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Biculturalism in Modern China and in Chinese Studies

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The “modern” era has seen the steady expansion of Western culture across the globe. How are we to think about the resulting changes and processes in the non-Western world?

Political history has taught us to think in national categories: of imperialism/colonialism versus national independence and of domination/subordination versus self-determination. The choice has seemed a clear-cut and binary one: for or against imperialism, for or against national liberation.

But is that a useful way to think about what has happened in the cultural, as opposed to the political, sphere? Has Western cultural expansion necessarily been a matter of “cultural imperialism,” a simple process of Western domination of the cultural sphere as in the political? Do cultural interactions require the same either/or dichotomous choices as those posited by nationality? Can we equate or analogize “culture” with “nation”? How are we to think about dual-cultural influences?

This article focuses on the relatively narrow subject of “biculturalism” and biculturals to illustrate the issues in a concentrated way and within a manageable scope. I begin with a definition of what I mean by biculturalism and then provide a brief overview of major groups of biculturals and an analysis of biculturalism in modern Chinese history

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and as it has generally been seen in scholarship and in theory. I end with some methodological, theoretical, and practical observations.

BICULTURALITY DEFINED

Culture may be thought of as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and so on of a given people at a given time, and language may be considered a concrete manifestation of culture. *Biculturality*, as used in this article, refers to the simultaneous participation by one person in two different cultures, and *bilinguality* refers to the use by one person of two different languages. (Obviously, though the focus of this discussion is on biculturality, similar observations apply to tri- or multiculturality.) Bilinguality is a useful and concrete illustration of biculturality. A person using English or Chinese cannot help but participate in the ideas and thought processes embedded in the two languages. A bilingual person is almost of necessity also a bicultural person. To be sure, there can be bilingual use of two languages in which each serves as no more than a neutral medium that makes little or no difference in meaning, as might be the case with references to concrete objects (e.g., pig, dog) or simple ideas (hot, cold). But there will unavoidably also be times when the use of apparently equivalent terms in the two languages involves very different cultural meanings. That is when bilinguality becomes biculturality.

The word *private*, for example, calls forth different associations in English and in Chinese. In English, private refers to what is personal, juxtaposed against what is public. There follows the notion of “private property,” of what belongs to oneself personally, as opposed to public property, of what belongs to the community or the state. There is also the notion of privacy and the rights to privacy, to keep what is personal confidential and out of public view. And there is the notion of private law, which deals with personal relationships between individuals, as opposed to public law, which deals with relationships between individuals and the state. By extension, private is used in expressions such as “private room” or “private entrance,” for use by the one party only. In all these usages, the word calls up mainly positive associations, undergirded by a classical-liberal tradition emphasizing the autonomy and absolute value of the individual.

The nearest Chinese equivalent to the word private, *si*, by contrast, carries very different connotations. To be sure, it too is juxtaposed against the word *gong*, a near equivalent of the English word *public*. And in twentieth-century Chinese, we have expressions that attempt to translate English notions such as “private affairs” (*sishi*) and “private property” (*siyou caichan*). But the equivalencies end quickly. The Chinese word *si* brings to mind immediately expressions such as *zisi*, or *zisi zili*, meaning “selfish.” What is *si* shades not only into what is selfish but also quickly into what is illegitimate, as in *sixin* (selfish motives), *yinsi* (a shameful secret), *sitong* (adultery or secret communication [as with the enemy]), and so on. The word *si* in fact usually comes with the stigma of being less desirable than *gong* (public), which means altruistic, fair, just. The contrast between *si* and *gong* is perhaps best captured in the expression *dagong wusi*, or “great altruism without selfishness.” The associated meanings of *si* are in fact almost unavoidably negative, undergirded by a long tradition of emphasis on *gong* as a moral ideal.

To give another related example, the English word *freedom* conveys immediately the notion of exemption or liberation from control of arbitrary power. It presupposes the concept of an opposition between the individual and the state (and, by extension, also between “civil society” and the state). It too stems from the classical-liberal assumption of the absolute value and autonomy of the individual.

The modern Chinese translation (via Japanese) of freedom, *ziyou*, by contrast, does not convey so much freedom from arbitrary power as the literal meaning of the two words: “to follow one’s self/own wishes.” The construction of the compound word is parallel to *zisi*—literally, “to be selfish about one’s self/own wishes.” Indeed, to this day, despite all the references to *ziyou* in the many constitutions of the successive regimes of twentieth-century China, *ziyou* has never quite been able to shake its associated negative connotation of selfishness, with obvious consequences for Chinese conceptions of “democracy.”

Patterns of bilingual use of English and Chinese seem to me to be good illustrations of biculturality in general. A bilingual person using these words may of course keep the two languages quite separate, using the words in each language with “native” command and fluency, complete with all their attendant nuances. Such a person may think

completely like an American when speaking American English and completely like a Chinese when speaking Chinese. For such a person, the two languages and cultural systems may remain segmented, with little or no crossing over. Conceptualized that way, bilinguality (and biculturality) may be seen as a matter of coexistence in a relationship that is mainly additive. The two languages and cultures do not merge or fuse to form a chemical compound—not in the sense of each constituent unit losing its original properties and acquiring brand-new ones distinctive to the compound. Instead, they remain separate, each a closed and segmented system.

A different possibility is that the copresence of two languages and cultures will result in quite a bit of mixing of the two. A ready example is the way in which bilingual people frequently intersperse one language with the other. They may in a single sentence call on the second language because a word or expression from that language comes more readily to mind or perhaps also because it expresses precisely an intended object, image, idea, or nuance. Many people in Hong Kong, for example, habitually switch back and forth between Chinese and English within a single sentence. With such usage, bilinguality (and biculturality) may be more appropriately conceptualized as a mixture, though still a physical mixture rather than a chemical compound.

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of a bilingual as opposed to a monolingual person is that he or she has the potential capability to stand apart from each language by comparing the two and thinking about each from the perspective of the other. While a monolingual person might be inclined to think that there can be only one way to think about “privacy” and “freedom,” a bilingual (bicultural) person enjoys at least the possibility of being aware of different usages and conceptions of the equivalent or near-equivalent words in a different cultural system.

