

# Occidentalism

*A Theory of Counter-Discourse  
in Post-Mao China*

XIAOMEI CHEN

*New York Oxford*  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1995

# CONTENTS

Introduction	3
1. Occidentalism as a Counter-Discourse: <i>He shang Controversy</i>	27
2. Occidental Theater: <i>Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Brecht as Counter Others</i>	49
3. "Misunderstanding" Western Modernism: <i>The Menglong Movement</i>	69
4. A <i>Wildman</i> Between the Orient and the Occident: <i>Retro-Influence in Comparative Literary Studies</i>	99
5. Wilder, Mei Lanfang, and Huang Zuolin: <i>A "Suggestive Theater" Revisited</i>	119
6. Fathers and Daughters in Early Modern Chinese Drama: <i>On the Problematics of Occidentalism in Cross-Cultural/ Gender Perspective</i>	137
Postscript	157
NOTES	169
GLOSSARY	203
BIBLIOGRAPHY	215
INDEX	233

# Introduction

In the years since its introduction, Edward Said's celebrated study, *Orientalism*, has acquired a near paradigmatic status in the Western academic world as a model of the relationships between Western and non-Western cultures. Said seeks to show how Western imperialist images of its colonial others—images that, of course, are inevitably and sharply at odds with the self-understanding of the indigenous non-Western cultures they purport to represent—not only govern the West's hegemonic policies, but were imported into the West's political and cultural colonies, where they affected native points of view and thus themselves served as instruments of domination. Said's focus is on the Near East, but his critics and supporters alike have extended his model far beyond the confines of that part of the world. Despite the popularity of Said's model, however, comparatists and Sinologists have not made extensive use of it in their attempts to define China's self-image or the nature of Sino-Western social, cultural, and political relationships.<sup>1</sup>

On first consideration, this neglect of Said's work seems justified. Throughout this century, and especially recently, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its political forbears have emphasized their unique and "Chinese" ways of doing things. Yet, such talk can be deceptive. Indeed it seems clear that when Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping advocated a "particularly Chinese road to socialism and communism," their "Chineseness" was not merely the product of how

the Chinese understood their unique political and cultural circumstances. Rather, just as Said's model suggests, the "pure Chinese" self-understanding advocated by such belated figures had already been historically "contaminated" and even constructed by cultural and cross-cultural appropriations that belong to the whole of Chinese-Western relationships, relationships that to a marked degree have been determined—and overdetermined—by the way that the West has understood itself and China. Most recently, for instance, in announcing its cultural uniqueness, the advocates of a culturally pure China have declared their nation as "the last banner of socialism." Such claims seek to have hortatory as much as descriptive content, since they take as their priority the national campaign against "the foreign imperialists' dream of a peaceful transformation to capitalism in China," especially in view of the recent disintegration of the Soviet Union and other Eastern block socialist countries, which had "tragically regressed to the road of capitalism."

Indeed, as this remark suggests, nowhere is the phenomenon of pervasive Orientalism, or the Western construction of the Orient, more visible in modern China than in the history of the Chinese revolution. One might well argue that to a large extent all elite discourses of anti-traditionalism in modern China, from the May Fourth movement to the 1989 Tiananmen student demonstrations, have been extensively Orientalized. This at least partially self-imposed Orientalism is quintessentially reflected, for example, in Chinese appropriations of the idea of history as progress and teleology, notions derived from the Western Enlightenment and from various schools of Western utopian thinking that, of course, found their most potent expression in the ideas of Karl Marx. Indeed, as Arif Dirlik has succinctly pointed out, Chinese Marxism has been greatly influenced by a Marxist globalized historical consciousness, which takes unilinear European history as the model to represent China's past in order to attain China's admission into universal history.<sup>2</sup>

Yet for all of this it would not be accurate to say that Chinese political and intellectual culture is nothing more than an outpost of mindlessly replicated Western thought. However Western these "Chinese" ideas may be in their origins, it is undeniable that their mere utterance in a non-Western context inevitably creates a modification of their form and content. In such modifications of Western Marxist thought we see examples of the way that in China—and perhaps elsewhere—Orientalism has been accompanied by instances of what might be termed *Occidentalism*, a discursive practice that, by con-

structing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others. As a result of constantly revising and manipulating imperialistically imposed Western theories and practices, the Chinese Orient has produced a new discourse, marked by a particular combination of the Western construction of China with the Chinese construction of the West, with both of these components interacting and interpenetrating each other. This seemingly unified discursive practice of Occidentalism exists in a paradoxical relationship to the discursive practices of Orientalism, and in fact, shares with it many ideological techniques and strategies. Despite these similarities, however, Chinese Occidentalism has mainly served an ideological function quite different from that of Orientalism. Orientalism, in Said's account, is a strategy of Western world domination, whereas, as the rest of this study seeks to show, Chinese Occidentalism is primarily a discourse that has been evoked by various and competing groups within Chinese society for a variety of different ends, largely, though not exclusively, within domestic Chinese politics. As such, it has been both a discourse of oppression and a discourse of liberation.

Chinese Occidentalism, especially as it is reflected in the political and literary expressions of the post-Mao period—which is the focus of this study—might be regarded as two related yet separate discursive practices, or perhaps, two different appropriations of the same discourse for strikingly different political ends. In the first, which I term *official Occidentalism*, the Chinese government uses the essentialization of the West as a means for supporting a nationalism that effects the internal suppression of its own people. In this process, the Western Other is construed by a Chinese imagination, not for the purpose of dominating the West, but in order to discipline, and ultimately to dominate, the Chinese self at home. This variety of official Occidentalism perhaps found its best expression in Mao Zedong's theory of three worlds, in which Mao asserted that the First World superpowers—the Soviet Union and the United States—invariably exploit and oppress the Third World countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This theory was to a great extent a product of the radical ideology of the Cultural Revolution, which, despite its expressed concern for the non-Chinese oppressed of the world, had as its chief interest the domestic legitimization of Mao as the "great leader" of the Third World. It thus was a strategy to consolidate Mao's shaky and increasingly problematic position

within the Chinese Communist Party. At the dawn of the Cultural Revolution in 1965, Lin Biao, Mao's chosen successor at the time, advocated the application of Mao Zedong's theory of "establishing revolutionary base areas in the rural districts and encircling the cities from the countryside"—a theory that was said to have brought about the victory of the Chinese revolution—to the international arena of the Third World countries in their struggle against "aggression and enslavement on a serious scale by the imperialists headed by the United States and their lackeys."<sup>3</sup> We can see these concerns in Lin Biao's long essay "Long Live the Victory of People's War," published in *People's Daily* on September 3, 1965, in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of victory in the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japan:

Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called "the cities of the world," then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute "the rural areas of the world." Since World War II, the proletarian revolutionary movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in the North American and West European capitalist countries, while the people's revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been growing vigorously. In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by the rural areas. In the final analysis, the whole cause of world revolution hinges on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples who make up the overwhelming majority of the world's population. The socialist countries should regard it as their internationalist duty to support the people's revolutionary struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America.<sup>4</sup>

As has subsequently become clear, Lin Biao's discourse, although seemingly directed to Third World countries against Western imperialist policies, was part and parcel of his radical anti-Western and antibourgeois ideology advanced in an attempt to advocate the Cultural Revolution for decidedly internal and domestic political ends. The most direct impact of his work was to initiate and promote a Maoist cult, which reached its peak at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, under the pretext of spreading "Mao Zedong Thought" as the supreme principle and living gospel of Marxism and Leninism. We seem to have here an Occidentalism wholly Chinese in its content and purpose.

Yet matters are more complicated than they might at first appear. Even the brief quotations given above suggest the complex relation-

ship between Chinese Occidentalism and Western Orientalism. Lin Biao cleverly elaborated Mao's supposedly Chinese theory of the dichotomy between the town and the country—a dichotomy that had served a strategic function in the triumph of the Chinese revolution—into a larger context of world revolution, in which the Third World "countryside" was expected to surround and finally overcome the "cities" of the imperialist Western superpowers. Beneath these claims lies a pervasive modern Chinese antiurbanism that, as Maurice Meisner has pointed out, reveals a key element of Maoist thought, which was characterized by "a deep emotional attachment to the rural ideal of 'the unity of living and working' " and a profound distrust of the cities as sites of foreign dominators and their servants, urban intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> Mao presented these notions as products of a specifically Chinese experience, as indigenous insights far removed from Western thought. Yet obviously this supposedly uniquely Chinese Maoist antiurbanism shares "certain similarities with a strain in the Western intellectual tradition, partly derived from Rousseau, which viewed the city as the embodiment of all social evils and moral corruptions, as a monolith threatening to crush the natural purity of the countryside."<sup>6</sup> In this regard Maoist Occidentalism seems dependent on the very Western predecessors with which it disavows any connection. Like its Orientalist counterpart, it seeks to construe its Other by asserting a distorted and ultimately anxious image of its own uniqueness. In addition, the apparent aim of this discourse seems, again like its Western counterpart, to be directed toward an imperialist strategy: it is China that will lead the rural Third World to its liberation, because it is China, at least in the period since the end of the World War II, that seems uniquely suited for this task.<sup>7</sup> Yet it must be strongly emphasized that the ultimate aim of this Occidentalist practice was not primarily Chinese hegemony in the Third World, but the consolidation of a particular group within domestic politics. It is possible to overemphasize this point, of course. Concerns with domestic politics are seldom absent from the exercise of Western Orientalism. But if we historically compare Western Orientalism with Maoist Occidentalism, it seems clear that the primary aim of the Chinese discourse has been domestic oppression of political opponents rather than world domination, while the inverse has been true in the West. Such a difference, obviously, does not arise out of the moral superiority or even the ultimate political aims of the Chinese practitioners of Occidentalism; after all, China has a history of imperialist longings and practices far older than its counterparts in the West. Rather, this

difference reflects the historical moment in which Western imperialism, aided in large measure by its Orientalist discourse, was at or near its apogee and in various ways presented a threat even to the prevailing Chinese political order. In this sense, Chinese Occidentalism is the product of Western Orientalism, even if its aims are largely and specifically Chinese.

This official Occidentalism—Chinese in purpose yet in paradoxical ways dependent upon Western ideas—is pervasive in contemporary Chinese culture and life. But Chinese Occidentalism is by no means confined to this official use. Alongside of it we can readily find examples of what we might term *anti-official Occidentalism*, since its purveyors are not the established government or Party apparatus but the opponents of those institutions, especially among various groups of the intelligentsia with diverse and, more often than not, contradictory interests. As a result of the cultural and sociological specificities of contemporary Chinese society, such Occidentalism can be understood as a powerful anti-official discourse using the Western Other as a metaphor for a political liberation against ideological oppression within a totalitarian society. It is here that I distance my approach from that of Said and other postcolonialists inspired by Said's paradigm. I argue that what might rightly be considered as a global, "central" discourse of Occidentalism in their account can also sometimes be used as a locally marginal or peripheral discourse against the centrality of the internal dominant power in a particular culture. Under these special circumstances, therefore, arguing absolutely against cultural imperialism in the international arena can be politically dangerous since it inevitably, if unintentionally, supports the status quo of a ruling ideology, such as the one in contemporary China, that sees in the Western Other a potentially powerful alliance with an anti-official force at home.

