

Ji Zhe is Professor of Sociology in the Chinese Studies Department of the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations and Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies on Buddhism. His current research is focused on Buddhism in modern and contemporary China.

Liang Yongjia is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore. He is interested in religious and ethnic revival in China and Asia, and ethnographic theory.

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Introduction

Toward a New Chinese Anthropology

Ji Zhe,
INALCO

Liang Yongjia,
National University of Singapore

Anthropology, like its subjects, is a product of society, culture, politics, economy, and it is constantly changing. In the acceptance speech delivered in the US on March 21st, 1980, Professor Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (1910-2005), recipient of the Malinowski Award by the Society of Applied Anthropology and one of the most prominent anthropologists in China, reminded the audience of the following :

“It must be noted that science itself is a constituent of a given culture. It at once propels and checks the advance of the other elements in the culture and vice versa. Anthropology, including the humanities and other social sciences, is more closely connected with the politics and economics of a given place at a given time.” (Fei Xiaotong, 1980: 117)

Even though anthropology was largely reduced to ethnic minorities studies under Mao's regime, Fei Xiaotong argued that the current disciplinary focus in the People's Republic of China (PRC) was no longer to “understand for understanding's sake,” but to be more committed to public services, by which anthropologists wield constructive relations with authorities and the people studied. According to Fei Xiaotong, this accorded Chinese anthropologists a stronger sense of responsibility towards their research. Thus, Fei Xiaotong described post-1949 Chinese anthropology as “toward a people's anthropology” (*op.cit.*).

At the time when Fei Xiaotong gave this speech, anthropology was at its turning point in China. In 1981, Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou was approved by the Ministry of Education to resume its anthropology program. This marked the institutional restoration of the discipline in post-Mao China, after it was banned nationwide by the communist regime who decided in 1952 that anthropology was a “bourgeois pseudoscience” like sociology¹. Thirteen years later, American anthropologist Gregory Guldin (1994), who had taught in Sun Yat-sen University as a “foreign expert” in the late 1980s, published *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao*. This was the first book written in a Western language devoted to the study of the history of Chinese anthropology. The author examined the vicissitudes of the discipline in the chaotic 20th century China through the life of anthropologist Liang Zhaotao 梁钊韬 (1916-1987), who played a key role in reviving anthropology at Sun Yat-sen University. According to Guldin, anthropology had been instrumental in China’s nation-building through its examination of dichotomies between China and the West, and communism and capitalism. Guldin went on and argued that the discipline eventually evolved into what he called a “patriotic” anthropology. Upon publication, the book drew wide attention. In a review article, Stephan Feuchtwang (1995), a British anthropologist working on China, raised the question “Is there a ‘Chinese anthropology’?” and suggested that “patriotic anthropology” might not be a fair summary of the state of Chinese anthropology. While Feuchtwang agrees with Guldin that the officially coordinated teamwork under the communist regime and the integration of anthropology with ethnic minority research and historical studies should be regarded as uniquely Chinese, he reminded readers not to forget the contributions of Chinese people residing overseas and anthropologists who studied Chinese communities, inside or outside the PRC.

Is there a “Chinese anthropology”? Revisiting this question more than two decades later, it is apparent that Chinese anthropology has undergone tremendous changes. In the 1980s and early 1990s that Guldin experienced, the reinstated discipline of anthropology remained under the shadow of stigma. New works had little academic and social impact, and anthropology was marginal in most universities (Wang Jianmin *et al.*, 1997). This was why Feuchtwang drew readers’ attention to the works of overseas Chinese scholars. Real developments took place only after the mid-1990s. According to Zhou Daming and Liu Zhaohui (2003), since the 1990s, Chinese anthropology grew in the following aspects: firstly, newly trained anthropologists in domestic and international programs reached maturity and became active. Secondly, anthropology began to influence mainstream disciplines such as economics and geography, thanks to the revival of other disciplines in both social and natural sciences. Thirdly, anthropological events increased dramatically. Among them, the Advanced Seminars on Social Anthropology organized by the Ministry of Education and hosted by Peking University was held for several years since 1995 and it attracted many anthropologists of different cohorts across the world². Fourthly, while

¹ Physical anthropology continued as part of biology, and some social anthropologists were also able to study ethnic minority societies as “ethnologists”.

² Over the years, invited speakers included Marshall Sahlins, Stephan Feuchtwang, Marilyn Strathern, David Parkin, F. K Lehman, David Hicks, Li Yih-yuan, Chiao Chien, Kim Kwang-ok, and of course, Fei Xiaotong.

anthropological knowledge continued to serve the country's economic policies, it became popular and began to affect the self-understanding of the ordinary Chinese people. For example, anthropological research on lineage and folk religions helped to destigmatise some traditional organizations and practices that were once under political pressure. Therefore, some believed that the mid-1990s was the beginning of the golden age of anthropology in contemporary China (Yang Shengmin, 2008).

