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Globalisation as glocalisation in China: a new perspective

Ning Wang*

Institute of Arts and Humanities, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China

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In the current Chinese and international cultural and theoretical context globalisation has been one of the most heatedly debated topics of the past decade. This raises these questions: why should we Chinese humanities scholars deal with this topic with such enthusiasm? Has China really benefited from globalisation in its modernity project? How is globalisation realised in the Chinese context? How has it affected China's humanities and culture? The advent of globalisation in China is subject to various constructions and reconstructions in its glocalised practice. So it is actually a sort of glocalisation in the Chinese context. Based on my previous research and on others' publications, I offer my own reconstruction of globalisation with regard to its 'glocalised' practice in China. In the age of globalisation modernity has taken on a new look, or become a postmodern modernity, characterised by contemporary consumer culture. Along with the rapid development of its economy, China is now experiencing a sort of 'de-third-worldising' process, with its function increasingly important in the world.

Keywords: globalisation; glocalisation; China; consumer culture; de-third-worldising

在当前的中国和国际文化理论语境下，全球化一直是过去十年内讨论得最为热烈的理论话题之一。人们也许会问这样一些问题：为什么中国的人文学者如此热衷于讨论这一话题呢？难道中国果真在自己的现代性大计中得益于全球化吗？全球化是如何在中国的语境下得以实现的？全球化是如何影响中国的人文学科和文化的？我们无法回避这一事实，即全球化来到中国就经历了一种全球本土化的实践，并在这其中不断地被建构和重构，因此它实际上就是中国的语境下的一种全球本土化。本文作者基于自己的先期研究以及其他学者的著述，尝试着参照中国的“全球本土化”实践提出自己关于全球化的重新建构。既然我们现在处于一个全球化的时代，那么现代性便带有了新的面目，或者说以一种后现代的现代性形式而出现，它带有当代消费文化的特征。随着中国经济的飞速发展，中国正经历这一种“去第三世界化”的过程，从而使自己在世界上发挥越来越重要的作用。

*Email: wangn22@sjtu.edu.cn

In the past decade, among Chinese scholars of humanities and social sciences, talking about globalisation from different perspectives has become an academic fashion, especially when it is associated with China's cultural and intellectual production and studies. It is true that ours could be defined as an age of globalisation, which manifests itself not merely in the economy, but more apparently in the aspects of cultural and intellectual production and studies. It is not surprising that the issue of globalisation, or globality, has been interesting not only economists and politicians but also humanities scholars. Obviously the advent of globalisation is regarded by many as merely a contemporary event, especially in the Chinese context, but if we reflect on its origin in the Western context from an economic and historical point of view, we may find that it has already had a long history, with globalisation in culture even earlier. In the eye of some Western scholars the advent of globalisation is really a miracle, enabling China, 'one of the globe's poorest countries' before its reform, to 'become a booming economy – second biggest in the world' in the present century.¹ On the other hand, globalisation has also affected our research in humanities and culture. So, in the present article, I will continue my previous studies on the issue of globalisation. I first trace its origin once again before exploring its positive and negative effects on China's cultural and intellectual studies from a new perspective, as I have published extensively on this topic since the beginning of the twenty-first century.²

Globalisation and glocalisation: the West and China

Since we do not deny that the concept of globalisation (*quanqiuhua*) in China is a 'translated' or 'imported' concept from the West, we will further question: how has globalisation been 'localised' in the Chinese context, like many other Western theoretical concepts such as modernity, postmodernism, Orientalism and postcolonialism? Obviously, as many Western critical concepts and cultural and theoretical trends have travelled far from the West to China since the early 1920s, the same is true of the concept of globalisation, although it travelled to China much later and has only become prominent in the past decade. In this sense, to many Chinese intellectuals, globalisation is nothing but a concept brought in from the West, although in ancient Chinese philosophy and culture there was a sort of world-view close to that of globalisation. This affirmation seems true, as in China the average person's living standard is still far from those in developed Western countries like the USA, Japan and Germany. Globalisation, especially economic globalisation, could not, however, have grown up on this poor soil without the Chinese economy having developed by leaps and bounds in the past decade. It is no doubt a consequence of global capitalisation and a function of transnational corporations. Thus I will first define our age as that of globalisation before dealing with its impact on some aspects of China's intellectual and cultural life and studies.

