The Cold War, Depoliticization, and China in the American Classroom

Seven

THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, dealt a blow to the myth of globalization and revealed the stark relation between culture and geopolitics. Shortly afterward, a visit to the local library in a New Jersey town opened my eyes to the artifacts, weapons, and photos of war on prominent display. These relics recall the times of the world wars, military interventions, and the sacrifice of young men who grew up in the neighborhoods. If curious about China, a library patron would have no difficulty finding about thirty to forty books a few steps away. China-related books fall into two categories. One set romanticizes a long tradition of the oriental culture, and the other narrates the harrowing experiences of living in the Mao era and the Cultural Revolution. Books like *Red Azalea* by Anchee Min, *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang, *Red Flower of China* by Zhai Zhenhua, and the like belong to a familiar genre of autobiography. Under the heading of "history" at Barnes and Noble, these

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books tell stories of personal tragedy, tortuous bildungsroman, and purgatory experiences under the so-called totalitarian regime. The first set enshrines China in a comfort zone of oriental civilization; the second one paints a "Red China" as a menace to the free world.

An unconscious link came to the surface between weapons for national security and oriental fantasies. The memorabilia testified not only to the World Wars but also to the agenda of national security and military interventions in the Cold War. But the world in the early 1990s seemed to indulge in a celebratory mood, hailing the end of the Cold War and the end of history. The new zeitgeist declared the world flat and predicted that things would move on the level field of trade, capital flow, and consumption. The Cold War, with confrontations between the sovereign nation-states, mutually assured destruction, and ideological conflict, had somehow gone the way of the dinosaurs. The age of capitalist globalization, intoxicated with cosmopolitan sentiments and prospects, would erase national boundaries and launch individuals into a brave new world.

By conjuring up the spectra of the Cold War, the events since September 11 gave the lie to this neoliberal myth of globalization. The spectral evocations of old-fashioned geopolitics—Pearl Harbor, the world wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, a new wave of cold war and assertive nationalism—returned with a vengeance. It is as if the world had lived in a daydream of global connection and harmony, only to be rudely awakened to the rugged terrain of geopolitics, interstate conflict, security threat, border tightening, and national self-preservation. Beneath the euphoria of globalization, the ashes of the Cold War seemed to be smoldering all along. Does globalization signal any change in the system of nation-states? How does the end of history affect the production of subjectivity and area studies?

Globalization obscures the century-old intertwinement of capital and interstate geopolitics in the mist of cosmopolitanism. The triumph of a newfangled cosmopolitanism goes with the waning of socialist internationalism and Third Worldism. This has led to a general trend of depoliticization that hollows out political dynamics and subjectivity by erasing memories of social movements of the global sixties. A recall of the revolutionary past will hopefully provide an alternative political language and shed critical light on Chinese studies in the American classroom.

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The post–Cold War rise of transnational capitalism obscures the stark geopolitical landscape of tension and alignment between major nation-states during the Cold War, recasting the world as a cosmopolitan, free marketplace. In its unceasing expansion, global capitalism is said to be hostile to national territory and sovereignty, which resists and limits capital's horizontal "free" flow. Although the powerful nation-states were the real drivers of global capital expansion since the nineteenth century, capitalism in the late twentieth century appeared to cut loose from state control and wield a power "over a bounded and segmented social terrain."[1] For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, late capitalism in the high Cold War era already evinced a boundless appetite for world markets, labor, and resources, morphing into globalized flows and massive deterritorialization and breaking down geopolitical boundaries and state sovereignty.[2] Pitting capital's centrifugal dispersal against national sovereignty, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri see the entire history of modernity in terms of a tension between the modern state and denationalized capital. Globalization, beginning in the Cold War's waning years, bears witness to a "one-sided movement from sovereignty's transcendent position toward capital's plane of immanence."[3]

"The plane of immanence" captures capital's inherent transnational tendency marked by a self-running, inexorable logic. Like a natural law, the logic of capital is apparently unchecked and unimpeded by the nation-state. In the Cold War era, however, capital's freewheeling profile was not so obvious. Caught in the confrontation between sovereign nation-states engaged in what Mearsheimer calls "great power politics," the nation-state played a pivotal role in powering and advancing capitalism and modernization.[4] Examining the cozy alliance between the imperialist state and market expansion, and between the military-industrial complex and culture, Virginia Carmichael designates the cultural and intellectual dimension of the Cold War as "Cultural Cold War" or the military-industrial-academic complex. Integrating technoscientific knowledge with power and capital with overseas intervention, the Cold War was also an ideological and religious war, featuring a rhetoric, a narrative, a moral drama propelled by the Manichean clash between good and evil, capitalism and communism, modernity and tradition. The intertwined operation of power and legitimacy, of colonial domination and civilizational missions, ran on a dual track: the hard-core strategies went hand in hand with ideological justification. Scholars, researchers, media, and think tanks participated in the cultural cold war to

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furnish myth, imaginations, and narratives as part of the military-industrial megamachine.[5] Cold War ideology reflects a "cosmopolitan" impulse to picture foreign affairs as a liberal agenda of promoting human rights and democracy for all mankind. In the era of globalization, this liberal tendency escalated into a utopian vision of market, trade, and growth as the conduit for international cooperation and global democracy, generating a cosmopolitan aura of freedom, empire, rule of law, norms, and transnationalism.

