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CHINESE HISTORY AND THE QUESTION OF ORIENTALISM

ARIF DIRLIK

ABSTRACT

The discussion develops Edward Said's thesis of orientalism. Said approached "orientalism" as a construction of Asia by Europeans, and a problem in Euro-American modernity. This essay argues that, from the beginning, Asians participated in the construction of the orient, and that orientalism therefore should be viewed as a problem in Asian modernities as well. The essay utilizes Mary Louise Pratt's idea of "contact zones" to argue that orientalism was a product of the circulation of Euro-American and Asian intellectuals in these contact zones, or borderlands. While orientalism has been very much implicated in power relations between Euro-America and Asia, the question of power nevertheless should be separated analytically from the construction of orientalism. In support of this argument, the essay points to the contemporary "self-orientalization" of Asian intellectuals, which is a manifestation not of powerlessness but newly-acquired power.

I consider below some questions raised by orientalism as concept and practice. These questions have their origins in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978, which has had a lasting impact on Third World cultural studies in Europe and the United States.¹ Provocative as Said's book was in its critique of orientalism as practice, its larger significance rests on Said's relentless demonstration of the intersection of historical interpretation, culture, and politics in Euro-American studies of Asia. I will argue, contrary to critics of Said, that questions raised by this intersection are still very much relevant to problems of historical interpretation of Asia in general, and China in particular. On the other hand, I will suggest also that contemporary historiographical evidence calls for a recasting of the relationship between history, culture, and politics in a configuration that is significantly different from Said's conceptualization of it in *Orientalism*. On the basis of this reconfigured understanding of orientalism, I will reflect by way of conclusion on the possibilities of escaping the burden of orientalism in historical studies. Because orientalism as concept refers to the "orient" as a whole, in illustrating my arguments I will draw on evidence from the career of orientalism not just in the historiography of China but in other histories as well. Finally, I am concerned here not with specific historiographical questions, but with questions that are best characterized as metahistorical.

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979).

ORIENTALISM

To summarize very briefly, in Said's own words,

Orientalism . . . refers to several overlapping domains: first, the changing historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia, a relationship with a 4000-year-old history; second, the scientific discipline in the west according to which, beginning in the early nineteenth century, one specialized in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions; and, third, the ideological suppositions, images and fantasies about a currently important and politically urgent region of the world called the Orient. The relatively common denominator between these three aspects of Orientalism is the line separating Occident from Orient and this, I have argued, is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography. This is, however, neither to say that the division between Orient and Occident is unchanging nor is it to say that it is simply fictional.²

Said's study was concerned almost exclusively with the second and the third aspects of orientalism as it related to Western Asia, and drew upon the work of prominent English and French orientalists to argue his thesis. A central aspect of the work was to represent contemporary area studies as a linear descendant of the orientalist tradition in Euro-America. Two guiding assumptions of the argument are worth spelling out.

First, "one of the legacies of Orientalism, and indeed one of its epistemological foundations, is historicism, that is, the view . . . that if humankind has a history it is produced by men and women, and can be understood historically as, at each given period, epoch or moment, possessing a complex, but coherent unity." Said described this notion of historicism more precisely as a "universalizing historicism," that placed different histories conceived as "coherent unities" on a temporal scale.³ Spatial differences were thereby rendered into temporal differences, and different societies placed at different locations in a progressive temporality in which Euro-America stood for the epitome of progress: "As primitivity, as the age-old antetype of Europe, as a fecund night out of which European rationality developed, the Orient's actuality receded inexorably into a kind of paradigmatic fossilization."⁴

Orientalist epistemology as it emerges from Said's analysis is also clearly culturalist, by which I mean a representation of societies in terms of essentialized cultural characteristics, more often than not enunciated in foundational texts. Culturalist essentialism is homogenizing both spatially and temporally. Spatially, it ignores differences within individual societies, and, in the case of orientalism, differences between Asian societies, which are endowed with common characteristics that mark them as "oriental." It is homogenizing temporally in substituting a cultural essence that defies time for culture as lived experience that is subject to temporal production and reproduction. Culturalism, in other

2. Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-84*, ed. Francis Barker et al. (London, 1986), 211.

3. *Ibid.*, 223-224.

4. *Ibid.*, 215.

words, emerges from a desocialized and dehistoricized conceptualization of culture (as “organically and internally coherent, bound together by a spirit, genius, *Klima*, or national idea,”⁵ which is the sense in which it appears in eighteenth-century European historicism, and also informs Said’s use of “historicism”). This conception suppresses relations both between and within societies in the production of culture as ongoing historical activity (which is informed by an alternative sense of historicism). Such culturalism is important to understanding why, in orientalism, so-called oriental societies may appear at once as objects of admiration for their civilizational achievements, but also relegated to the past as fossilized relics because, with culture substituted for history, they have no “real” historicity and, as Johannes Fabian puts it in a different context, no real contemporaneity, since their presents are but simple reproductions of their pasts.⁶

This epistemology, second, is bound up with questions of Euro-American power over the orient. In *Orientalism*, Said singles out four preconditions without which orientalism “could not have occurred”: European expansion which brought Europeans into contact with other societies; the confrontation with other histories this contact necessitated, which culminated in comparative history; “sympathetic identification,” which for some offered the only access to the panoply of alien cultures, “each permeated by an inimical creative spirit” (this, informed by, and informing, eighteenth-century historicism); and, finally, “the impulse to classify nature and man into types,” and to bring order into the profuse variety of experience that could no longer be contained in inherited conceptions of the world.⁷ Expansion, we may observe, was the point of departure for the new epistemologies for re-ordering the world. Orientalism was an integral consequence of this process.

Orientalism, as part of this epistemological reordering of the world, is not a mere intellectual instrument of imperialism, it *is* “intellectual imperialism.” For Said, orientalism is a “discourse” in the sense that Michel Foucault used that term: “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁸ It is important to underline here that, while Said is quite aware of the complex relationship between power and orientalism, he is adamant that orientalism does not merely serve or represent power, but is itself “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts”⁹ — in other words, orien-

5. Said, *Orientalism*, 118.

6. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, 1983).

7. Said, *Orientalism*, 116–120.

8. *Ibid.*, 3.

9. *Ibid.*, 12.

talism as discourse is an epistemology of power. As such, it is integral to a modern Euro-American cultural consciousness (and unconscious).

It is noteworthy that Said sets out to study in *Orientalism* this dimension of modern Euro-American culture, rather than the “oriental” societies represented in it. In fact, one of his basic goals is to demonstrate how such representations of the orient have silenced the “orientals,” and undercut their ability to represent themselves. His argument on orientalism, however, might not have been as compelling had he stopped here. *Orientalism* concludes not with condemnation or closure, but with a further set of questions: “How does one *represent* other cultures? What is *another* culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the ‘other’)?”¹⁰

Power, specifically Euro-American political power, is key to the argument Said presents on orientalism, and configures the relationship between politics, culture, and history that structures his conceptualization of orientalism. Following the logic of the argument, we might expect a power shift in global relations to reconfigure that relationship, in which case orientalism may be consigned to the past as a manifestation of one specific period in the Euro-American relationship to the world. This is indeed one contemporary verdict on orientalism (not to speak of those who deny it altogether, past or present).