In speaking of the essence of globalisation, William J. Martin describes how the world we now live in is an 'electronic global village where, through the mediation of information and communication technologies, new patterns of social and cultural organisation are emerging'.³ He is clearly describing this sort

of globalisation from a cultural and communicational perspective. This finds particular embodiment in the case of China. But globalisation, especially in the humanities, is, on the other hand, resisted by the other strong force: localisation and various types of ethnicism or regional nationalism. We could not but recognise that globalisation is an objective phenomenon haunting our memory now and then and influencing our cultural and intellectual life, our way of thinking and academic study, as well as our cultural and intellectual production. Under the impact of globalisation the cultural and literary market has increasingly shrunk. Today's young people read literary works online rather than consult books in libraries. Similarly they can easily get access to new films from the internet at home, rather than seeing these films in public cinemas. Elite literature and art are indeed severely challenged by popular and consumer culture. Furthermore, the humanities are especially challenged by the over-inflation of knowledge and information.

In the age of globalisation all the artificial constructions of the centre have been deconstructed by the floating of capital, travelling of information and the new international division of labour. A new identity crisis has appeared in national cultures with the travelling of the (imperial) Western theory to the (peripheral) Oriental and Third World countries. More and more literary works have started to deal with questions such as: who are we? Where are we from? And where are we going? How shall we seek a national and cultural identity when all national cultures are becoming more and more homogenised? All these issues are presented before us humanities scholars, who have to take them seriously. In such a global age the long repressed sub-discourses have all stepped out of the restricted domain, moving from periphery to centre in an attempt to deconstruct the monolithic centre.

As a humanities scholar doing research on globalisation mainly from a cultural perspective, I always think that Marx and Engels were two of the earliest Western thinkers to observe the phenomenon of globalisation and deal with this issue from different dimensions. Thus it is worth re-reading what Marx and Engels described more than one-and-a-half centuries ago in their monumental *Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes...The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country...All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed...In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.⁴

If we read the above passages carefully we will have no difficulty finding that the two thinkers here are describing how capitalism has developed from the phase of primitive accumulation to free competition, from monopoly to global expansion and from imperialism to (transnational) globalism, etc. Then the last sentence of these passages clearly indicates that a sort of world literature emerges from such a process of economic and financial globalisation. It is obviously a complete process of the 'travelling' of globalisation from economy to culture, from the West to the East and from centre to periphery. And it is also true that, when we talk about the birth of comparative literature and world literature, we usually regard the globalisation of culture as one of its sources. But in the eyes of Marx and Engels here, 'world literature' is no longer merely restricted to the domain of literature proper, as Goethe constructed: it actually refers to all cultural and intellectual production and consumption in a cosmopolitan way.

Although China is regarded as one of the biggest winners in the process of globalisation, I would rather argue from a cultural perspective that it is the 'glocalising' orientation that is enabling China to relocate itself in the broader context of global culture. As we know, along with the large-scale translation at the beginning of the 20th century and the 1980s, large numbers of Western cultural and humanities works have entered China, exerting tremendous influence on modern Chinese culture and humanities. That is why Western sinologists would rather focus on the study of classical Chinese literature and culture than their modern counterparts, as they think that modern Chinese literature and culture were formed under Western influence. Nevertheless, in an oriental country such as China, where the traditional cultural mechanism is so strong, anything from abroad tends to be localised or 'Sinicised' before functioning effectively. The same is true of globalisation. In this sense we may say that China has benefited from a sort of glocalisation. Just as Roland Robertson pointed out many years ago,

the notion of glocalisation actually conveys much of what I have in fact been writing in recent years about globalization. From my standpoint the concept of glocalisation has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or – in more general vein – the universal and the particular. Talking strictly of my own position in the current debate about and the discourse of globalisation, it may even become necessary for me (and others) to substitute occasionally the term 'glocalisation' for the contested term 'globalization'.⁵

This is particularly true of cultural globalisation in the present era, if we apply the concept of glocalisation to contemporary Chinese cultural and intellectual production and consumption. Although Chinese scholarship has welcomed the advent of globalisation by quoting Robertson's description and discussion of globalisation,⁶ it seems to have neglected the fact that Robertson was among the first to conceptualise the term 'glocalisation' and apply it to describing cultural globalisation in the world. The practice of globalisation in China, especially in culture and the humanities, has undoubtedly proved that globalisation cannot be realised in those countries where there is a long national cultural heritage and strong cultural mechanism

unless it is 'localised', thus developing in a 'glocalising' orientation. China has benefited and will continue to benefit from globalisation overall but most probably in the form of glocalisation, as its practice of modernity is a sort of alternative modernity different from that in the West.⁷ In the following sections, I will deal with this phenomenon with regard to the 'localised' practice of globalisation in China.