Post-Mao Chinese society presents us with a compelling example of Occidentalism, by which I mean a Chinese representation of the Occident as "its deepest and most recurring images of the Other."<sup>8</sup> Such Occidentalism may be considered as a counter-discourse, a counter-memory, and a counter-"Other" to Said's Orientalism. These terms, of course, readily evoke Michel Foucault's notion of "discourse," employed also by Said in his definition of Orientalism, as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."<sup>9</sup> Yet a critical difference between Said and Foucault's conceptions, as noted by Uta Liebmann Schaub, resides in the fact that "whereas Foucault allows for the emergence of counter-discourses

beneath the official discourse of power, Said ignores Western discourses about the Orient that oppose Western expansionism and subvert, rather than support, Western domination."<sup>10</sup> The same claim, as we shall see, can be advanced from yet another perspective: Said's claims do not provide for even the possibility of an anti-official discourse within "Oriental" societies that employs an Occidentalism to combat the official cultural hegemony dominating a given non-Western culture. In such cases, the Western Other at least theoretically can and often does become a metaphor for political liberation against indigenous forms of ideological oppression.

As the following chapters make abundantly clear, this has often been the case in modern China, though the appearance of this phenomenon is by no means limited to Chinese culture. But in China, the evocation of the West, as a counterpart of the indigenous culture, has more than once set in motion a kind of "dialogic imagination" that in turn has become a dynamic and dialectical force in the making of modern Chinese history, both literary and political. One difficulty in the ongoing debates concerning Third World and anti-colonial discourses is that some critics seem to have interpreted Said's book as asserting that any kind of indigenous cultural appropriation of the Other has necessarily negative effects, being either an act of imperialistic colonialization when performed by the "superior" culture, or one of self-colonialization when carried on by the "inferior" culture in the context of global domination. Such a charge, for example, has recently been brought against Peter Brook's production of the Indian Epic *The Mahabharata*.<sup>11</sup> While not in total disagreement with Brook's intertextual reading, which relates *The Mahabharata* to various Shakespearean themes, Gautam Dasgupta believes that "one should not, under cover of universality of theme or character, undercut the intrinsic core of how *The Mahabharata*'s characters function within the world of which they are a part."<sup>12</sup> Here we see a privileging of the "intrinsic core" of an original text and the culture of which it is a part, understood from "the native's point of view," over the alien specificities of a receiving culture that necessitate cross-cultural communications in the first place.

My argument with Said in terms of recent Chinese experience connects with some recent critiques of Said's Orientalism from what might well be termed post-Orientalist perspectives. In his review of Said's recent book *Culture and Imperialism*, Ernest Gellner asserts that Said's Orientalist discourse against imperialism and colonialism fundamentally neglects the fact "that the industrial/agrarian and

Western/Other distinctions cut across each other, and obscure each other's outline. . . ."<sup>13</sup> In Gellner's opinion the current spate of economic success stories from the Pacific Rim may now call for a critical reversal of the concept of power structure as defined by Said's Orientalism, since one might be able to argue that industrialism—one of the crucial yardsticks with which Said developed his binary categories of the Orientalist and Orientalized entities—might be better “run in a Confucian-collective spirit” in the non-Western societies.<sup>14</sup> From a different angle, moreover, Gellner argues that Said, while selectively criticizing some Europeans as Orientalists, privileges anti-colonialist critics such as Franz Fanon in a thoroughly unhistorical manner. Though Fanon was enormously influential in “the international literary-intellectual scene” in the West, Gellner claims, Fanon nevertheless “meant nothing to the Algerians themselves (whereas Ben Badis, unknown internationally, meant a very great deal)”<sup>15</sup> to his own people. Gellner continues to hold this view even after having been so challenged by Eqbal Ahmad and David Davies, both of whom claimed that Franz Fanon was indeed influential in wartime Algeria.<sup>16,17</sup> To this charge Gellner insisted that “vicarious populist romanticism means nothing to the average Algerian, who does not know Fanon's name,” whereas Ben Badis's “influence was pervasive and persistent, and there could be no need to ‘appropriate’ him. He was there all the time. He more than anyone else had made modern Algeria.”<sup>18</sup> In another review of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, Fred Inglis also sees its theme as “nothing less than the monster claim that imperialism is the biggest fact of the 20th-century world, that it pervades and defines the structure of feeling . . . of the epoch, and that all culture and all art, high or low, must (sic) be read as a revelation of old imperialism and its colossal field of force.”<sup>19</sup> Said's claim to this universal truth, however, finds its supports only in regional parts of the world in “strictly British, French and American provenance.”<sup>20</sup>

Although I cannot endorse their entire political agendas, Gellner's and Inglis's critiques of Said's most recent reflections on Orientalism nevertheless have a certain cogency, because they point to the (ir)relevance of Western theory to the day-to-day life experience of those persons who are victims of ideological illusions in their indigenous cultures both in the Orient and the Occident. These reviews raise an important issue: many Western cultural critics created a system of values from which they criticized the Orientalism of their own culture, a critical act which I applaud since it was motivated by a desire to address problems in one's own social and political environment.

But the events of the last half-decade have made it impossible for us to overlook what these thinkers betrayed in endorsing in an essentialist way the opponents of Orientalism. Indeed, Said's Orient is a half-Western Orient, and it is inevitable that “real” Orientals from China and Korea are likely to see how one-sided Said's arguments really are. Seen from this perspective they are valid, but they are not the whole story as Said continues to claim even in his recent response to Gellner's review, whom he accuses of having, once again, expressed “the ways of Orientalism.”<sup>21</sup>

The discourses of Orientalism and of Occidentalism are, of course, intricately related to the problems of Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism. Among the reams of material produced on these subjects, one of the most telling is Kwame Anthony Appiah's insightful essay “Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism.” Appiah analyzes two approaches towards African studies taken by scholars in the West: the first group is characterized by its attempt to promote a negative belief that everything produced on the part of Western and European scholars about Africa is highly Eurocentric; it either implies that Europe is the “ideal type,” or describes its African Other as “sympathetic,” thus presupposing that Africans themselves “have produced little of much cultural worth” with “sophistication” and “value.”<sup>22</sup> The second group, according to Appiah, proposes an Afrocentric view as an positive alternative to negative Eurocentrism; it attempts to claim “African cultural creativity” as the origin of Western civilization, as typically shown, for example, in the works of Cheikh Anta Diop, who sees “the splendours of Egypt” “as a reason for contemporary African pride. . . .”<sup>23</sup> Appiah demonstrates how Afrocentrists such as these fall into the same trap as those they are attacking: similar to the Eurocentrists who are heavily influenced by nineteenth-century European thoughts, Afrocentrists are likewise preoccupied “with the ancient world.”<sup>24</sup> More importantly, by claiming Egypt as the source of Greece and thus of the West, Afrocentrists admit, willy-nilly, that “the West too is a moral asset of contemporary blacks, and its legacy of ethnocentrism presumably one of our moral liabilities.”<sup>25</sup> Afrocentrism is therefore seen by Appiah as “simply Eurocentrism turned upside-down.” It functions merely as a reaction to Eurocentrism, Appiah implies, not as a possible refutation of or a real alternative to it. Appiah's concern is with contemporary Afrocentrism, its uses and misuses, while this book is concerned with a quite different part of the globe. Yet Appiah's essay is relevant and cogent to the discussion of Occidentalism that follows, since both warn against a dangerous ten-

dency in contemporary American academic discourse. Many Africanists, especially American ones, have invented an Africa that has little to do with the African peoples and their experiences and forms of life. This academically sponsored Afrocentric discourse functions primarily, and seems so intended, as a tactic to advance interests and careers in the West. Even while claiming those interests as "African," their advocates, as Appiah shows, are often totally removed from African experience, no matter how great their sojourn in Africa has been. Indeed, while making antiracial claims and judgments, they often perpetuate a fundamental racism. In the studies that follow, I have attempted to avoid this pitfall by strongly rejecting binarist and universalist arguments based on the concept of an Orient constructed either by East or West as its "true Other." Only in this way, as far as I can see, can scholarship remain responsible both to the theoretical insights from which it often and legitimately proceeds and to the concrete situations of the peoples it seeks to describe in their cultural and historical integrity.

In this regard, perhaps a parallel can be drawn between what Diana Fuss defines as the binarism between essential and constructive feminism and what I discuss as the antithesis of East and West. In her *Essentially Speaking*, Fuss criticizes "appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order."<sup>26</sup> The studies that follow make a similar critical move, arguing that it is also an essentialist claim to assume that the West is by nature or definition monolithically imperialistic, and therefore has subjugated all non-Western cultures throughout all historical periods. Of course, it would be just as mistaken to assume that "Oriental" cultures have never been imperialistic, or that they have only learned their "imperialism" from the West.

Despite the recent claims to the contrary, and the endless disputes among comparatists, theoreticians, and cultural critics over cultural imperialism, it seems clear that neither East nor West is an essential and empirical category. Indeed, this study intends to demonstrate, among other things, that in many instances being politically "correct" in the West might be at the same time politically "incorrect" in the East where a totalitarian regime posts the West—or any form of "Other"—as antithetical to its dominant power. My ultimate aim, then, is to discuss particular cultural phenomena in the light of their own historical exigencies, and to explicitly avoid the totalizing strategies and universal claims that have all too often been part of even

those interpretive strategies that claimed to reject them. No theory can be globally inclusive, and hence conclusive of local diversities and cultural specificities. The critical discourse of Orientalism should not become a new orthodoxy that could be easily applied to all countries and all historical periods.

In fact, the very discussion of the problematic and paradoxical East-West relation involves a denial of such opposition. There are many examples of failures in a clear definition of, and distinctions between, East and West. Joseph R. Levenson, for example, was aware of this problem as early as 1967 in his classic study of Liang Qichao, a Chinese westernizer at the beginning of the century who saw the West as representing matter while China was said to stand for spiritual qualities. Levenson pointed out that Liang's "matter-spirit distinction between the Western and Chinese cultures, regardless of its justice or injustice at the moment he made it, becomes always less applicable to the actual scene."<sup>27</sup> And this is truer today than ever as China industrializes and modernizes in response to the West. Another example of a rejection of sweeping distinctions of the Orient and Occident in the field of Chinese studies can be found in Benjamin I. Schwartz's celebrated study of Yan Fu, a Chinese interpreter of Western thoughts. Schwartz cautioned against stiff categories such as West/non-West or preindustrial/traditional societies, believing that "in dealing with the encounter between the West and any given non-Western society and culture, there can be no escape from the necessity of immersing ourselves as deeply as possible in the specificities of both worlds simultaneously. We are not dealing with a known and an unknown variable but with two vast, ever changing, highly problematic areas of human experience."<sup>28</sup>

In a more recent study advanced from a somewhat different perspective, Masao Miyoshi narrates his account of the image of cultural dynamics of modern Japan, which constantly blurred the boundaries of the Self and the Other, the colonialist empire and the colonized subordinate. As "the earliest non-Western case of modern imperialist aggression," according to Miyoshi, Japan's incursion simultaneously "contained a nativist program of fighting back against the Western conquest."<sup>29</sup> Although contaminated with a domestic imperialist agenda that imitated the Western model of domination from the onset, Japan's defeat of the powerful Russian imperialist czarist army in 1905 paradoxically "became a model for other independent-movement leaders" such as "Sun Yat-sen of China, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. . ."<sup>30</sup>