I would like to suggest here a contrary position: that far from being a phenomenon of the past, orientalism, and the culturalist epistemology that nourished it, are very much alive in the present – in a reconfigured relationship between politics, culture, and history – but not necessarily where Said located them. The nature of this relationship is such, moreover, that it raises certain fundamental questions about Said’s conceptualization of orientalism, its location and structure. One question that is of particular interest is: is orientalism an autonomous product of Euro-American development, which is then projected upon the “orient,” or is it rather the product of an unfolding relationship between Euro-Americans and Asians, that required the complicity of the latter in endowing it with plausibility? To mimic what E. P. Thompson said of classes, is orientalism a thing or a relationship? Let me offer some observations on contemporary self-representations before I return to this question and what it might tell us about the historical meaning of orientalism.

“THE ORIENTALISM OF THE ORIENTALS”¹¹

Said’s argument in *Orientalism* may be open to criticism from a variety of perspectives, and it has received its share of criticism, especially from “orientalists.” Whatever may be the merit or lack thereof of these criticisms, the central

10. *Ibid.*, 325.

11. I borrow this subtitle from Yang Congrong, “Dongfang shehide dongfanglun” (The Orientalism of Oriental Societies), *Dangdai* (Contemporary) 64 (August 1, 1991), 38–53.

argument of the book is in my opinion indisputable: orientalism was an integral part (at once as constituent and product) of a Eurocentric conceptualization of the world that was fully articulated in the course of the nineteenth century, that placed Europe at the center and pinnacle of development, and ordered the globe spatially and temporally in accordance with the criteria of European development. Non-European societies were characterized in this reordering of the world not by what they had but by what they lacked—in other words, the lack of one or more of those characteristics that accounted for European development. Rather than provide contemporary alternatives to European development, they were perceived predominantly as located at some rung or other of the ladder of development that Europe already had left behind. They provided Europeans with glimpses not of alternative presents, but of a past stage of European development, what has been described as “a theory of our contemporary ancestors.”¹² The development of this new view of the world went hand in hand with the progress of European colonization and domination of the world.

While we may have come a long way since the nineteenth century, it is hardly arguable that Eurocentrism is already a thing of the past. Post-World War II modernization “theory,” still fundamental to our views of the world, continues to bear strong traces of Eurocentrism. The difference is that it is now a surplus of history rather than a historical lack that defines the state of “premodern” non-European societies, what we call “traditional.” It is the burden of the past in one form or another that marks a society as traditional, which impedes its ascent to modernity. In spite of radical challenges, including challenges from intellectuals from non-European societies, that assert that modernity and tradition, or development and underdevelopment, may be different aspects of the same historical process, the conceptual isolation of the one from the other (of a developed “inside” from an undeveloped “outside”) persists not just in popular consciousness but in intellectual work as well. The “inside” now has come to include some non-European societies, which has created some problems for earlier versions of the modernization explanation, but arguably has contributed further to enhancing the power of the idea of modernization itself.¹³ The question I would like to raise here is whether orientalism was just the autonomous creation of Europeans, or whether its emergence presupposed the complicity of “orientals.” This is what I had in mind when I referred to orientalism as possibly a “relationship.” In *Orientalism* Said raises a number of questions which he does not pursue. These questions, brought to the surface, call for a number of qualifications with regard to the location, production, and consequences of orientalism that are, I think, fundamental to understanding orientalism and its place in modernity.

12. This argument is developed fully, if somewhat tendentiously, in J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York, 1993). For “our contemporary ancestors,” see 16.

13. The inside/outside distinction as a basic feature of Eurocentrism is developed at length in *ibid.*

Said's *Orientalism*, as he is quick to acknowledge, is a study in Euro-American thought, and it has little to say on the question of how intellectuals and others in Asian societies may have contributed to the emergence of orientalism as practice and concept. And even if orientalism was a product of a European intellectual space, how did "oriental" intellectuals respond to it, or receive it? Were the "orientals" indeed as silent, or incapable of representing themselves, as Said's study suggests? How does "orientalism" and the whole question of a modern consciousness appear when we bring the "orientals" into the picture, not as silent objects of a European discourse, but as active participants in its emergence? What bearing would such a reconstructed picture of orientalism have on the question of the relationship between orientalism and power? While Said is quite right in arguing that orientalism derives from an inside/outside (or occident/orient) distinction, moreover, is it possible that in the long run the consequence of orientalism is to call such a distinction into question?

First, the orientalists. Said notes that orientalism, by its very epistemological assumptions, called for "sympathetic identification" as a means of grasping an alien culture. I take this to imply that in the very process of understanding an alien culture, orientalists need in some measure to be "orientalized," if you like, which brings orientalists closer to the Other while distancing them from the society of the Self. If only as specialist or expert, the orientalist comes not just to speak about but also *for* the Other. In a recent work on Chinese modernization, the editor Kurt Werner Radtke, presumably speaking for the contributors to the volume, writes that "the contributors, all intellectuals and China specialists, have in the course of their lives been affected by the process of sinification."¹⁴ There is nothing peculiar about this except that, while we have no difficulty thinking of "Westernized Chinese," which is the subject of much scholarly attention, we do not often think of the "Sinified Westerner." If we do, the distinctions between self and other, or subject and object, crucial to the analysis of orientalism, become blurred though not necessarily abolished, as I will argue below. Suffice it to say here that examples of "orientalized Westerners" abound from the origins of orientalism to the present: from the Jesuits in China to Lawrence of Arabia, who sought to live as Chinese or Arabs; from William "Oriental" Jones, the founder of British orientalism, to the "sinified" contributors to Radtke's volume.¹⁵ Their "orientalization" was what qualified

14. *China's Modernisation: Westernisation and Acculturation*, ed. Kurt Werner Radtke and Tony Saich (Stuttgart, 1993), 1.

15. *Orientalism* provides instances of such "orientalization." Also important for an account of many orientalists in Europe is Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Discovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, transl. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking, with a foreword by Edward Said (New York, 1984). Jonathan Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China, 1620-1960* (Boston, 1969), offers insightful portraits of Westerners involved in China whose activities provide insights into the workings of power at the ground level, as does Randall E. Stross, *The Stubborn Earth: American Agriculturalists on Chinese Soil, 1898-1937* (Berkeley, 1986). For a recent work on the Jesuits, see *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773*, ed. Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie B. C. Oh (Chicago, 1988), which contains a number of articles of great interest. For Lawrence, see his autobiography, T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York, 1964), and for William Jones, see Garland Cannon, *Oriental Jones: A Biography of Sir William Jones (1746-1794)* (New York, 1964).

the orientalists to speak for the orient. To the extent that they were “orientalized,” however, they themselves assumed some of the exoticism of the orient, which on occasion marginalized them, and even rendered them ideologically suspect at home. The latter inevitably raises questions concerning the relationship between orientalism and power.

