

critical zone 2

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Edited by Q. S. Tong, Wang Shouren, and Douglas Kerr

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Introduction

Q. S. Tong, Wang Shouren, and Douglas Kerr

It's appropriate for *Critical Zone* to consider the concept and practice of "empire," and not just because the experience of historical imperialism has some special bearing on the regional formations in this part of the world. *Critical Zone*, as described in our introduction to the inaugural volume, is a publication project that takes its local situatedness as a starting point and a geo-cultural basis from which to engage with issues that critical intellectuals located elsewhere are also concerned with.¹ What has made empire a topic of special interest for us is the question of how imperial formations and operations, whether in the past or at present, should be examined in a larger discourse of international politics and how historical imperialism may be usefully considered in relation to the conditions of our time. Within the academy, empire seems to have increasingly become a subject of scholarly inquiry and academic interest, and discussions of empire as such, though helpful, remain preoccupied primarily with the narrating of the historical past as a temporal condition of imperialism. History, however, hasn't yet corrected itself by presenting a clear break from an unfortunate past and promising a better future.

1. See Q. S. Tong and Douglas Kerr, "Introduction: Difference and Convergence in Globalization," *Critical Zone: A Forum of Chinese and Western Knowledge*, vol. 1 (Hong Kong and Nanjing: Hong Kong UP and Nanjing UP, 2004), 1–17.

In a world that is being rapidly homologized, the challenges globalization presented to us are numerous and multifaceted, and they demand critical responses that should and must contribute to our understanding of the continuities or discontinuities between the past and the present. The question of globalization is inseparable from the question of global domination and therefore inseparable from the question of critical resistance to that domination, of which empire is the embodiment. One danger of globalization is its relentless and ruthless efforts to "flatten" the world — to wipe out traditional boundaries and differences within the international order of nation-states and erase the memories and histories of those boundaries and differences by isolating our thinking and experience in a disconnected moment of the present. The advent of a "flat" world, for some, is the end of history and the beginning of non-history.²

Ironically perhaps, the international bestseller *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri has done more than any other work to deepen the myth that we're at a historical turning point where a new form of empire is to reshape the world. In this book of extraordinary optimism about globalization, the authors prophesy the emergence of a free multitude as a global human formation which constitutes the material basis for the establishment of "a new logic and structure of rule," of a global democracy, of "a new form of sovereignty,"³ which is to replace old forms of empire organized on the basis of individual (Western) nation-states as centres of power and domination and lead to the establishment of a super global democracy. Their new book, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, follows on what they have set out to do in *Empire* and outlines that vision of a new global order created by a community of the multitudes interconnected across the globe and beyond the boundaries of nation-states. The book opens with a prophetic statement reminiscent of the opening of *The Communist Manifesto*: "The possibility of democracy on a global scale is emerging today for the very first time." And it concludes with a spectacular display of the authors' romantic optimism: "We can already recognize that today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living — and the yawning abyss between them becoming enormous. In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that living future. This will be the real act of love."⁴

The ethical basis of Hardt and Negri's vision of this global democracy is analogous to that of the Enlightenment notion of popular participation in social and political decision within the modern nation-state. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's

2. For a description of the flattening world in globalization, see Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

3. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), xi.

4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), xi, 358.

famous dictum that opens his *Social Contract* — “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” — launches him into an enquiry into “whether in the civil order there can be some legitimate and sure rule of administration,”⁵ an enquiry which is intended to usher in, at least in theoretical terms, a political and social order that ensures the distribution of maximum equality among members of a nation-state. One would only need to substitute “global” for Rousseau’s word “civil” to see the similarities between Rousseau’s idea of “legitimate and sure rule of administration” and Hardt and Negri’s idea of “a new logic and structure of rule.”