Thus, Miyoshi implies, it is difficult, if not impossible, to totally and completely separate imperialism—as reflected in Japan's military actions during World War II—and anti-imperialism—as demonstrated when Japan was subjected to Russian imperialism at the turn of this century, or to the Chinese imperial empire long before modern times. Miyoshi thus argues that any attempt to represent different realities between the First World and the Third World is “treacherous,” since the very term “Third World” may imply “a racist reaffirmation of the First World with its essentialized characteristics; it can likewise celebrate placement of the First World at a more advanced stage on a supposed scale of progress and modernization. Conversely, it can signify a reactive nativist valorization of Third World communality of spirituality; it can also congratulate Third World traditionalism, proposing permanence as an absolute.”<sup>31</sup> Arguing against an essentialist claim of a binarism in critical discourse that sees the First World and the Third World as “homogeneous” entities, Miyoshi ultimately believes that one should not just talk about “white and black, rich and poor, men and women; but rich men and poor women, or rich black women and poor white men, or even poor yellow women living in the First World and rich white men inhabiting the Third World.”<sup>32</sup> It is only with such critical—and crucial—positioning that Miyoshi was finally able to point to the “internal colonization” within the discourse of colonialism with which the “poor and powerless of the First World are mobilized to serve as the actual agents of colonialism—often at the expense of their compatriots in poverty,” while at the same time the same practice of colonization produced native elites who speak the voice of the colonizers to suppress their compatriots.<sup>33</sup> Current cultural studies such as Miyoshi's have greatly enhanced our awareness and understandings of (post)colonial and (semi)colonial societies; what needs to be further explored is the internal discourse operating against imperial power within the indigenous culture, using anti-colonialist discourse to dismiss the political and ideological demands of the people both in Western and non-Western societies.<sup>34</sup>

From yet another cultural and historical perspective, Chungmo Choi discusses the problematics of the (post)colonialist South Korea, where the end of Japanese colonialist rule in 1945 only began for the South Korean people a new era of “colonization of consciousness” in which liberation was acknowledged in the official history of South Korea as “a gift of the allied forces, especially of the U.S.A. . . .”<sup>35</sup> It was this national narrative and the subsequent American imperialists'

contest with the former Soviet Union that made Korean people accept “Cold War ideology as the ruling ideology of both Koreas.”<sup>36</sup> Choi is correct in pointing out that modernization and decolonization in contemporary South Korean society meant a privileging of Western culture, English language, world history, and finally “an admission of one's own cultural inferiority.”<sup>37</sup> It created a “subaltern climate” in which “the ‘postcolonial’ Korean elite distinguish themselves as members of the privileged class by meticulously acquiring Western, that is, American, culture.”<sup>38</sup> While Choi's forceful argument certainly falls in with and furthers the discussion about the complexity and the problematics of postcolonialist discourse that is taking place in American academia, one wonders, however, if a different or at least additional factor is not relevant to the cultural scene that she describes: the cultural and political arena of North Korea, where anti-American imperialist discourse applied by the official ideology is employed for a hidden agenda of the “socialist” regime of Kim Il Sung. As an ally of the former Soviet Union and an old friend of China's octogenarian leaders, with whom he had fought a common enemy in an anti-Japanese-imperialist war, Kim Il Sung more often than not joined his socialist brothers in their anti-American and anti-imperialist rhetoric, while playing with a delicate balance between the two socialist-imperialist superpowers—China and the former Soviet Union—in their ideological and territorial disputes. Here, an official Occidentalism was employed in Maoist China for the sake of subjugating its socialist brother, which paradoxically shared its master-country's attempt to promote a global discourse against Western imperialism at the expense of the interests of the local communities both in China and North Korea. By so doing, a neocolonialism in socialist China effectively recovered the long-lost Chinese imperial claim on Korean subjects by employing an anti-Western-imperialist strategy. The “imperial” China, in turn, also had its share in making use of an anti-imperialist Korean War in the early 1950s to carry out “mass campaigns to extend the ethos of the [Korean] war into a passionate hunt for domestic spies and alleged or real enemy agents,” especially those who had contact “with the Guomindang or had worked in foreign firms, universities, or church organizations” before 1949.<sup>39</sup>

Seen in this light, one might point to a historical parallel between a Chinese Occidentalism and a North Korean Occidentalism; in both the image of the modern West is used as cultural and symbolic capital for different ideological agendas. Failure to recognize this indigenous use of Western discourses and the great variety of conditions that

might provide the focus for its utterance can lead to fundamental problems in cross-cultural studies, as I hope this study will demonstrate. It is one thing for cultural critics writing in the West in the area of Korean studies to condemn Occidentalist discourse. Such writings are only to be expected in the current academic tradition that unswervingly sets itself against colonialism and neocolonialism. But it does not at all follow that those in Korea for whom they presume to speak would necessarily agree with their claims. And certainly it is the case, as Choi has shown, that the discourse of classical Marxism has been employed in South Korea by dissenting intellectuals as a form of protest against a regime that has been repeatedly linked with "American imperialism."<sup>40</sup> But if our focus is on the use of discourse, rather than on the "truth" or "falsity" of a particular ideological position, it should be clear that underground Occidentalist sentiment in North Korea also has a potentially liberating function vis-à-vis the unrelenting orthodoxy of local Marxist indoctrination.

This is also clearly the case in the current relationship between Chinese studies in the West and lived experience in contemporary China. The leftist claims that are so frequently voiced in the West, no matter how positive a role they have or might play in the West in bringing about social changes, do not necessarily appeal to the contemporary Chinese generation oppressed by the leftist ideology. The widespread rejection of this discourse in China is as pervasive today as was its widespread acceptance when it inspired previous generations to participate in the Communist revolutionary movement. The situation could hardly be otherwise, and Orientalists in the West who fail to see this are doomed to an unending and historically irrelevant repetition of "truths" that are now widely regarded in the East as shopworn and outmoded. Shift the historical perspective just a bit, and the same holds true for many regions at the end of the twentieth century, where Occidentalist discourse can and is employed as a strategy of liberation. From this perspective, we can further problematize and enrich the debate on what Choi terms "colonial double discourse," a discourse that "has created for colonized people an illusion of living in the same social and cultural sphere as that of the metropolis, while it ruthlessly exercises a discriminatory politics of hierarchy."<sup>41</sup> Just as such oppression is the product of both capitalist and socialist strategies of domination, so both Orientalist and Occidental discourses can serve, under differing local conditions, as discourses of liberation.

It is this strategic use of discourse that the present study seeks to

employ. Situated within the critical debate of postcolonial and cultural studies and locally focused on Chinese Occidentalism, it undertakes to explore the "semi-colonized" Self that uses the discourse of the colonialist Other for its own political agenda within its own cultural milieu. Understood from local context, Occidentalist discourse in contemporary China is neither merely the product of an ideologically colonizing importation from the West, nor an expression of a masochistic wish on the part of the Chinese people that the more unfortunate aspects of a capitalist system be established in their country. Just as a radical feminist does not necessarily speak for her subaltern Other, who had no voice in the debate about political "correctness" among the elitist theoreticians, the often strident claims of liberal theoreticians usually operating in the West cannot automatically be taken as identical with the hopes and wishes of the non-Western Other for whom she, usually without prior consultation, purports to speak. Though such theoretical pronouncements often do address in some manner the subaltern subject, like all other utterances, they are certainly not free of the personal interests of their speakers. One must candidly admit, though such admissions are seldom found in First World academic discourse, that there is always the danger of theoretically recolonizing the Third World with Western-invented and theoretically motivated languages of "anti-colonialism." As I hope the remainder of this book will make clear, such an assertion is not made in order to deny the usefulness of Western theory, or even its potential for strategies of liberation. By reinterpreting non-Western realities mainly through the looking-glass of Western theory, one might invent a new center with which a non-Western phenomenon can only be meaningfully explained by Western terminology and from a Western point of view. The natives' voices in non-Western countries should not have been "rediscovered" to promote the agendas of political "correctness" in the West. Western theoreticians—especially those "Third-World-born" critics residing in the West—who speak for the need of liberating the "Third World" from the West's economic and political power—need to be much more cautious in their claims, lest they unwittingly and unintentionally themselves become neocolonizers who exploit the cultural capital of the colonized in a process in which those voices are appropriated for re-investment in those "banks of the West" that currently offer the highest rate of return to speculators in trendy academic markets. For one who lives in the West and speaks from the center about marginal cultures, it is extremely difficult and problematic to represent the Other. As one such critic myself, I have felt the need to constantly ask myself, "Who

are we?" "Whose voice is it when we speak?" "Are we also the beneficiaries of the very system we are decrying? One needs to persistently ask the question "does my study mean anything to people back at home?" Clearly these are ponderous questions with no easy answers, or perhaps no answers at all. But responsible criticism needs to ask them, and one cannot but lament that one does not find them more foregrounded in the exciting and stimulating studies that have been produced in the West in recent years. In any case, my study of Chinese Occidentalism attempts to address, or at least to be informed by such questions as it explores such phenomena as the television series *He shang*. These programs, like some of the other subjects discussed in the pages that follow, are unquestionably politically "incorrect" by the theoretical standards of American and European academia because of their glorification of a "progressive" West. Yet they have nevertheless exerted an enormous and even liberating influence on Chinese society, an influence that directly or indirectly resulted in the political event of the June 4 Tiananmen demonstrations.

Of course, not everyone is likely to agree with the argument advanced here. But I hope that by these remarks I have shown that I am fully aware of the problematics of my own voice in this study, which in varying measure distances itself from the official voice of contemporary China, from diverse groups of Chinese intellectuals whose voices I describe as anti-official, from the Western theoreticians who dwell in the center while speaking for the marginal, and last but not least, from isolationists who think that Western theory has no value for non-Western cultures whose traditions are varyingly deemed either as superior or inferior to their Western counterparts. As a Chinese intellectual educated in the West, I cannot realistically shake off the unavoidable influence of Western culture—be it neocolonial, postcolonial, or neotraditional—since the very English language I use in writing about the voices of the "Other" predetermines the temporality of my own historical vantage point. By the same token, being a native Chinese does not necessarily give me an uncontested "native" voice since I cannot claim to speak absolutely for the interests of the majority of the Chinese people of both genders, all classes, all races, and different social spectrums. So long as we continue to use Chinese sources to write in the West, we should always be critically aware of what Rey Chow has insightfully termed the unequal "relationship between us as intellectuals overseas and them at home," which "will increasingly take on the coloration of a kind of master discourse/native informant relationship."<sup>42</sup> Such a situation has its

assets and liabilities, and it certainly characterizes the arguments which follow.