A closer look, however, reveals that the Cold War rhetoric of democracy and freedom barely veiled the stark geopolitical aggressiveness of the powerful nation-states. Consider the Cold War rationale raised by George Kennan. In a 1948 secret State Department memorandum, Kennan urged that the United States should invest in the realpolitik of military and economic domination rather than indulge in moralistic rhetoric of human rights, development, and improved living standards. Alert to the fact that the United States had 6.3 percent of the world's population but possessed 50 percent of its wealth, Kennan warned of inflammable situations of social upheavals, such as revolution or anti-hegemonic movement. "Our real task" in the coming period, wrote Kennan, "is to devise a pattern of relations which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security."[6] The long-term interests of the United States would be best served by policy directed toward the maintenance and concentration of wealth, capital, and resources.[7] However, human rights rhetoric has never dropped out. The strategy combining realpolitik and modernization allowed a powerful nation to emerge, which "wielded a military stick and dollar carrot to forge imperialist empire such as man has never known before."[8]

In the name of modernization and development, capitalism during the Cold War spread a myth of cosmopolitanism. What lay behind the myth was military occupation, arms race, interfering with affairs of other nations, violation of treaties, and regime change, causing constant hot wars in peripheral regions. Driven by national self-interests and neocolonialism, capitalist expansion depended heavily on the military-industrial machinery for its smooth operation at home and abroad. The state and capital worked in cahoots to manage America's world agenda. As Carmichael writes, the Cold War agenda included "the national security state, with foreign policy priority over domestic; massive military development and buildup; overt and covert non-democratic political, economic, military, and cultural intervention in and manipulation of the affairs of the other nations; and the most effective and enduring dispersal and silencing of dissent in a (legally) totally enfranchised and constitutional democracy in history."[9]

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Recent talk of globalization, with its fiction of postnational, cosmopolitan world order, has thrown a veil over this realpolitik condition. The cultural and economic aspects of the Cold War came to the fore in the media and in public discourse. As culture and commodity, capital flows across a flat world of market, free trade, transnational trends, and financial investment. With the bipolar Cold War structure out of the way, the global superhighway seemed wide open for the realization of a liberal cosmopolitan order. Yet for all the euphoria, the rift has deepened between claims for democratic self-rule and military intervention.

The new cosmopolitanism arose on the heels of waning socialist internationalism and Third World movements of the global sixties. It has reshaped Chinese studies by hollowing out the political dynamics of social movements and by sweeping revolution into the dustbin. Fabio Lanza's recent book *The End of Concern* offers refreshing insights into this process. By unearthing the history of a group of Asian scholars buried under the rubble of the Cold War, Lanza invoked memories of Third World movements and China's socialist experiments. The concerned scholars broke away from orthodox Asian studies and rallied around the journal *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Sharing an affinity with the French Maoists such as Badiou and Jacques Rancière, the young radicals "framed themselves in opposition to the imperialist venture of Vietnam and to US policy in Asia in general."[10] They embraced revolutionary changes in China and rural reconstruction in developing Asian countries, drew lessons and critical insights from the socialist experiment, and identified with the aspiration for an alternative world. Their anti-imperial and anti-colonial stance prompted them to reflect and critique the separation of scholarship and politics in American academe. Decrying the complicity of mainstream Asian studies with the hegemonic powers, they probed into ideologies that undergirded the developmental model premised on modernization, orientalism, and neocolonialism. Although Lanza laments the retreat of the cohort's theoretic critique and the tragic fates of some scholars in the post–Cold War era, his work pulls the chestnuts from the flame, offering a critical perspective from the past to illuminate the present.

One major problem with contemporary Asian studies is the retreat of political consciousness in terms of depoliticization. To reiterate, "depoliticization" (*qu zhengzhi hua* 去政治化) describes the absence of public debate, intellectual reflection, ideological argument, and concern about public issues and global crises. In the amnesia of these big-picture issues, China's image has been neutralized into a developmental process on track with global capital. In the era when all nations seem to be jumping on the neoliberal

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bandwagon, the poignant irony is that China is back to square one, back to its old bourgeois beginning that Mao dubbed "old democracy." We recall that the bourgeois nation building, led by Sun Zhongshan and the Guomindang, was to make China in the image of the West. The Chinese Revolution under "New Democracy" reoriented the bourgeois national project into a socialist path, predicated on the people's democracy, mass mobilization, and social transformation. But beginning with the post–Cold War era, area studies reverted back to the shopworn modernization paradigm that cookie-cuts every nation to fit into the capitalist orbit. Chinese studies began to demonstrate how China has returned to the universal norm of West-led modernity. Scholars began to celebrate the positive role of foreign capital in breaking down the isolated and centralized system.[11]

This situation was precisely what the concerned Asian scholars critiqued and rebelled against. They looked at China as a mirror to reflect on and critique the scholarship trapped in Cold War ideology. Scholarly works on Asia "too often spring from a parochial, cultural perspective and *serve self-interest and expansion*."[12] Mortgaged to a depoliticized, objective approach rooted in a positivistic epistemology, the modernization paradigm sees China as a local instance that is being enfolded into the international norm. China was scrambling to "become like us."

As one of the concerned Asian scholars, Paul Cohen reexamined the links between the modernization paradigm, Cold War ideology, and imperialist expansion. American historians, as part of the system in shaping the American image of modern China, in the postwar years had also "taken a leading part in the creation of conceptual paradigms for understanding it."[13] Pitting modernity against tradition, they perceived Chinese culture as being devoid of real history and dynamic change. Imperial China had been stagnant in an immutable tradition until it was jolted out of its age-old slumber by impacts from the West. Modern changes in China are to be measured by how well or miserably the country is able to make the grades in catching up with the West. With economic growth and political reform as the sole measures, the modernization paradigm writes off as tragic aberrations a whole history of revolutionary China, trashing its national liberation, decolonization, socialism, aid to the Third World, and internationalism. In short, the paradigm invalidates the experiences of the Chinese people in taking charge of their destiny and entering the world stage.