That kind of awareness can lead, of course, to tensions born of conflicting ideas and allegiances, but it can also lead to creative impulses such as, for example, an active effort to forge a new compound from the two constituent entities. A bilingual person may be fully aware of the different meanings and nuances of the two languages and may seek to forge new conceptions and combinations in both. One ready example is the self-conscious effort by bicultural Guomindang lawmakers of the 1920s to forge a new compound by combining modern Western

law, which they considered fundamentally individualistic, with traditional Chinese law, which they saw as basically familial, into a new modern Chinese law that they described as “social” in emphasis (The Civil Code of the Republic of China, 1930-1931: xx).

These different patterns—of coexisting, mixing physically, and compounding chemically—can be readily evidenced in the process of translation. The action can involve, to be sure, no more than rendering concrete objects and simple ideas from one language into the equivalents of another. But it will usually require also finding new words and ways to express in one language the different ideas of another (consider, e.g., what it would take to convey the idea of a “private entrance” in Chinese). And it may even involve creating new concepts to capture and encompass the differences and similarities between the two (e.g., a discussion of the meaning of “democracy” in Chinese and in English).

The potential ability to access two different languages and cultural systems, to serve as an interpreter between them, and perhaps further to become a detached observer of both or even to create new compounds from their cross-fertilization or fusion sets bilinguals and biculturals apart from monolinguals and monoculturals.

What follows below is first a bird’s-eye review of major groups of Chinese-English bilinguals, from American China scholars to eminent Chinese of the Republican period in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, and from U.S.-based expatriate China scholars to Chinese “returned students.” Great differences separate these groups, to be sure, but they share the denominator of biculturality. The differences and commonalities between the different groups, in fact, help spotlight the tensions that have existed between nationality and culturality.

AMERICAN CHINA SCHOLARS AND MODERN CHINESE BICULTURALS

American China scholars are almost by definition biculturals. Most have invested years upon years in the study of the Chinese language and Chinese culture. They engage by profession in two-way cultural interpretation. It is not surprising, therefore, that U.S.-based China studies has drawn not only from American nationals trained in Chinese language and culture but also from bicultural Chinese, whether

Chinese nationals or erstwhile Chinese nationals. Seen from a cultural rather than national perspective, Chinese studies in America has been part of a much larger story of biculturality, and American China scholars have been part of a much larger group of biculturals.

In the 1950s, all major American centers drew on expatriate scholars from China, many of them erstwhile Chinese "returned students" who had received their advanced education in the United States. One needs only think of individuals such as Kung-ch'üan Hsiao, Lien-sheng Yang, and Ping-ti Ho. Many American China scholars were trained by those expatriate Chinese biculturals.

Those returned students who had studied in the United States (and other Western countries) before 1949 are of course traceable to at least 1911, when China began systematically to send students (on Boxer indemnity funds) to Western countries to study. At its height, there was a flow of nearly 1,000 students a year, perhaps one-fourth of them to the United States and the rest to Europe. (Study in Japan, which was the major "interpreter" of "the West" for China, began earlier and in larger numbers, reaching totals as high as 8,000 in 1905 and 6,000 in 1935, the two peak years.)¹ Only a small minority of those returned students, of course, ended up in China studies; the majority majored in the sciences and engineering. But their biculturality was shared with the group as a whole. These returned students were generally as comfortable, or nearly as comfortable, in English (or another European language) as in Chinese and as much influenced by Western culture as Chinese.

These returned students should be seen in conjunction with the products of the many missionary schools in China. First established in the nineteenth century, those schools grew by the 1920s to enroll more than half a million students in curricula that were either bilingual or principally English.² Graduates of these schools were often as closely or even more closely tied to Western culture than to Chinese. From their ranks came many of the returned students. While perhaps not matching the prominence of returned students, missionary school graduates far outnumbered them.

In U.S.-based China studies, after the returned students of the 1950s came younger Chinese scholars, mainly from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Many were the offspring of earlier returned students or other

biculturals. They may be seen as the continuation of tendencies initiated earlier in the Republican period, transferred outside mainland Chinese boundaries after the Communist Revolution. By the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic Chinese, both those who became American nationals and those who did not, comprised perhaps one-third of the 400-plus China scholars in the United States (Lindbeck, 1971: 55).

Other groups of Chinese biculturals have joined American China studies during the 1980s and 1990s. First are the students from mainland China who enrolled in American China studies programs and have entered the profession in increasing numbers in the 1990s. These new students of the 1980s and 1990s are of course part of the second and much larger wave of Chinese students studying abroad that began with the thawing of relations between China and the United States (and other Western countries) and the coming of reforms in China. In 1991 and 1992, there were a total of 39,600 Chinese students studying in the United States alone, dwarfing by far the scale of the earlier wave. By 1997, an estimated 270,000 mainland Chinese students had studied abroad, perhaps one-half or more in the United States. Altogether, perhaps one-third of the total had returned to China; the rest remained abroad.³ Once again, only a tiny minority of these returned students found their way into American China studies, their main fields of study being in the sciences and engineering. But all share biculturality in common.

In addition to the new students from mainland China, there is the group of what might be called "Pacific Rim children." The product of expanded business and other contacts between the United States and Taiwan, Hong Kong (and, to a lesser degree, also Singapore and Malaysia), and then China itself, many of these young people have grown up spending almost equal parts of time on both sides of the ocean. As at home with *wuxia* (knight-errant) stories as television cop shows, they showed up first in undergraduate Chinese studies courses and now, increasingly, are finding their way into Chinese studies graduate programs. We will soon see substantial numbers of them in American China studies. Those, of course, would be just a tiny minority of an expanding social-cultural group of bilinguals.

There is, finally, another group of ethnic Chinese, mostly third- or fourth-generation Americans, who have been drawn to the Chinese

studies profession, along with its protracted language study, under the stimulus of the tide of “multiculturalism” (more below) in our undergraduate education of recent years.

These Chinese Americans are of course part of the enormous story of “overseas Chinese”⁴ migration that began in the nineteenth century, coincident with the population pressures and domestic unrest that lay behind the mid-century rebellions. By the 1990s, an estimated 30 million (ethnic) Chinese were living overseas, not counting those in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. More than 1.5 million live in the United States.⁵ The first-generation and sometimes also the second-generation overseas Chinese are generally strongly bicultural, the third and fourth much less so. But recent educational multiculturalism has brought many more third- and fourth-generation Chinese Americans into Chinese studies courses. From those, a few have entered graduate programs in Chinese studies and have undertaken protracted language study; many more in other walks of life have become bicultural to varying degrees through academic study, travels to China, and work related to China.

