

Discourses of Cultural China in the Globalizing Age

Edited by Doreen D. Wu



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Glocalization and the Discourses of Cultural China: An Introduction¹

Doreen D. Wu

China is not just another nation-state in the family of nations, China is a civilization pretending to be a state. (L. Pye 1990, 58)

It is now not so much physical boundaries [. . .] that define a community or nation's "national limits." Increasingly we must think in terms of communications and transport networks and of the symbolic boundaries of language and culture . . . as providing the crucial and permeable boundaries of our age. (Morley and Robins 1995, 1)

Amidst the changes, alienation and re-grouping in the age of accelerated globalization, a new universe is fast taking shape and firming up: the universe of "Cultural China," whose boundary, if it had one, is receding beyond erstwhile, stereotypical limits and whose referents and implications are proliferating. This new universe represents, in addition to mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Singapore, various Chinese diasporas in the Asia-Pacific, North America, Europe, and further afield. This formative universe is becoming increasingly meaningful and significant, both within the relevant communities and outside them. Because of the changing economic, geopolitical, and international position that China now enjoys and its local and global implications, the interests in the notion of Cultural China are growing, in not only various Cultural China regions and communities, but also the rest of the world.

The emergence, spread and transformation of Cultural China² as discourse or discourses has received attention by scholars in history, politics, economics, sociology, and cultural studies (e.g., Baldinger 1992; Crane 1998; Kemenade 1997; Liu 2004; Lu et al. 2002; Myers and Puchala 1994; Rawnsley and Rawnsley 2003; Su et al. 2006; Sung 2005; Tu 1994; G. Wang 1995; N. Wang 2002; Weidenbaum 1993). Nonetheless, few systematic studies (e.g., Feng and Wu 2007a, Feng and Wu 2007b; Kuo and Nakamura 2005; Pan et al. 1999; Wu 2000, 2002; Wu and Chan 2007; Wu and Chung 2004; Wu et al. 2007; Wu and Hui

1997, 2000, 2002). The present volume represents our endeavor devoted to this domain. In this chapter, I shall present in more detail the discourse and the glocalization perspective I am proposing in studying Cultural China as discourses.

Researching Cultural China as discourse and discourses

There have been various models and conceptualizations of discourse by scholars in linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies. In this book, “discourse” is treated as culturally saturated forms of communication, involving linguistic-symbolic activities in the various domains of social and cultural life of a community. As such, discourse is neither merely text and talk reducible to forms and structures, as is the case in some language-oriented disciplines, nor just units of meaning irrespective of the forms of realization, as often occurs in some other social sciences (see Shi-xu 2005, 2007).

The contributors to this book have come from different camps of scholarship, i.e., from the language-oriented disciplines to the social-sciences-oriented disciplines; nonetheless, we have all conceived discourse as construction of meaning — as representing and acting upon reality — through linguistic-symbolic means in concrete situations. We all echo the thought that to properly understand and explain contemporary Cultural China, we need to understand and explain what it says, how it says it, and how its current discourses are connected with its past and furthermore are connected and reconstructed with those of the other cultures it encounters in this age of accelerated globalization.

Accordingly, we set out to examine and assess the discourse and discourses of Cultural China from cross-disciplinary and multicultural perspectives. In terms of methods of analysis, we have encouraged eclecticism to better understand local contexts and to obtain innovative insights. In consequence, a variety of approaches and methods have been embraced in this volume: conversational analysis and genre analysis originating from linguistics are deployed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5; content analysis and rhetorical analysis originating from communication studies are applied in Chapters 1, 6, 7, and 9; survey and interview techniques originating from sociology are applied in Chapters 8, 11, and 12. Furthermore, in Chapters 2 and 10, Sihui Mao and Anthony Fung respectively have integrated different approaches/methods in media discourse studies to examine their concerned discourses in terms of three aspects — the semiotic aspect, the narrative/textual aspect, and the common ideological (social practice) aspect.

