local theories by reaffirming its claims to universal truth, the "sinicization of sociology" in many ways sought to do the same by reaffirming the ultimate validity of the theoretical universals of sociology, which would be enriched in its global claims through the very process of indigenization. For those who saw globalization as the goal of "sinicization," "sinicization" represented no more than "a process and method" (Cai, 1985: 14). Ma Liqin adds that "sinicization" represents "a transitional necessity in the process of 'developing Chinese sociology,' and a method to that end" (Ma, 1985: 208). What is recognized in either case is the dual goal of "sinicization": to bring sociology into a national cultural space, where it is to be domesticated to lose its foreignness; and to incorporate this domesticated sociology in a universal sociology, thereby introducing into the latter a Chinese voice that would make sociology both more global and more cosmopolitan, reinforcing its universalist claims. The whole procedure is not dissimilar to the Communist undertaking of "sinicization" which sought to make Marxism less foreign in China, while insisting on a Chinese voice at the global level. The difference is mainly in political goals and reference; this time around not to an international "brotherhood" of revolutionaries, but to an international profession.

Unlike the Communists devoted to the goal of national liberation, concerned about the hegemony over national culture of a universalist theory, in this case the loyalties were more ambiguous. I am referring here both to ambiguities created by simultaneous loyalty the global and the local, and the problems presented by difficulties of defining the Chinese nation, and a national culture, in a situation of global dispersal of Chinese populations. Unlike in the case of the Maoists who could suppress the cultural diversity of China with the rhetoric of national unity (and still did in the discussion of the “sinicization of sociology”), by the 1980s it was impossible to suppress the contradictions presented to the Chinese culture idea of the coexistence of a multiplicity of Chinese societies with different historical trajectories—a situation that has gotten more serious since then. In such a situation, it was hardly possible to speak of “indigenization” as if that could be equated with the nation. The idea of a Chinese culture then appears more than ever as a “strategy of containment,” where the myth of cultural unity may be sustained against the evidence of history.

The problems presented by the fragmentation of Chineseness were compounded by the different relationships of the various Chinese societies to its global environment, especially the “hegemonic” center in the United States. The conflicts referred to above over the issue of “sinicization” were bound up with these relationships. The contradictions are most readily visible in the case of Chinese — American sociologists, with their self — identifications as “border” intellectuals (a common metaphor of postcolonial criticism), who were at once “outsiders” to Chinese and American societies and, from a different perspective, insiders to both. But they are also visible in the differences claimed by sociologists from different Chinese societies, with PRC sociologists most adamant about their distance from the global hegemonic center.

These differences also cast in a different light the interpretation of “sinicization” as a process of indigenization with ultimate globalization as its goal. Why indigenization should lead to globalization rather than fragmentation, as in the case of Mao’s Marxism (or other postcolonial fragmentations of theory) is not self-evident. I suggested above that while “the sinicization of sociology” may be viewed as one instance of postcolonial challenges to EuroAmerican or American centrism, it was also empowered in the case of Chinese societies by the immense prestige that accrued to them with successful performance in the global capitalist economy. If Chineseness was privileged in the discussions of “sinicization,” this empowerment had much to do with it, as it did with the Confucian revival at the time. In other words, what is at issue here is not just a traditional Sinocentrism, but a

development on the global scene. To the extent that globalization refers to a rearrangement of global hegemony by admitting into it the resurgent economic powers of East Asia, it is easy enough to accord to "sinicization" a privileged place that sets it apart from other postcolonial encounters with theory: it promised further globalization, and the consolidation of hegemony, not its fragmentation through indigenization. The hegemonic partnership suggested here, however, is a fragile one, made possible by suppressing the contradictions in its assumptions, as well as its contradictions to a larger global environment. This has become evident since then in the assertion of "Asian values" against the cultural assumptions guiding "Western" theory. The preoccupation with "Asian values" appeared about the same time as the effort to "sinicize sociology," and overlapped with those efforts. In spite of the effort of scholars to contain a possible contradiction between the two by a globalized, albeit still, monistic theory, the contradictions created by the intrusion of culture into theory are readily visible in conservative as well as radical attempts to find alternatives to Euro — or America — centric interpretations of Asian societies.

It may make sense, when there is so much shared culture, to speak of a globalized theory that is multi-vocal rather than parochially universalistic. But such efforts may ignore the contradictions built into the very undertaking at the risk of falling into ideological wishful thinking. The contradictions involved are not just contradictions between Chinese societies and US theories, or contradictions between these societies themselves. They also invite consideration of contradictions presented by the global context of "sinicization": in other words, other societies that demand voices in this multi-vocality. Having been "sinicized" and globalized, is theory then going to be also Indianized, Islamicized, etc. Can the unity still be maintained if other cultural voices are to be brought into it?