In other words, although I base my research on published and unpublished materials from Chinese culture, I admit my subjectivity in selecting my data and structuring my narratives. In this regard, I agree with Silvia Tandeciarz's argument against Spivak's search for an "empirical truth" and "scientific," "verifiable," and "anthropological fact-finding" approach in examining the Third World woman. Tandeciarz believes that one should ask the better question of "whether it is to anyone's advantage to read any text as anything other than a fiction, constructed by a particular vision, which in turn is constructed by a particular experience, and whose claim to 'objectivity' thus necessarily is rendered moot" by the assumption of fictionality.<sup>43</sup> Tandeciarz insists that after one acknowledges the impossibility of knowing the "other," he or she could examine "how the imagining of that space construed as 'other' might serve certain ends, suggest certain alternatives that otherwise might have remained unvoiced."<sup>44</sup>

The issue of what alternatives, ends, and impact the writing of the Chinese Other might bring about are perhaps best illustrated in a recent letter from China written by Li Xiaojiang, a Chinese scholar who lived through the June 4 massacre, traveled to the West, and finally returned to China. Writing in an open letter to Su Shaozhi, a Chinese scholar in exile, Li argues that overseas Chinese scholars, trained in the latest Western intellectual fashions, are extremely competent in developing profound and meticulous theoretical arguments, which unfortunately, she insists, do not often address "the real conditions prevailing in China" in the post-1989 period.<sup>45</sup> Upon her return from the West, Li traveled extensively to many remote regions in China, conducting investigations across the country, the conclusions of which were usually related to the current changes and transformations in China. Li pointed to the phenomenon of a perplexing discrepancy between "China will perish"—a judgment derived from gazing at China from a distance with grand theoretical analysis on the part of overseas China scholars—and "China's continued survival"—a contradiction which "leav[es] a large opening for reflection."<sup>46</sup> Li thus warned her colleagues in diaspora: "We must look at what China really is, beyond 'concepts,' and beyond 'systems.'"<sup>47</sup>

From a slightly different angle, Zhang Longxi also emphasizes the importance and desirability of understanding China from the perspectives of those who actually live and survive in contemporary Chinese society. Zhang argues against a trend in Western discourses involving

Chinese studies which seem to have resulted from the current American leftist intellectual context rather than from “a perspective grounded in Chinese reality.”<sup>48</sup> Sophisticated Western theory, albeit important, can be useful when understood in terms of the role it plays *within* the cultural and political environment of China. Conversely, those critics inside China without a real understanding of Western theory can and have developed their own form of articulation situated at the very center of political events: “Liu Zaifu and many other Chinese literary scholars, to put it simply, are not ivory-tower dwellers who talk about the autonomy of literature and the freedom of artistic expression only from a safe distance, somewhere outside history. They are men and women of enormous courage and moral integrity fighting for social justice and intellectual freedom in political actions.”<sup>49</sup> The validity of this claim is self evident, yet to acknowledge it is not to necessarily agree with the essentialist rejection of self-contained Western theory and its concomitant construction of a “true” Other. Zhang’s essay, which is itself well-versed in Western theory, challenges the voice behind theory, not theory itself. It is one thing to critique theory from the perspective of indigenous Chinese society; it is quite another to advance theory merely as a means of self-empowerment conditioned by a particular moment in Western culture. Such a distinction is just what my study advocates: to reject binarist and universalist arguments grounded in an Orient constructed either by the East or by the West. Such a project thus demands both engaging with and moving away from theory, rejecting a globalizing tendency—which falls prey to Orientalism—and a localizing approach—which would once again isolate China from the rest of the world through the discourse of the official Occidentalism that this study seeks in part to explore.

In their discussions of the problematics of Western theory and Chinese experience, both Li and Zhang point to the important question of the role of intellectuals in social transformations in indigenous cultures, an issue that is doubly complicated in China and other societies where intellectuals traveled to the West and are now living and writing in the West. Such studies in the past decades have produced many valuable perspectives exploring the indispensable and yet problematic roles Chinese intellectuals have played in inaugurating new ideas and social changes in traditional Confucian society in modern China before, during, and after the May Fourth movement. Yet it would be easy—and questionable—to overvalue the role of intellectuals. Recent works in subaltern studies, primarily initiated by Indian scholars, have explored problems within the role of intellectuals in

colonized and semi-colonized countries. By raising the question of “Can the subaltern speak?” the Subaltern Studies Group intended to “write subalterns, (‘the people’) back into a history dominated by two elite historiographies: one which gave pride of place to colonial authorities, the other to Indian nationalist elites.”<sup>50</sup>

In response to such theory, Gail Hershatter recently pointed out that such an end aim of subaltern studies became problematic for Chinese historiography after 1949, when officially dispatched historians collected “speak bitterness” stories of worker and peasant against the feudal and imperialist past in a vocabulary supplied by the state.<sup>51</sup> Yet this “legacy of official subaltern-speak” should not foreclose our interrogation of the subversive voices.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, by exploring the “multiple, relational degrees of subalternity,” Hershatter gives a positive answer to Spivak’s question of “Can the subaltern speak?”: some of the subaltern speak “can be understood as resistance to the dominate discourses and institutions that constrain subalterns. . . .”<sup>53</sup> The strength of Hershatter’s essay lies in her emphasis on “local configurations” and “multiple political subjectivities” in subaltern and cultural studies, even if there remains much more to be said in order to fully and convincingly answer Spivak’s question.<sup>54</sup>

Yet in cultural matters things are never simple or straightforward. Hershatter’s conclusion, striking as it is, calls out for the problematizing that the details and localness of history can always produce. We can see this by considering an episode in the history of subaltern representation in contemporary China. During the height of the Cultural Revolution, when the Red Guards were increasingly spinning out of control in chaotic cities torn by civil war, Mao Zedong promoted the movement of “going up to the mountain areas and going down to the villages,” during which millions of educated youth were coerced into settling down in remote rural areas. The initial goal of such a movement was to provide an opportunity for the educated youth to “receive education from the poor and lower-middle peasants” so that they could eventually be accepted by the subalterns, acting like them, and speaking in their voice. The following quotation from Mao Zedong, for example, was frequently used to promote a Maoist theory of subaltern representation during the Cultural Revolution, when educated youth were encouraged to reform themselves according to the role models of the subalterns in the countryside:

How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can only be one criterion, namely, whether or not he is

willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing to do so and actually does so, he is a revolutionary; otherwise he is a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. If today he integrates himself with the masses of workers and peasants, then today he is a revolutionary; if tomorrow he ceases to do so or turns round to oppress the common people, then he becomes a non-revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary.<sup>55</sup>

This Maoist theory of subaltern representation is drastically different both from the regional and local Indian subalterns in Ranajit Guha's definition and from the gendered subalterns in Spivak's definition. Most importantly, Rey Chow's explanation that "the relation between the elite and the subaltern in China needs to be formulated *primarily* in terms of the way education and gender work together" is not at all sufficient to account for the brutality and unpredictability of a dominant political power that classifies people into opposing social classes at random according to its various and ever-changing ideological agendas.<sup>56</sup> In the numerous political movements in the brief history of the PRC, the concept of "revolutionary subaltern" is conveniently used by the ruling ideology as a counter Other to classify a dissident as "counter-revolutionary" with the simple pretext that he "ceases to" integrate himself "with the masses of workers and peasants" or that he "turns around to oppress the common people." More often than not, even members of the subaltern group itself can be outlawed overnight as "counter-revolutionary" if they happen to step beyond the Party line. Differences in gender, class, and educational level alone cannot, therefore, fully explain the complexity of the subaltern representation in the PRC.

This Maoist utopian idealism, of course, never materialized into concrete reality. For more than 10 years during the Cultural Revolution, many of the educated youth were either persecuted, or in some instances, even raped, by local tyrannical Party officials who claimed to represent the best interests of the subalterns, since—as opposed to the educated youth—they belonged to the class of the subalterns themselves.<sup>57</sup> As for the real subalterns, their illiteracy, lack of power, or even lack of a desire for power, kept them silent and invisible. The educated youth thus became a new generation of a special class of the oppressed "subalterns" whose literacy became the very reason for their being deprived of any traces of the power of discourse that they had previously possessed. Instead of realizing the initial intention of becoming one of the subalterns, they were reduced to a class less

verbal and visible than the illiterate subalterns themselves. This situation predictably led to these intellectual subalterns entering into open confrontation with the ruling ideology between 1978 and 1979, a time when many of the 10 million educated youths still remained in the countryside. These youths joined their efforts in hunger strikes, railway blockages, and mass demonstrations for the purpose of demanding their right to go back to their home cities.<sup>58</sup> For the first time, the educated youths spoke up for themselves as "subalterns," but their demands had nothing to do with the interests of local subalterns whom they were supposed to embrace as role models. Their voice of protest was further recorded in post-Mao history through their writings of "wounded literature (*shanghen wenxue*)" in which they expressed their grievances at being reduced to the position of the subalterns.<sup>59</sup> One finds in these writings ambiguous feelings towards the local subalterns, some of whom suppressed them as political opponents whereas others sided with them against the official ideology on different occasions.<sup>60</sup>

This episode demonstrates the impossibility and complexity of a one-sided discourse about subalterns in contemporary China, where class categories crosscut each other and are continuously redefined by the representatives of the ruling ideology in accordance with their own interests and ever-shifting agendas. The same can be said of other political movements such as the "anti-rightist" and the Cultural Revolution, during which numerous Chinese intellectuals were sent to the country in exile to be "ideologically reformed" by the local subalterns. In the context of the cultural and political history of contemporary China, the issue of "Can the subalterns speak" is much more complicated than those situations that have been reported, accurately or not, by Indian scholars. In fact, to many Chinese readers and critics, the question of "Can the subalterns speak" is painfully reminiscent of the familiar question of "For whom do we speak?" which was the central issue raised by Mao Zedong in his Yan'an Talk of 1943. To a large extent, this document helped shape the predominant Maoist-Marxist theory of literature and art since 1949, a theory that has persistently marked out the goal of serving the interests of workers, peasants, and soldiers. In the political and cultural history of the PRC, this supposedly subaltern theory of literature and art has conveniently justified the Party's demand for "the correct attitude of the writer, the need for a popular language comprehensible to the masses, the prerequisite of 'extolling' and not 'exposing' revolutionary reality, and similar phrases which at various times have been

much more than empty utterances.”<sup>61</sup> In the “glorious” defense of subalterns—most of whom, thanks to the failure of official education programs, remain illiterate even in present-day China—the ruling ideology found a “natural” ally in the political suppression of the intellectuals whose already limited articulations of anti-official voice were rendered even more mute and powerless. Seen from this context it is ironic to note that at the very moment when the pretext for subaltern speech as an instrument of power is dying in China as part and parcel of an obsolete, radical Marxist ideology, it is being popularized in the West as an effective weapon against the mainstream claims of Western academics. While not denying its positive role in opening up theoretical issues, I nevertheless caution against the use of this once local-and-regional discourse for the sake of globalizing cultural and theoretical issues. Like other strategies of “truth” that seek to assert power both at home and abroad, this discourse may well turn out to be yet another form of the Western theoretical hegemony that it claims to displace. It is not easy for the Chinese people to erase the memory of the promulgation of an official discourse on subalterns, a discourse of power fully employed to suppress the advancement of other discourses by Chinese intellectuals. Indeed, the memories of this discourse and its tragic effects are one of the places from which I here advance my study of a Chinese Occidentalism that focuses on the role of the intellectuals in producing a counter-discourse about an imagined and imaginary West, a discourse, as we shall see, that was directed against the ruling ideology and its self-claimed subaltern interest.