Reconstructing globalisation: a Marxist perspective

According to the published research results, globalisation is by no means a mere contemporary event,⁸ but rather a process started long before the latter part of the twentieth century. If we have a clear idea from the passages above quoted from the *Communist Manifesto* of how globalisation started in the West and then travelled eastwards, we will naturally regard it as a 'travelling process'. But in its travelling from the West to China it has metamorphosed and been subjected to various constructions and reconstructions. Since globalisation takes a unique form in China, we will certainly reconstruct it by referring to its practice in the Chinese context. I myself – inspired by my Western colleagues and their constructions of globalisation, especially by Marx and Engels and some neo-Marxists or left-wing intellectuals like Robertson, Scholte and Appadurai – would like to offer my own theoretical reconstruction of globalisation by referring to its 'glocalised' or 'Sinicised' characteristics in the Chinese context. I hold that globalisation can certainly be reconstructed, especially with regard to its practice in different countries or regions, including China. Now I shall try to offer my reconstruction of globalisation using the seven dimensions below.⁹

1. Globalisation as a means of global economic operation

This is particularly true of its practice in China. Economic globalisation is certainly marked by the fact that all countries are developing their economies according to a 'homogeneous' rule formulated by certain international organisations like the IMF and World Trade Organization (WTO). The expansion of global capital has no doubt caused a sort of new international division of labour. To avoid unnecessary repetition in production, some widely known commodities are sold worldwide under the cruel law of 'survival of the fittest'. This not only stimulates backward national industries to innovate in their technology, but also ruthlessly resolves the established system of national industry. In this way it is not surprising that globalisation is largely opposed both in the developed countries and in the underdeveloped countries. In the earliest phase of globalisation in China the country largely imported advanced technologies and management experience from developed countries, seldom exporting its own technologies. But things have gradually been changing: with the innovation and renovation of China's high-speed rail technology and other high technologies, China is building itself into a powerful country of advanced science and technology, as well as creating efficient management models mixing both capitalism and Confucian doctrines. The Chinese government and some of the major national enterprises have already paid particular attention to exporting not only

daily goods but also high technologies and efficient management regulations in recent years.

2. *Globalisation as a historical process*

According to Marx and Engels, the process of globalisation started with Columbus' discovery of the Americas and the consequent global capital expansion. This historical process culminated in the stage of transnational capitalisation in the 1980s, when capitalism entered its late stage. But it does not necessarily mean that capitalism has come to an end; rather, it will probably develop in two directions: either coming to the natural end of its internal logic, or reviving itself after readjusting its internal mechanism. Just as Robinson illustrates, 'Globalisation is characterized by related, contingent and unequal transformations. To evoke globalisation as an explanation for historic changes and contemporary dynamics does not mean that the particular events or changes identified with the process are happening all over the world, much less in the same way.'¹⁰ The current revival of economy in the USA is certainly an indispensable consequence but, from a long-term point of view, the productive means of capitalism will sooner or later be replaced by a more advanced means of production, and capitalism will finally come to an end. At present, the Chinese mode of development, or the Chinese way (*Zhongguo daolu*), is becoming increasingly attractive to those engaged in the study of globalisation. So we should clearly realise that this transitional period is not necessarily a short one, but rather a long period that will develop step by step. In China's socialist construction there are many capitalist factors. Similarly, in the developed capitalist countries, there are also lots of socialist factors. But this is a tentative phenomenon. From a Marxist historical-materialist point of view, socialism will finally replace capitalism if we practice it in an adequate manner.

(3) *Globalisation as a process of financial marketisation and political democratisation*

Alongside the advent of globalisation the flow of capital has a free outlet, with free trade largely replacing the old practice of government intervention in foreign trade. Thus globalisation has become a 'hidden God' crossing the boundaries of nations and countries and functioning both at the centre and periphery. Unlike the aggression characteristic of the old imperialism, economic and cultural imperialism usually intervene in other countries by gradual penetration, in the process of which political democracy is naturally realised once the economy has developed to a certain stage. But, just as globalisation may be localised in a particular country or nation, democracy should not be viewed as a singular form, especially in an oriental country like China, where feudal and totalitarian systems dominated for thousands of years. Thus democracy is a long and gradual process different from its forms in Western countries.¹¹ The current flourishing of China's internet culture, characterised by the forces of public opinion leaders, more-or-less indicates the irresistible tendency of gradual democratisation. Overseen by various internet users and public opinion leaders, government decisions have been more and more transparent and democratically made.