BICULTURALITY AND NATIONALITY

The differences and commonalities among the groups outlined above underscore the tensions between nationality and culturality. If we think mainly in terms of national categories, we would not normally group China scholars who are American nationals with Chinese returned students who are Chinese nationals. Nationalism conditions us to think of nationality as an essential attribute of an individual, usually in singular rather than dual terms. Indeed, naturalized citizens would demand nothing less. A Chinese American is an American national first and “ethnically” Chinese second. Conceptually and legally, he or she would expect not to be equated with a Chinese national—one concern being to claim the full rights and protections of citizenship. From such a perspective, the shared biculturality of American China scholars and Chinese returned students appears at best as something of secondary importance.

The problem with such “essentializing” of nationality, which can be really no more than a legal category and an artificial construct, is

that it obscures other important shared common denominators. If we see only the concerns of nationality—and in the Cold War era there were strong pressures to do so in the name of “national security”—then China scholars who are American nationals and those who are not appear as different as other American nationals from other Chinese nationals. But this habit of mind obscures the reality that individuals from the two groups work closely together in a single cohesive professional community, based on shared biculturalism and the shared pursuit of scholarly understanding of Chinese society. The commonalities, in fact, arguably matter much more in the daily lives of both groups than the legal differences in nationality. American China studies has in fact from the start been very much a transnational pursuit, the “national security” concerns of its origins notwithstanding.

*BICULTURALS AND BICULTURALITY
IN MODERN CHINESE HISTORY*

The same considerations apply to biculturals in modern Chinese history. Their fate and our perceptions of them have been heavily influenced by the historical forces of anti-imperialism and nationalism. The Chinese Revolution was made in the name of anti-imperialism, against cultural as well as political-military domination of China by Western nations and Japan. In that historical context, the biculturals, almost like the Chinese “compradores” who served foreign business interests, were stigmatized or forgotten, swept aside by the tide of revolutionary history. The main story or social force of modern China, it seemed to most historians (Western and Chinese alike), had to do with the popular “masses,” especially the peasants who were least touched by Western culture; by comparison with them, the biculturals of modern China seemed insignificant.

In the polarized world of imperialism and anti-imperialist nationalism, the dominant view of China’s contact with Western culture was to reject the reality of the coexistence and interaction of two cultures and to insist instead on the necessary triumph of one or the other. Anti-imperialist impulses led to a focus on the evils of expansionist imperialism and a call for the rejection of the modern West. At bottom, cultural issues were subsumed under issues of nationality. Those

impulses were provoked by, and in turn counterprovoked, self-righteous views of modern Western civilization. While one insisted that China must become more like the West, the other insisted that China must throw off the yoke of modern Western imperialism. While Western ideologues condemned anti-Western impulses in modern China as aberrations, insisting that any real modernization must finally follow a Western form, the Chinese Communist Revolution launched for almost three decades repeated attacks on Western cultural influence.

The ideologically charged environment of imperialism and anti-imperialism/nationalism has made it difficult to discuss dispassionately the full importance of biculturals and of biculturalism in modern China. Biculturals have been attacked or dismissed as compradores (with connotations bordering on the traitorous) or (Western) "bourgeois" intellectuals, while China as a whole under dual-cultural influence came to be seen as "semicolonial," not only politically but culturally.⁶

The historical fact, however, is that biculturals figured very prominently in modern Chinese history. We need not belabor the obvious: the leaders in the sciences and engineering in modern China came almost exclusively from the ranks of the returned students from the West before 1949 and, in the 1980s and 1990s, are once more coming from that same group. That is to be expected, given the technological strengths of the Western countries. What is less obvious is that the same applies to other major fields of activity as well.

Sun Yat-sen (Sun Yixian), of course, is probably the best-known bicultural of modern China. Sun went to Hawaii as a teenager (age thirteen to sixteen), was educated in a missionary school there and then at Queen's College in Hong Kong, and later obtained his M.D. from the medical school affiliated with Alice Hospital in Hong Kong. He was nearly completely bilingual, as comfortable in English as in Chinese (Boorman, 1967-1979: 3/170-71).

For better or for worse, the small circle of top Guomindang leaders around Sun and later Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) included a disproportionate number of biculturals. As is well known, Sun himself went on to wed Soong Ching-ling (Song Qingling), a graduate of Wesleyan College for Women, who had worked as his English-language secretary after the 1911 Revolution. Ching-ling's elder sister

Ai-ling married H. H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi), educated at Oberlin and Yale, who was to become Chiang Kai-shek's top financier. The younger sister Mei-ling, a graduate of Wellesley College, would of course marry Chiang Kai-shek. The brother T. V. Soong (Song Ziwen), a graduate of Harvard and known to be more comfortable in English than in Chinese, is said to have habitually conversed in English in China and read Chinese books mainly in translation (Boorman, 1967-1979: 3/142-44; *Ajia rekishi jiten*, 1959-1962: 5/350a).

The top leadership of Republican China counted many other biculturals. As might be expected, they were prominent in the diplomatic corps: one needs only think of Eugene Chen (Chen Youren), arguably China's most important diplomat of the 1920s and instrumental in the rights recovery movement, who was a native of Trinidad and was trained as a solicitor in England (*Ajia rekishi jiten*, 1959-1962: 6/375a). Or one might think of Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun), prominent after Chen in the 1930s and 1940s, who was educated at the missionary college St. John's in China and then Columbia in the United States (*Ajia rekishi jiten*, 1959-1962: 3/184b).

Less obviously, biculturals were also prominent in jurisprudence, another field that required intimate knowledge of English and other European languages, given the great importance of Western law as a model for China. Consider the example of Wu Tingfang, imperial commissioner with Shen Jiaben for law reform in the late Qing, who was born in Singapore and educated in Hong Kong (St. Paul's College) and (in law) at Lincoln's Inn in London (Cheng, 1976: 81-85). Or consider Wang Chung Hui (Wang Chonghui), acknowledged as "China's leading jurist" of the 1920s and instrumental in the writing of the Guomindang Civil Code (of 1929-1930), who had been born in Hong Kong, received a bilingual education there, and later studied at Yale Law School.⁷ And Fu Ping-sheung (Fu Bingchang), another key figure in the drafting of the Guomindang Civil Code and prominent in jurisprudence throughout the 1930s and 1940s, also grew up in Hong Kong and attended St. Stevens School and Hong Kong University (in engineering) (*Minguo renwu da cidian*, 1991: 1158).