Related to our tenet of a multicultural/multiculturalist perspective is also our recognition of diversity and variation not only in the approaches to and methods of investigating the discourses of Cultural China but also in the opinions regarding culture and communities of practice in Cultural China. As the editor of this volume proposing a glocalization perspective (see discussion

below) and as co-editor of the book series in *Studying Multicultural Discourses*, I have tried to follow the principles of “letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools contend” (百花齐放, 百家争鸣), embracing the diverse points of view, be it formative or negative, optimistic or pessimistic, about the discourses of contemporary Cultural China. I believe diversity enriches our understanding and fosters further societal progress.

Towards a glocalization perspective of Cultural China

There have been two general tendencies in conceptualizing cultural globalization: the liberal perspective and the critical perspective (see also Chan and Ma, 2002; Su et al. 2006; Zhang and Cheng 2006). The liberal perspective views cultural globalization as a result of the triumph of the world's capitalist economies and of Western/parliamentary democracies. To the holders of the liberal perspective, to be part of the globalized world is not only feasible but also desirable and the asymmetrical relationships among different cultures are often ignored. From the May Fourth generation (1919) to the generation pursuing Deng Xiaoping's Policy of Reform and Opening-up after Mao's death (1976), Chinese intellectuals have been enthusiastically involved in advocating comprehensive modernization of China qua Westernization (Tu 1994). In contrary to the liberal perspective, the critical perspective (e.g., Song and Zhang, 1996) challenges cultural imperialism from the West, warns against the homogenizing effect of Western culture and advocates reasserting one's cultural autonomy.

The perspective the editor has proposed for this volume is a developmental perspective, a perspective that is beyond the liberal and critical perspectives and conceptualizes cultural globalization as a process of “glocalization” — as a dialectical process between the global and the local forces in cultural change and formation. The notion of “glocalization” was first presented by Robertson (1995) in the attempt to overcome the weaknesses in the notion of “globalization” which emphasizes the development of cultural convergence, suggesting a rigid, one-way process from the West to the rest of the world and slighting the heterogenizing force of local cultures in the change process.

The glocalization perspective proposed in this chapter is a further extension of Robertson's notion and entails a set of principles in our approach to researching Cultural China as discourses. First, it entails that we devote our attention to issues related to the push and the pull of the global and the local in Cultural China at present, e.g., the issues of competition, conflict and struggle between the global/the Western/the modern and the local/the Eastern/the traditional forces in cultural change. An abundance of scholarly attention has been paid to this in the recent decade (e.g., Chen and Ma 2001; Flowerdew 1997; Gu 2001; Guo and Huang 2002; He 2000). The chapters in Part I of this book, “Conflict, Crisis, and Discourse Struggle in Cultural China”, also represent

primarily this tenet of the glocalization perspective. For example, in Chapter 1 (“Official Discourse of a ‘Well-off Society’: Constructing an Economic State and Political Legitimacy”), Bei Cai studies the crisis the Chinese Communist Party faces with its open-door to the West and how the party, i.e., the central government of China, tries to manage the crisis with the rhetorical construct of “xiaokang society” (well-off society), projecting this concept as the national vision by the year 2020. The chapter discusses in details the eschatological nature of the “xiaokang” discourse, the tension between a free market economy and a non-democratic political system, and the (non)separation between the state administrative system and the enterprise system in China. In Chapter 2 (“Dances with Discursive Ghosts”), Sihui Mao selects five Chinese films that have both won global recognition and success in China and focuses on the individual film directors’ struggle with visible and invisible ghosts — Confucian values, political censorship, feudalistic mentality, stifling patriarchy, social and financial constraints in an age of greed and global capitalism — in their process of constructing the cinematic narratives and the discursive audiovisual representations of the (fe/male) body out of the intricate relations among art and life in contemporary China. In Chapter 3 (“A Woman Warrior or a Forgotten Concubine? Verbal Construction of a Feminist Politician in Taiwan”), Sai-hua Kuo analyzes the conflict management and verbal construction of Annette Lu Hsiu-lien, the first female vice president of Taiwan and concludes that although the roles and status of women in Taiwan have been significantly transformed in the modernization process, the symbolic aspects of the traditional gender system in modern Taiwan are still robust.