(4) Globalisation as a critical concept

The issue of globalisation heatedly discussed in the international humanities and social sciences is also viewed as a critical concept, with which scholars try to deconstruct the old-fashioned concepts of modernity and postmodernity. That is, globalisation has deconstructed the artificial opposition between modernity and postmodernity by overlapping the two, thereby breaking through the Eurocentric mode of thinking. But, on the other hand, since the imperial centre moved to the USA with the advent of globalisation, this critique of Eurocentrism will thus be pointed to a sort of American-centrism. The reason why globalisation was once a controversial concept in China is largely a result of the contingent condition of the country and of misunderstanding: globalisation is another type of Westernisation or Americanisation to many people. So it was economically welcomed and adopted but politically and culturally resisted. Now, however, along with the progress of globalisation overall, the leading role of China in this process is apparent not only economically but also politically and culturally. More and more people have realised that globalisation is by no means an economic phenomenon only, for it also manifests itself in many aspects of people's life and work.

(5) Globalisation as a narrative category

Homi Bhabha points out that 'nation' is in a sense a sort of 'narration'.¹² The same is true of globalisation as a narrative category, for it not only represents people's expectations of a bright and beautiful future, but also embodies the global expansion of an imperial notion of value. Globalisation is therefore a grand narrative, according to which the traditional boundaries of nations and countries can be deconstructed. But this grand narrative becomes fragmentary in its practice in different countries or regions as it merges with their local conditions. A sort of economic globalisation and marketisation is taking the place of the power of government, which finds particular embodiment in the penetration of strong cultures into weak cultures and weak cultures' resistance to the former. National and cultural identity is becoming more and more obscure, with a single identity replaced by multiple identities. As a result, people in the age of globalisation are suffering from a sort of identity crisis. They often ask themselves such questions as: who are we? Where are we from? How are we different from people of other countries and nations? This is particularly the case in overseas Chinese writers' works, in which their identity is split and they usually play a double role, with multiple identities mediating among different cultures.

(6) Globalisation as a cultural construction

The reason why cultural globalisation was controversial in China at first is the result of unnecessary worry: confronted with the penetration of a strong Western culture, Chinese culture has seemed rather weak, embracing the former without reservation. Thus, in the course of cultural globalisation, Chinese culture might well be colonised or Westernised. But the practice of cultural globalisation in China over the past few decades proves that globalisation in culture is also a cultural construction like its precursors, modernism and postmodernism. We will

continue to bring in Western culture to China; at the same time we will also promote Chinese culture in the West as well as the rest of the world. Indeed, in discussing this issue, scholars from different fields cannot but make their own constructions or reconstructions. In this way it is their goal to construct and reconstruct different cultures of globalisation. For us scholars of literary and cultural studies, observing our research objects in a broad global context and communicating with our international counterparts on common ground will undoubtedly broaden our horizons and endow our theoretic debate with more liveliness, so as to make some theoretical innovations.

(7) *Globalisation as a theoretical discourse*

More and more scholars of the humanities in China are involved in discussion of this issue, but how to construct a sort of Chinese theoretical discourse has become a tough question. In this respect globalisation has gradually become a polemical and theoretical discourse. I therefore agree with Robertson that, in theorising cultural phenomena, we could use the concept of globality instead of that of globalisation, for the former appeared much earlier than the latter, and is more appropriate for describing the orientation and development of culture and literature.¹³ In speaking of the theory of globalisation, we cannot deny that there is a powerful Western theoretical discourse of globalisation. But in the process of cultural communication and exchange, some Chinese scholars have been increasingly strongly arguing for a reconstruction of a Chinese theoretical discourse under the umbrella of the grand narrative of globalisation.¹⁴ In this sense globalisation has provided precious opportunities for us Chinese scholars to have equal dialogues with our Western and international colleagues in an attempt to construct our own theoretical discourse.