Such suspicion may be a consequence of the fact that however “condescending” they may have been in their “veneration” of “oriental” cultures (in Raymond Schwab’s words), orientalists have also been responsible for introducing elements of Asian cultures into their societies, for their use of the “orient” in self-criticism, as well as in the critique of Euro-American modernity. French and German orientalists of the early nineteenth century called for an “oriental Renaissance,” which would make the “orient” (understood in terms of India) instead of Greece and Rome into the basis of a new departure in European history.¹⁶ The use of the “orient” in self-criticism is almost a discourse within a discourse of orientalism, from Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* and Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* in the eighteenth century to Andre Malraux’s *The Temptation of the West* and radical US intellectuals’ critiques of the US in the twentieth.¹⁷

Most revealingly, orientalism, itself a product of Eurocentrism, may even find service in the critique of Eurocentrism. A recent example of this is the notion of a “China-centered history” proposed by Paul Cohen and John Schrecker.¹⁸ China-centered history as conceived by these authors is in keeping with the epistemological procedures of orientalism, especially in drawing a clear methodological line between Chinese and other histories, and arguing that Chinese history may be understood only in terms that are internal to it. Schrecker’s *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* illustrates the approach by attempting to understand Chinese history over a three-thousand-year period in terms of the two Chinese concepts of *fengjian* and *junxian*. What is interesting about “China-centered history,” however, is the authors’ explicit positioning of themselves against Eurocentric histories of China. I will have more to say about this approach later.

16. What made the veneration condescending was the sense that India contained “the eternal in its present” (Schwab, 7). In other words, contemporary India was not truly contemporary, but showed Europe its own past. Nevertheless, the challenge to the earlier “Eurocentric” Renaissance is not to be ignored, and neither is the extension of the boundaries of the “inside” to include Asia.

17. Montesquieu (Charles-Louis de Secondat), *Persian Letters*, transl. with an introduction by C. J. Betts (New York, 1993); Oliver Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World: Or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to His Friend in the East*, in *Collected Works*, ed. A. Friedman. 5 vols. (Oxford, 1966); Andre Malraux, *The Temptation of the West*, transl. with an introduction by Robert Hollander (New York, 1961); *America’s Asia: Dissenting Essays on US-Asian Relations*, ed. Edward Friedman and Mark Selden (New York, 1971). It is important to underline that, as with the oriental Renaissance, works such as Montesquieu’s and Goldsmith’s display an “ethnocentric cosmopolitanism,” in other words, employ Asia to European ends. They also render Asians into caricatures of sorts. My concern here, however, is with pointing to varieties of orientalism, and what this variety might imply for the connection between orientalism and power.

18. Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China* (New York, 1984), and John Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1991).

Finally, as with the oriental Renaissance, orientalism could serve as a critique of European modernity, and a means to redirecting it. Such was the case with the Theosophical movement in the middle of the nineteenth century, which attracted the likes of Lafcadio Hearn in the US.¹⁹ Whatever these uses of the “orient” may say about orientalism, they suggest also that orientalism played a transformative part in Euro-America.

A similar complexity attends the relationship of the orientalist to the “orient.” There is considerable evidence also that those in Asian societies did not necessarily perceive orientalists as a vanguard of Euro-American power; to the extent that orientalists were “orientalized,” they could find acceptance in the society of the Other. The Jesuits are the classic example. In case they seem to belong to another age, we might adduce contemporary examples. In his recent proposal of a “Cultural China,” Tu Wei-ming includes non-Chinese China specialists in the outer realm of his notion of a “Cultural China,” the inner two realms consisting respectively of Chinese in China and Chinese overseas.²⁰ As if echoing his sentiments, *Sinorama* magazine in Taiwan published in 1991 a volume (compiled from earlier publications in the magazine), entitled *When West Meets East – International Sinology and Sinologists*.²¹ Published in Chinese and English, the volume offers accounts of sinologists, all European with the exception of John King Fairbank, in order to, in the words of the publisher Yuming Shaw, see China through the eyes of others and “better appreciate ourselves.”²² While the editors are by no means unaware of the connection between sinology and “trade and imperialism” (29), the volume is on the whole quite laudatory of the part foreign sinology (“culture’s other half”) has played in globalizing Chinese civilization.

Second, and even more complex, is the question of “the orientalism of the orientals,” of which the *Sinorama* collection is emblematic. While the occident/orient distinction, and orientalism as concept and practice, are of European

19. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, 1981), 175–176. An interesting example of the utopianization of China as a refuge from modernity, written around the turn of the century, also in epistolary form, was Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *Letters from John Chinaman* (London, 1901) (Subsequently published in the US in 1903 as *Letters from a Chinese Official: Being an Eastern View of Western Civilization*). This work spoke of the conflict between Eastern and Western civilizations, and argued for the moral superiority of Chinese to Western civilization. What makes it interesting in this context is that it was one of the works that helped convince one important reader, Rabindranath Tagore (who was unaware of its English authorship) of the superiority of Asian to Western civilization. See Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 34–35. Of Tagore and orientalism, more below.

20. Tu Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as Center,” *Daedalus* 120 (Spring, 1991), 13. This was a special issue of *Daedalus*, “The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today.” Tu Wei-ming has recently initiated a new journal with the title “Cultural China” (*Wenhua Zhongguo*).

21. Wang Jiafeng (Wang Jia-fong) and Li Guangzhen (Laura Li), *Dang xifang yujian dongfang: Guoji hanxue yu hanxuezheng* (Taipei, 1991). This title, revealingly, conveys a sense of “going West to meet with the East.” That this is the sense is confirmed by the editors’ introduction, “A Sinological ‘Journey to the West.’”

22. *Ibid.*, 5.

origin, and the term orientalism has been used almost exclusively to describe the attitudes of Europeans toward Asian societies, I would like to suggest here that the usage needs to be extended to Asian views of Asia, to account for tendencies to self-orientalization which would become an integral part of the history of orientalism. We tend to view the Euro-American impact on Asian societies primarily as an impact of “Western” ideas and institutions on Asia. To the extent that orientalism had become a part of “Western” ideas by the early nineteenth century, the “Western” impact included also the impact on Asian societies of European ideas of the orient. How Euro-American images of Asia may have been incorporated into the self-images of Asians in the process may in the end be inseparable from the impact of “Western” ideas per se. One fundamental consequence of recognizing this possibility is to call into question the notion of Asian “traditions” which may turn out, upon closer examination, to be “invented traditions,” the products rather than the preconditions of contact between Asians and Europeans, that may owe more to orientalist perceptions of Asia than the self-perceptions of Asians at the point of contact.

One of the most fascinating examples of what I have in mind here was the so-called Bengal Renaissance, the rediscovery of Hindu traditions in the nineteenth century by Bengali intellectuals. British orientalism was to play the crucial part in the Bengal Renaissance by both authoring translations of and authorizing the rejuvenated study of ancient Hindu texts, which kindled the interest of Bengali intellectuals in these texts. In the process, a Hindu tradition was invented in the course of the nineteenth century in which orientalist interpretations of India played a significant part. Schwab’s description of these textual interchanges is worth quoting at some length because of its relevance to the argument here:

Europe’s knowledge of the Upanishads through Anquetil [-Duperron, Abraham Hyacinthe] has as its origins a Hindu unitarian attempt. . . . In 1665 the Mughal Prince of Delhi, Muhammad Dara Shikoh . . . wanted to compare the sacred books of all peoples in order to attain and adopt the ultimate truth. . . . Not satisfied with that and having heard of the Vedas, he summoned the ascetics of Banaras to instruct him in Brahmanical doctrine. For this occasion he ordered a remarkable version of the Upanishads made in Persian, the lingua franca of Asia at that time. It is this text that, in the following century, found its way to Anquetil through the efforts of Gentil and that Anquetil retranslated between 1776 and 1796, first into French and then into Latin, and published in 1801-2. As good historical fortune would have it, the same pandit-scholar who had been Dara’s principal translator also became Bernier’s most valuable instructor, and Bernier . . . brought a separate manuscript of the *Oupnek’hat* to France . . . the work that Dara had initiated impressed an important adept: it was this text which a century and half later fell into the hands of Rammohun Roy, and which he, in turn, translated and annotated in local dialects and English. It must be said that shortly after his birth the example of such parallels had been established by William Jones, who himself had become a student of Brahmans Radhakanta Sarman and Sarvoru Trivedi: the Hindus were moved by Jones’ sincere desire to know their true beliefs. They soon became the pupils of their disciples, whose processes they adopted, beginning with the printing press, an instrument whose diffusion always rendered a critical spirit inevitable within a short time.²³

23. Schwab, 246. For the Bengal Renaissance, see *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, ed. Atulchandra Gupta (Jadavpur, Bengal, 1958), and, David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (Berkeley, 1969).