The recoil from the paradigm, however, seems to be a retreat into an ahistorical notion of China-centered history. Self-contained, aloof, and unscathed by imperialist and capitalist penetration, an "authentic" China

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emerges behind the bamboo curtain, enclosed in the millennia tradition and closed to the world. Despite this mystified assumption of the Other, one may give the benefit of the doubt. Cohen's inquiry into a "history inside China," whose legacy remains active in modernity, challenges the objectivity and neutrality of area studies. Pointing to an alternative worldview rooted in Chinese history and tradition, the China-centered lens reinstates ideological and intellectual debate back into Asian studies. Targeting US involvement in Vietnam and Indochina, the oil embargo of 1973, and the Iran hostage crisis of 1979–81, Cohen perceives a symbolic meaning of Vietnam as a subject of criticism, which opened up a space for soul-searching, guilt, and heightened political consciousness. The meaning of Vietnam "confronted us with the limits of our power, the very real constraints upon our capacity to bend the world to American purposes. This second meaning of Vietnam also . . . had a profound impact on American historians of China. By exposing the myth of American global supremacy—political, moral, cultural—it freed American historians, perhaps for the first time, to abandon Western norms and measures of significance and to move toward a more genuinely *other*-centered historiography, a historiography rooted in the historical experience not of the West but of China."[14] It is an irony that Cohen's critical vigilance in the Cold War seems to be swallowed up in the post–Cold War return to the modernization paradigm and neoliberal development.

Depoliticization in Asian scholarship is most evident in the methodological reduction of the sovereign people and political collectives into inert objects for "scientific" inquiry. As political, world-making subjects, a national people is the vital link between a socialist nation and Third World movements. Socialist internationalism and anti-colonialism were the ideological grounds for national-popular movements to reach out and connect with the world. But the modernization paradigm breaks the link between the people and the world. Challenging that method, the concerned Asian scholars took a new look and approached China and its influence in the Third World "as a subject of its own history and politics."[15] This affirms the revolutionary claim that the people are the motive force for world-historical change. In the spirit of Third World internationalism, the Chinese and peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America actively participated in the movement of decolonization and pursued socialist values and self-reliant development. As masters of their own societies, they made domestic changes in order to overcome the pitfalls of colonialism and capitalism. Revolutionary and socialist China represented a hotbed of activity and vibrant transformations. In the post–Cold War era, however, China became a mere "geopolitical location."[16] Forgotten

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are "Maoist economic experiments, land redistribution in liberated Vietnam, Indian peasant rebellions," among other concerns.[17]

Predicated on the mobilized Chinese people as political subjects, China's socialist experience defined its political identity as grounded in the working-class leadership and the worker-peasant alliance. The notion of the people's democracy opens the door to an internationalism based on people-to-people connections. To Lanza, this characterization is not only Chinese but also international. "It was on the basis of these categories that transnational connections, such as the relationship between the Second and Third World, the alliance of formerly colonized people—and . . . the very recognition of political subjects across the continents—was possible."[18]

Depoliticization and China's Self-Image

With the global sixties as a reference, two conflicted Chinas emerged on the world stage. One China pursued socialist and Third World internationalism; the other is now engaging "socialism with Chinese characteristics," a process that seems to abandon socialism, and is dubbed by some critics "capitalism with Chinese characteristics."[19] Before, solidarity and alliance among decolonized and independent nations defined China's world image; now, a globalism partaken by China becomes crystallized with the catchphrase "get on track with the world." Culturally, this agenda has fueled a cosmopolitanism of commodity, style, finance, and consumerism.

For many, a global China has emerged from the dark world of Mao's era. In the previously mentioned biographies loaded with harrowing narratives of repression and victimhood, Mao's China trailed miserable track records in human rights and freedom. But China is different now and is moving on a racetrack to catch up with "our" modernity. The trashing of revolutionary China continues the Cold War imaginary by positing an evil other so as to assure voters of the righteousness of liberal democracy and a "national" security in East Asia. The globalized China, on the other hand, goes with the neoliberal world picture. Both perceptions depoliticize China—by treating it as a shadowy entity whose significance is granted by external agencies and observers. China is seen either as a reluctant member of the world community or a threatening empire ready to wield its ominous power. These views ignore China as an autonomous nation-state capable of charting its own course and taking control of its future.

China's global image corresponds with its liberal self-understanding. It is a China that has finally awakened to the universal history of worldwide

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economic development. China moves to the world by repudiating more than a half century of revolutionary and socialist experience. Despite its preservation of the "red legacy," the official policy seems to favor further integration into the global market and unbridled economic growth. China's deepening involvement and increasing power in the global financial superstructures reflect a desire to make a clean break with the historical "aberrations" of the socialist past.

The revisionist negation of dark and tragic pasts is most evident in the narrative of trauma and memory. Numerous books have contributed to a culture industry that cashes in on the theme of trauma and victimhood, recounting harrowing experiences of individuals living under communist rule. These eyewitness and personal accounts of hunger, oppression, and repression correspond strongly to the indictment and the search-for-roots literature of the mid-1980s. The main plotlines feature tales of bildungsroman or the saga of freedom seekers in a fight against tyranny (the victims all come out scarred but unscathed). But rescues and redemption often come from the West, especially the United States. It is no accident the writers are mostly immigrants safely nestled in the United States, who look back at the other shore with fear and trembling. It is disturbing to see books of this kind arranged in libraries and touted by online retailers as the "true history" of modern China.