The above is my new construction from a Marxist perspective of the concept of globalisation on the basis of previous research done by my Western colleagues as well as by myself. In reconstructing the above seven aspects of globalisation, I am undoubtedly indebted to some of my Western colleagues, especially to the constructions made by Robertson, Appadurai and Scholte; however, my reconstruction is largely made by referring to the Chinese practice of globalisation, a sort of 'Sinicised' practice of 'glocalisation'. I am trying to prove that the reason China has achieved great success in the process of globalisation both in its economy and in its cultural and political capacity is to a great extent a result of the practice of a sort of glocalisation with Chinese characteristics. Anyone who is familiar with modern Chinese culture knows that the formation of this culture and literature is basically a result of the pragmatic attitude of '*nalaizhuyi*' (grabbism), as formulated by Lu Xun, ie grabbing everything useful to China, even including Marxism. The reason Mao Zedong finally achieved victory in the Chinese revolution was his combination of Marxist fundamental principles with concrete Chinese practice. By such means Mao led the Chinese Communist Party to the overthrow of the Nationalist regime by armed struggle, with the 'countryside surrounding cities', and finally founded socialist new China. He actually 'glocalised' the universally recognised Marxist theory using specific Chinese experience, thus achieving victory for the Chinese revolution. Theoretically he also constructed a 'Sinicised' Marxism, which has not only

contributed to global Marxism but also enriched it with Chinese practices and experiences. Culturally speaking, we should say that modern Chinese culture has formed its unique tradition by critically inheriting its national cultural heritage and importing Western culture by means of translation. I here intend to further argue that only by observing globalisation in the light of the above seven or more dimensions can we grasp the characteristic features of globalisation comprehensively and precisely. Also, only by realising that globalisation is subjected to various constructions and reconstructions in different contexts, can we adequately evaluate the positive and negative impact of globalisation on Chinese culture and humanities. And only by recognising its multidimensional significance can we Chinese scholars carry on equal dialogues with international scholarship on the issue of globalisation and add our unique voice to international theoretical debate.

Consumer culture and its study in China

From the above descriptions and theoretical analyses, we can see that globalisation has largely been 'localised' or 'Sinicised' before achieving success in China. As has been indicated above, the country has greatly benefited from globalisation, in the process of which contemporary China has gradually become a sort of consumer society with various postmodern symptoms appearing in different forms. Although there is still a striking difference between the rich and the poor, between interior regions and coastal cities and between urban and rural areas in China today, the country has nevertheless been marked by various symptoms of postmodern consumer culture. Early in the 1980s Fredric Jameson, who helped form Chinese postmodernism,¹⁵ pointed out in his lecture 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' that, apart from observing the various characteristics of postmodernism, one 'can also come at the break from the other side, and describe it in terms of periods of recent social life...a new kind of society began to emerge (variously described as postindustrial society, multinational capitalism, consumer society, media society and so forth)...these are some of the features which would seem to mark a radical break with that older prewar society in which high modernism was still an underground force.'¹⁶ Although China did not become a post-industrial society until recently, various symptoms of consumer society have long been evident. In this sense, Jean Baudrillard's postmodern theory on consumer society is a more appropriate means to interpret this phenomenon.

As we know, Baudrillard has been one of the most influential postmodernist theorists, especially in China since the beginning of the new century. After his death in 2007 an increasing number of Chinese scholars has paid considerable attention to his theoretical doctrines, especially that on consumer society. As a post-Marxist theorist, he was first influenced by Marxism but later broke away from it and even offered a critique of Marxist doctrine. Dissatisfied with Marx's theory of political economics, he tried to complement the latter from a postmodern perspective. To him, commodity does not only have exchange value, it is also of certain symbolic value, a value that incorporates style, fame, luxury and the expression of power and mark. He realised that society as a whole was surrounded by consumption and exhibition, by means of which individuals

acquired fame, position and power. So Baudrillard thought: ‘Simulation is precisely this irresistible unfolding, this sequencing of things as though they had a meaning, when they are governed only by artificial *montage* and non-meaning. Putting a price on the event up for auction by radical disinformation. Setting a price on the event, as against setting it in play, setting it in history.’¹⁷ It is true that in a postmodern consumer society everything is thus of certain value; similarly, everything is thereby of no value. Even meaning may be arbitrarily constructed through one’s dynamic and creative interpretation; but the constructed meaning can also be deconstructed in the same way.

Since China started its economic reform and opening up to the outside world in the latter part of the 1970s, the various symptoms Baudrillard described many years ago have appeared in the country. That is why Baudrillard is first of all known in China as a social theorist dealing with consumer society. Although Baudrillard did not develop a systematic critical theory of his own, judging by the core of his theory, we can easily see that he is closer to the critical theory practised by the Frankfurt School of Marxism, which has been discussed and studied in the Chinese context in a thoroughgoing manner. Since the late 1990s China has been increasingly involved in the process of globalisation. Scholars have gradually found theoretical inspirations in Baudrillard’s works. For, from the very beginning, he tried to argue that social homogenisation, alienation and exploitation have all helped to form the process of commodity reification. Technology and materialism have gradually mastered people’s life and thinking and deprived them of their critical faculties and capacity. All his ideas are widely quoted and discussed by Chinese scholars in dealing with the postmodern condition in contemporary China.