The most famous product of the Bengal Renaissance would be Rabindranath Tagore, who in the early twentieth century was to emerge as a “missionary” of a pan-Asian civilization, distinguished from the “materialist” West by its spirituality. But it was not merely the tradition of the Bengal Renaissance that played a formative part in Tagore’s thinking. He was also influenced deeply around the turn of the century by Okakura Kakuzo (himself a student in Tokyo University of Ernest Fenollosa), by the Theosophist Margaret Noble from Ireland (who helped Okakura with his influential book, *The Ideals of the East*), and, as I noted above, by *Letters from John Chinaman*. Tagore, in turn, was to assume the role of a “missionary” of Asian civilization in Japan and China, where he exerted at least some influence on intellectuals such as Zhang Junmai and Liang Shuming, themselves involved in efforts to rejuvenate Chinese and Eastern cultures.²⁴ In the end, however, Tagore’s messages of pan-Asianism and Asian spirituality were received more favorably in Europe and the US, where they had originated in the first place, than in China or Japan (or, for that matter, India), which were caught up in the contemporary concerns of national formation.

There are obvious differences between the Indian and Chinese encounters with Europeans, but similar processes are observable in the latter case as well. Unlike in India where the Brahmanical texts were rescued from esoteric obscurity by British orientalists and made into the source of Indian civilization, Confucianism in China was state orthodoxy, and when Jesuits formulated their representations of China as a Confucian state, they no doubt had the benefit of drawing on the self-image of the bureaucratic elite. Nevertheless, the Jesuit “invention of Confucianism,” as Lionel Jensen has described it, had the effect of codifying Confucianism as an emblem of Chinese society not just for Euro-Americans, but also for twentieth-century Chinese who drew not only on Chinese but also Euro-American scholarship in their own evaluations of China’s past.²⁵ Benjamin Elman has suggested Jesuit influence in the emergence of

24. It may be worth noting that another Indian intellectual and political leader, who would play an even more important part in asserting the contemporary relevance of ancient Indian values, Gandhi, first discovered the significance of those values and the texts in which they were embedded during his years of education in London. In his case, in addition to the Theosophists, European intellectuals such as John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy would play a significant role in his reading of these Indian traditions. See Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York, 1983), especially 59–61. In later years, in his critique of capitalist modernity and his pursuit of an alternative path for India, Gandhi did not hesitate to call upon orientalist authorities to justify his advocacy. See the appendix to his *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, rev. ed. (Ahmedabad, 1921), 170–180.

25. Lionel Jensen, “Manufacturing ‘Confucianism’: Chinese and Western Imaginings in the Making of a Tradition” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1992). It is noteworthy that before they came to realize the importance of Confucianism through acquaintance with the Chinese scene, the Jesuits first attempted to enter China through Buddhism, no doubt on the basis of everyday encounters. “When they realized the low esteem in which Buddhism was held by the literati and saw the lifestyle and ignorance of some of the Buddhist monks, they adopted at the urging of some of their literati friends, the attire and lifestyle of the literati.” See Joseph Sebes, S.J., “The Precursors of Ricci,” in Ronan and Oh, 19–61, 40.

textual criticism, which was to have a significant intellectual and political consequence in the interpretation of Confucianism during the Qing.²⁶ Where there seems to be little doubt concerning the Jesuit impact on the Chinese self-image is in the mapping of the world, of China, and of China's place in the world. Witek credits Matteo Ricci with coining the term *Yaxiya*, among others, which "presented to the Chinese . . . a unified conception of the world."²⁷ In a "ten-year project," Jesuits produced for the Kangxi Emperor the first comprehensive map of China. The Kangxi Emperor, according to Theodore Foss, was anxious to know "the extent of the empire," and especially to see a map of the Great Wall, a desire which was nurtured by a Jesuit advisor. The Emperor's desire for control over his territories coincided in the project with the Jesuits' wish to fathom the extent of the realm that could be opened up to Christianity to produce the first map of China as a whole; in the process, local knowledges (Chinese maps of localities) were transformed into a map of the whole realm that became available to Chinese at the same time as to the Europeans, and through the agency of the latter.²⁸ Arthur Waldron has provided us with a fascinating account of how "the myth of the Great Wall," invented by the Jesuits, would come to play a central part in Chinese nationalist consciousness at a later time.²⁹

It is in the twentieth century, however, that Euro-American orientalist perceptions and methods become a visible component in the formulation of the Chinese self-image, and Chinese perceptions of the past. The process was facilitated by the emergence of nationalism. Nationalism, once it has emerged, tends to project itself over both space and time; homogenizing all differences across the territory occupied by the nation, and projecting itself back in time to some mythical origin to erase the different temporalities of the past, so that all history becomes a history of national emergence. In the process, some trait or traits become emblematic of the nation, while others that are inconsistent with the national self-image are swept aside as foreign intrusions. In this metonymic reductionism, nationalism shares much with the culturalist procedures of orientalism, now at the scale of the nation.³⁰

The Euro-American assault on imperial China both provoked the emergence of Chinese nationalism and, ironically, provided it with images of the Chinese past that could be incorporated in a new national identity.³¹ While different

26. Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 47, 62–63, 76.

27. John W. Witek, S.J., "Understanding the Chinese: A Comparison of Matteo Ricci and the French Jesuit Mathematicians Sent by Louis XIV," in Ronan and Oh, 71.

28. Theodore N. Foss, "A Western Interpretation of China: Jesuit Cartography," in Ronan and Oh, 209–251. See 223 for the Kangxi Emperor and the Great Wall.

29. Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

30. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1993), offers a stimulating critique of nationalism that incorporates the spatial and temporal implications of nationalism.

31. To my knowledge, Partha Chatterjee, in his analyses of Indian nationalism, has provided the most astute analyses of the problems presented by orientalism to national consciousness. See, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis, 1993), and, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993).

political strands in Chinese nationalism focused on different aspects of the past, and evaluated the historical legacy differently, metonymic reductionism has been apparent in the identification of China among liberals and conservatives with Confucianism, despotism, bureaucratism, familism, or even with particular racial characteristics, all of them traceable to orientalist representations, or to an unchanging “feudal” or “Asiatic” society, in a Marxist version of orientalism.³² What was common to all was a rewriting of Chinese history with images, concepts, and standards drawn from a contemporary consciousness of which “Western” ideas, including the “imaginative geography” of orientalism, were an integral component. This consciousness was formed now not just by the circulation of Euro-Americans in China, as in the case of the Jesuits, but by the circulation of Chinese abroad.