Secondly, a glocalization perspective of Cultural China, furthermore, entails that we devote our attention to understand and explain the intricate process as well as the outcomes of any possible creative confrontations or hybridizations between the global/the Western/the modern and the local/the Eastern/the traditional elements that have led or will lead to cultural blending, reinvention, and emergence of new discourses in Cultural China. The glocalization perspective in this sense is similar to what Chan and Ma (2002) have presented as a transculturation perspective. It is argued that cultural sovereignty is rendered less relevant as the world becomes more integrated technologically, economically, and politically; nonetheless, as a result of mediation by the nation-state, local interests and the need for local identity, foreign culture is not imposed but indigenized. What is absorbed and retained is what matches the needs of the receiving culture at a given time (Chan and Ma 2002, 4). For example, in the age of globalization, media as cultural and commercial products move globally but are constantly domesticated in ways that create links of meaning between the media and the history, culture, politics, society, etc. of the local viewers (e.g., Cohen 2002; Cohen et al. 1996). Lee et al. (2002) have examined various reports on the Hong Kong handover and demonstrated how a global event was glocalized by media in different countries, i.e., how journalists

tried to transform global events through adaptation into the relevant structure of a local audience and converted a foreign agenda into home agendas.

As editor of this volume, I can observe at least two important processes of glocalization in the circulation of linguistic-symbolic forms of Cultural China: (1) the process of “discursive appropriation,” (2) the process of “discursive reinvention.” Discursive appropriation entails the adaptation and/or indigenization of one’s discourse conventions as they cross the border to be practiced in another community or another domain of social practice. But discursive reinvention entails the continuous selection, reinterpretation, and reformation of elements drawn from at least two different communities to be practiced in a particular socio-cultural context. The research on glocalization of media practice mentioned in the last paragraph can be characterized as focusing primarily on the process of discursive appropriation. Many of the authors in this volume have also contributed to our understanding of discursive appropriation. For example, in Chapter 7 (“Confucianism and Utilitarianism in Jiang-Clinton Rhetoric”), D. Ray Heisey analyzes the rhetoric of President Jiang of the People’s Republic of China and President Clinton of the United States in their respective visits to the other’s country and shows that while both speakers conform to their respective cultural characteristics on Confucianism versus Utilitarianism dimensions, they creatively adapt to the other’s cultural values in the political communication as well. In Chapter 6 (“Children’s Television Programs in China: A Discourse of Success and Modernity”), Kara Chan and Fanny Chan find that while the children’s television programs broadcast on CCTV, the national television network of China, are predominantly produced locally, they emphasize intellectual development related to science and technology which is consistent with the nation’s drive for the “Four Modernizations” (i.e., modernization and development in agriculture, industry, science, and technology). The programs embed modern Western values with traditional Chinese values in their discursive organization as represented in the legitimization of competition with peers mixed with the glorification of collective success, and in the values of modernity for the nation mixed with the value of yielding to authorities.

In addition to discursive appropriation, some of the authors in this volume have also touched on the issue of discursive reinvention. For example, in Chapter 5 (“Patterns of Global-Local Fusion in Chinese Internet Advertising”), Doreen D. Wu investigates how multinational as well as local corporations in China creatively deploy linguistic and visual resources from both the global/Western and the local/Eastern in creating Chinese advertisements for promoting their products on the web. Furthermore, in Chapter 10 (“Discourse and Cultural Identity: Towards a Global Identity for Hong Kong”), Anthony Fung examines how various social and political forces have shaped and negotiated the hybridized postcolonial identity in Hong Kong and shows how global values are embedded in the local identity that prevent national displacement. By the end

of Chapter 8, Sim Liang also argues for identifying a synergistic communication model integrating the strengths of both Eastern and Western cultures for the future of China. Nonetheless, much more work needs to be done in uncovering the components and the intricate process constituting discursive reinvention as well as discursive appropriation which underlie the various possible types of cultural hybridization in the discourses of contemporary Cultural China.