By the beginning of the 21st century, owing to the political, economic and academic space created through the market reforms and the opening-up policy that were relaunched in 1992, Chinese anthropology increasingly earned domestic and international respect (Harrell, 2001; Liu Mingxin, 2003). From this point, Chinese anthropologists began to reflect on the mistakes they might have made and what are some possible ways out. Such reflections by anthropologists from mainland China was partly related to the "indigenisation" (*bentubua* 本土化) discussion started by sociologists and anthropologists from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s-90s. The differences in views pertaining to "indigenisation" are remarkable⁵. To the western-trained, anthropologists from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the idea of "indigenisation" (or sometimes "sinicisation") was meant to challenge their double marginal positions as Chinese scholars in Western academia and Chinese studies in anthropology. The purpose of their discussion was to oppose the hegemony of Western anthropology with an academic nationalism. Very often, the arguments were developed through a discourse of the China-West dichotomy. "Indigenisation" in this context means that China should not be a field to apply or test Western theories, but to brew original ones, and it is impossible to understand China with Western theories. Thus to a certain degree, "indigenisation" is the equivalent of "patriotism" in the context of post-colonialism.

However, around year 2000, some mainland anthropologists introduced a different perspective to indigenisation: the possibility of anthropological knowledge production, moving away from the conventional concern about the power relations in the field of international academia. Firstly, Fei Xiaotong, in his later years, put forward the idea of "cultural self-awareness" (*wenbua zijue* 文化自觉) (Fei Xiaotong, 2000a ; 2000b ; 2004). It should be noted that Fei Xiaotong's vision of anthropology was still relatively politicised; even if he did not relaunch the notion of "people's anthropology," his arguments often conflated political projects with academic requirements. For example, he associated the indigenisation of social sciences with the "sinicisation" of Marxism as official ideology. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that he tried to seek a balance between universalism and nationalism. More importantly, compared with his thinking in the 1980s, his universalism was less coloured by the pride of communist triumph and his nationalism was moderately inspired by traditional culture. Fei Xiaotong pointed out that the 21st century would be characterized by "cross-cultural communication" and by this he meant that anthropological thinking should react to the realities of globalisation. Therefore, people should have "the wisdom of knowing oneself" about their own

⁵ For a variety of "indigenization" of social sciences in China, see Xu Jieshun, 2001 and Dirlik, Li Guannan and Yen Hsiao-pei, 2012. For the criticism on the ideology of "indigenisation" in the Chinese context, see Zhao Xudong, 2003.

culture and understanding their history and characteristics. The concept of “cultural self-awareness” does not merely apply to the Chinese, but it “also applies to the peoples of all cultures, who should understand other cultures and their relations to them through ‘the wisdom of knowing oneself’ about their own culture” (Fei Xiaotong, 2000b: 13). This idea dates back to Fei Xiaotong’s proposition in year 1999: “Value one’s value. Value others’ values. Together, all values create a harmonious world” (*ge mei qi mei* 各美其美, *mei ren zhi mei* 美人之美, *mei mei yugong* 美美与共, *tianxia datong* 天下大同). This proposition runs through many of Fei Xiaotong’s other writings towards the end of his life, crystallising into a methodological piece (Fei Xiaotong, 2003). As Fei Xiaotong has repeatedly highlighted, his “cultural self-awareness” came directly from his investigation of the ethnic minorities whose cultures were on the verge of disappearance. He also drew inspiration from classical Confucian notions, such as “putting oneself into others’ position” (*tuiji jiren* 推己及人), “understanding others’ hearts with one’s own” (*jiangxin bixin* 将心比心), and the ethic of “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others” (*jisuo buyu, wushi yuren* 己所不欲, 勿施于人). For the science of anthropology, “cultural self-awareness” is epistemologically innovative. While most anthropologists believe studying the Other is to know the Self, Fei Xiaotong values the reverse: to know the Self in order to know the Other.

Fei Xiaotong’s idea of “cultural self-awareness” marks a point of departure for Chinese anthropologist to relocate their discipline in the new global configuration of the sciences. The younger generation’s reflections on Chinese anthropology at the beginning of this century seem more direct, profound, and with fewer political burdens. If the agenda of “indigenisation” was to develop a “Chinese discourse” for anthropology or to transcend the disadvantageous position of Chinese anthropologists with an imagined China-West dichotomy, the viewpoint of scholars represented by Wang Mingming 王铭铭 (born in 1962) was very different; Wang Mingming suggested that Chinese anthropology was a domain owned by and owed to all involved anthropologists, Chinese or Western. In a forum discussion in 2008 (Xu Xinjian, Wang Mingming, Zhou Daming *et al.*, 2008; see also Wang Mingming, 2008a, 2008b), Wang Mingming echoed Richard Fardon’s opinion (Fardon, 1990) by arguing that a homogenous Western anthropology antithetical to Chinese anthropology does not exist. The anthropological knowledge has always been plural and local. Thus, criticism is not possible until one starts with specific local traditions. Chinese anthropology can develop only through a self-critique of its local knowledge and take that as an opportunity to produce a general knowledge about the world.