Easy acceptance of these narratives as historical truths puts to rest the historical and massive drive by millions of people in shaping their own destiny. Individual accounts of trauma and suffering personalize history and dissolve the persistent, unresolved problems of modern China—problems that do not end with the Cold War and integration into the global market. As Dirlik and Meisner observed, personal narratives reduce the historical understanding of complex, long-term problems embedded in Chinese history to "spatially and temporally limited tropisms" or figures.[20] Wielding an aesthetic power by couching personal experience in a melodramatic form, the trope privileges personal encounters over reflection, inquiry, and historical examination of collective problems and systemic issues. The reader is called on to like or dislike out of personal preference, not to delve into the historical context and social implications. Here we get an aesthetic that says what you see is what you get and there is nothing behind or off the screen. The personal is political or rather erases politics. The testimonies are proffered not "in explicit arguments or by systematic analyses that bring up concrete issues for discussion and debate."[21] They play on the desire for black-and-white clarity, enforcing the Cold War divide of freedom versus authoritarianism.

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The individualistic account rests on the premise of history as a melodramatic, dog-eat-dog fight rather than motivated collective movements geared toward emancipation and social progress. Buttressed further by individualistic methodology and atomistic individualism, this narrative creates superficial entertainment by erasing systematic, political, and social reflection. This type of history writing has affected "Third World cinema," which is now oriented increasingly toward the cinematic staging of the spectacle of the historical past as melodramatic clashes of individual desire, ambition, and power. Merging with the aesthetic flow of capitalist culture industry, Chinese cinema is getting on the bandwagon as an instance of capital's worldwide expansion.[22] To get a sense of this trend, we may consider a Chinese film titled *Once Upon a Time in Shanghai* (*Shanghai jishi* 上海紀事, 1998).

Made in 1998 and directed by Peng Xiaolian, the film was commissioned and funded by the Shanghai municipal government to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the communist liberation of the city. Receiving favorable reviews and a major prize, the film was successful in rewriting Shanghai's history as a replenished icon of capitalist modernity. With its focus on Shanghai's liberation by the communists, the film may fall into the category of "red classics." Nicolai Volland cautions that the revival of the red classics or the main melody (*zhuxuanlü* 主旋律) in the 1990s could be "exploited by crass commercialism" and betrayed a vaunted "national pride" and "transnational trends."[23] *Once Upon a Time in Shanghai* is such a superficial work of the main melody. Far from affirming the history of liberation, the film replaces the genuine melody of class struggle and mass politics with the flying colors of global capitalism.

The film begins with a series of melodramatic mise-en-scènes of chaos resulting from the Guomindang leader Chiang Jieshi's ill-conceived plan to regulate the financial market. The rush on banks and stores, the street riots, the battles with the People's Liberation Army, and the crackdown on financial speculation invoke the cinematic clichés of war and the collapse of a Third World nation embroiled in turmoil. These retro-style scenes strip the volatile and potentially dynamic circumstances of political agendas. The economic and financial turmoil underscores the city's woes as a managerial and economic issue rather than a political struggle. The battles between the communists and nationalists, the day-to-day political activities of the population, the military action, the restoration of social order—all these seem to be bubbles in the film's single-minded gravitation toward the bottom line of Shanghai's financial and economic fate.

The managerial logic has its counterpart in characterization. The real hero with a mission to pull the city out of the woods is not communists,

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workers, soldiers, or revolutionary leadership. Instead, a Western-educated, management-savvy woman, Li Huirong, steps up as the savior and liberator. Li manages a textile factory jointly owned by her father and father-in-law, who reside in America as overseas capitalists. The overseas connection highlights her role as the harbinger of global capitalism in China. As an offspring of the national bourgeoisie with the dream of industrialization, she would have been a negative image in any work of red classics. In this film, however, she takes on an unequivocally heroic and "progressive" flare. With little support from the communists and workers, Li works single-handedly to preserve the abandoned industrial infrastructure against terrorist sabotage by retreating nationalists. It seems as though Shanghai's economic survival and revival all hang on the courage, will, and ingenuity of this capitalist daughter.

This image of progressive capitalism takes on a romantic, feminine aura, as Li is portrayed as a lovely young wife and a street-smart, sophisticated Shanghai girl. The film's romantic episodes revolve around her as the object of affection for her husband, Guo. On the eve of liberation, Guo debates with himself over taking his wife to America or joining her in rebuilding national industry—a conflict of personal desire entangled with the dilemma of shaping China's future. A freelance journalist based in America, Guo professes to take an "objective" stance toward reporting Shanghai's liberation and new order. He grounds his "objectivity" on his eyewitness accounts to tell Chinese stories to the "outside world," but the objectivity is undercut by his ideological leaning toward his wife's patriotism. The "outside world" for his reports is the United States, which is in the midst of implementing the Cold War policy against a China being lost to communism. Objectivity is meaningless and useless at that moment—except for the film's retrospective look at the dawn of Shanghai's capitalism.