This latter situation also has implied that the origins of our images of China’s past have become increasingly blurred. A fascinating example is provided by the career of John King Fairbank, who has been held responsible for both the virtues and the woes of US China scholarship. Fairbank’s case is doubly interesting because he himself rejected European-style orientalism, and played a major part in launching US China scholarship in the direction of Modern Chinese studies. A younger generation of scholars has accused Fairbank of promoting a Eurocentric “impact-response” view, which rendered Chinese into passive objects of Western impact. To be sure, Fairbank did place a great deal of emphasis on the ways in which Chinese tradition (perceived largely in terms of bureaucratic despotism) held China back, so that only the Western impact could provide the dynamic force of change in modern Chinese history. But how different were Fairbank’s premises from those expressed in the following lines by a prominent Chinese intellectual, in explanation of China’s modern fate?

First, we were lacking in science. In the competition between individuals or nations, what ultimately determines success or failure is the level of knowledge. The contest between scientific and non-scientific knowledge is similar to the contest between the automobile and the rickshaw. The basis of Western science was already established at the time of the Jia Qing and Dao Guang Emperors, when our ancestors were still writing eight-legged essays, and discussing YinYang and the Five Elements. Secondly, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the West was already using machinery to produce wealth and conduct war, whereas our industry, agriculture, transportation and military affairs followed the models of the Tang and the Song. Thirdly, the political visage of the West during the Middle Ages closely resembled that of the Spring-Autumn Period, while following the Renaissance it was more like that of the Warring States period. In the conflict for supremacy among the powers, Westerners cultivated a strong patriotism, and a deep national spirit. We on the other hand were stuck corpse-like in familism (*jiazu guannian*) and localism (*jiaxiang guannian*). So in the early years of the nineteenth century, though Western nations were small, their unity gave them a foundation of steel; our nation was big, but it was but a pan of sand, without power. In sum, by the

32. The use of these various traits in representations of China is so commonplace that I will not attempt citation; some of the interpretive trends discussed below may serve as illustrations.

nineteenth century, the Western world already enjoyed the so-called modern culture, while the Eastern world was still mired in the Middle Ages.³³

The above is from the introduction to Jiang Tingfu's *Outline of Modern Chinese History*. Jiang Tingfu had received his Ph.D. in diplomatic history from Columbia University, before he went back to China to establish the field of modern Chinese diplomatic history in Qinghua University. It was there that in the 1930s John King Fairbank as a graduate student worked with Jiang Tingfu. In pointing to the strong parallels between Fairbank's and Jiang's views of modern China I do not wish to imply that Fairbank's views were shaped by Jiang's; if anything unites their views, it is a common origin in liberal interpretations of Chinese history. But the parallels do suggest the confounding of the origins in Europe or China of such views. By the twentieth century in particular, orientalist conceptions had no distinct geographical origin.³⁴

This circulation of ideas is more than ever the condition of our understanding of China, which has led some to the conclusion that orientalism is no longer a problem. What I would like to propose instead is that what has changed is the power relationship between China and Euro-America, rather than the abolition of orientalism. On the contrary, the very transformation of power may have culminated in the reification of orientalism at the level of a global ideology. Orientalism, which earlier articulated a distancing of Asian societies from the Euro-American, now appears in the articulation of differences within a global modernity as Asian societies emerge as dynamic participants in a global capitalism.³⁵ In this contemporary guise, orientalism provides the site for contention between the conflicting ideological loyalties of an elite that is no longer easily identifiable as Eastern or Western, Chinese or non-Chinese.

The foremost example of this may be the appearance of "cultural nationalisms" in East and South Asia in the midst of the so-called globalization of Asian societies.³⁶ One aspect of this cultural nationalism, especially pertinent to Chinese societies, is the so-called Confucian revival. I have discussed this at length elsewhere, so I will summarize it very briefly here.³⁷ While the discus-

33. Jiang Tingfu, *Zhongguo jindaishi dagang* (Outline of Modern Chinese History) (Taipei, 1968), 4-5.

34. For the relationship between Jiang and Fairbank, see John King Fairbank, *Chinabound: A Fifty Year Memoir* (New York, 1982), 85-90, and Paul M. Evans, *John King Fairbank and the American Understanding of Modern China* (New York, 1988), 50-51. What Jiang said in a lecture in England of returned students like himself is revealing: "we read foreign books and are engrossed in things in which the people have no interest . . . [We can be] eloquent in the class room, in the Press in Shanghai and Beijing, even come to Chatham House and make you think we are intelligent, and yet we cannot make ourselves understood to a village crowd in China, far less make ourselves accepted as leaders of the peasants" (Fairbank, 90). The statement may distinguish the Chinese intellectual from the foreign, even when they hold similar views.

35. See for an example, *Capitalism in Contrasting Cultures*, ed. Stewart R. Clegg and S. Gordon Redding (Berlin, 1990).

36. See *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*, ed. Harumi Befu (Berkeley, 1993), and Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Inquiry* (London and New York, 1992).

37. Arif Dirlik, "Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," *boundary 2* 22 (Fall, 1995), 229-273.

sion of Confucianism among China scholars and Chinese intellectuals has never stopped, the intensive discussions of the 1980s do indeed mark this most recent phase as a “revival.” The discussion this time involves not just China specialists or Chinese intellectuals, but state leaders, businessmen, sociologists (such as Peter Berger), and futurologists (such as Herman Kahn). While in the past there has been a tendency to relegate Confucianism to the past, as an obstacle to modernization, this time around Confucianism is reaffirmed as a positive force in capitalist modernization, relevant not only to the experience of Chinese societies but to East Asian societies in general, and perhaps globally. Theoretically speaking, in its reversal of Max Weber’s judgment on Confucianism, the “new Confucianism” seeks to refute orientalist evaluations of Confucianism. There is, however, no challenge to Weber’s formulations on modernization per se: what Weber portrayed as inimical to the development of capitalism in China (Confucian values of harmony, familism, patrimonialism) is now reaffirmed as being eminently functional to capitalist development, at least in its present stage. Otherwise, the conceptualization of Confucianism is quite reminiscent of earlier orientalist conceptions of Confucianism as a desocialized and dehistoricized metonym for Chinese society; one advocate states that although Confucianism has a complex history, it may be used “loosely” as being “synonymous with Chinese culture.”³⁸ Confucianism, moreover, has been “deterritorialized” from its Chinese sources to be rendered into a characteristic of East and Southeast Asian societies in general. Tu Wei-ming, whose name has been most closely associated with the Confucian revival, seeks to make Confucianism into a global philosophy (paralleling Christianity in Europe) that may be transplanted anywhere—from the US to Africa. His efforts are quite reminiscent of the missionary pan-Asianism of Rabindranath Tagore; and, as with Tagore, they ignore that the term “Confucian societies” disguises national appropriations of what may or may not be a common legacy of East Asian societies. But he is not alone in the undertaking. In recent years, political figures such as Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore and Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia have joined in a new chorus of “Asianism” against the West—in the case of the latter, obviously, it is Islam rather than Confucianism that is the point of departure. This, too, is consistent with earlier pan-Asianism, where different pan-Asianists projected upon Asia the different “characteristics” of their various national societies. Finally, these intellectual trends are clearly products of a contemporary circulation of intellectuals and ideas; Confucian revivalists, including Tu Wei-ming, readily cite Herman Kahn and Peter Berger as the “Western” authorities who

38. *Confucianism and Economic Development: An Oriental Alternative?*, ed. Hung-chao Tai (Washington, D.C., 1989), 3. Ironically, Tai agrees with Said’s thesis on orientalism, and sees the “oriental alternative” of Confucianism as a means to counter Eurocentric orientalism. Not all those who write of Confucianism engage in this kind of reductionism. An example is Yu Ying-shih’s *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jieji* (Modern Chinese Religious Ethic and the Merchant Class) (Taipei, 1987). While Yu subscribes to Weberian ideas of modernization, he offers a more nuanced analysis of Confucianism, which accounts both for change in Confucianism over time, and for its different appropriation by different classes, in this case the merchants.

have legitimized the “new Confucianism.” On the other hand, the assertion of “Asian cultural differences” by Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, and the People’s Republic of China leadership, especially over issues of democracy and human rights, resonates with prevalent anti-Eurocentric sentiments in Europe and the US.