However, the pervasiveness of social inequality that Rousseau lamented 200 years ago is to be experienced today more intensely and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state on a global scale. In the context of globalization, inequality is enforced jointly by the existing social order of the nation-state, whether it’s a developing nation or a developed one, and by the external network of globalizing forces. Appealing and exciting as the vision of a global democracy is, the operation of traditional nation-state powers, which compete and contest for international domination by either consolidating or subverting the existing world order, remains rampant. The conflicts among these powers and dangers arising from these conflicts, as we have seen since the end of the post-Cold War, should remind us that it would take a long time for nation-states to die, if they ever do. Traditional imperial forces and forms of imperial thinking remain a major obstacle to the global democracy envisaged by Hardt and Negri. It’s all too tempting to think of historical forms of empire as a thing past.

In early 2005, the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bandung conference brought together world leaders to celebrate the principles and aims of the Non-Alliance Movement. An unintended effect of this event seems to have reconfirmed the continuing need to combat forms of domination and control. The first Afro-Asian conference held in Bandung in 1955, which Kathyrene Lindberg foregrounds in her essay in this volume, should be remembered as a landmark, memorializing a coordinated anti-colonial movement that was inspired, encouraged, and supported by new international political forces following the global success of communism, particularly in a country like China. Speaking at the conference, Sukarno, first president of Indonesia after its independence from Dutch colonial rule, called for a distinction to be made between classic imperialism and modern imperialism: “We should no longer think of imperialism in the classic form It has also its modern dress in the form of economic control, intellectual control, and actual physical control by a small but alien community within the nation.”⁶ The importance of this distinction was understood primarily

5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997), 41.

6. Quoted in A. P. Thornton, *Doctrines of Imperialism* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), 6.

in relation to the continuing need to combat colonial agents and establishments in the postcolonial new nation-states. It was evident, for Sukarno and certainly many world leaders among his audience, that decolonization and national independence would be incomplete if the global anti-imperialist movement stopped at the stage of political independence — self-government and self-rule. More specifically, Sukarno noted, the life of classic imperialism was to be extended by its representatives, by a small social élite that remained in control over many aspects of social life within the new nation-state. The creation of this “small but alien community” was a complicated historical process, but one consequence of such colonial administrative strategies as “Indirect Rule,” which Elaine Ho’s article in this volume discusses in the context of Frederick Lugard’s colonial practice in Africa and Hong Kong, would be the deepening of social stratification within the colonies. Many of the former colonies, years after decolonization and national independence, were still faced with the problems created by this internal partition as a legacy of “classic imperialism.”

Imperial thinking *after* imperialism persisted. The structure of power of empire and its present relevance are a shared concern of the essays in the first part of the volume. Although they differ in assessing and interpreting what the experience of imperialism has meant under specific circumstances in their critical accounts of empire, whether in terms of its particular operations or with regard to a more conceptual understanding of it as a “benign” hegemonic force, these essays exhibit, in rich critical and historical detail, the complexities of empire. William Spanos’s essay on US exceptionalism, as embodied by its practitioner Alden Pyle and its theoretical exponent and advocator York Harding in Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, offers an example of what Said has called the “epistemology of imperialism” and how it works⁷ — what imperialism sees and what it doesn’t, how it chooses to see the world. The “benignity” of the US mission to democratize the world and, in the case of Pyle, to contain and combat communism in its struggle against European colonial domination in Indochina serves as more than just a reminder of the striking similarities between US military interventionism during the Cold War and its ideological positioning supported by its corresponding practice in the post-Cold War era. Pyle’s unconcealed contempt for French colonial rule and his conviction in the virtue of US actions in Indo-China embodies an imperial imaginary that not only distinguishes the US from an “old” Europe but also endows it with a moral authority that historical imperialism has never had in its overseas operations. The sinister aspect of US interventionism is that it takes its action as a demonstration of its belief in its foundational values, its morality, and its idealism as universal. What is poignantly ironical about contemporary politics, as Hannah Arendt notes in a different

7. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 376.

context, is the paradox created by "the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as 'inalienable' those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves."⁸