Furthermore, Chan and Ma (2002) point out that cultural hybridization can be physical or chemical in nature. While physical hybridization is represented by the co-presence of two different cultural traits or forms, chemical hybridization assumes the emergence of a new synthetic culture that results from the combination of the formerly “pure” cultures that will be impossible to separate the component elements and to reverse the change. Therefore, questions that remain to be answered and explored in our further attempt to study how the global/Western/modern elements intertwine, coincide and reinvent with the local/Eastern/traditional elements in the discourses of Cultural China are: What is the nature of the hybridized discourse(s) we have located in Cultural China? Is it simply physical in nature — a surface combination of the forms from the foreign and domestic cultural practice? Or is it chemical in nature — producing a new synthetic culture/discourse based on which further hybridization and change can take place? When and in what context will discursive appropriation be likely to take place in the communities of practice in Cultural China? And when and in what context should we reinforce a process of discursive appropriation for Cultural China? When and in what context will discursive reinvention be likely to take place in the communities of practice in Cultural China? And when and in what context should we reinforce a process of discursive reinvention for Cultural China?

Finally, a glocalization perspective of Cultural China entails that we render our research in the service of cultural solidarity and prosperity of Cultural China in the global context, for example, (1) by recognizing that cultural boundaries are socially constructed and will continually be defined and redefined, especially with accelerated global interactions when all cultures and communities of practice have become increasingly interconnected and interdependent, and that it is through the hybridization of foreign and domestic cultures that cultural development is achieved; (2) by trying to understand and explain how the global/Western/modern elements intertwine, coincide and reinvent as well as compete with the local/Eastern/traditional elements in the discourses of Cultural China.

Chapter organization

The volume contains 12 chapters which are further divided into three sections. Part I, “Conflict, Crisis, and Discourse Struggle in Cultural China,” consists of four chapters which deal with conflict or crisis management and discourse

struggle in Cultural China in this era of accelerated globalization and further socio-cultural changes. While Chapters 1 and 4 are concerned with the official discourse(s), Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the individual's struggle.

Part II of the volume, "Hybridized and Diverse Discourses in Cultural China", is concerned with researching Cultural China as consisting of a set of interrelated but different discourses, i.e., manifesting differential forms of hybridization of the global and the local, of the Western and the Eastern, and of the Northern and the Southern elements. While Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the phenomena of hybridity in the media and popular youth culture in China, Chapters 7 and 8 deal with cultural encounters and adaptation when the Chinese meet the Westerners. In addition, in Chapter 9, Changfeng Chen and Jiani Zhang compare media practice between the three critical regions of Cultural China — mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, focusing on their differential news coverage of Soong Meiling — a famous and controversial female figure in modern Chinese history. Their study demonstrates diversity as well as similarity on ideologies and operations in media practice between these three Chinese-speaking regions.

The last section of this volume contains three chapters which deal with "Discourse and Identity in Cultural China". While Chapter 10 focuses on the postcolonial identities in Hong Kong, Chapter 11 deals with the emergence of hybrid identities in urban China, Shanghai, and Chapter 12 examines the mediated individual globality in five cities of China: Chengdu, Wuhan, Lanzhou, Changchun, and Beijing.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented our approach of discourse analysis and outlined a glocalization perspective in researching contemporary Cultural China as discourses. Two notions "discursive appropriation" and "discursive reinvention," particularly, have been presented and postulated as important notions and directions for future research and further attention in our attempt to understand and explain the discursive hybridizations, i.e., the dialectical process as well as the diverse outcomes of glocalization in the discourses of contemporary Cultural China.

With continuous experiments with and new alternatives to global capitalism and Western democracies, Cultural China is undergoing new and emergent socio-cultural formations, transformations, and reformations. As scholars concerned with the development of new discourses in contemporary China, we face new challenges and responsibilities which are not only to record, but also to understand and explain how and why the discursive hybridizations take place and to predict where the hybridized discourses are leading us to. As the editor of this book on the discourses of Cultural China, I wish to stress that we see

Cultural China as a culturally distinct yet globally incorporated, hybridized rather than homogeneous, dynamic rather than static through history.

Notes

1. I wish to thank Shi-xu particularly for his vision of a multiculturalist approach to discourse theory (2006a, 2006b) which has prompted me to think about and propose this glocalization perspective of researching Cultural China as discourses. This study is also supported by RGC Direct Allocation Grant A-PA0G, Hong Kong.
2. The notions of “Cultural China” or “Greater China” have been used interchangeably and defined in various ways. In this book, “Cultural China” covers only the cultural/communities of practice in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and/or Taiwan.

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