Biculturals were also prominent among the top leaders in the modern sector of the economy. There was, for example, the "matches king" Liu Hongsheng, who studied at the missionary university St. John's; the textiles "giant dragon" Tang Xinghai, who studied at MIT;

and Rong Yiren, heir from the late 1930s to the enterprises of the “flour king” Rong Desheng and also a graduate of St. John’s, who has become prominent once more in 1990s China (Aija rekishi jiten, 1959-1962: 9/267b; Hai Xiao, 1994; Zhongguo renming da cidian, 1994: 519-20). Individuals such as these spearheaded the development of capitalism and industrialization in China.

Biculturals were prominent, finally, in higher education and indeed intellectual life as a whole. Cai Yuanpei, China’s top educator and president of Beijing University (Beida) from 1916 to 1922, studied twice in Germany (after obtaining the *jinshi* degree under the old examination system by age 23) (Aija rekishi jiten, 1959-1962: 4/6b-7a). At Beida, Cai gathered together a number of other returned students, including Chen Duxiu, who had studied in Japan and was dean; Hu Shi, who earned a Ph.D. from Columbia and was professor of philosophy; and Li Dazhao, who had studied at Waseda University in Japan (Minguo renwu da cidian, 1991: 253-54) and was the librarian. Lu Xun, of course, had also studied in Japan. These people were at the forefront of the intellectual movements of the May Fourth period.

Biculturality in modern China, of course, was associated not just with a few prominent individuals but also with fundamental long-term changes. In the realm of thought, the May Fourth call for the wholesale transplanting into China of Western culture shaped an entire generation and beyond. In law, court actions came to be guided by a modern code that was copied from Germany (via Japan) in its first instance, until it was altered to better fit Chinese realities, resulting in a document that can only be called bicultural.⁸ In the realm of education, the blueprint was almost entirely Western (again much of it via Japan), later adapted to the Chinese context, resulting in a school and university system that also can only be considered bicultural.

The 1949 Revolution, of course, sidelined biculturals and biculturality from the center stage of Chinese history for a time until the coming of reforms after 1978. “Bourgeois intellectuals,” especially those schooled in foreign universities and those in fields of study most influenced by the West—such as English and English literature and jurisprudence—were especially hard hit in the anti-rightist movement of 1957 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976. Yet the vehemence with which the Cultural Revolution attacked “bourgeois

influences" in the schools and in legal institutions (as well as in the health services, the arts, and other spheres) in the end only attested to Western culture's great presence in China. Indeed, the Cultural Revolution itself, despite its nativist undertones, claimed final ideological authority not from indigenous roots but from the West's Karl Marx.

With the coming of the reforms, biculturals and biculturalism quickly moved back to the center of the historical stage. Many Western-educated intellectuals and party leaders victimized in the Cultural Revolution have returned to power and prominence.

Biculturals are also coming to play a larger role than ever before in Chinese economic life. There are, first of all, the overseas Chinese tycoons, mostly based in whole or in part in Hong Kong, some traceable to earlier generations of bicultural capitalists who remained abroad. Termed (rather misleadingly and inappropriately) *diasporic capitalists* by some scholars, these wealthy biculturals have helped drive China's distinctive economic development of the past two decades. Most of the 35 overseas Chinese billionaires identified by *Forbes* magazine in 1994 (out of a total of 350 billionaires in the world) have invested heavily in China in recent years.⁹ Their family enterprises have technological and marketing know-how, while China provides a cheap disciplined labor force as well as raw materials and favorable terms of investment.

Beneath the top tier of big tycoons are much larger numbers of smaller, bicultural overseas Chinese investors who, on more modest scales, have taken advantage of similar combinations of foreign capital know-how with Chinese labor-raw materials. Together with the more visible tycoons, they have formed the core of the dynamic foreign and joint-enterprise sector of the Chinese economy that, along with rural industrial enterprises, has led the way in the stunning development of the past two decades.

The old Republican tradition of lawmaking based on Western models has returned once more. Newly promulgated codes draw liberally from the West, as has the reinvigorated court system. In education, English has returned as the primary foreign language, as has the guiding influence of Western models. In intellectual life, the earlier May Fourth call for wholesale Westernization has once more become a major current of thought.

*DUAL-CULTURAL INFLUENCES
IN THE MODERN WORLD*

I have restricted the word *biculturality* in this article mainly to the thoroughgoing copresence of the English- and Chinese-speaking cultures in individuals, best exemplified by bilinguals or near-bilinguals. If we consider instead just the copresence of dual-cultural influences, without necessarily the degree of coequal and concentrated expression found in bilinguality, it should be clear that we would be talking about a much larger and broader phenomenon.

Of all the multiple ways in which one might think of “modernity” in the non-Western world, the intrusion of the Western world is surely a basic consideration, as well as the most commonly employed defining characteristic of the “modern period” in historiography (so that China’s “modern” period is generally defined as starting with the Opium War). This copresence of Western with indigenous culture was born in the first instance of historical imperialism, in the sense of political-military expansion. With the passing of imperialism, it has been the consequence of world capitalism and the continued aggressive spread of Western cultural influence through new mediums.

Indeed, for the non-Western world as a whole, the growing presence of Western culture and hence of the copresence of the modern West with the “indigenous tradition” may be seen as the fundamental reality of the “modern” era. It is the basic condition of existence of most non-Western peoples in the modern age. Five centuries of expansion of Western capitalism have brought the culture of the modern West into almost every corner of the globe. The resulting coexistence of Western with indigenous cultures makes cultural duality one of the truly mammoth historical facts of the modern age.

Dual-cultural influence, of course, has in fact affected much larger numbers in modern China than just the bicultural groups discussed above. Outside of the bicultural returned students, graduates of missionary schools, and overseas Chinese, there have been many more Chinese who experienced dual-cultural influences. Chinese who were closely associated with the 300,000-odd foreign residents in China by the 1930s,¹⁰ mainly in the special concession areas in the 90 or so treaty ports that had been opened up by the unequal treaties, were all

under Western cultural influence to varying degrees. With the new changes that have come with reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, the Western presence in China has not only revived but has also grown and spread by leaps and bounds. Thousands more are drawn into employment, involvement, or association with foreign and joint enterprises month by month. The numbers of people conversant in English language and culture have been multiplying geometrically. Major Chinese cities are becoming once more quite thoroughly exposed to foreign influence, in the manner of the pre-1949 cities.