Toward the end of the film, a spy attempts to sabotage the industrial infrastructure by blowing up a power plant. In safeguarding the plant, Li gets into a fight and is killed by the saboteur, who turns out to be her classmate in a business school back in America. As she lies dying in her husband's arms, the spectacular fire, explosions, and destruction on the screen seem to celebrate the tragic sacrifice of the capitalist daughter, leaving no doubt as to the seeds planted for China's future. From the scene of death and destruction, the camera cuts, magically traversing fifty years to the present, to Guo standing on the Bund of Shanghai against a dazzling array of neon-lit signs, advertisements, and a glaring silhouette of towering financial buildings—a metaphor of the phoenix rising to meet the skylines. Guo has retreated to America after his wife's death and returns half a century later in the era of

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globalization to Shanghai, only to find her image forever young and refreshing. Consecrated in his memory, the capitalist wife magically blends into the new financial zone of Pudong bathed in mesmerizing simulacra, complete with skyscrapers, screen towers, and myriad lights—a virtual Manhattan in the Orient.

This cinematic spectacle glosses over the rugged historical terrain by linking a personal and melodramatic scenario to capitalist modernity: the personal story sows the seeds of capital, ironically, at the dawn of Shanghai's liberation. This nostalgic evocation, as Rebecca Karl observes, makes ostensible references to its prerevolutionary past but actually empties out socialist revolution.[24] The film reflects a desire to return to a past Shanghai as the outpost of semicolonial modernity and cosmopolitanism. Foretelling its future at the moment of its liberation, this Shanghai romance creates a myth of Chinese capitalism and recasts the history of Chinese socialism as aberrant and mistaken. This back-to-the-future strategy signals contemporary China as a capitalist juggernaut, with a booming economy that renders social contradictions and conflict into a culture of management and consumerism. Holding a return ticket to the glamorous future, the film affirms the hidden teleology of China's rush to the global market. By replenishing Shanghai as the vanguard of capitalist modernity, it erases the fifty years of Chinese revolutionary history, which, ironically, is what the film commemorates.

Consuming China in the American Classroom

Not just the media treat Chinese people as capitalists and consumers. College students also approach China with a consumer gaze. This reflects the imperial attitude toward the "Chinese difference." Critics have characterized the United States not as a nation but as an empire. Although it is difficult to convince a student that he or she may be an imperial subject, much evidence from the classroom suggests what may be called imperial attitude. "Imperial" does not simply mean superior or number one; it means my culture is "all under heaven." Although Coca-Cola or Hollywood may seem to be part of world culture, they are both thoroughly American and hence national in origin, products of a particular place and time. Yet this is precisely what eludes the imperial attitude, which assumes that what originates in America is not just American but the universal norm. This mentality resembles the nonchalant, "all under heaven" mindset criticized by Liang Qichao, who associated private morality with individuals unconcerned with the national community. Is this a tianxia with American characteristics?

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Liang charged that Chinese knew their families, kin, and communities—discrete units under the Mandate of Heaven—but did not know themselves as a people. Living in the long shadow of dynastic empires, they did not know who they were as a political community. For the imperial attitude, there is only genealogy, no history; there is patriarch, no political participation of citizens; there is private affair, no public good.

Many students indulge in this imperial mentality, which is utterly at odds with the image of the citizen worthy of a nation, much less of the world. This attitude affects their understanding of a foreign culture. A Chinese culture class is designed to tell stories of Chinese society and history. "Chinese culture" entails a national character with fraught relations with cosmopolitanism. Understood in the sense of a certain national origin, of public activity, a stream of political events, and a drive to forge a people's destiny, the idea of national culture is increasingly foreign to college students. Writing against the self-advertising spectacle of pan-African culture, Frantz Fanon argues that every culture is primarily national, rooted in political struggles of a people on the ground.[25] Fredric Jameson also contends that an individual's fate in a Third World culture points to a collective project.[26] But this national dimension of culture is being displaced by a denationalized, cosmopolitan flatness, and so when "Chinese" is mentioned, you may be accused of being a bloody nationalist.

The supposition "My culture is the world" links individualism to a superficial cosmopolitanism. This self-centered attitude came under fire by the concerned Asian scholars during the Cold War. Looking to revolutionary China and Third World movements for alternative global relations, Mark Seldon has critiqued "atomized individuals" bent on private interest at the expense of the public good and saw the attitude as a sign of political decay and breakdown of republicanism and civic virtue.[27] In his 1987 book *The Closing of the American Mind*, published at the moment of transition from the Cold War to globalization, Alan Bloom diagnosed the obsessive inner-directedness of American students under the rubric of "self-centeredness." Students are preoccupied with their own relationships, sexuality, and career prospects, and "the affairs of daily life rarely involve concern for a large community in such a way so as to make public and private merge in one's thought."[28] Free from the constraints of nation, religion, family, and politics—all tragic burdens of the past—students experience American culture not as "a common project but as a framework within which people are only individuals, where they are left alone."[29] Dropping all cultural belonging and communal ties, they worry about making it economically in the marketplace and about seeking

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personal fulfillment, success, and status. This individualistically based culture regresses to a realm where the individual resides in a naked state of nature, stripped of all national backgrounds and historical memories. With regard to other cultural traditions, the attitude leads to a bland globalism that permits anything as long as it does not infringe on the individual's rights and privacy, placing the student at an equal distance from diverse cultures. World cultures amount to little more than a playground to project personal preferences and give vent to self-expression.

This self-absorption shuts students out from geopolitical events of the day and immures them from the ongoing events that grip the attention of concerned scholars in Chinese studies. This mindset stems from a deeper moral problem that Alasdair MacIntyre has theorized as "emotivism." Cutting oneself off from culture, history, and moral evaluation, the emotivist self bears directly on self-other relations. In conceiving moral judgments as "nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling," emotivism removes the question of good or bad, of truth and falsehood, from moral debate. When the individual is entitled exclusively to their opinion and feelings, moral judgments are seen as neither true nor false. Consensus "is not to be secured by any rational method, for there are none. It is to be secured, if at all, by producing certain non-rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with one."[30] Whoever dominates and aestheticizes a show controls perception and shapes feelings. The moral question is thus turned into a theatrical performance for the purpose of producing aesthetic effects.