A more subtle imperial/colonial imaginary is to be found in Elaine Ho's narrative of Lugard's theory and practice of "Indirect Rule" in two seemingly unconnected sites: Africa and Hong Kong. Drawing on rich historical detail, Ho shows how an indigenous élite was created, trained, and employed for the constitution of "Indirect Rule," a colonial project intended to strengthen and advance the interests of the empire through a formalized social and political process. The establishment of the University of Hong Kong embodies such an imperial vision. However, the irony about this imperial vision is classic: no sooner did the empire start to plan for its future than it began to see its end. Lugard was to become anachronistic not only from the vantage point of postcolonialism: he was receding rapidly into the past while still alive, as Ho shows in her concluding paragraph quoting an editorial in *The Lagos Weekly Record*, which, with justified optimism, "pronounced the demise of his projects for imperial civilization" at the time of his retirement as governor-general of Nigeria in 1919.

Empire requires not just an international order that suits its purposes, interests, and practices but also an internal social structure that corresponds to that international order. Lindberg's critical narrative reveals a different form of US imperial power in its creation of a subaltern other within itself — a subject class defined by its ethnic origin. Perhaps at no other time were the contradictions between its political values and its racist social practice more revealing and more self-reflexive than when Black Americans were needed and called to arms for the defense of its national interests during WWII. The role of the Black Americans in this context is not entirely different from that of the colonized; the former French colonies, for example, were considered the "lands of soldiers which could produce a *force noire* to protect the inhabitants of France against their national enemies,"⁹ and colonial troops fought for the British in both world wars. Subject classes, like subject races and nations, are the imperial imaginaries, central to which is the idea of dominance through power. Interesting to note is how the discourse of nationalism within the US during WWII was intercepted by a discourse of human rights and how the internal struggle for liberty was interwoven with an analogous discourse of freedom elsewhere — the communist revolution in China.

The materiality of imperialism expresses itself in diverse forms. The correlation between the idea of political liberalization and the idea of the superiority of linguistic "orality" in the West, as Christopher Hutton shows, reflects

8. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 279.

9. See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 129.

"the changing intellectual and political climate in Europe" since the late Middle Ages onwards and is, historically, an expression of the desire for a more virtuous and equal social system that brought about those changes. In the domain of linguistic practice, the vernacularization of European culture culminated in the romantic theory of language in its celebration of the oral quality of everyday language, which was to become a framework for Protestant missionaries to comment on the complexities of linguistic conditions in China, in particular in terms of the relationship between local systems of speech (dialects) and the normalized system of "standard" Chinese, a relationship that in its historical context seemed analogous to that between the ruled and the ruling. Towards the end of the essay, Hutton's problematization of *Putonghua* or "the common language" as simultaneously democratizing and centralizing linguistic accessibility offers one more example of the paradoxical complexities of hegemonic forces within one and the same nation-state.

Empire is not a singular formation but a complex phenomenon manifested and materialized in particular examples and experienced by individuals. Like language, the landscape garden for Haun Saussy is the site of shifting meanings of the imperial notion of ownership, whose historical ephemerality is arrested in the materiality of the imperial garden. Empire needs to be demonstrated and to be seen — it needs to be exhibited and put on display. "The king's garden," says Saussy, "is the image of the king." In tracing historical remnants of empire, Saussy travels between China and France in delineating the mutations and transformations of the imperial idea in the vanished structure of the imperial garden. What remains visible is the spectator's musing over the symbolisms of those imperial possessions for the present. The Yuanming Yuan, once a location that witnessed the rapacity of the British Empire during the Second Opium War, is now a patriotic basis, and its auratic ruins have more than one lesson to teach today.