In evoking the term “Chinese intellectuals,” I hardly need to point out the obvious fact that it is a loaded term that necessarily involves diverse social groups and conflicting ideologies in different historical periods. I do not wish to claim that the post-Mao age can merely be understood in terms of a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the official and the anti-official discourses designed by “progressive” intellectuals. Neither do I intend to give the impression that the anti-official message alone constitutes the historical necessity of those literary and dramatic institutions under discussion. Fully aware of the danger of a binary thinking that confines intellectual inquiry, I use the terms of “official/anti-official discourses” *strategically* in order to identify temporary, complex, fluid, and constantly shifting historical moments in which diverse groups of Chinese intellectuals collaborated with other social forces in their confrontations with the ruling ideology. To demonstrate the complexity of those historical moments, I

discuss, in chapter 2, an example of a third kind of Chinese Occidentalism in which the anti-official Occidentalism overlapped with the official Occidentalism of the early post-Mao regime, which manipulated the former into legitimizing the latter’s political agenda. In these instances, it is precisely the “complicity” with the ruling ideology that marked the multiple historical moments of Chinese Occidentalism. This “complicity” marks a crucial feature of the Chinese Occidentalism and the questionable role of what Carol Lee Hamrin and Timothy Cheek termed “Chinese establishment intellectuals,” who allied themselves with the authoritarian ruling elite, living and writing within the tension and conflicts between them.<sup>62</sup>

Yet to emphasize the politically liberating force of Occidentalism in the formation of literary and cultural history in contemporary China is not to ignore the fact that Occidentalism is multifaceted and highly problematic and can at times become ideologically limiting and confining. I therefore stress in chapter 6 the problematic nature of Occidentalism by recounting a profound irony in an earlier episode in modern Chinese dramatic history. I argue that, on the one hand, several male May Fourth playwrights considered writing about women’s issues of liberation and equality important political and ideological strategies in their formation of a countertradition and a countercanon against the Confucian ruling ideology. In such a peculiar “male-dominated-feminist” discourse, they found in the image of the West a powerful weapon against the dominant ruling ideology of Confucianism. When the West is used in this way as a strong anti-official statement against Confucian traditional culture, this Occidentalist discourse can be regarded as politically liberating. On the other hand, however, in view of the particular historical conditions of the May Fourth period, which is characterized by its embrace of an anti-imperialistic agenda as its top priority, the appeal to the West paradoxically turned out to be a yet another way in which Western fathers subjugated and colonized “Third World” women, as I hope to show. The last chapter deliberately steps out of the historical period of post-Mao China, from which the bulk of this study draws its raw material, in order to demonstrate the continuity and complexity of Occidentalism in modern Chinese society. The postscript, by contrast, brings this study of Chinese Occidentalism up to the present historically by analyzing the controversial receptions of *A Chinese Woman in Manhattan*, a best-seller in 1992 in China, which was then bewildered by a recent “autobiographical” account of a Chinese woman’s success in living the “American dream.”

It hardly seems necessary to emphasize that this study in no way constitutes an attempt to sketch a comprehensive history of Occidentalism in modern China. Such an attempt is surely beyond the scope of any single monograph. Indeed, this work does not even claim to be a typical survey of the entire post-Mao period, whose political course is to a large extent characterized by an ambivalent and paradoxical relationship to the West. It is merely a portrait gallery of the “heroes” and “villains” in a few exciting—and, in some cases, much-neglected—moments in history when Chinese realities clashed with the Western Other, confusing the traditional differences between them, and claiming the Other as access to its own cultural and symbolic capital in an indigenous battle to subvert domestic power and knowledge both in economic and political terms. By avoiding a chronological history, these fragmented “case studies” categorically question the familiar story outlined by the continuous narratives of official and national history. By drawing materials more heavily from dramatic studies than from other literary genres, I intend to redeem modern Chinese spoken drama from its marginal position both in China and in the West. While selectively celebrating the internal antihegemonic use of the image of the West in certain specific moments in contemporary Chinese history, I am equally aware of the fact that the symbolic uses of the West in Chinese texts and contexts treated here by no means offer a complete story of Chinese Occidentalism, which has rightly been characterized on both sides as problematic and contradictory ever since China’s initial contact with the West.<sup>63</sup> The discussions of the instances of Chinese Occidentalism considered here are offered as at best partially representative and are merely meant to open up a new discourse, which mediates between theory and historical analysis of the concrete experience of the indigenous cultures. With this observation, I begin my tale, to be completed inevitably by the interrogations and interventions of others.

# 1

## Occidentalism as a Counter-Discourse *He shang Controversy*

Throughout contemporary Chinese history, literary and political texts have often been composed by different and diverse groups of the intelligentsia as deliberate endeavors to promote anti-official discourse.<sup>1</sup> Although impoverished in political power and material wealth, the Chinese intelligentsia has nevertheless been blessed with knowledge and literacy—qualities that have been ingeniously and repeatedly used against the “powerful” status quo. The ability to write, especially as it enables the production of anti-official agendas, points to an obvious advantage of the urban intellectuals over the peasants, the majority of whom have remained illiterate even in postrevolutionary China. Indeed the very act of public writing is itself a form of anti-official Occidentalism and thus a critique of Mao’s antiurbanism, which, as we have seen, is itself a result of, and a reaction to, Chinese Orientalism. Yet the creation of an anti-official Occidentalism by the Chinese intelligentsia for diverse and complicated reasons is more than a coincidental product of its literacy. It was preconditioned by the parameters of Maoist political discourse, which categorized anything opposed to its political dominance as “Western” or “Westernized.” To prevent China from being “Westernized” or “capitalized,” for instance, was commonly advanced as the reason for starting the Cultural Revolution, and for persecuting numerous intellectuals. In this situation, the adoption of an Occidentalist discourse was a strategic move by dissenting intellectuals. Accused of being “Western” both by virtue of their cultural

status and their political sympathies, they had little choice but to assert that the Western Other was in fact superior to the Chinese self. By thus accepting the inevitable official critique raised against them, whether or not it was “factually” always the case, they strengthened their anti-official status. By suggesting that the West is politically and culturally superior to China, they defended their opposition to established “truths” and institutions. In the process, these urban intellectuals created a form of anti-official Occidentalism that stands in the sharpest contrast to the official Occidentalism pervasive in government and Party propaganda in contemporary China.

Nowhere is this anti-official Occidentalism more evident than in the controversial 1988 television series *He shang* (River Elegy); indeed, as we shall see, the critical debate that this series engendered can serve as an especially revealing example of the character and function of anti-official Occidental discourse. *He shang* was widely noted even in the West for its positive image of a scientific and modern West, indeed its almost embarrassingly positive evaluation of all things Western. Given this apparent celebration it would be easy—though facile and mistaken—to dismiss the series as an especially overt example of Western “cultural imperialism,” as that term is now defined in postcolonial and Third World discourses. Seen from such a limited and mistaken perspective, *He shang* appears as but another potent example of the ideological power wielded by the West in Edward Said’s account of Orientalism. Yet if considered within the cultural and historical context of post-Mao society, *He shang* can be seen more profitably as a product of anti-official Occidentalism. From this perspective it can be best understood neither as an example of Chinese naiveté nor of Western imperialism, but as a potent anti-official discourse employed by the Chinese intelligentsia to express what was otherwise politically impossible and ideologically inconceivable.

I hope to make clear by this study of *He shang* that ideas or ideological concepts, whether they stem from a politically dominant or from a subordinate culture, are never intrinsically oppressive or liberating. Certainly the appropriation of the image of the West, when put into critical use against the domestic hegemony of the ruling ideology, as was the case with *He shang*, can rightly be viewed as positive, liberating, and even desirable. Seen from this perspective, *He shang* was above all else an anti-official discourse that employed the Occidental Other, in its cultural and ideological absence, to critique the oppressive presence of official ideology. Its depiction of the West was not offered as mimesis, but as an oppositional and supplementary Other

and as a counter-discourse that sought to be subversive of the dominant and official Orientalism and Occidentalism prevalent throughout Chinese culture.<sup>1</sup> Thus the account of *He shang* that follows argues against the essentializing of any cultural discourse, Western or Eastern; it offers a prime example of how superficially similar sign systems can be manipulated for very different ideological ends.

Initially broadcast in June 11, 1988, the six-part TV documentary series *He shang* roused perhaps the greatest national sensation in the history of the PRC television industry. *He shang* was produced by Xia Jun, a 26-year-old TV director and journalist. The principal scriptwriters were Su Xiaokang, a well-known reporter and a lecturer at the Journalist Department of Beijing Broadcasting College, and Wang Luxiang, a lecturer at the Chinese Department of Beijing Normal University. Others who also contributed to the writing of the narrative script were Zhang Gang, Xie Xuanjun, and Yuan Zhiming.<sup>2</sup> Immediately after its première, *He shang* writers received thousands of letters from audiences in all walks of life unanimously expressing their “deep gratitude” for an excellent TV program and requesting a written copy of *He shang*’s script in order to study its profound messages.<sup>3</sup> As a result, *He shang* was unprecedentedly rebroadcast two months later in prime time, in spite of official efforts to ban it as a vilification of Chinese culture.<sup>4</sup>

One of those profound messages can be found, surprisingly, in *He shang*’s total rejection of traditional Chinese cultural fetishes. Contrary to its conventional image as the cradle of the Chinese civilization, the Yellow River is here portrayed as a source of poverty and disaster. In fact, it is depicted almost as if it were a willful human being, violent, brutal, tyrannical, periodically sweeping away millions of people and their livelihoods at free will. It seems likely that such an image of the river could not but remind many Chinese people of their traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution. In the television series, the river is personified as a dying old man, “alone and desolate, stubbornly waiting to die in his devastated homeland.”<sup>5</sup> This characterization certainly defamiliarizes the common presentation of the Yellow River as a revolutionary symbol of national resistance, such as we find it, for example, in Xian Xinghai’s “The Yellow River Chorus.” Composed in 1939 during the Sino-Japanese War, this musical piece has been interpreted as eulogizing the “gigantic image of the Chinese nation, whose glory, diligence, and courageousness are depicted in the battlefields on either side of the Yellow River against



Japanese invaders.”<sup>6</sup> Repeated performances of the piece after the war at crucial historical moments, such as the one after the arrest of the “Gang of Four,” preserved its function as an inspiration for the Chinese people’s commitment to socialism, especially in times of adversity. In addition to deviating from this earlier association of the Yellow River with China’s revolutionary tradition, *He shang* also rejected an earlier 1988 television depiction of the river in a series of documentary programs on Chinese landscapes; here the river was idealized for its “beauty,” “grandeur,” and its personification of the “resourcefulness” of the motherland.<sup>7</sup>

As if such blasphemy of China’s “cultural roots” were not enough, *He shang* also deconstructs other quintessential national symbols. The dragon and the yellow earth are interpreted as representing cynicism, parochialism, conservatism, confinement, and land and ancestry worship in Chinese culture. The Great Wall, China’s most famous tourist attraction and historical site, is also singled out for ridicule as a defense mechanism that secluded China from the rest of the world. “If the Great Wall could speak for itself,” the narrator in *He shang* assures us, “it would have honestly told Chinese offspring that it is a huge monument of tragedy constructed by the fate of history,” not a symbol of strength, glory, and enterprising spirit of the Chinese people.<sup>8</sup> As a kind of culmination, all of the negative aspects of Chinese culture are finally traced to Confucian ideology, whose monolithic social system resists plurality and change. *He shang* thus concludes that the yellow earth and the Yellow River cannot teach contemporary Chinese people much about the spirit of science and democracy, both of which are necessary for life at the end of the twentieth century. Similarly, those traditional cultural monuments, it is suggested, will not provide the Chinese people with “nourishment and energy”; they are no longer capable of “producing a new culture.”<sup>9</sup>