It is true that many of the European theorists have become world-renowned academic stars through the intermediary of the USA. Or they have become world renowned largely thanks to their works being translated into English. This is also true of Baudrillard, who first became well known in the English-speaking world and then even more popular in the Chinese context. Compared with his French colleagues like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, his popularity in the English-speaking world is much smaller, so it is not surprising that, when Chinese scholars in the 1980s and 1990s talked a lot about Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, very few people knew Baudrillard. But in the past 10 years, as a result of China’s involvement in globalisation and the greater availability of Baudrillard’s works in English, his works have been translated into Chinese largely from English. So it will no doubt be that, with the deepening of the study of consumer culture and semiotic and picture theory in China, Baudrillard will gradually become one of the most attractive contemporary French thinkers to Chinese literary and cultural scholarship. Baudrillard and his works have also become an important research object for China’s literary scholars, philosophers, cultural studies scholars and art critics in their study of globalisation and China.

The critical and creative reception of Jean Baudrillard and his theories in China is highly relevant to China’s involvement in the process of globalisation, which has made a profound impact on people’s lives. As we know, globalisation in culture has severely challenged elite culture and its literature and art. Thus popular culture has increasingly permeated people’s daily lives, influencing their cultural life and aesthetic taste as well. Since the country is now strikingly

affected by consumer society and full of postmodern symptoms, elite cultural studies are also severely challenged by popular culture and consumer culture. Humanities scholars should study all these phenomena from certain theoretical perspectives. Thus Baudrillard's works are their precious resources. From a global perspective we can easily understand that observing and studying consumer culture in such a contingent postmodern condition is also a continuation of the critical studies of postmodernism and its art and culture made by both Western Marxists and post-Marxists like Baudrillard.

Baudrillard has long been concerned about consumer culture and its impact on people's life. In *The Consumer Society*, he starts with the phenomenon that today's people are surrounded by consumption and rich materials. We often spend much time not dealing with other people but, rather, with these commodities and thinking about how to manipulate commodity and information. This is obviously a characteristic of the postmodern condition: people are increasingly controlled by commodities, with their daily lives dominated by consumption of commodities and exchange of information. So people in consumer society are not first concerned about how to maintain basic daily necessities, but how to comfortably or even 'aesthetically' enjoy their cultural and intellectual life. In postmodern society people's material life is rich and colourful, so what dominates their thinking is how to enjoy and consume these cultural goods. If they cannot consume the goods they want in their own countries, they will find the opportunity abroad. That is why the Chinese New Year's Day (Spring Festival) has become more and more important and attractive to people in some Western countries,¹⁸ for it represents an aspect of Chinese culture and during these holidays rich Chinese people usually travel and consume abroad. They are most welcome in Europe as people there realise that, if they grasp the spirit of this Chinese culture, they will attract more Chinese tourists to consume in their countries and help their economy flourish.

Thus postmodern society has provided people with more choice: they do not have to spend much time and energy reading a long literary masterpiece; instead, they stay indoors enjoying a world renowned film in their family cinema for a mere two hours. Similarly, literary scholars and students have also changed their reading habits: they can easily get access to canonical literary works by means of film or TV or even DVDs instead of spending much time in the library. These phenomena raise a challenge to those engaged in elite literary production and studies. And this is true not only of Western postmodern society, but also of some Chinese cities, where postmodern elements are even more easily seen than modern ones. In this sense, humanities scholars and literary critics can easily find theoretical inspiration in Baudrillard's works. Furthermore, they may well explore whether China is still a developing country belonging to the Third World, as it has always boasted. If not, what kind of country should China be regarded as? I will make a further exploration of this issue in the final section of this article.