In a different vein, one Chinese intellectual in a recent work has explicitly reaffirmed the positivity of “orientalism” against Said’s arguments. In her recently published *Occidentalism: Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, Chen Xiaomei goes so far as to charge Said with a new kind of neo-colonialism.³⁹ The “occidentalism” in Chen’s title refers to Chinese reification of the “occident,” much like the orientalist “reifications” of the “orient.” Occidentalism is very much a mirror image of orientalism and, in Chen’s usage, includes orientalism as a premise; the TV series “He Shang” which is her point of departure obviously combines “occidentalism” where the West is concerned with “orientalism” in its depictions of China. Chen, however, seeks to refute the connection Said establishes between orientalism and Eurocentric power, arguing that such representations carry different significations in different contexts. In the case of “occidentalism” (or orientalism, for that matter), she draws a distinction in the Chinese context between official occidentalism, that uses representations of the West to justify political repression at home, and anti-official occidentalism, exemplified by “He Shang” that serves as legitimation for resistance against oppression. The issue is not orientalism; rather, what is at stake is the implication for power of orientalism in different social and political contexts.

Finally, I will mention as an instance of orientalism something that is very much bound up with global exchanges, and has received some critical attention among Chinese intellectuals: the reification of Chinese culture into a commodity, mainly in the cause of global tourism. Yang Congrong, from whose essay I have derived the title for this section, has pointed to the commodification of Chinese culture in theme parks, tourist brochures, and so on, that represent an “orientalism of oriental societies.” In this case, culture is totally deterritorialized, and placed in global tourist circuits, which now endow it with signification. The theme park is emblematic of the reification of culture in its spatialization of cultural artifacts, which derive their meaning from their positioning in the theme park, rather than from their locations in the complex geographical and social entity that we know as China. And the theme park comes to serve as a substitute for China, as in the Chinese state TV advertisement that announces “you can see all of the four-thousand-year old culture of China in half an hour in the Chinese culture theme park in Guangzhou.” In this case, government and business collude in perpetuating a distinction between East and West, so as to make an “exoticized” East more salable to a tourist industry for which

39. Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York, 1994), introduction. See also her “Occidentalism as Counterdiscourse: ‘He Shang’ in Post-Mao China,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer, 1992), 686–712.

east-west distinctions offer one more commodity for sale to consumers who are no longer identifiable clearly as “eastern” or “western.”⁴⁰

ORIENTALISM RECONSIDERED

Orientalism emerged historically in accompaniment to Eurocentrism.⁴¹ The historical consequence of Eurocentrism has been to erase the part that non-Europe had played in European development in the course of centuries of interaction, and, on the contrary, to distance other histories from the European. The emergence of Eurocentrism also coincided historically with the establishment of Euro-American domination and colonialization of the world. Eurocentrism served the cause of colonialism by representing the world outside of Europe as “empty,” at least culturally speaking, or backward,⁴² defined in terms of “lack,” and hence in need of European intervention. Europe had everything to give to the world; what it received in return were images of its own past—and the rightful material returns from its civilizing activity.

The “orientalization” of Asian societies not only erased the part they had played in “the making of Europe,” but also the spatial and temporal complexities of these societies. The question of representation raised in Said’s *Orientalism* is not the correctness or erroneousness of orientalist representation, but the metonymic reductionism that led to the portrayal of these societies in terms of some cultural trait or other, that homogenized differences within individual societies, and froze them in history. Where the representation was extended to Asia as a whole, metonymic reductionism took the form of projecting upon Asia as a whole the characteristics of the particular society of the individual orientalist’s acquaintance.

Regardless of how individual orientalists may have responded to Asia, orientalism as *discourse* also implied a power relationship: Europeans, placed at the pinnacle of progress, were in a better position than the natives themselves to know what Asians were about, since they had the advantage of a more prodigious

40. I may take note here of an important observation that Yang makes: “If we take the situation in Taiwan as a concrete example, it is very difficult in everyday life now to distinguish clearly what is typically Chinese culture from what is typically Western culture; but a clear distinction between Chinese and Western cultures seems to persist in people’s minds. If they cannot refer something to a past that is no longer retrievable, then they insist on finding it in an inexhaustible West with an indistinct visage” (50). Yang describes the role the government and the tourist industry have played in the production of “Chinese culture,” much to the denial of the complexities of the living culture of the present. A similar argument is offered by Allen Chun, “The Culture Industry as National Enterprise: The Politics of Heritage in Contemporary Taiwan,” *Culture and Policy* 6 (1994), 69–89. Both authors cite *Sinorama* magazine, cited above in connection with Sinology, as one of the major organs of such “cultural production.”

41. The emergence of Eurocentrism, as an autonomous, self-contained development from ancient Greece to modern Euro-America, has been examined incisively by Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York, 1989), and Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Volume I: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785–1985* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1987).

42. Blaut describes this as “the myth of emptiness” (15), which included the absence of working over the environment in European ways; in other words, living in harmony with nature.

gious (and panoptical) historical hindsight. I noted above that orientalists did not just speak about Asia, they also spoke for Asia. While this points to perturbations within orientalism, it also raises the question of power: power to speak for the Other. Orientals may speak about the past, of which they are embodiments, but not about the present, in which they are not genuine participants—especially critical orientals, who appear as degenerations of the ideal type to the extent that they have learned to speak in the language of the present. Advocates of a “China-centered history,” to whom I have referred above, have suggested that contemporary Chinese, who have been touched by “Western” ideas and methods (especially Marxism, it seems), have lost touch with their own past, and are at a disadvantage, therefore, in providing a truly China-centered history.

Where orientalism as articulated by Said is wanting, I think, is in ignoring the “oriental’s” participation in the unfolding of the discourse on the orient, which raises some questions both about the location of the discourse and, therefore, its implications for power. I have suggested above that orientalism, regardless of its ties to Eurocentrism both in origin and in its history, in some basic ways required the participation of “orientals” for its legitimation. And in its practice, orientalism from the beginning took shape as an exchange of images and representations, corresponding to the circulation of intellectuals and others—first the circulation of Europeans in Asia, but increasingly with a counter-circulation of Asians in Europe and the United States.