The most critical and adversarial comment made by the television series about Chinese culture, however, is presented in its very title. The word *he* (river) refers to the Yellow River civilization and, by extension, to other primitive agricultural civilizations such as those in India and Egypt.<sup>10</sup> The word *shang* means “dying before one comes of age.” According to Su Xiaokang, one of the main screenwriters of *He shang*, the term suggests the stagnation of the characteristic “Asiatic mode of production,” which “had matured too early, thus resulting in an early stagnancy.” The word *shang* also suggests a survivor’s mourning for the martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for their country, as evidenced in Qu Yuan’s (ca. 340 BC to 278 BC) poem “*Guo*

*shang*” (Hymn to the Fallen) in his *Chuci-jiuge* (Elegies of Chu—Nine Songs). Thus, the word *shang* “crystallizes the ambiguous feelings of Chinese intellectuals in more than a century”—the more deeply they love their country, the more eagerly they long for its rebirth.<sup>12</sup> Using the elegy of the Yellow River as a central image, *He shang* “meditates, in all aspects, on the history, civilization, and destiny of the Chinese nation,” foregrounding the imperative of “economic and political reforms.”<sup>13</sup> To the inhabitants of the PRC, who are necessarily accustomed to reading between the lines in a strictly censored media, such statements were clear cries of protest against the current regime, which is fundamentally opposed to political reform. As Wang Jing has correctly pointed out, the message from *He shang* seemed “loud” and “clear”: “Only by liberating human intelligence from the stifling sense of history will the Chinese people creatively confront the problems of the present. The past conceived as such is viewed as the antithesis rather than as the basis of what Chinese intellectuals came to revere and value in their own present.”<sup>14</sup>

In addition to unsettling its Chinese viewers with its depictions of a dying and declining “Orient,” *He shang* further shocked its audiences with a passionate account of an Occidental Other, which, it suggests, represents youthfulness, adventure, energy, power, technology, and modernity.<sup>15</sup> The West is characterized as a “blue ocean civilization,” openly embracing the outside world and “simultaneously transporting the hope of science and democracy” across the oceans.<sup>16</sup> The ironies and paradoxes of such a depiction of the image of the West, however, were insightfully critiqued by Wang Jing as “the new fetish for the Chinese people.” What “empowers the color ‘azure blue’ is exactly what used to empower the national symbol of the Great Wall and the dragon—namely, power in the sense of expansion, glory, and aggression.”<sup>17</sup> Even the major successes of the West were attributed to its “right” attitude toward the sea. The rise of Athens as a marine power was viewed as having paved the way for “a democratic revolution” “in ancient Greece.”<sup>18</sup> Columbus’s discovery of the New World and Magellan’s journey in 1519 across the ocean, the program claims, established among other things the foundations for a bourgeois revolution. Even the history of science and technology in the West was closely related to mankind’s fate on the ocean. The urgent need for building bigger and better ocean-going ships for world trade and colonialism, for example, “demanded a further development of mathematics, physics, technology, and science.” This was the reason why, according to *He shang*, “Galileo published his *Dialogues Con-*

cerning *Two New Sciences* in 1636, which was conducted," not incidentally, "in a ship-yard."<sup>19</sup>

*He shang* persistently lamented the historical opportunities that, it suggested, the Chinese people had lost, often by failing to heed the "advice" of Western men-of-letters. While Magellan was sailing across the oceans, *He shang* noted with regret, the Chinese Emperor Jiajing (Ming dynasty) declared a "closed-door" policy after a quarrel with a Japanese official over Japan's "tribute" to China.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese people also "did not hear in time" what Adam Smith had to say in 1776 about Chinese culture in his *The Wealth of Nations*, in which he declared that Chinese culture "suffered from stagnation as a result of neglecting overseas trade." History, the program declared, has proven correct this Westerner's view that to "close oneself up amounts to suicide."<sup>21</sup> As another instance of Chinese neglect of salutary components of Western culture, the program alludes to the case of Yan Fu, an important Chinese thinker and translator, who believed that Western notions such as the social contract and the will to power were useful "balance mechanisms" that could tap human potential, thus bringing about new forms of culture with vigor and vitality. Yet the conservative resistance to Western ideas was so strong in China that in his old age, Yan Fu was forced to surrender to Confucianism at the very historical moment when Ito Hirobumi, his former Japanese schoolmate in a British naval college, was successfully, as the Japanese Prime Minister, leading Japan's rapid advance to a position as one of the world's powers.<sup>22</sup> Here, then, a Japanese imperialist, known in Chinese history books to have been responsible for both the seizure of Taiwan from China and the imposition of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, was presented paradoxically as a superior and senior "Other," contrasted with an inferior and impoverished Chinese "Self." It is worth noting that in *He shang* this "Other" is alien even though he would seem to a non-Chinese viewer as "Oriental," if not Chinese.

The details cited here are merely representative. *He shang* abounded in problematic images of China and its oppositional Others. Indeed, *He shang* amounted to no less than a rewriting of the usual Chinese versions of world history. Included were references to such events in Western history as the rise of the Roman Empire, the British Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Russian Revolution—almost all of which painted the West in favorable colors. Western thinkers were also approvingly evoked, among them

Hegel, Marx, Plekhanov, Francis Bacon, Joseph Needham, and Arnold Toynbee. It seems clear that such an extremely and even one-sidedly favorable treatment of those people and events could only serve to establish a non-Chinese paradigm that could then be employed to critique things Chinese.

Naturally such a presentation drew many outraged cries of disagreement. It was reported, for instance, that "Vice-President Wang Zhen condemned *He shang* as a 'vilification' of Chinese culture and banned videotapes of the program from leaving the country," and that "in a speech to the northwest Ningxia Province on September 27, the 80-year-old conservative leader described *He shang* as having portrayed the Chinese people and their seat of civilization, the Yellow River Basin, as devoid of any merit."<sup>23</sup> In a literary journal, Chen Zhi'ang also observed that although *He shang* aimed at "an all-round meditation on Chinese history, civilization, and destiny," as one of its authors Su Xiaokang had claimed, it amounted in effect to a meditation on the negative aspects of the Chinese culture, which are set in sharp contrast, whenever possible, with the positive elements of the Western cultures. Quoting Lenin's remarks on the dual possibilities to be found in any cultural heritage, Chen argued that an all-round meditation on any single culture, be it Chinese or Western, must include analysis of both the negative and the positive sides. Only in this way, he claimed, could it become dialectical, and hence, convincing.<sup>24</sup> For Chen, the reason for the stagnation of Chinese society resides not in the negative characteristics and personalities of the Chinese people, but rather in the very fact that the Chinese feudal society had reached its perfection too early and too securely, and hence it was difficult to surpass that stage of civilization.<sup>25</sup>

Other academics, of course, focused on "factual mistakes" in *He shang*. Gao Wangling noted that *He shang* expressed an "unbalanced view" of Chinese history by "hallucinating" an idealized Western Other.<sup>26</sup> Using outdated research materials "from the fifties to express their disappointments in the eighties," Gao argued, *He shang* screenwriters created "acts of misunderstanding" in their proclamation of an "oceanic civilization," a myth that viewed the lack of a navigational culture as the root of China's stagnation.<sup>27</sup> Yet for a long time, Gao pointed out, navigation in the West was indeed limited within the "small bathtub" of the Mediterranean. Its "cultural expansion" cannot possibly be compared to that of China in the same historical period, in which the latter reached out to the world on a

much larger scale both by sea and by land. Neither is the “yellow earth” a particularly Chinese phenomenon. The West, too, has developed an “inland” agricultural civilization in its own history.<sup>28</sup>

As if to further support Gao’s view, Pan Qun observed that during at least two periods in Chinese history—the early Qin dynasty, and again before Song and Yuan dynasties—China had developed much more advanced navigational enterprises than any other countries, including those in the West. Zheng He’s seven journeys to the West across the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean—journeys that began in 1405 and lasted for the next 28 years—were results of the open-door policies of the imperial courts. For at least one time, or more, China, too, enjoyed a hegemony on the “blue ocean.” The subsequent stagnation of Chinese society, Pan Qun concluded, was brought about by the closed-door policy of the Qing dynasty in a much later period; thus, he claimed, it had nothing to do with an absence of a “blue culture.”<sup>29</sup> Commenting further on *He shang*’s oversimplification of Occidental-blue/Oriental-yellow civilizations, Yan Tao stated that if it were true that the ancient Greeks were a “blue-ocean culture” as *He shang* claimed, then, the medieval millennium certainly had nothing to do with this “blueness.” The Middle Ages were indeed much “darker” and more isolated from the rest of the world than was Chinese culture during that period.<sup>30</sup> As for the Great Wall as a symbol of China’s defensiveness toward the outside world, Ji Ren noted to the contrary that in the Han dynasty, Emperor Wu extended the Great Wall to what is now the Xinjiang Autonomous Region for the sole purpose of protecting the “*sichou zhi lu*” (silk road), the only trade route between China and what was then known as the “*xiyu*” (western region). Thus the Great Wall significantly contributed to cultural and economic exchanges between China and the West, and therefore had nothing to do with China’s “cowardice,” “parochialism,” and “self-isolation,” as *He shang* had claimed.<sup>31</sup>

In all of this it seems clear that *He shang* created and propagated a misleading image of the alien West, which might well be termed Occidentalism since it provides a politically and culturally motivated image of the cultural Other. This Occidentalist discourse in *He shang* becomes even more striking when viewed in the context of much current Third World discourse against a claimed Eurocentric Western domination. For example, citing Martin Bernal’s argument in *Black Athena* concerning the “fabrication of Ancient Greece,” Samir Amin observed, in his *Eurocentrism*, that the Western ideology of “Eurocentrism” was based on cultural, religious, literary, and linguistic recon-

structions of a Hellenist myth with a false “annexation of Greece by Europe” from the ancient Orient.<sup>32</sup> Set against such a perspective, *He shang* seems to voluntarily import such “Eurocentrism,” rather than reject it, as much of the Third World seeks to do. At least on first consideration, *He shang* seems to fortify the image of what Amin calls an “eternal West,”<sup>33</sup> with its repeated claims that a combination of the best cultural heritage of Greek civilization and Western industrialization accounts for the rapid emergence of a modern Europe. Such an image of an “annexed” Athens as the “cultural capital” of Europe<sup>34</sup> is most typically underscored in *He shang*’s glorifications of the rise of Hellenism, the conquests of Alexander the Great, the Discovery of the New World, and the triumph of colonialism and imperialism at various points in the text. Advocating in the East an Orientalism that Third World intellectuals like Amin would consider a distorted view of both the East and the West, *He shang* can be seen as an Oriental fabrication of the Occidental “Other,” an “Other” whose centrality is ultimately celebrated in a historical “progression from Ancient Greece to Rome to feudal Christian Europe to capitalist Europe—one of the most popular of received ideas” in the West.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, *He shang*’s sympathetic portrayal of the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci—the first Westerner who “brought scientific works to the Chinese” and informed them that they “did not live in the center of the world, but live somewhere in the Northern Hemisphere”<sup>36</sup>—can be seen as a Chinese postcolonial affirmation of an earlier European act of cultural imperialism. This is indeed a shocking departure from what has been conventionally taught in standard Chinese history books on the imperialist nature of Western missionary activities, which are usually described as being conducted hand in glove with Western military aggression. It is thus not surprising that *He shang* mentions only in passing the humiliating Opium War, which resulted in a series of treaties and agreements including the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing that forced China to pay an indemnity of \$21,000,000, to cede Hong Kong, and to open Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Ningpo, and Shanghai to foreign trade with most-favored-nation treatment.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the claims that the Yellow River and the Great Wall symbolize an “inward-looking,” agricultural culture seem to inflict a Western “‘geographic’ racism,” that, following the failure of “genetic racism,” still attempts to explain an underdeveloped and conquered Orient by locating “acquired and transmissible traits produced by the geographic milieu” without any “scientific value whatsoever.” It is amusing to note, in passing, that Amin argued that it was not possible to claim continuity in

European culture in view of the fact that “the Renaissance is separated from Classical Greece by fifteen centuries of the medieval history.”<sup>38</sup> Here, then, Amin seems to echo the opponents of *He shang*, who argued that the existence of a “blueless” Middle Ages deconstructed *He shang*’s claim of the continuity of an oceanic European culture from Ancient Greece to the Modern West.