'De-third-worldising' China in the process of globalisation

When we say that China is one of the biggest winners of globalisation, we largely refer to its rapid economic growth in the past few decades, since the

Chinese government started to practise economic reform and opening up to the outside world in the latter part of the 1970s. As we know, China has undergone several stages in the process of globalisation. First, it was involved in this process passively. Then it quickly adapted itself to the regulation of globalisation. Finally it played a leading role in this process. Now that China has become the second largest global economy, with its GDP ranking second to that of the USA, many Western scholars are suspicious of its status as a 'developing country' or a 'Third World country'. In my view, judging by the reports made by some of the major Western media and by China's own practices, the country should indeed no longer be regarded as a Third World country, for it is experiencing a sort of 'de-povertising' and 'de-third-worldising' process in an attempt to build itself into the most powerful and richest country in the not too distant future. The recent discourse of 'China Dream', formulated by China's top leader Xi Jinping has certainly proved this aspiration of the entire Chinese nation. The aim of 'de-povertising' the country has basically been realised, as the average Chinese living standard is close to that in an ordinary developed country. But it will still take some 10 years before China as a whole becomes a real developed country, although parts of the most developed regions within its vast territory are flourishing even more than such European metropolises like London and Paris.

American scholar Doug Guthrie, in associating China with globalisation, offers his insightful description of how China, within a quarter-century, has shifted 'from communism to capitalism', and how it has transformed from a 'desperately poor nation into a country possessing one of the fastest-growing and largest economies in the world', which is certainly 'a story of the forces of globalization'.¹⁹ But after a vivid description of the marvellous development in China's major cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu and Chongqing, he points out pertinently:

All of these facts and images are, by now, well known. Indeed, the headlines announcing 'China's Century,' 'The China Challenge,' 'The China Syndrome,' 'Buying up the World,' 'America's Fear of China,' 'China Goes Shopping,' 'Can China be Fixed?' and many others, have thundered across the covers of such magazines as *Business Week*, *the Economist*, *Forbes*, *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*, and many other major publications.²⁰

Guthrie is right in pointing out the above facts and making some relevant analyses of these objective phenomena. It is true that in recent years, in contrast to some Western powers suffering a severe economic and financial crisis, the Chinese economy has continued to grow fast, although it has slowed down in an attempt to readjust itself in order to achieve sustainable development. The country needs to solve many of its own problems, including environmental pollution and the increasingly striking difference between the rich and the poor. While humanities are suffering a great deal in funding terms, with many programmes and projects cut in the Euro-American universities, the Chinese government is still investing huge amount of money to build world-class universities and develop its language teaching and cultural dissemination abroad. But in China, with a vast territory and the world's biggest population, there not only exist striking differences between rich and poor, but also differences

between North and South, between the coastal areas and the interior regions, and between the urban and rural areas. So modernity is still an incomplete project, both economically and culturally: it has brought the Chinese people both prosperity and problems. In the past few years the country has witnessed the grand scene of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and the prosperous Shanghai World Expo in 2010. These two spectacular events certainly made China much better known to the outside world and its status as a Third World country more doubtful. Yet, according to the official statements from Chinese leaders and the mass media, China is still a developing country belonging to the Third World in much of its countryside and frontier areas. It is therefore no surprise that China projects different and contradictory images in much of the West.

However, Western media have also noticed that, since Xi Jinping became China's top leader, its status as a Third World country has dramatically changed. Xi, not only proud of China's booming economy, but also of its splendid cultural heritage and comprehensive capacity, behaves like a world leader and makes China appear a great power that should have an equal say among its international counterparts, especially the USA. In a speech he delivered on an occasion celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-French diplomatic relations, he mentioned this long-circulated anecdote: To the French emperor Napoleon China was just like a sleeping lion. Once it awakened, it would shake the earth. For a long period of time people were puzzled as to whether this was a true story or a false one. But now the Chinese president wants to let the world know that China is indeed 'a sleeping lion. When it awakens, the entire world will be shaken for it'. But, said Xi immediately, 'it is a peaceful, intimate and civilised lion'.²¹ Just as Xi said, China is now a rising giant, a fact that is undeniable. But, at the same time, Xi also wants to convince the world that China's rise will not necessarily form a challenge to or threat against the West, as it will not threaten the rest of the world – it just wishes to realise a sort of China Dream, according to which it will achieve the great renaissance of the entire Chinese nation overall. In this sense neither the Chinese leader nor the people are satisfied with the current country status as a Third World nation. What, then, will China go on to develop into? This is the real question that we Chinese intellectuals and humanities scholars should answer. Put another way, as a rising country, in what aspects is China de-third-worldising itself? Before ending this article, I will briefly illustrate these.

First, it is still an urgent task for Chinese people to build their country into a well-off society in the near future. That is, China should de-third-worldise itself with its comprehensive capacity largely heightened and the gap between rich and poor gradually closed. This is perhaps the major difference between China Dream and the American Dream: the former appeals to collective prosperity, the latter appeals to individual success. But at the moment the country is still confronted with numerous problems, especially those of environmental pollution and the unequal development of different areas within the country.