I do not want to suggest that dual-cultural influences must of necessity end in the bilingual type of cultural duality (i.e., biculturality). Not all of China is going to end up like Hong Kong, in which the double linguistic and cultural heritages coexist in almost equal parts. What I do want to suggest, however, is that we need to employ the same kind of perspective outlined for biculturality to think about the copresence of Western and non-Western cultures in the modern non-Western world. While the ideologies of anti-imperialism and nationalism condition us to think in terms of either/or dichotomies, culture as the lived experience of the peoples themselves does not carry such dictates.¹¹ Just as most bicultural and bilingual individuals live comfortably most of the time with the coexistence of two cultures and languages, with some mixing and perhaps also some compounding of the two, so too do most peoples under different degrees of dual-cultural influences accommodate both cultures readily most of the time in their daily lives. Concepts such as “semicolonial” or “(Western) bourgeois influence” in the cultural realm presuppose a mutually exclusive opposition between what is “Chinese” and what is “Western” and are constructions of nationalistic ideologies; they do not really have much meaning on the level of everyday life experiences.

BICULTURALITY VERSUS EDWARD SAID AND CLIFFORD GEERTZ

Recent tendencies in academic theories have helped us to overcome some of the parochialism of self-righteous Western-centric modernism, but they have ironically only reinforced the dichotomous

juxtaposition of the modern West versus the non-West. Edward Said (1978) helped to overcome Eurocentrism by analyzing imperialism as a cultural phenomenon and “Orientalist” discourse as the core of that phenomenon. He argued compellingly that Orientalist constructions of the Middle Eastern societies and nations (equally applicable to China) as “the other” anticipated and even helped rationalize expansionist imperialism. And he, more than anyone else, has turned the spotlight from political-military imperialism to “cultural imperialism” (Said, 1978).

Clifford Geertz (1973, 1978), at the same time, helped to undermine Eurocentric positivism through his calls for “local knowledge” and “thick description.” In Geertz’s view, the modern world has placed too much faith in the idealization of modern science. Our study of other societies, especially anthropological research, provides us the opportunity to see how relative cultural constructions and knowledge are. What we must aim for, according to Geertz, is “thick description,” by which he means not dense factual narrations, as the term itself might suggest, but rather “interpretive anthropology” that tells us about indigenous constructions, their conceptual structures, and their differences from our own. That is what Geertz means by “local knowledge”: again, not merely any kind of knowledge of local societies, as suggested by the term itself, but the anthropologist’s interpretive clarification of indigenous meanings as distinguished from our own Western modernist presuppositions (Geertz, 1973, 1978; Anderson, 1995).

Under the influence of theorists such as Said and Geertz, some parts of the China field have now become preoccupied with critical “reflexivity” on our modernist presuppositions, as part of a radical critique of earlier Western-centric scholarship. Instead of berating China as inferior, the new scholarship takes the posture of relativism: China is as value worthy as the West. The new scholarship would not try to impose supposed universals on China, which are after all just Western constructions. Instead, it would interpretively translate for us the true Chinese meanings, which will help us not only understand Chinese culture but also gain additional critical perspective on our own culture.¹²

Those new tendencies, however, have not been able to leave behind the basic binary discursive structure of the earlier scholarship. To be

sure, in the new culturalist scholarship, the West is no longer seen as the model and the non-West the inferior Other. Equivalence and cultural relativism are emphasized. However, that very emphasis carries with it still a dichotomous juxtaposition between the West and the non-West. The twist it brings is to “privilege” instead the non-Western over the modern Western. For Said (1978), Western-centric Orientalist scholarship and Western cultural imperialism are to be countered by reflexive criticisms of their discourse, which is to be rejected in favor of an alternative discourse from the point of view of the victimized societies. For Geertz (1973, 1978), the counter to Western-/modern-centric scholarship (and to the West’s cultural imperialism) is “thick description” and “local knowledge” of indigenous “webs of meaning” to replace the social science discourse based on modernist Western presuppositions. The choice, for both of them, is still between dichotomized opposites.

The Geertz-inspired scholarship, especially, has not paid much attention to modern history. Given its intent to search out different cultural constructions to provide a critical mirror on the self-righteous assumptions of the modern West, it has understandably preferred the precontact non-West over the postcontact non-West for study. Under Western cultural imperialism of the modern period, the assumption goes, the non-West comes to be dominated by modern Western culture. It might even adopt the modernist assumptions and discourse of the modern West. Once that happens, the indigenous culture can no longer provide a clear, critical reflection on modernist Western culture. Geertz himself thus has had very little to say about how indigenous cultures have changed and not changed under Western influence, beyond simply assuming their subjugation.

In the end, Said and Geertz have left us in a dichotomous world of the modern versus the indigenous and (cultural) imperialism versus anti-imperialism, no less than the modernist (including Marxist or Weberian) scholarship of the earlier generation that they criticize. The anti-imperialists must choose to reject modern Western civilization and its cultural imperialism. In the imperialist world, there can only be domination of one and subordination of the other; there can be no co-equal presence as in biculturality or cultural duality.

*SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR
THE STUDY OF MODERN CHINA*

In the earlier scholarship on modern China, the binary discursive structure of academic theory and ideology had carried so much force that even those who would consciously argue against Orientalist constructs had adopted it, even if unwittingly. Thus, a generation of work on why China failed to modernize (i.e., was not more like the West) had led to a generation that countered it by insisting that China was much like the West. Chinese cities were not just administrative centers but commercial-productive cities like the West's. China too had its "early modern" period. The difference between the West and China was not in kind but in time, with China lagging by, at most, just a century.¹³

That dichotomous discursive structure was reinforced at the same time by radical critiques of imperialism. In the 1960s and 1970s, social historians led in the criticisms of Western imperialism and of the imperialist implications of the modernization paradigm of the day.¹⁴ Their sources of inspiration were mainly Marxist and, for some, also "substantivist" in valuating premodern peasant communities. In the 1980s and 1990s, radical cultural historians have shifted the critique of imperialism from the material to the cultural realm. Their sources of inspiration have been Said's "Orientalism," Geertz's "local knowledge," and, for some, also the "postcolonial" work of the "subalternists."¹⁵ Through it all, the West and China have remained sharply dichotomized.