In social interaction, emotivism obliterates any distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative relations. MacIntyre reminds us that in modern moral discourse, a human relationship bereft of morality differs radically from one informed by rational communication. The former denotes a relation in which "each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends"; the latter is one in which "each treats the other as an end."[31] To treat someone as an end is to treat them not as an inert object but as a sovereign subject endowed with reason and discretion. In conversation, I may offer reasons and facts to show what is good, but I should refrain from influencing another "except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good." On the basis of Kantian universalism, this moral reason appeals to a common, shared ground, which is not dictated by you and me from a particular vantage point. Further, treating the person as the end entails mutual respect for the integrity and dignity of people who are party to a conversation: "By contrast, to treat someone else as a means is to seek to make him

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or her an instrument of my purposes by adducing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective on this or that occasions."[32] Referencing Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, MacIntyre illustrates the rendering of the individual as an aesthetic object of consumption. Rich aesthetes in European villas preoccupy themselves with seeking thrills and warding off boredom. They get their daily diet of amusement by "contriving behavior in others that will be responsive to their wishes, that will feed their sated appetite."[33] Treating the other as a consumer item, the emotivist individual behaves as the consumer of persons.

The Kantian maxim "to treat someone as an end" contains a genuine cosmopolitan ethic. It could be extended to "treat a nation as an end." This means to treat each sovereign nation and its people as the master of their own destiny; to respect a nation's culture, history, and national development. The self-centered, imperial stance, however, encourages students to treat China as a means for their own private purposes. One could list five ways of approaching China. First, China is a commodity; it is a flavor of food in a multinational, multiethnic buffet and thus a source of pleasure. Second, a student may act like a connoisseur of national geographical exotica, seeking to satisfy touristic wanderlust. Third, utilitarianism motivates students to study China and its culture, prompting them to see the country in terms of market value and profit in global capital expansion. The question of China's own way of sociopolitical development or historical trajectory is irrelevant. Fourth, students view China from the capacity of a therapist, believing that as a pathological case, China is a maladjusted country that needs to receive shock therapy for it to become normal. Finally, China supplies a canvas to project the individual's ego, attitudes, feelings, and preferences.

Such self-absorption shuts students out from geopolitical events of the day and from the ongoing drama and traumas. They do not have to be concerned with the questions of what China was and is striving for. The country's unique way of sociopolitical development and history is not their concern. What this nation has been doing on its own terms, its revolutionary movements, the creativity and agency of the Chinese people, are irrelevant.

Chinese Literature and the World

Is "Chinese literature" a meaningful concept? Should it be replaced with "world literature"? There are two pitfalls in thinking about national and world literature. On the one hand, it is myopic to pin the culture down to the allegiance to the nation-state. On the other hand, a world vision is not a transcendent

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observation over and above the nation but an awareness of human conditions linked to a particular nation's aspirations for a common world.

In Chinese culture classes, the historical coverage of reading material plays an important role in the selection of authors and periods. How does one pick seven or eight authors for a literature course? A genuinely historical appreciation of Chinese culture and history hinges on a particular curve of historical events and a choice of authors. For example, students may not like to study old films made before the reform era of the 1980s and prefer newer films made in the twenty-first century. This presentist preference gets them excited quickly about familiar images of urban youth and juvenile delinquency, romantic relationships, consumerist lifestyle, and so on. Never mind these have become stale and uninteresting in the American media. Students readily relate to the familiar scenes and characters dressed up in Chinese trappings.

Motivated by a sense of continuous history, the older films are selected for teaching in order to showcase China's creative as well as tragic attempts to deal with problems and challenges in modern times. Without a sense of the crisis-ridden trajectory in dealing with themes of colonialism, imperialism, and upheavals, the student's perception of China would remain a series of unconnected, shallow snapshots, palatable, consumable, touristic. Worse, serving up quick snapshots caters more to a narcissist navel gazing than critical inquiry into Chinese history.

Although some students may be open minded and curious about China, this attitude can only go so far. China should be manageable and containable. Numerous threats loom large: A powerful China will inevitably disturb the power balance in East Asia and is posing a threat to US interests and security in the Asia-Pacific region. A fast-developing China will be a grave rival for oil, high tech, capital, and natural resources. A prosperous China will lead to military buildup and expansionism and the pursuit of the hegemon in Asia.[34] The sense of existential threat plays a role in shaping students' plans for China-related careers. In a recent Chinese-language class at a university in Texas, students professed that they had basically two goals in studying China. The professor, a former student of mine, said that more than half of the students were from the oil tycoon families with private jets and thought of themselves as future leaders of America. They would deal with China as diplomats, statesmen, or businessman. It is hard to underestimate the utilitarian implications of Chinese pedagogy in the geopolitical landscape: China is an object, a target, an enemy, and a rival for the United States. Chinese culture does not matter; it is a means, not an end. The point of learning the Chinese language is to facilitate intelligence gathering as a

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means of containing the country. With the goal of maintaining American domination in the Pacific and other regions, Chinese studies was and is the academic arm of the State Department, an enterprise of strategic importance and interstate rivalry, and academic research is no different from strategic think tanks.