A comparison of *He shang* with such a Third World critique points to a number of striking paradoxes between Amin’s rather typical “anti-Eurocentrism” and *He shang*’s “Occidentalism.” Whereas Amin criticizes the West for regarding itself as “Promethean *par excellence*, in contrast with other civilizations,”<sup>39</sup> *He shang* laments over the profound tragedy of the Chinese literati, who failed to bring into China “the spirit of Faustus and Prometheus.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Amin would indeed be surprised to learn that *He shang* did not depreciate the image of China alone; it sounds an elegiac criticism for Oriental traditions as a whole. Recalling Marx’s theory of an Asiatic Mode of Production, *He shang* claims that although in ancient Semitic languages, “Asian” means “the region where the sun rises,” 5,000 years later, the “Asian sun” has finally set—the ancient civilizations in the Orient have declined one after another for the simple reason that they have depended too heavily, and for too long, on an agricultural mode of production.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the greatest paradox to be found in *He shang* concerns its “misreadings” of Arnold Toynbee, whose early theory of challenge and response is cited as if it were uttered by a universally acknowledged great authority. Quoting Toynbee’s view that the hostile physical surroundings along the Lower Yellow River Valley engendered the development of Chinese civilization, *He shang* calls on the Chinese people to confront the hard facts of history, which, according to Toynbee’s *A Study of History*, chronicle the extinction of fourteen civilizations and the decline of six, including those of the Euphrates, the Nile, and the Yellow River. The critics of *He shang* were, not surprisingly, quick to point out that this early theory of Toynbee was already considered passé in Western scholarship and that Toynbee himself had corrected these views in the 1970s: he no longer assumed that Chinese civilization was isolated and backward, but argued instead that China’s “ecumenical spirit” will play a major role in shaping the future of the world.<sup>42</sup>

Our account of *He shang*’s uses and misuses of Toynbee is even more complicated than the bare restating of facts suggests. If *He shang* can be viewed as a profound political critique against Maoist ideology and its imperial roots, Toynbee was certainly “misreading”

Chinese society when he claimed in 1976—toward the end of the Cultural Revolution—that “on the whole, the history of the Chinese Empire, which still survives in the form of the present People’s Republic, has been a political success story. It contrasts dramatically with the history of the Roman Empire, which tried and failed to give lasting political unity and peace to the West.”<sup>43</sup> Here, Toynbee completely turned around the “success story” of the West—which *He shang* screenwriters borrowed from his early works—a West that he saw in the late seventies as in the process of disintegration. Toynbee’s prediction that “the future unifier of the world will not be a Western or Westernized country but will be China” is obviously unheard—or deliberately ignored—by his Chinese disciples.<sup>44</sup> As if to further license China as “the geographical and cultural axis for the unification of the whole world,” Toynbee pointed to the “Chinese people’s experience, during the last twenty-one centuries, of maintaining an empire that is a regional model for a literally worldwide world-state” and “the humanism of the Confucian *Weltanschauung*” as unique qualifications, which, ironically, are the very “cultural and historical sediment” that *He shang* screenwriters wished to eradicate from Chinese society by appealing to a “better” model in the West.<sup>45</sup>

Yet Toynbee and the *He shang* screenwriters perhaps have other things in common as well. Just as Toynbee sought to write a philosophy of history that sometimes plays a bit freely with historical facts, so did the *He shang* screenwriters, who sought to create a political document not intended to be accurate about the historical events it reported. Both Toynbee and the *He shang* writers were seeking a macro-historical model in order to come to terms with a teleology of their contemporary societies, be it in the East after the chaotic Cultural Revolution, or in the West after disastrous World War II. Indeed, *He shang* was never meant to be a scholarly essay. As Yuan Zhiming, one of the screenwriters, has rightly said, “*He shang* can never be qualified as an academic work; it did not even claim to address specific issues either in history or in contemporary society.”<sup>46</sup> Thus *He shang* might more profitably be regarded as a poetic text rather than a historical one, a text that expresses a younger generation’s mythic vision of the world. It is a political text reflecting Chinese intellectuals’ own vision of “truth” and “knowledge.” Or seen from another angle, the *He shang* screenwriters *did* attempt to be accurate, but in the construction of their program they singled out only those historical facts and data that supported their thesis. In the final analysis, whether those “facts” are accurate is not ultimately

important. What is important is their critical use. Yet it is also true that Kenneth Winetroun's characterization of Toynbee's "historical" enterprise seems particularly appropriate for describing the *He shang* scriptwriters: they are "no historian[s]." For them, history "should stress pattern";<sup>47</sup> "history is feeling as well as intellect"; "history is contemporary"; "history is partly myth" and "theology." Both *He shang* screenwriters and their Western "master" believe in "historical prophecy."<sup>48</sup>

Indeed the debate on whether or not *He shang* is a historical or a literary text is quite beside the point. *He shang* cleverly interweaves two levels of discourse—the factual and the symbolic. By appealing to historical "facts"—which its writers selected and emphasized in order to support the polemical thrust of their documentary—*He shang* proceeds as if it were based on solid factual data and hence, empirically, rather than merely rhetorically, convincing. Yet these "hard facts" were, to a great extent, manipulated in order to appeal to the emotions of the contemporary Chinese audience against the ruling ideology. Thus from its very outset, the critique of *He shang* was problematic, since it was predicated on a fundamental confusion about genre. If *He shang* were considered as literature, its detractors were mistaken in their critique of its non-factuality; if it were treated as history, however, one could not account for the appeal of its rhetorical and symbolic dimension, which disqualified it as history. Indeed, *He shang* struck a cord in the national sensibility by glossing over the jump from the factual to the symbolic. It was *He shang's* rhetorical power and emotional appeal that encouraged its willing audiences to overlook the missing links and fill in the gaps between the historical and the symbolic with their own imagination, a faculty that at the moment *He shang* was aired was dominated by its strong predisposition against the official ideology. Indeed, there was no real engagement in the debate about the factuality in *He shang*; both its writers and supporters admitted that it would not pass muster as history. What was at stake was the ideological thrust of the series, which was both more and less than history. The rhetorical force of *He shang*, therefore, lies in its intricate interplay between history, poetry, and politics, having to do, for the most part, with the symbolic rather than with the factual. To single out any one of its three dimensions for critique is to miss the better part of the picture.

This characterization can perhaps explain the reason why, in spite of its expressed Occidentalism accompanied by "self degradation," *He shang*—a seemingly "colonialist" TV series with otherwise dry

facts, figures, and philosophical and political jargon, and without any sexual or violent content—could touch millions of Chinese from all walks of life. In fact, as Gong Suyi has observed, there emerged in the China of 1988 a "*He shang* phenomenon" in which philosophers and scholars "walked out of their studies and salons to initiate a dialogue on television screens with a national audience" concerning China's past, present, and future.<sup>49</sup> *He shang* was thus hailed as successfully combining both popular-cultural media and "elite," "scholarly" discourse. It is interesting to note here that the image of the West is so predominant and paradoxical in contemporary China that even in the act of appreciating a heavily Eurocentric *He shang*, the Chinese critics did not forget to mention the difference between China and the West in "television culture" "as products of various historical conditions. . . . We should therefore not blindly accept the Western concept that sees television as part of the popular culture"; under the specific circumstances in China, "an elite cultural discourse [such as *He shang*] can be regarded as the soul of television." Popular culture thus means the "popularity" of a particular work among the ordinary people.<sup>50</sup> One finds in this remark an example of a deeply rooted practice of alluding to the Occident as a contrasting "Other" in order to define whatever one believes to be distinctively "Chinese."

The favorable reception of *He shang* can be seen from yet another angle. Immediately after its première, *He shang* became so popular that many prestigious newspapers, including *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *China Youth Daily*, *Economy*, *Wenhui Newspaper*, and *Beijing Youth*, competed with one another in publishing *He shang's* narrative script. Furthermore, viewers and readers hand-copied and circulated the narrative script among themselves. These actions significantly transformed *He shang* from a media event into a literary text, and an exceedingly popular text at that. Especially worth noting is its warm reception among high school students, usually a disillusioned generation that in recent years has shown little interest in the fate of its country. A high school student reported to *He shang* writers that her graduating class sacrificed its "precious" preparation hours for college-entrance examinations in order to study the *He shang* script together in class. "When our teacher read aloud the passage in which the Great Wall is depicted as a huge monument of national tragedy, we all applauded with excitement!"<sup>51</sup> A senior-high student from a poor Henan village told the *He shang* writers that since television sets are still luxury items in some remote countryside locations he had to walk a long distance, twice a week, in order to watch every

single part of the series in another village.<sup>52</sup> High school students were by no means the only group that received *He shang* with excitement and fervor. Even the elder generation took it personally and seriously. An old “revolutionary,” who fought in the war at the age of sixteen, lost sleep after watching *He shang*, pondering over the meaning of her “glorious” life stories—“How many of them were mistakes?” “How would later generations evaluate my revolutionary career?”<sup>53</sup> It seems clear that to a large extent the success of *He shang* can be attributed to its fundamental challenge to the Chinese conventional value system and world view.

Such an outlet of anti-official sentiments among the Chinese people inevitably drew automatic defense from China’s “revolutionary tradition” by those who saw the message of *He shang* as representing “anti-Marxist” and “counter-revolutionary political programs.”<sup>54</sup> Others were disturbed by the fact that the “sacred” places along the Yellow River such as Yan’an, where Mao Zedong rallied his revolutionary forces in the 1930s, were dismissed and even profaned as poverty-stricken in *He shang*. Confronted with such criticism, Su Xiaokang, one of the chief writers of the script, explained that while on location, his crews did go to “pay their respects” to the “revolutionary relics” in Yan’an. The “white-washed, tidy, and well-kept” cave dwellings of the Party leaders in the thirties did arouse in them a sense of admiration. Yet, when looking closer at the names in front of each cave dwelling, Su recalls, their hearts “saddened at once when ruminating on the tragic endings of, or the tense relationships between,” most of the former revolutionary leaders, “such as Mao Zedong, Zhang Wentian, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Ren Bishi.” As a result, Su and his crews left with heavy hearts “without shooting a single scene” in Yan’an, the so-called cradle and beacon of Chinese revolution.<sup>55</sup>

At their next stop in Kaifeng, Henan Province, Su further tells us, his crews went straight to the small, dark room in a tightly secured bank office where Liu Shaoqi, the first president of the People’s Republic, was detained for the twenty-eight days before his tragic death during the Cultural Revolution. It was Liu who supervised the implementation of the first constitution of the People’s Republic in 1955. Yet, as Su Xiaokang has rightly pointed out, as an architect of the PRC legislation, Liu could not even protect his own rights as a citizen, let alone those of the president of the Republic, who was, ironically, elected by the Chinese people according to the letter and spirit of their constitution. Liu Shaoqi was persecuted without any

trial or legal procedure. He died in that desolate room, alone and in agony, Su emphasizes, adding the detail that his untended white hair was reported to be more than a foot long!