Rather than view orientalism as an autochthonous product of a European modernity, therefore, it makes some sense to view it as a product of those “contact zones” in which Europeans encountered non-Europeans, where a European modernity produced and was also challenged by alternative modernities as the Others in their turn entered the discourse on modernity. I borrow the term “contact zone” from Mary Louis Pratt, who has described it as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”⁴³ The contact zone is not merely a zone of domination, but also a zone of exchange, even if unequal exchange, which Pratt describes as “transculturation,” whereby “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to various extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.”⁴⁴ We may note also that, in the contact zone, in the process of the very effort to communicate with the dominated, the dominant or the metropolitan culture goes through a language change, if to a lesser extent than the dominated.

43. Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, 1992), 6.

44. *Ibid.*

The idea (and the reality) of the contact zone enable an explanation of some of the contradictions in orientalism that I have described above. The contact zone is a zone of domination, because it does not abolish the structures of power of which it is an expression, and to which it serves as a zone of mediation. But the contact zone also implies a distance, a distance from the society of the Self, as well as of the Other. The orientalist, I suggested above, is “orientalized” himself or herself in the very process of entering the “orient” intellectually and sentimentally. It is the same with the “oriental,” whose very contact with the orientalist culminates in a distancing from native society, where she or he becomes an object of suspicion, and who in the long run is better able to communicate with the orientalist than with the society of the Self (remember the quotation from Jiang Tingfu above). In some ways, it is this distancing from the complexities of everyday life in either society that facilitates the metonymic cultural representations that I have described above as a basic feature of orientalism — whether by the orientalist, or by the self-orientalizing “oriental.” Is it very surprising that nationalism in China, which was as much a source of cultural reification as orientalism, was the production of intellectuals who were themselves products of contact zones, be they Chinese in China, Chinese intellectuals studying abroad, or Chinese overseas?

If locating orientalism in the contact zone modifies our understanding of the processes whereby orientalist representations are produced, the same location also reveals different relationships between orientalism and power. Chen Xiaomei’s reminder that orientalism (or occidentalism) may have different meanings in different contexts is a valuable one, so long as we relocate the context of which she speaks not in “China,” but in the contact zone of “Westernized” Chinese intellectuals. As Chen argues, occidentalism (the mirror image of orientalism) serves as a source of critique of an oppressive state ideology. But there is arguably another aspect to such self-orientalization. However closely orientalism may be tied in with Euro-American power historically, its contemporary manifestations are difficult to explain in terms of a past relationship between orientalism and Euro-American power. The Confucian revival of the past decade, I suggest, is an expression not of powerlessness, but of a newfound sense of power that has accompanied the economic success of East Asian societies who now reassert themselves against an earlier Euro-American domination. In this sense, the Confucian revival (and other cultural nationalisms) may be viewed as an articulation of native culture (and an indigenous subjectivity) against Euro-American cultural hegemony.⁴⁵

The challenge to Eurocentrism in the Confucian revival, within the context of a global capitalism, has had reverberations within a Euro-American context as well, raising questions about another fundamental premise of orientalism: the idea of an occident with a unified culture. Interestingly, even as capitalism has emerged victorious over existing forms of socialism, and global unity under

45. This is very much the case with Tu Wei-ming’s advocacy of a “Cultural China.” See Tu, “Cultural China,” 2.

a globalized capitalism seems a real possibility for the first time in nearly a century, new fissures have appeared that are expressed in the affirmation of cultural differences not just in Asia or what used to be the Second and Third Worlds, but within the First World itself. The notion of different “cultures of capitalism,” to which I referred above, has been extended by some to differences among Euro-American societies themselves, as in a recent work that identifies “seven cultures of capitalism,” all but one (Japan) located in Europe and North America.⁴⁶ The contradiction may be a contradiction of proliferating “contact zones” under a globalized capitalism, which has been accompanied not by the abolition, but by a simultaneous proliferation, of national and ethnic reification of cultures.⁴⁷ The idea of a “West” is called into question in a Europe or North America striving for economic and political unification, just as claims to a Confucian zone runs aground on claims to national uniqueness in East and Southeast Asia.

The part that self-orientalization may play in the struggle against internal and external hegemony, and its claims to alternative modernities, however, must not be exaggerated. In the long run, self-orientalization serves to perpetuate, and even to consolidate, existing forms of power. Partha Chatterjee has observed that “nationalist thought accepts the same essentialist conception based on a distinction between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’, the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same ‘objectifying’ procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.”⁴⁸ Self-essentialization may serve the cause of mobilization against “Western” domination; but in the very process it also consolidates “Western” ideological hegemony by internalizing the historical assumptions of orientalism. At the same time, it contributes to internal hegemony by suppressing differences within the nation.

Examples of the latter abound in contemporary cultural nationalisms. Most obvious is the use of “culture” to reject calls for “democracy” and “human rights,” which is common to a diverse group from Lee Kwan Yew to Mahathir Mohamad to the government of the People’s Republic of China. While there is no denying that “democracy” and “human rights” as they are conceived are Euro-American in origin, and are often misused by the latter in the pursuit of power, their denial on the grounds of “cultural imperialism” also justifies oppression at home – and makes little sense when the regimes involved incorporate so much else that is also Euro-American in origin.

46. Charles Hampden-Turner and Alfons Trompenaars, *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism: Value Systems for Creating Wealth in the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and the Netherlands* (New York, 1993). For an interesting take on this problem, from an entirely different perspective, see, J. G. A. Pocock, “Deconstructing Europe,” *History of European Ideas* 18 (1994), 329–345.

47. I have addressed this question of “contact zones” or “borderlands” extensively in Arif Dirlik, *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism* (Hanover, N.H., 1994). The notion of “borderlands” is quite pervasive in our day in all manner of cultural criticisms.

48. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 38.

This “official occidentalism,” as Chen Xiaomei calls it, however, is only part of the problem. “Anti-official occidentalism” may be just as complicit in oppression in its resort to self-orientalization as a protest against the oppression of the state. The essentialization and homogenization of the national terrain serves in that case as much as in the case of the state to disguise differences within the nation, including class, gender, and ethnic differences. I have suggested above that elites in Asian societies have been complicit all along in the production of orientalism. This may be more the case than ever in the past, as the idea of the “nation” has become problematic, and the nation difficult to define as a cultural entity, as globalization and diasporic motions of people complicate cultures and challenge state-defined national cultures with localized cultures. Culturalist essentialism, regardless of its origins in the state or with intellectuals, serves to contain and to control the disruptive consequences of globalization. This helps explain the simultaneous appearance of cultural nationalism with calls for economic globalization. In the works cited above by Harumi Befu, Yoshino Kosaku, Yang Congrong, and others, the authors all point to the part played by government and business in the production of “cultural nationalism.” This has been the case also with the Confucian revival, in which Confucianism appears, on the one hand, as a dynamic ideological force in the development of capitalism, and, on the other hand, as a value-system with which to counteract the disruptive effects of capitalist development.

While dissident intellectuals may employ occidentalism or orientalism to challenge existing hegemonies, internal or external, they often ignore this aspect of the problem. While *He Shang* in Chen Xiaomei’s conception may serve the cause of the struggle against oppression at home, it is itself a product of dissident Chinese intellectuals of the “contact zone,” who portray Chinese society from a privileged outside (as Chen admits), and render backward not just a reified native tradition but, with it, the people who are carriers of that tradition—thus a tendency among Chinese intellectuals in recent years to represent once again the “people” at large, especially the peasantry, not as an oppressed group but merely as carriers of “feudal backwardness.”