That same binary discursive structure affected scholars in China no less than those in the United States and Europe. To counter Marx's notion of an Asiatic mode of production, Mao developed the formulation of "incipient capitalism": China was not stagnant but rather was headed in the direction of capitalist development just like the West, until Western imperialism skewed China off that proper path of historical development. Chinese scholars have since expended immense energies to document such "incipient capitalism" in the Ming and Qing, including especially commercialization and the rise of the capitalist production relations of wage labor.¹⁶

As for China's "modern" period, the emphasis had been on the subjugation of China by the modern West under imperialism and

“semicolonialism.” The Chinese Revolution, therefore, had to throw off not just the yoke of feudalism but also that of imperialism and China’s resultant semicolonialism. Only then would China return to the proper historical path of capitalist-socialist development and, at the same time, assert its distinctive national character and culture.

In none of those constructions was there room for dual-cultural influences as the coequal presence of Chinese and Western cultures, with continuing interactions and indeterminate outcomes and possibilities. Much less could biculturalism be seen as a desirable: given the context of imperialism, it could only mean subjugation; there could not be coequal coexistence. Modern China had to be either indigenously Chinese or slavishly Western. There could be no third alternative that would allow it to be both Western and Chinese, with as-yet-unthought-of alternatives. Even after its reversion, Hong Kong still carries to a great extent the stigma of a bastard child, a product of hated colonialism, and not quite of the mainstream of China and Chinese society, much less of Chinese nationality.

The postmodernist notions of Said and Geertz have reinforced, if unwittingly, that same binary discursive structure of past scholarship by its rejection of the modernist West and its “cultural imperialism.” That rejection, to be sure, comes with laudably critical attitudes toward imperialism and its Western-centrism and self-righteous modernism. But it is predicated still on a dichotomized opposition between the West and the non-West. And since it rejects the modernist West, it in effect leaves for the non-Western world no other alternative than premodern indigenous cultures.

The result is a scholarship that can seem to the modern intellectuals of the non-Western world rather irrelevant to their concerns. Most of those intellectuals want urgently for their societies to modernize, to attain what they see as the universal gifts of modern civilization, such as higher labor productivity and the freedom it provides from survival pressures and back-breaking physical labor, better health services and the greater infant survival rates and higher life expectancy that they afford, or just superior firepower so as not to suffer again the indignities inflicted by imperialism. Geertz, who rejects modernism while taking for granted those gifts of modern civilization, can seem to be indulging himself in the rather frivolous pursuit of writing about the quaintness of indigenous traditions.¹⁷

The historical example of biculturals and biculturalism suggests a different way to think about cultural contact between the modern West and the non-Western world. At the level of lived experience among individuals, rather than the ideological constructs of nations and academic theorists, dual-cultural influences can usually coexist quite easily in the manner of two languages. There is no necessary domination-subordination. Ideologies might require either/or choices between tradition/modernity, Chinese/Western, autonomy/domination, or sinicization/Westernization, but the people in their life experiences usually do not.

Individuals in their everyday lives, unlike nations with their ideological constructions, are pretty secure about their "Chineseness": what is "Chinese" is simply what the Chinese people have seen fit to incorporate into their lives. "Chinese culture," like the Chinese language, is not some unchanging abstraction but rather what is lived and used by the Chinese people at a given time.¹⁸ At that level, there is no necessary contradiction between "Western" and Chinese. One can be both modern and Chinese at the same time.

What the concept biculturalism urges us to do is to acknowledge the on-the-ground reality of dual-cultural influences in the modern non-Western world. Such a view of the expansion of Western culture into the non-Western world allows us to think of it as open-ended historical process, not as preconceived ideological judgment. In today's postimperialist world, when cultural influence is not linked to and politicized by political-military domination, we need all the more to emphasize the coexistential over the conflictual side of biculturalism.

DOMINATION-SUBORDINATION IN CULTURAL INTERACTION?

Let us lift out and examine more closely here the assumption that interaction between Western and indigenous cultures can only result in the domination of one over the other. That assumption has two roots. One comes from the perspective of the political history of nations: the expansion of the modern nation-states of the West did indeed result historically in political domination of non-Western societies (i.e., in imperialism and in colonialism). The other comes from the perspective of anthropological theorists studying small

indigenous communities, such as Clifford Geertz: the intrusion of the West and of the modern nation-state, accompanied by industrialization and urbanization, did result historically in at least the partial disintegration of the “premodern” communities and their cultures.

But do these perspectives apply to Chinese culture? Here we need to recall first the fact that modern China’s political subjugation by imperialism was partial, not total. Even in the construction of Mao, Western intrusion only turned China into a “semicolony,” not a colony. The history of the Chinese state in modern times is different from that of a colonized state.

More important, Chinese culture needs to be considered separately from the political entity of the Chinese state. While it makes good sense to think in terms of the weak maritime defenses of the late Qing state and the discrepancies in firepower between it and the modern West, what might be the analogues to such when one considers the realm of culture and thought?

To be sure, modern Western concepts, such as nation or democracy, made their inroads into Chinese culture. And “traditional” Chinese systems of thought, such as Confucianism, unraveled as a ruling ideology with the collapse of the imperial state. But did those result in the subjugation or disintegration pure and simple of Chinese culture?

Here again, language seems to me a useful way to consider the problem, for it is the most concrete manifestation of a cultural system. When we think about the Chinese language, it should be obvious that it has been far more resilient than the imperial state or its Confucian ideology. Chinese children continue to grow up in the language, and Chinese adults continue to use it by instinct and habit, with all its attendant webs of meaning. Modern Chinese has changed from classical Chinese, to be sure, but would it make sense to speak in terms of its “subordination” to English?

Foreign languages have in fact made only very limited inroads into the Chinese language in modern times. The resilience of the Chinese language has been shown, in part, by its resistance to phonemic loan words. Consider, for example, the limited life spans of the May Fourth phonemic loan words for democracy, *de-mo-ke-la-xi*, and science, *sai-yin-si*. Both were shortly replaced by terms that drew instead on existing words and meanings in the language (albeit via modern

Japanese)—*minzhu* and *kexue*. As was noted earlier, new terms and concepts, even when intended as translations of foreign terms and concepts, such as *ziyou* for “freedom,” unavoidably carried Chinese cultural imprints.