And what is the culture that is to be brought into theory? As I noted above, the so-called Western theory that is to be confronted with Chinese culture has already been transformed by its many confrontations with other societies, and is now practically in a state of break-down, challenged most radically by voices from within; or more accurately, no longer sure of what is within and what is without. Much the same may be said of "Chinese culture," which is already a product, and has been for some time, of the internalization of a century of confrontation with EuroAmerica; as evident most readily once again in the case of the People's Republic of China, whose spokespeople guilelessly speak of a Chinese culture of which Marxism is an integral part, even though it is now supplemented by a born again Confucianism which the revolution sought to eradicate for nearly a century

— which is an indication not of the subjugation of history by culture, but, as the pairing indicates, the appropriation of cultural legacies in accordance with contemporary needs. And where do we locate Chinese culture, or an inside or outside to it, when the very notion of a Chinese nation has become deeply problematic?

That a notion of “culture” repeatedly finds its way into the consideration of theory (among other things), it seems to me, is itself evidence of the fragility of arguments that take globalization as their premise, because it is the process of globalization that itself renews the reification of culture in the problems of power and identity that it presents. As globalization is accompanied by fragmentation at different levels, as is frequently noted these days, culture is brought back into defining political authenticity and identity, even though few agree on what culture may mean, except as a means to policing boundaries of identity when all other social forces threaten to abolish it. And there is no reason why, theory, rather than serve the purposes of communication across boundaries, should not be broken down along the lines of these policed cultural boundaries; as it has along fissures of race, gender and ethnicity.

It might make sense, under the circumstances, to shift the grounds of the discussion to history. I do not mean by history here either a culturalism that parades in the guise of historicism, that subjects history to the prerogatives of an unchanging cultural continuity that is more imagined than real. Nor do I mean history in any reified modernist sense that entraps the present in the past and colonizes the future with the present, which itself has become highly problematic. What I have in mind is history in the sense of historicity; that accounts for temporal and spatial divisions, and is the overdetermined product of the conjuncture of forces that go into the making of everyday existence, of which the repertory of the past is only one moment, albeit an important one.

Theory and culture are both products of historical conjunctures, as historical conjunctures contain theories and cultures as their determining moments. That a thoroughgoing historicization of theory and culture introduces a deep uncertainty into the meaning of either of these terms makes it unlikely that it may find easy acceptance among political ideologues, professionals devoted to the discovery of laws governing human behavior, or the everyday subjects of history who need some measure of stable meaning just to live; for as the assumption of cultural unity gives some meaning to social existence, theories about culture and history serve to order that existence. But we need to recognize also that human activity, and the way human beings endow their activities with everyday meaning, are part of the

process that produces new theories, cultures and histories which resist the classifications that are demanded by the demands of a political or professional urge to theorize life so as to bring to it an intellectual order that it may not have. The point is not just to create new theories that substitute new universalisms for old, satisfy abstract national or cultural desires, or to entrap theorization in pasts of its own creation — which promise little more than perpetuating human oppression in novel forms. The point is to create theories that point to possibilities suppressed in theories of order; so as to enable humane relations that give new meaning to human existence. Where in the repertory of past and present human existence the inspiration for such creativity comes from is at best a secondary consideration.

APPENDIX: A NOTE ON THEORY

An explanation is necessary concerning various problems associated with the concept of theory; what is understood by theory here and, the even more complicated question, in light of the question of culture raised in this essay, of whether or not theory means the same thing in the two contexts at issue here, the “Western” and the Chinese. Theory has been subject to diverse interpretations even in Western thinking, and even within the same field. In his classic work published first in 1906, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, Pierre Duhem defined physical theory as “a system of mathematical propositions, deduced from a smaller number of principles, which aim to represent as simply, as completely, and as exactly as possible a set of experimental laws” (Duhem, 1962: 19). Duhem insisted that theory was a representation and “not an explanation” (Ibid). His discussion not only acknowledged the possibility of different conceptualizations of theory in different fields, but, even more interestingly, national cultural differences of style in representations of theory itself (most importantly in his case, between the English versus French/German approaches).

There is no need here to belabor the even more vexing problems presented by theory as in social, political and cultural theory, where normative and ideological elements are almost an inevitable part in the constitution of theory. I think that most of us working in these fields understand theory to mean the formulation of abstract relationships that seek to make sense of diverse historical phenomena; and that more often not these relationships are expressed as relationships between concepts, derived from experience or experiment, that are themselves generalized representations of individual phenomena which lend themselves to generalization nevertheless in their apparent regularity. The “grand theories” or “metanarratives,” associated

with the names of K. Marx and M. Weber, or, more recently, of “world-system analysis, are of this type. For historians, however, theory may simply mean the use of abstract concepts such as class and gender in organizing and/or explaining historical data. Theory mediates the relationship between the particular and the general; it suggests patterns to the relationship, but it is different from laws in being open (at least theoretically) to other possibilities of interpretation. Regardless of the ultimate truth claims for theories sometimes made by their proponents, theories are inevitably limited in their claims, as they have no way to foreclose the simultaneous existence of competing theories; for the concepts that inform any one theory foreground certain aspects of reality over others, which means that they leave room for other concepts that reveal reality differently.