While as an advocate of the revival of Confucianism someone such as Tu Wei-ming is quite different in his evaluation of China’s past, in terms of power relationships his position reveals a similar elitism that accompanies his privileged status as a westernized Chinese intellectual. In speaking of cultural China, Tu has suggested that the creation of a cultural China must proceed from the “periphery” to the “center,” from Chinese overseas to Chinese in China (or, in terms of the metaphor used here, from the “contact zone” to China proper). In terms of Chinese societies, the center-periphery distinction suggests that “Cultural China” is to be created by the transformation of the centers of power by intellectuals from the margins with little or no power, as this is the configuration of power that the center-periphery model usually suggests. Viewed from a global perspective, however, the power relationship appears to be quite different, because in that perspective, the periphery coincides with the centers

of global power while the “center” of Chinese society appears as the location of the periphery. “Diasporic Chinese,” to the extent that they are successful in a global economy or culture, then, become the agents of changing China. But their very location suggests that they are no longer “Chinese” in any simple identifiable sense, but the products of the “contact zone,” in which the West or the East, or the occident or the orient, are no longer identifiable with any measure of clarity. The assertion of “Chineseness” against this uncertainty seeks to contain the very dispersal of a so-called “Chinese culture” into numerous local cultures which more than ever makes it impossible to define a Chinese national culture. This strategy of containment is the other side of the coin to the pursuit of a “Chinese” identity in a global culture. If in the former case it may serve to counter a Euro-American hegemony, in the latter case it is itself an expression of establishing a cultural hegemony that denies the diversity of what it means to be Chinese. In this latter case, ironically, it is empowered by the very Euro-American hegemony that it seeks to displace.

Aijaz Ahmad in a recent study has criticized Said for ignoring class relations in the emergence of orientalism.⁴⁹ Orientalism is not just a matter of continents or nations representing one another; it also entails class (or, for that matter, gender and ethnic) representations, not only in terms of who is engaged in representation, but how a society is represented. It was the upper-class, upper-caste Brahmins who provided British orientalists with the texts of Hinduism, as well as their assumptions about Hindu spirituality. Jesuits in China, who were initially drawn to Buddhism as a means of entry into China, decided that Confucianism served better than Buddhism in the representation of China because their friends in officialdom pointed them toward the lifestyles of the elite. In our day, Confucianism may be subjected to different evaluations, which also suggest different relations of power within Chinese societies, and between Chinese societies and the outside world. Recent experience also indicates that it is insufficient to conceive of orientalism simply in terms of Eurocentrism or nationalism. It is position in the capitalist structuring of the world that ultimately accounts for the changing relationships between orientalist discourse (Eurocentric or self-orientalizing) and power. Just as it was once the apparent Chinese inability to make the transition to capitalism that condemned Confucianism to a defunct past, it is currently Chinese success in the world of capitalism that now enables its admission to the center of a global modernity as an alternative to Euro-American capitalisms—acknowledged as such even by the ideologues of the latter. Intellectuals who themselves have become part of a global elite (not to speak of the managers of capital) play a crucial part in the transformation.

Ironically, the self-assertiveness of “orientals” under these circumstances would seem to represent not an alternative to, as they claim, but a consolidation of Eurocentric hegemony—or, more accurately, the hegemony of capital glob-

49. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, 1992), especially chapter 5.

ally. As I noted above, orientalism was a product of capitalist modernization (and colonialism) in Europe; and the very notion of modernization incorporated orientalist assumptions as an integral premise. Where orientalism earlier represented the past of modernity, it is now rendered into one of its versions—but still without history. The cultural nationalisms of recent years, while they make claims to the uniqueness of essentialized national cultures, all have one thing in common: that the unique national culture is a force of modernization, more precisely, capitalist modernization. Rather than question capitalism with Confucian or other Chinese values, for example, the tendency has been to render it into a value-system conducive to capitalist development. While this has dislodged the claim that only Europeans had the value-system appropriate to capitalism, and has asserted the possibility of multiple paths, the multiple paths are all contained within a teleology of capitalism as the end of history.⁵⁰

Said has suggested that the solution to overcoming orientalism may lie in the cultivation of a “decentered consciousness” that resists totalization and systematization,⁵¹ something, I take it, along the lines of “multiculturalism.” If my analysis based on the “contact zone” has any validity, this may not be sufficient, because orientalism itself may be a product of a consciousness already decentered, even if the decentering is not complete. There is no self-evident reason why a decentered consciousness should not find relief in culturalist fundamentalism, or the reification of ethnicity and culture; the history of orientalism provides evidence of this strong possibility. Multiculturalism, ironically, may enhance tendencies to orientalism in its insistence on the cultural definition of ethnicity, which reifies cultural origins at the expense of the historicity of both ethnicity and culture.⁵²

It seems to me to be more important to question the assumptions of capitalist modernity (not merely Eurocentrism) of which orientalism is an integral expression. To the extent that they have assimilated the teleology of capitalism, recent challenges to Eurocentrism (such as with the Confucian revival) have promoted

50. Needless to say, this is not accepted universally, and has produced predictions of new kinds of conflict in the world. The foremost example, by an influential US political scientist, may be Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Summer, 1993), 22–49. An example of a history-less Asia that is nevertheless modern is to be found in *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority*, by the political scientist and China specialist Lucian W. Pye, with Mary W. Pye (Cambridge, Mass., 1985). Pye argues for differences among Asian societies, but differences on a common site marked by a culture of “paternalism and dependency.” Pye’s argument is echoed by many advocates of Confucianism. I noted Yu Ying-shih’s study of Chinese merchants above as an example of a different, more historical, approach to the problem of Confucianism and capitalism. It is necessary, in my opinion, to distinguish economic change from capitalist modernization. That Chinese society at different points had dynamic economic change does not imply that it was therefore headed for capitalism; just as the absence of capitalism does not imply that it was therefore stagnating. Such conclusions follow only from a hindsight application of the teleology of capitalism, as in the “sprouts of capitalism” idea in Chinese Marxist historiography.

51. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” 228.

52. Said himself has recognized these possibilities; see *ibid.*, 216.

rather than dislodged orientalism. What is necessary is to repudiate historical teleology in all its manifestations. This would entail the historicization of capitalist modernity itself, and the identification of alternative modernities, not in terms of reified cultures, but in terms of alternative historical trajectories that have been suppressed by the hegemony of capitalist modernity. It also requires questioning not just continental distinctions (orient/occident), but nations as units of analysis, since the latter also thrive on cultural homogenization and reification. It is necessary, I think, to restore full historicity to our understanding of the past and the present, historicity not in the sense that Said uses “historicism” (that presupposes organically holistic cultures) but historicity that is informed by the complexity of everyday life, which accounts not only for what unites but, more importantly, for diversity in space and time, which is as undesirable to national power as it is to Eurocentrism. A thoroughgoing historicism subjects culture to the structures of everyday life, rather than erasing those structures by recourse to a homogenizing culturalism. This, of course, requires also that we conceive of alternative modernities that take as their point of departure not a reified past legacy, but a present of concrete everyday cultural practices where, as Yang Congrong put it, it is no longer possible to tell what is identifiably Chinese or identifiably Western.

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