Geopolitical rivalry goes with the notion of China as a cultural museum. Derived from the essentialist view of a national community, this belief goes back to cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. As Robert Hymes puts it, the essentialist approach tends to regard diverse materials in a culture as "contained in one complete, logically compelling package or structure." A culture is typecast in "a shared and unitary system, all of its parts somehow dependent on one another or informed by a single principle of ethos, and all of its parts common property."[35]

This essentialist view resurfaces in the pervasive notion of civilizational clash. Samuel Huntington sees political and social changes in China in the post–Cold War era as a recipe for coming cultural clashes. A litany of Asian cultural patterns in opposition to universal Western values underscores the differences between Asian and American civilizations. The Confucian ethos "stressed the values of authority, hierarchy, the subordination of individual rights and interests, the importance of consensus, the avoidance of confrontation, 'saving faces,' and in general, the supremacy of the state over society and of society over the individual."[36] By contrast, Americans hold on to "beliefs of liberty, equality, democracy, and individualism." It is quintessentially American to distrust government, oppose authority, promote checks and balances, encourage competition, sanctify human rights, forget the past and ignore the future, and focus on maximizing immediate gains.[37] Thanks to these absolute, irreconcilable differences, cultural clashes are inevitable.

The world vision of cultural clash sees China as a lag in the modernization timeline. In my Chinese literature classes, works of the earlier period by Lu Xun, Shen Congwen, Ding Ling, and Eileen Chang are prominent on the reading list. In addition, more recent works from the reform era, such as *Raise the Red Lantern* by Su Tong and *To Live* by Yu Hua, help students understand China's economic reforms and cultural changes. For a time, the favorite was Dai Sijie's novel *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* and its film adaption. I would suggest that the preference for this film reflects a stance of cultural clash with Eurocentric implications.

The film *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* tells the story of two educated youth, sent down to the countryside for reeducation during the Cultural Revolution. While trapped in a mountainous village, they steal a box of

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books from another youth and get to read books by Balzac and other Western literary masters. An ironic jab at the reeducation campaign of Chinese youth during the Cultural Revolution, the reading experience is depicted as a religious revelation. Reading Balzac awakens the educated youth to universal values of freedom, individualism, love, and sex. Taking the text as sacred, Ma Jianling, one of the two sent-down youths, piously inscribes a whole chapter of Balzac's book on a sheepskin coat. This parchment signals the "godsend" of Western culture bequeathed to uncivilized and unenlightened Chinese youth and peasants. The Western classics change the youth's lives and, through their dissemination, the lives of the villagers, who have never seen a car or been to a modern city. The two youths develop a romantic relation with the seamstress, and under their tutelage the illiterate girl quickly becomes "enlightened" and savvy about female beauty, modern ways, and consumer fashions, including the use of bras. The seamstress's decision to leave her village signals the triumph of civilization over barbarian backwardness and benighted tradition.

Playing out on the civilizational hierarchy between a superior "us" and inferior "them," the film extends the divide to the tension between freedom and authoritarianism, modernity and tradition. The first episode pits Western civilization against a backwater of barbarism and was so compelling and irresistible as to generate glowing comments in the media. On *The Diane Rehm Show* on National Public Radio in 2003, every "China hand" pundit raved about it. The scenario begins with the urban youth's arrival in the mountain village. As peasants crowd around the young men in a dimly lit, rickety house, they spot a mysterious object: a violin. They condemn the violin as an evil bourgeois toy and hasten to burn it. The owner of the violin, Ma, protests that it is a musical instrument and wants to demonstrate by playing a Mozart sonata. With remarkable ingenuity, his friend comes up with the name for the piece: "Mozart Thinks of Chairman Mao." Having passed the ideological test, Ma begins to play the violin and the peasants immediately fall under the spell of the elegant music. With the sweet, graceful melody of Mozart's sonata flowing from the house to the crowd watching at the window, and from the crowd to the mountain ridges, the peasants seem to be undergoing an epiphany. They are discovering their "innate" human potentials for this gift of universal culture. The camera slowly backs off from the house and takes a long, panning shot over the mountain ridges and the open sky. For the first time since time immemorial, the mountain village is ringing with heavenly music and awakening to a taste of high culture from the West.

Students in my class welcome these signs of Chinese becoming enlightened about freedom, love, sex, and individualism. The irony, alas, is that Balzac is

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no longer a familiar name for students. We recall that Balzac was at the top of Zhou Libo's list in the world literature class in Yan'an (chapter 3). Mozart may be more familiar, but few students can name a Mozartian piece. The pundits on NPR would not fare better. How do we account for this gap between the ignorance of one's own culture, which is yet coupled with self-pride and superiority? Probably the knowledge of Balzac or Mozart does not matter so much: it is gratifying enough to see the unenlightened Chinese peasants rush to embrace our Western culture.

In this self-love, "our" Western culture is not just any particular culture; it is unconditioned by historical time and particular places; it is universal civilization, the bottom line of humanity. Culture and enlightenment here turn into a code word for superiority, progress, and advance. In the film, the religious inscribing of Balzac's words on the sheepskin overcoat is coupled with another scenario about a Chinese priest's deathbed confession. As he lies dying in the hospital, the priest has lost the memory of his mother tongue, Chinese. Yet as he struggles to utter parting words to his children, what comes out of his mouth is a stream of Latin phrases from the Latin Bible that he cherished in his early years. The students and talk show pundits take this linguistic switch for granted, as if it were the most natural things that a good Chinese can do, affirming the power of the West's civilizing mission. The message is clear: these suffering, benighted Chinese, political victims of their own country, will be able to redeem themselves, body and soul, by abandoning their own culture and prostrating before the icons of Balzac or Latin scriptures.