When we consider bilingual and bicultural individuals and communities, it should be clear that the concepts of domination and subordination can be of only very limited usefulness. As noted earlier, the relationship between the two languages is more likely to resemble an addition, physical mixing, or chemical compounding than domination-subordination. The meanings and patterns of thought carried by the Chinese language have remained in the face of English, the most powerfully “hegemonic” of the contemporary world’s languages.

Some readers might counter that the Chinese language is possibly unique in this respect. But there can be no question about the continued “integrity” of the Japanese language/culture system, for example, despite its ready receptivity to imported terms and concepts, including phonemic loan words, and despite postwar American occupation and the imposition of an entirely new political system from outside. Even with colonized societies such as India and Hong Kong, in which English became the official language not only of the colonials but also of the indigenous elite, the indigenous languages and cultures have retained most of their original patterns and meanings without disintegration. The Indian example shows, moreover, how even a colonial language such as English can be made into a medium for a distinctive Indian nationalism and culture (Chatterjee, 1993).

The fact is that languages and cultural systems historically have not behaved like states and nations. They have not collapsed with the demolition of shore batteries and the capture of a capital. Instead, they live on and are continually reproduced through the everyday usages and experiences of a people. They survive as long as parents continue to bring up their children in the original language and as long as the members of the society continue to relate to one another through that language. Even when a foreign language has “penetrated” an indigenous culture to the extent of bilinguality/biculturalism, the result has not been an either/or dichotomous opposition, or domination-

coequal relationship, with indeterminate outcomes and creative possibilities.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN FOREIGN-AREA STUDIES

Such a view of biculturality and of dual-cultural influences can give us a way to conceptualize American China studies that goes beyond the burdens of the past, be they Western-centric modernism and its derivative “national security” concerns or postmodernism and its nihilistic rejection of the West’s recent past. It might even offer us a conceptual path out of the current crisis that afflicts China studies.

The original impulse for postwar American China studies was concern over national security. Government funding for foreign-areas studies through the National Defense Education Act and private funding through the Ford Foundation were motivated in the first instance by the Cold War and the imperative to “know one’s enemy.” Advancement in scholarly knowledge was the by-product, not the original intent of these efforts. Today, in our postcommunist and post-Cold War world, that earlier impulse has lost its original urgency and imperative.

At the same time, foreign-area studies has been threatened by recent fads in academic theory. In the social sciences, as the different disciplines continue to “harden” in their efforts to imitate the physical sciences, “rational choice” theory has acquired enormous influence. With the general emphasis in the social science disciplines on “hypothesis-driven” and “hypothesis testing” research, problems for study are increasingly being formulated deductively from theoretical suppositions. The distinctive constructions of “rationality” (e.g., in economic behavior) in the modern West are being applied universally throughout the world to guide research. There is little respect for qualitative knowledge about the cultural specificities of different societies. Economics, sociology, and political science departments are less and less willing to hire area specialists, who are increasingly assumed to be weak in disciplinary skills and theories. Earlier generations of China economists, China sociologists, and China political scientists are not being reproduced.

Postmodernist "cultural studies," mainly in the humanities departments and in history, could have been a useful corrective to such scientific tendencies. That was indeed the original intent of someone like Clifford Geertz, who emphasized the need for us to appreciate the relativity of cultures and the cultural constructedness of ostensibly objective scientific inquiry. Such critiques could have brought us strong defense of academic foreign-area studies in the name of "local knowledge."

The excesses of radical culturalism, however, have contributed to the creation of a polarized opposition between the social sciences and the humanities and, to some degree, also within individual disciplines themselves. In its political posture against "cultural imperialism," its epistemological posture against "mere" empirical research, and its use of exclusivist jargon, radical culturalism has created a world unto itself, unable (or even unwilling) to communicate constructively with other kinds of scholarship. Geertz's (1973, 1978) "local knowledge" and "thick description" may sound like calls for intensive foreign-area studies, but they have actually come to carry a much narrower and more specific meaning of studying only the "conceptual structures" of indigenous, premodern societies. That kind of emphasis leaves little room for constructive communication with social sciences that take a universalist approach.

The result has been a bifurcation between and within the academic disciplines that reminds us in many ways of the divides between earlier modernization theory and the postmodernist critiques of it as "Orientalist." The rational choice approach, like the modernization model, takes the West as the universal standard and would make of social science research a positivistic exercise. The radical culturalist approach criticizes such presuppositions for their Western-centrism and their scientific assumptions and calls for the humanities to concentrate instead on indigenous webs of meaning. In that polarized world, there is little room for approaches that draw inspiration from both. Studies of bicultural context risk being dismissed as unscientific, while considerations for common human concerns, such as overcoming subsistence crises and improving health services, are under suspicion of being modernist or "Orientalist" and therefore imperialist.

In this polarized world of absolutist tendencies, the small minority of vocal theorists (and would-be theorists) has come to occupy the center stage of academic debate. The majority, engaged "only" in substantive research, is in danger of being relegated to a voiceless "silent majority" or of being swept up into one or the other opposed positions.

Even multiculturalism, originally a worthy ideal of cosmopolitan education to reflect the composition of contemporary America, has been swept up by the polarization in the universities between scientism and postmodernism. In reaction against the positivistic universalism of the social sciences, multiculturalism in the humanities has come increasingly to emphasize cultural relativism. Since past Western studies of other cultures have been so heavily influenced by modernist, "Orientalist," or imperialist perspectives, we must now turn to study all foreign cultures "on their own terms." In undergraduate education, what this has come to mean is that Chinese history courses are taken mostly by students of Chinese ethnic origin, Japanese history mainly by those of Japanese origin, and German history by those of German origin; the operative consequence of multiculturalism has turned out to be not cosmopolitan "internationalized" education but narrow ethnocentrism.

In academic research, the positivistic universalism of the "hard" social sciences and the ethnocentric culturalism of the "soft" humanities have left little room for commonsense foreign-area studies. At the same time, the contraction in and uncertainty surrounding extramural support are depriving foreign-area studies centers of their hitherto most important lifeline. One even hears talk at universities' highest levels of the possibility of discontinuing support for foreign-area studies centers.