Theorization, the activity of producing theories, therefore, is an interpretive act in its choice of concepts, and their relationships, to represent reality. The choices are political because they have political consequences even where they are not intended politically. Theory is also historical in the sense that it is in no position to anticipate the changing meanings attributed to concepts in different historical contexts, the changing relationships between concepts, and the very question of the relevance of concepts to changing social realities. It may be possible in the physical sciences to judge the validity of competing theories by making them serve as “prophets” (in Duhem’s terminology), to “tell us the results of an experiment before it has occurred (Duhem, 1962: 27). Social theories may aim at similar prophecy, but in their case the prophecy is mediated by history, which rules out the regularity to be found in nature (although historicity often needs to be considered in the natural sciences as well). It is not that there is no regularity in human behavior or relationships, but that more often than not, such regularity may be established only at the cost of the denial of difference. An example is the concept of class. There is little question that the concept of class opened up new lines of inquiry into social relations that had been hidden from view earlier. It is easy enough by those opposed to class analysis to point to its inability to account for social organization or political behavior, since the concept of class, like all concepts of social representation, is fuzzy along the edges because it is overdetermined; intermediated in other words, by other social relationships. However we need also to ask if the realities represented by the concept of class have equal saliency at all times, as in our day, for instance, when it is overshadowed by concepts of gender and race. The effort to render class relationships into a “natural” condition of humanity, as under Communist regimes, on the other hand, required the classification of all individuals into class categories, which rendered a concept with liberat-

ing intentions into an intellectual and social prison-house. Theorization in social and cultural studies, if it is to avoid such imprisonment, must recognize of necessity that social and cultural theories are loaded with uncertainties and ideological implications, subject to the meanings attributed to them under different circumstances.

Theorization as interpretive activity is built into the very term. The American literary scholar Wlad Godzich, tracing the etymology of theory, observes that the Greek *theorin*, meaning "to see, to behold," referred to the adjudication of complex situations by the "theoros," who were appointed to pass judgment on complex situations that involved the possibility of different interpretations. The "theoros" passed the judgment, but the judgment itself was conditioned by considerations of order in a concrete historical situation. Theorizing under the circumstances involved not only interpretation, but also considerations of public order (Godzich, 1986: xv).

To turn to the other question, whether or not theory means the same thing in the Chinese context as it does in EuroAmerican contexts, it is necessary to note that while the question of vocabulary across cultural divides is a very vexing question, it needs to be approached with some care in order to avoid the culturalist assumptions built into the question itself. After all, theory has served as a means of communication across cultural boundaries (wherever those may be located), and simple differences in terminology should not lead to automatic assumptions about differences in understanding. The question needs to be raised nevertheless to avoid misunderstanding. The most commonly used Chinese term for theory, *lilun*, which could be translated literally as "discourse on principles," intimates not only the possibility of generalization on principles, but also that generalizations involve interpretations, since discourses on principles offer different portrayals of those principles. The term also carries implications that parallel in remarkable ways what Godzich has to say of theory in its etymology, which may explain why, in most twentieth century discussions of theory in China, theory often overlaps with "ism" (*zhuyi*). According to Wing-tsit Chan, *li* (principle), used as a verb, means "to establish order" (Chan, 1963: 260, fn23). Theorizing, therefore, means not only getting at fundamental principles of distinguishing right from wrong, but also that the procedures of doing so involve interpretation with an eye to settling disputes so as to achieve order. But there may also be a significant difference in connotation, that involves the question of order. The "theoros" were publically appointed officials charged with interpreting events. *Li*, according to a Chinese etymological dictionary, the *Cihai*, referred in some early Chinese texts (Guanzi) to a "prison-official" (*Cihai*, vol.2, p.28. Taipei: Zhonghua shu ju). [See also *Hanyu*

da cidian, vol.4, p.5686, def. No.13, which has citations from Sima Qian and Han Yu to the same effect. I am grateful to Victor Mair for bringing this source to my attention]. If that is indeed the case, the association of theory with a policing function may be much stronger in the one term, *li*, than in the other, *theory*, which is much more closely associated with the adjudication of difference, although that, too, involves a policing action of sorts. But we need to remember that we are talking about terminology, and abstract etymologies, which are not necessarily a guide to understanding twentieth-century usages.

The question of a Chinese or Western theory involves not different appreciations of the term "theory," but of different representations of reality through abstractions, the part representation plays in the appreciation of reality, and the social and political meanings attached to representation.

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