To see Balzac as cosmopolitan godsend is to ignore the history of Balzac's reception in China in connection with the Chinese Revolution and Chinese literature. Balzac has long been an important motif in modern Chinese criticism and literature, and generations of Chinese writers and critics studied and loved the French writer. The best-known Chinese translator of French literature, Fu Lei, translated Balzac's major novels since the 1940s. A huge body of artworks, the Balzac translations educated generations of Chinese readers, critics, and writers. In the complete oblivion of this side of Balzac, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* becomes patently Eurocentric. This forgetfulness goes with another lack: the educated youth, while having access to the whole box of books, is indifferent to Chinese books. Books by Lu Xun and the highly regarded classics are passed over and remain unread.

The Eurocentric elevation of Balzac's fiction raises the question of world literature in the national-international nexus, harking back to Zhou Libo's lecture on world masterpieces at the Lu Xun Academy of Arts. Zhou explained

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Balzac's significance not only for the novel but also for socialist realism, popular democracy, and mass movements. Balzac represents a mode of realism that discerns in naturalistic details historical and social movements. Driven by emergent people and popular nationalism, these trends run counter to the conservative elements and the power elites. Balzac's importance in Chinese literary criticism derives from the Marxist analysis of "typicality" in Balzac's fiction. In his letter to Margaret Harkness regarding her novel *City Girl*, Friedrich Engels wrote that rather than naturalist descriptions of wretched victims in *City Girl*, Balzac described the bourgeois and popular classes as an emergent historical trend and social force. Although a conservative and affiliated with the waning aristocracy, Balzac rubbed against the grain of his own politics and worldview. His novels depict the emergent characters who were representative of the lower classes and rising popular masses. A treasure trove of sociological details and motifs, Balzacian realism is nothing less than an archive of materialist history, loaded with "facts" about French society that are more insightful and objective than all Engels had learned from historians, economists, and statisticians. Balzacian realism creates an epic of historical transformation driven by "the real men of the future" as they emerge on the world arena. Engels's reading came to shape a cottage industry around Balzac, which was a forerunner of socialist realism and gestured toward the notion of world literature rooted in a national people. Just as the French Revolution attracted Liang Qichao for its creation of a republic linked to cosmopolitan aspirations, Balzac's fiction appealed to modern Chinese writers for its consciousness of historical change and realistic depictions of French society.

In the realistic and world-historical dimension, Balzac inspired Chinese critics and writers who believed literature to be a vehicle of national liberation and social emancipation. Rather than consecrated into a world republic of letters and accumulated capital and commodity, the lessons from Balzac forge the links between one nation and another and facilitate people-to-people communication. This, I think, is what Liang Qichao had in mind when he referred to the scenes of cultural exchange in the World Expo as datong in *The Future of a New China*.

A recall of the revolutionary tradition should allow students to steer clear of Eurocentrism and move to a historical understanding of modern China. A close reading of texts and a deeper awareness of the context may challenge the Cold War labels of communism, authoritarianism, and freedom. Watching the film *Yellow Earth*, for example, the students are readily drawn to the depiction of rural poverty, hopelessness, the depleted soil and nature,

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arranged marriage, women's suffering, and the desperate search for a new life in Yan'an. Emancipatory motifs based on an affinity with liberal ideas of freedom, individual well-being, and people's rights are recognizable and comprehensible. Why do these themes, presumably communist, make so much sense to the American students who know little about the historical backgrounds in Shaanxi province in North China? Why do they readily sympathize with the peasant girl Cui Qiao when she attempts to join the communist army and become a soldier? Why do students wish that she crosses the Yellow River to find a new home?

To close national and ideological differences, the American Revolution and Valley Forge come to mind. Surely the two revolutionary histories are far apart in space and time, but the different pursuits converge in the perception of a people trying to gain freedom and achieve independence from colonial rule. When it comes to the anti-colonial fight by soldiers led by George Washington and the Eighth Route Army's battle against Japanese aggressors, the difference between China's liberation and the American Revolution narrows and becomes unimportant. This imaginative leap narrows and transcends the East-West divide and explains China's century-long acceptance of the Western intellectual currents of cosmopolitanism, socialism, the Enlightenment, humanism, and national self-determination.

Revolution is not to create a gloomy future drenched in war, slogans, or blood: it is to change the status quo in pursuit of well-being, livelihood, and political freedom. A revolutionary narrative makes sense to an audience born and bred on the liberal-democratic tradition, precisely because it is an endeavor of seeking freedom and justice. By placing a revolution in its historical context and by discerning sharable aspirations, one may discover a method of teaching China called "historicization." Historicization is politicization: it blends sociopolitical history with a history of ideas and sensibility, and illuminates the way Chinese experiences become aligned with worldwide movements beyond national and cultural boundaries.

In the new round of cold war geopolitical conflict, what fatally obstructs mutual understanding, sympathy, and communication stems from the myth of the absolute difference and cultural clash. This myth divides and places America and China in different universes, maintaining that two countries have entirely different cultures and systems, that the difference is so huge that the two powers cannot coexist under one heaven and on planet Earth. The history of US-China cultural and intellectual exchange has constantly given the lie to the myth. People of both countries have always been able to understand and sympathize with each other and share certain values—

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as human beings and even in their distinct identity as Chinese and Americans. The Chinese revolutionaries admired George Washington and Martin Luther King Jr.; Chinese citizens applauded and supported America's civil rights movement and anti-racialist movement. With sharable values and sympathy and in constant communication and mutual leaning, Chinese and American cultures, in Levenson's words, can be "nationalist and internationalist at the same time."[38]

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