What about China's own idea of empire? How does it see itself in relation both to its internal racial tensions rooted in its ethnic and cultural diversity and to the external Western powers? In the beginning years of the twentieth century, the Qing Dynasty was in the last throes of collapse. Wang Hui's essay recounts how a group of radical reformers in the late Qing period strategically revived classical New Text Confucianism and how their appropriation of Confucianism served the reformist movement that culminated in the new cultural movement during the May Fourth period. Notably, Wang attempts to revise the accepted readings of the making of China's modernity, in particular the Fairbank model of "Western challenge/Chinese response." As the Qing court was a Manchu court, the New Text scholars and reformers must find a way to legitimize its Chineseness before they could respond to the expansionist operations of Western powers and Japan in China. The historical dichotomy of "*xia*" (China) and "*yi*" (barbarians), like Saidian self/other dichotomy, must be then reinterpreted and strategically employed for the creation of a unified nationalistic ideology vital for the project of China's modernity.

Today, China continues that unfinished project of modernity started in the late nineteenth century. The changes that have taken place in China in the past twenty-five years are phenomenal, and they are increasingly of global significance. In *The Beijing Consensus*, Joshua Cooper Ramo argues that "China's rise is already reshaping the international order by introducing a new physics of development and power." Indeed, the rapid development of China has brought about a visible amount of anxiety elsewhere in the world over "what destination China might reach in 20 years" and has created the questions Ramo attempts to deal with in *The Beijing Consensus*: "Will [China] be a seething pot of nationalist hate? A rich, super-large Singapore, warlike only in the board room?"¹⁰ We can't answer these questions, but we know the future of China will be an integral part of the future of the world as a whole.

To understand a changing China constitutes a part of our understanding of a changing world. *Critical Zone* is committed to the improvement of our knowledge of China in a global context by providing concrete readings of the momentous changes taking place in China. The second volume of *Critical Zone* continues the format of its predecessor. In addition to original essays collected in Part I, the second part of this volume presents a sample of publications from China, selected and organized thematically, which we believe will provide concrete and specific examples of ongoing developments and changes in China. In Part II, therefore, the reader will find two groups of translations, each of which is led by a review essay.

The first group of essays presents a controversy that started from the discursive attempt to decanonize Lu Xun (1881–1936), the most celebrated Chinese writer in the twentieth century. One would need to understand the post-revolution political history of China for a fuller appreciation of the significance of this debate as revealed in this group of essays. Lu Xun was called the "soul of the Chinese nation" at the time of his death and has been revered after his death nearly as a literary demigod. Our purpose in including this collection of essays in this volume is not to attempt to reach any conclusion about the canonicity of Lu Xun, not least because it's an impossible task to assess and determine here his achievements as a writer. Lu Xun is likely to remain one of very few important Chinese writers in the twentieth century, as his monumental presence in the modern history of China is simply a fact. For us, this debate, involving some of China's most prominent writers and critics, is evidence of the continuing intellectual and cultural liberalization that started twenty-five years ago and of the fact that this liberalization is consequential not only in China's choice of its path to modernity but in aspects of its social and cultural life.

However, the road to modernity for a latecomer like China is not exactly a free choice that can be made independent of the outside world. In its project of

10. Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004), 2.

modernization, China has to respond not only to its internal needs and conditions but also to its discursive relations with other nations. Every reform measure in China has ramifications for its own understanding of such relations, as revealed in, for example, the controversy surrounding Peking University's reform. The top US universities such as Harvard University and the University of Chicago are frequently referred to as the benchmark of excellence for higher education in China, either in the model of liberal education or in personnel structure. The desire to transform Peking University into a "world-class" university presupposes the university's own acceptance of a constituted set of rules and norms by which universities around the world are rated and ranked. Whether those rules and norms should be brought to China, however, is a question that reaches beyond the issue of Peking University's identity. This debate, in more than one way, is symptomatic of the problems arising from China's reform programme as a whole. It's no accident that China's constant reference to the US in other areas reveals its ambivalence about the US, in whose lengthening shadow China continues its unfinished project of modernity.

Contributors

Cheng, Zhaoxiang

Cheng Zhaoxiang is Professor of English and Dean of the School of Foreign Languages at Peking University where he teaches courses on Shakespearean drama, Elizabethan drama, and liberal education. His major research interests are British and American drama, film studies and western liberal education. He is the author of numerous critical essays on Shakespeare and Chinese higher education.