Second, it is also necessary to construct a new Chinese culture and philosophy to recover its long and splendid cultural tradition. China should embrace both its past traditions and the advanced foreign cultures so as to make greater contributions to global culture and world civilisation. As we know, Chinese civilisation is one of the most ancient in the world with its most

splendid cultural heritage and literary tradition. It is still energetic and full of vitality compared with many others. Although it was largely marginalised during the past few centuries, it has been gradually recovering its grand tradition through the joint efforts made by China's humanities intellectuals. The current revival of *Guoxue* (traditional Chinese learning), especially (neo)-Confucianism simply indicates that it is moving towards a sort of universal discourse in its dialogue with the Western discourse of modernity.

Third, there is an increasingly pressing need to reconstruct a new image of China as a big country. That is, China should preserve its powerful economy and build up its influential thinking so as to help maintain world peace.²² As I have previously pointed out, the rise of China should not necessarily threaten its neighbours or the West, since China is a peace-loving country. It has suffered a great deal in the past from various imperialist aggressions and colonial oppression. It is now implementing the grand project of 'Belt and Road' (*yi dai yi lu*), according to which, the country will develop the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, both of which will undoubtedly contribute to global economy and culture. In any event a powerful and flourishing China will certainly contribute to world peace.

In short, only by de-third-worldising itself can China make greater contributions to humanity, as was expected by its late leader Mao Zedong many years ago. In this respect the advent of globalisation, or of a sort of 'Sinicised' glocalisation, has indeed pushed forward and will continue to promote this grand project.

Notes on contributor

Ning Wang is Zhiyuan Chair Professor of Humanities at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Apart from his numerous books and articles in Chinese, he has published two English books: *Globalization and Cultural Translation* (2004) and *Translated Modernities: Literary and Cultural Perspectives on Globalization and China* (2010). He is one of the associate editors of the Routledge *Encyclopaedia of Globalization* (2006) and the editor in chief of its Chinese translation (2011). He has also published extensively in English and edited 10 special issues for many international journals, including the *European Review*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Semiotica*, *Neohelicon*, *Perspectives*, *Amerasia Journal*, *Narrative* and *Telos*.

Notes

1. Perry, "Growing Pains," 5.
2. Wang, "Globalization, Cultural Studies and Translation Studies"; Wang, "Postmodernity, Postcoloniality and Globalization"; Wang, "Confronting Globalization"; Wang, "Globalization and Culture"; Wang, "Comparative Literature and Globalism"; and Wang, "Global English(es) and Global Chinese(s)."
3. Martin, *The Global Information Society*, 11–12.
4. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 66–69.
5. Robertson, "Globalisation or Glocalisation?," 38–39.
6. As one of the most influential scholars on globalisation, Robertson, his book *Globalization* (translated by Liang Guangyan and published by Shanghai People's Press in 2000) and his co-edited volume, the *Encyclopaedia of Globalization* (translated by Wang Ning et al. and published by Yilin Press in 2011) are frequently quoted in discussions on globalisation.
7. Robinson, "The Transnational State," 17–18.
8. Wang, *Translated Modernities*.

9. In reconstructing these seven dimensions of globalisation, I am particularly inspired by Appadurai's wonderful book *Modernity at Large*, esp. 33–36.
10. As far as research on globalisation is concerned, among the books, largely from the perspectives of post-coloniality and cultural studies, from which I have gained inspiration are Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Robertson, *Globalization*; Robertson and White, *Globalization*; Jameson and Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization*; Raudzens, *Empires*; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*; and Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World*.
11. On China's democracy, see Yu Keping, *Minzhu shi ge hao dongxi*.
12. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 1.
13. Robertson, "Globality."
14. Shi-xu, *Chinese Discourse Studies*.
15. Wang, "The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity."
16. Quoted in Foster, *The Anti-aesthetic*, 124–125.
17. Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, 14.
18. It is particularly remarkable that, during the Spring Festival of 2015, quite a few Western leaders sent congratulations for the Chinese New Year's Day on TV by using some Chinese sentences or expressions, so as to be closer to Chinese TV viewers as well as ordinary people.
19. Guthrie, *China and Globalization*, 3.
20. *Ibid.*, 2.
21. See Huang Xiang, "Xi Jinping."
22. The *European Review* 23, no. 2 (2015), a journal run by Academia Europaea, has just published a special issue guest edited by myself and John Aldrich, entitled 'Rediscovering China: Interdisciplinary Perspectives'.

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