Perhaps biculturality can have a role to play in the current crisis. Academically speaking, it is distinct from "rational choice" approaches because it does not claim that the modern West's constructed rationalities are the only humanly possible rationalities. It stands for a comparative and critical perspective from thoroughgoing acquaintance with at least one other culture. At the same time, it is distinct from culturalist relativism because it begins not with segmented ethnocentrism and relativism but the fact of dual-cultural influences in the modern world. In the lives of ordinary people, the copresence of two

cultures does not have to lead to the kinds of relations of domination-subordination as in the political history of imperialism but can result rather in a much more equal relationship of continued interaction, with undetermined outcomes and creative possibilities.

In undergraduate education, biculturalism can be a value that replaces the present segmented ethnocentrism. It acknowledges the fact that increasing numbers of our students are biculturals, and it emphasizes the desirability of that fact. A bicultural education would not be like the ethnocentric education of a misused multiculturalism. It would involve instead the study of Western culture as well as one (or more) non-Western culture. Students must not be led by radical culturalism to reject the Western culture of which they are so much a part; they need to become steeped in Western civilization. Yet they would also be encouraged to take pride in and develop their other cultural backgrounds. Most important, biculturalism itself can be emphasized as a desirable goal of liberal education: it is biculturalism that enables us to transcend our parochialism and develop comparative and critical perspectives on both cultures. It is biculturalism that might open the way to truly transcultural and transnational alternatives. Such bicultural education should serve well not only the growing numbers of bicultural students but also those of monocultural background.

In spotlighting biculturalism, my intention is not to propose it as a new "ism" to replace the others. By biculturalism, I mean to point to the concrete reality of groups of individuals who combine two cultures and two languages. Their experience teaches us that the two can coexist readily. The reference is to a particular history, albeit with a lesson, but not to another ideological "ism."

I wish most of all to emphasize that the history of biculturalism shows us that the copresence of two cultures does not have to lead to dichotomized choices between imperialism and nationalism or subordination and autonomy, in the manner of the histories of nations or of the constructions of Western-centric modernism or postmodernist relativism. Rather, cultural contacts at the level of the everyday lived experience of the people can result in ready accommodation, without aggression or domination and victimization or subjugation. Biculturalism and bilingualism of individuals in modern China and in American China studies show us in concentrated form how two cultures can

coexist, intermingle, and even fuse into something new. They offer a glimpse at the possibilities for a cosmopolitanism that can come with intercultural understanding and transnational visions.

NOTES

1. Accurate statistics are difficult to come by. This figure of an average of 1,000 is based on the years 1929 to 1934, when a total of 3,174 went to Europe and 1,089 to the United States (Jiaoyubu tongjishi, 1936: 284). Figures for study in Japan are from Sanetō Keishū (Huang, 1972: 37, 41).

2. In 1924, about 300,000 students were enrolled in Protestant schools, another 260,000 in Catholic schools (Xiong Ming'an, 1983: 402). Jiang Zemin's excursions into English during his 1998 visit to the United States came from his education in a missionary school.

3. The total is from *Shenzhou xueren* (1997: 6/19). The proportion of those who had remained outside China in 1991 and 1992 was 59% (Kong Fanjun et al., 1994: 174).

4. A term I still prefer to *diasporic Chinese*, with its inappropriate equation with the Jews, who have a long history of being persecuted as a people.

5. Liu Hanbiao and Zhang Xinghan (1994: 405) give 1,645,000.

6. Prasenjit Duara has reflected critically on how the modern nation-state has shaped and organized historians and history. For a recent essay, see Duara (1998).

7. And served variously as a justice of the Supreme Court, Minister of Justice, and President of the Judicial Yuan (Boorman, 1967-1979: 3/376b-378b). Wang, a polyglot, translated the German Civil Code of 1900 into English; published in 1907, his translation became the standard English version.

8. I have estimated that by the 1930s, each year at least one person in 200 households became involved in a new lawsuit. Over a twenty-year period, or roughly the period of active recall shown in village investigations, that would mean something like 1 of every 10 households, enough to make the modern court system a factor in everyone's life and consciousness. This extended not just to urban populations but to the villages as well (Huang, 1996: 178-81). The incidence of lawsuits shrank during the highly ideologized period of the late 1950s to the late 1970s. By the late 1980s and the 1990s, however, the incidence of litigation in modern-style courts that is traceable directly to the Republican period dwarfed that of the 1930s. In the 1990s, for example, each year one person in every 50 households became involved in a new lawsuit (Huang, 1996: 180; computed as 2 million cases or 4 million litigants for 1.2 billion people, or 200 million households: 1 for 50 households). The Western-style law court is once more a major factor in the life of almost every Chinese.

9. This includes Li Ka-shing and Gordon Wu in Hong Kong, the Kuok brothers in Singapore and Malaysia, the Riadys (now almost a household name in the United States because of all the attention on campaign fund-raising) in Indonesia, and the Chearavanonts in Thailand (Lever-Tracy, Ip, and Tracy, 1996).

10. Reliable numbers are hard to come by. This is John Fairbank's estimate (Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig, 1965: 342).

11. Hanchao Lu makes the important point that, seen through the everyday lives of the "little urbanites" (*xiao shimin*), twentieth-century Shanghai cannot be seen simply in terms of the old binaries between "Westernized" and "traditional" (Lu, 1999).

12. These, at least, are the stated ideals of James Hevia's recent book (Hevia, 1995). But see Joseph Esherick's critique of the evidential basis of the book (Esherick, 1998).

13. The leading spokesman for this view in American scholarship is William Rowe (1984, 1989, 1990). Its influence can be seen in many other areas of scholarship.

14. The classic statement from Esherick (1972) is featured in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* with Andrew Nathan's (1972) argument for the opposite point of view.

15. Barlow (1993) is the representative statement of the new radical cultural studies position.

16. Arif Dirlik (1996) points out well that "Orientalism" was the product not only of "Western" Orientalists but also of indigenous intellectuals who came under the influence of Orientalist constructs.

17. See Woodside (1998) for similar points.

18. Ho Ping-ti's (1998) recent article makes a powerful case that multiethnicity and multiculturalism made up the very essence of "sinicization" and Chinese civilization.

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