Ho, Elaine Yee Lin

Elaine Yee Lin Ho is Associate Professor and former Head of the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong. Her recent publications include two monograph studies on the fiction of Timothy Mo (2000) and Anita Desai (2004). She has published a number of articles on Renaissance literature, different aspects of anglophone Hong Kong literature, women and gender in the films of the Hong Kong filmmaker, Ann Hui, and Indo-English fiction.

Hutton, Christopher

Christopher Hutton is currently Professor and Head of the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong. He studied modern languages, linguistics and Yiddish studies at Oxford University and Columbia University, and taught at the University of Texas at Austin before coming to Hong Kong. His research is concerned with sociolinguistics, identity theorizing in relation to language and

race, and the history of Western writings on Asian languages. Recent publications include *Race and the Third Reich* (2005) and *A Dictionary of Cantonese Slang* (2005).

Kerr, Douglas

Douglas Kerr is Professor in the English Department at the University of Hong Kong, and has been visiting scholar at Oxford University and London University. His published work includes *Wilfred Owen's Voices* (1993) and *George Orwell* (2003), and essays and articles on literary history and colonial discourse analysis, twentieth-century British literature and Joseph Conrad in particular. His current work is concerned with the tropes of representation of Eastern people and places in English writing, from the time of Kipling to the postcolonial period.

Lin, Qingxin

Lin Qingxin is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Peking University. His current research is concerned with the fictional representation of history in contemporary Chinese, British and American fiction. He is the author of *Brushing History against the Grain: Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction 1986–1999* (2005) and numerous articles on comparative literature and literary theory.

Lindberg, Kathryne V.

Kathryne V. Lindberg is Professor of English and Africana Studies at Wayne State University in Detroit. She is author and editor of numerous works on American poetry and critical theory, modernist poetics, and black textuality. With Zanita Fenton, Professor of Law at the University of Miami, she is working on *Guerrilla Theater: Using the Spectacle of Contemptuous Courts to Reform the Justice System*. Lindberg's next book, from which this essay departs, is *From Claude McKay to Huey Newton: Black Revolutionary Letters*.

Saussy, Haun

Haun Saussy is Professor of Comparative Literature and East Asian Languages & Literatures at Yale University. His most recent book publication is (as editor) *Comparative Literature in an Era of Globalization: The American Comparative Literature Association Report on the State of the Discipline*, 2006.

Spanos, William V.

William V. Spanos is Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at SUNY at Binghamton. He was the founding editor of *boundary 2: A Journal of Literature and International Culture* and is the author of numerous essays on modern and postmodern literature and theory and several books, including *Repetitions: The Postmodern Occasion in Culture and Literature* (1987), *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (1993), *Heidegger and Criticism: Retrieving the Cultural Politics of Destruction* (1993), *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the*

Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies (1995), and *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire* (2000). He has just completed a book on Herman Melville's fiction after *Moby-Dick*.

Tong, Q. S.

Q. S. Tong is Associate Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong. He has been at work on issues and problems of critical significance in cross-cultural studies, with special attention to the historical interactions between China and Britain on different levels, political, cultural, and intellectual. He is an editorial member of several international journals including *boundary 2: an international journal of literature and culture*.

Wang, Hui

Wang Hui is Professor of Chinese at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tsinghua University, Beijing. He is also the executive editor of *Dushu* magazine. His main publications include the four volumes of *Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (2004) and *China's New Order* (2003). He is currently involved in a research project on the cultural history of 20th-century China.

Wang, Shouren

Wang Shouren is Professor of English and Dean of the School of Foreign Studies at Nanjing University. He is Vice Chairman of the China English Language Education Association and Vice Chairman of the China Association for the Study of American Literature. His research interests are British and American fiction, literary history and English education in China. His publications include *The Theatre of the Mind* (1990), *Xingbie zhongguo wenhua* (Gender, race and culture, 1999; 2004), *Xinbian meiguo wenxueshi* (New literary history of the United States, 2002) and numerous papers on English literature and cultural studies.