Su Xiaokang could not help but compare this “horror room” with Liu Shaoqi’s “honorable” room in Yan’an. He perceived in them a historical connection and the inevitable tragedy of not just one individual, but of “the entire generation of Chinese communists.” For Su and his crews, the “sacred” place along the Yellow River region could not teach them about the “gigantic revolutionary spirit,” nor could it inspire in them a sense of national pride and grandeur. It merely offered them a vivid lesson on ignorance, self-deception, and autocracy. It is high time, Su insists, that we open our eyes to the outside world and stop considering China as still “number one.” It is high time that we catch up. For him, this is perhaps one of the most important messages in the entire Occidentalist discourse of *He shang* series.

Such a remark seems to offer a perspective from which we can begin to make sense of the *He shang* phenomenon. Whatever else it might be, *He shang* is without a doubt an expression of an anti-official discourse prevalent in China at the end of the 1980s, which painted the Occident as an oppositional and supplementary Other. Clearly such a discourse served above all as a counter-discourse that aimed at subverting the predominant official ideology. Thus the majority of the audience did not care whether the historical facts were “correct.” They read into the contrasting Other a hope for remodeling and rescuing their own country and their own selves. Realizing this helps explain why even academics, who had earlier questioned the scholarly soundness of *He shang*, began to defend it politically after Party tyrants such as Wang Zhen threatened to denounce it as “counter-revolutionary.” The critical point driven home to the critics and viewers seemed to be that it is not the Chinese people who are ultimately depicted as inferior to their Western counterparts. The “inferior” China presented in the program is part of a strategy for exposing the inferiority of a monolithic, one-Party system. The depiction in *He shang* of a problematic cultural past and a progressive Occidental Other were merely pretexts to debunk current official ideology.

This observation is central to any understanding of *He shang*, but it also needs to be set in a broader framework. To Westerners unfamiliar with the history of twentieth-century China, *He shang*’s Occidentalism

may seem striking and innovative. Perhaps to a certain degree it is. But it is important to recognize that Occidentalism has frequently been employed by the ruling classes in modern China for their own political agendas. No one can dismiss the undeniable fact, for instance, that ever since the founding of the PRC, both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping have “successfully” used anti-imperialist discourse to stunt anti-official voices at home. During the Cultural Revolution, even Mao’s former “comrades-in-arms” were persecuted as “*di, te, pan*”—enemies, spies, and traitors—who allegedly aligned themselves with Western powers and their nationalist followers; such an association with the West was even more strongly—and fictionally—created for those dissidents who openly challenged Mao’s ideology. Liu Shaoqi was publicly humiliated during the Cultural Revolution for his pro-Western and pro-capitalist stance, and his wife, Wang Guangmei, was accused of adopting a Western, and hence, “rotten” life-style. One might, of course, not idealize Liu Shaoqi, one of the top Party leaders up to 1966, who was also deeply involved in the policy formation concerning China’s involvement in the Korean War and other anti-Western movements. Yet the very fact that even an anti-Western president of the PRC was accused of being pro-Western, and hence, counter-Marxist and counter-revolutionary, demonstrates the powerful role that “Occidentalism” plays in the political drama of contemporary China.

The same is true even for Deng Xiaoping, who was himself removed more than once from the top Party apparatus for the sole “crime” of introducing Western technology. It thus seemed natural for Deng to use his own brand of Occidentalism, at the beginning of the post-Mao years, to attack Mao’s Cultural Revolution, his political purges, and his closed-door policies. Yet it is ironic to note that in January of 1979, when Deng was visiting the United States as the first major Party leader to do so in thirty years—performing his “epoch-making” pro-Western drama—he had already started back home in China a large-scale government crackdown on the Democratic Wall movement, just as soon as his own political power was secured after Mao’s death. Wei Jingsheng, the movement’s leader, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his alleged spying activities—for providing information on the Sino-Vietnamese war to a Western journalist.

Likewise, the official reason for the 1989 Tiananmen student crackdown, announced by Deng Xiaoping himself, was that it was a “counter-revolutionary rebellion,” that was caused, not incidentally, by “an international and domestic climate” in an attempt to “over-

throw the Communist Party and socialist system” and to “establish a bourgeois republic entirely dependent on the West.”<sup>56</sup> The ensuing event, in which Fang Lizhi took refuge in the U.S. embassy, was manipulated to further testify to the official view that the student movement was indeed plotted by a “traitor” who ran into the open arms of American imperialists. Seen from these political and ideological perspectives, such events enable one to argue that it is this “Western devil” and his professed ideology—although seriously and justly critiqued by its own people in the West—that has paradoxically kept alive a myth of democracy and human rights in post-Mao China. Indeed, Deng himself is a master in annexing the Occident: he wants only Western science and technology for his economic reform, while wholly rejecting Western political and legal systems. Such contradictions inevitably led to the Tiananmen massacre, which signifies, among other things, the end of Deng’s “pro-Western” era and the beginning of a closed-door policy once again.

In view of the domestic politics in Dengist China, it is important to point out that it was almost accidental that a polemical treatise such as *He shang* could be allowed even a short life. Cui Wenhua has explained the accidental appearance of *He shang* within the limitations of a strict censorship system.<sup>57</sup> According to Cui, both Chen Hanyuan, the deputy director of the Central Television Station, and Wang Feng, the vice minister of broadcasting, cinema, and television, could have vetoed any film or television show at any point by simply questioning its “political healthiness.” Yet, to everyone’s surprise, both of them minimized their power “as the ultimate censor” and did not even suggest any changes in the script.<sup>58</sup> Had either one of them chosen to play his “proper” role as the “representative of Ideological State Apparatuses”—whose job is to purify and unify people’s way of thinking—we would have probably seen an entirely different *He shang*, if we were to see one at all.<sup>59</sup> The appearance of *He shang*, therefore, does not testify to the soundness of the Chinese television industry, Cui argued forcefully; it illustrates, rather, how a few persons’ “free will” could have instantly killed numerous movies and TV programs in spite of the fact that they were the product of the talent and hard labor of many people.<sup>60</sup> In addition to the fact that a controversial program like *He shang* was inevitably in constant political danger in the PRC’s highly centralized and tightly controlled media, it is also true, in my view, that all key persons involved in the *He shang* affair may well have had their accounts to settle with the ruling ideology. It is at least possible that they may have deliberately looked

the other way because they, too, for a variety of possible motives, wanted this counter-discourse to appear. At any rate, their negligence of duty testifies to the popularity of the provocative *He shang*, which to a large extent represented the anti-official sentiments culminating in the student movement of the following year.

The “accidental” appearance of *He shang* can also be better comprehended when placed in the context of the power struggle within the Communist Party: without the support of Zhao Ziyang, then the Party Secretary-General, *He shang* would have been severely criticized for its pro-Western, anti-socialist, and anti-Party stance, even after its seeing the light of day, as has often happened to many films and literary works after 1949. The importance of Zhao Ziyang’s support was underscored in an official Chinese report after he was ousted as a scapegoat for the Tiananmen students protest of 1989. Jin Ren points out, for example, that soon after the appearance of *He shang*, Zhao encouraged his “cultural-elite activists” to write positive and even “flattering” reviews despite the fact that some academics questioned the soundness of its scholarship. Zhao even asked that 500 videotape copies of the program be distributed around the country. In late September 1988, Zhao, as the Party Secretary-General, ignored Wang Zhen’s request that *He shang* be criticized for its anti-socialist content during the third plenary session of the Thirteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee.<sup>61</sup> Although Jin’s account can be seen as part of another political campaign against Zhao Ziyang and hence highly questionable in its cited “facts,” it at least tells us how polemical a role *He shang*—or any other work of literature and art—can play in the political dramas of the PRC. And that *He shang* was part of that polemical drama is beyond doubt. Xinhua News Agency has reported that in post-Tiananmen China, a book entitled *Reappraisal of He shang* was published in November 28, 1989 by Hangzhou University Press, which had invited fourteen experts and scholars in history, philosophy, political science, journalism, and Chinese literature to a seminar in which they critiqued *He shang*’s national nihilism, historical fatalism, and systematic promotion of “complete Westernization.”

To a large extent, then, the *He shang* screenwriters’ initial anti-official efforts to interfere with everyday reality were subsequently used by reformist Party officials like Zhao Ziyang to discredit his conservative opponents within the Chinese Community Party. This was an accidental—but crucial—circumstance that allowed *He shang* a temporary, but highly political, life. Thus the very act of attempting

to transform what Louis Althusser calls “Ideological State Apparatuses was nevertheless appropriated by a different faction within the ruling ideology for consolidating its own power. Or seen from another angle, an anti-official discourse of Occidentalism merged with the specific agenda of a faction within the predominant official discourse, both using the image of the Other for its own purposes.

It was to be expected, therefore, that *He shang* became an immediate target for another political campaign against “cultural imperialism” in post-1989 China, a campaign that accused writers, producers, and supporters of *He shang* of being pro-Western, and hence, anti-Chinese—“nationalist.” A post-Tiananmen-massacre article published in *People’s Daily* claimed, for example, that in the rewriting of history, *He shang* highlighted two “new epochs,” the first one being the year 1649, in which the British Industrial Revolution began, and the second one, the year 1987, in which Zhao Ziyang became the Party Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, *He shang* is accused of suggesting to its audiences that “only Zhao Ziyang is the standard-bearer of economic reform” and that only “the capitalism which he advocated can save China.” It is not surprising, then, the article asserts, that Su Xiaokang, the main screenwriter of *He shang*, “actively threw himself into the Tiananmen counter-revolutionary rebellion” of 1989, which was in itself “a result of the collaboration between the so-called ‘intellectual elite’ and Zhao Ziyang’s political supporters”<sup>62</sup> The very fact that Su Xiaokang had no choice but to flee to the West further proves the highly subversive function of Occidentalism in the political arena of contemporary Chinese society. Seen in this light, the anti-official Occidentalism of the television program was in turn manipulated by the ruling clique itself, which, as in the case of Zhao Ziyang, collaborated with the anti-official Occidentalism in order to achieve its own practical goals in Party politics. The subsequent tragedy of the Tiananmen student demonstrations is another classic example in which the masses who protested against the current regime were eventually exploited by the very ruling class that they had initially fought against.

At this point I must finally address the issue of “nationalism,” a confusing term that frequently surfaced in the *He shang* debates. *He shang* was on many occasions criticized for its “cultural nihilism” and its lack of the “patriotism” that was said to have stimulated “masterpieces” of literature and art in the past, inspiring many to sacrifice their lives for the dignity and integrity of the motherland. The Chi-