Two years before this forum, Wang Mingming published an article titled “Anthropological Research in China for the Past 25 Years: Achievements and Problems” (Wang Mingming, 2005), and elaborated on it in a series of later publications (for example, Wang Mingming, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014; Feuchtwang, Rowlands and Wang Mingming, 2010). According to him, contemporary Chinese anthropology had exposed the following shortcomings (Wang Mingming, 2005): firstly, although progress was made in the studies of Han communities in China’s east, ethnic minorities in the periphery, and of Chinese and non-Chinese communities overseas, there was no systematic study of the relations

among the abovementioned communities. Secondly, while the study of traditional anthropological issues such as kinship, religion and rituals, comparative politics, economic culture, etc. made great achievements, these studies dealt exclusively with contemporary changes and lacked historical depth. Thirdly, the Chinese anthropological discourse tended to be anachronistic; trapped in the “tradition” versus “modernity” dichotomy, anthropologists over-demonstrated how rural societies were “urbanised,” “nationalised,” “citizenised,” and “globalised.” Some anthropologists also accepted the “postmodernist” sense of time, arbitrarily deconstructing traditions with fancy terms, without considering the legacy of Chinese anthropology. In this regard, he called for a synthesis of ethnographies with the vernacular concept of “All under Heaven” (*Tianxia* 天下), and drew from historical studies by reinterpreting those historical texts with ethnographic significance and making them relevant to the present. In addition, he also promoted mutual learning between the historical studies of lineages in South China and the community studies in North China, and strove to break the long-standing gap between studies of the Han people and the ethnic minorities.

In our view, the reflections by Wang Mingming and his colleagues indicate a new orientation of Chinese anthropology. This new orientation of doing anthropology is desirable as it seeks to resolve the contradiction between anthropology and China studies as described by Brigitte Bapandier (2001): traditional anthropology based on tribal and small-community research is insufficient in portraying China, a political-cum-civilisational entity of vast territory, diverse populations, long history, and high degree of structuring. Such a challenge was felt since half a century ago by Maurice Freedman (1963), who proposed “a Chinese phase of social anthropology” by calling for a turn from the study of simple societies to “civilisations.”⁴

The focus of the new anthropology represented by Wang Mingming is precisely *civilization*. Wang ambitiously proposed to reconfigure Chinese anthropology in both spatial and temporal dimensions. In space, this mode of anthropology promotes synthetic studies across regions, ethnic groups, and nations, establishing their “relatedness” as equally important. In terms of time, the historical data and studies are given ethnographic value to re-historicise Chinese anthropology. Through this, the new mode of anthropology aims to shift from accumulating ethnographic cases to developing a holistic study of Chinese civilisation. Achieving this goal would not only require interdisciplinary cooperation – especially with history and sociology – but also a critical synthesis of various anthropological traditions. In the first half of the 20th century, Chinese anthropology had been shaped by various academic lineages with different sources: French, Anglo-American, German, and Soviet, as well as Chinese. After 1949, it was further shaped by theoretical and empirical legacies crystallised in highly politicised academic institutions. Finally, Chinese anthropology absorbed substantial influence from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other forms of “Chinese studies” abroad since the 1980s, consolidating into several schools of thought. In addition, Chinese

⁴ Freedman also noticed that Marcel Granet and Marcel Mauss might have offered a clue. This is one of the reasons why Chinese anthropologists of today attach great importance to these two French sociologists.

anthropology should also include the narratives and concepts from ancient Chinese texts of anthropological significance. Frank N. Pieke (2004: 71) criticised Chinese anthropology in the 1990s and argued that “anthropology [in contemporary China] should not be called an academic discipline, but rather is a key word that is flexibly applied in several disconnected discursive communities.” If one can connect different academic communities and achievements around anthropology, the hybridity that results will yield considerable advantages.

In summary, the new anthropology re-problematizes “China” and Chinese studies. Rather than compartmentalizing the different fields of anthropology, contemporary Chinese anthropology attempts to forge a new epistemology. This ambition will undoubtedly require more input from various scholars and it is a long-term investment. Though it may be too early to evaluate its accomplishments, based on what has been done thus far, especially in the past decade or so, contemporary Chinese anthropology deserves our attention. At present, we can still see the shadows of authoritarianism and ardent nationalism in some of these publications. However, this is exactly why a dialogue is necessary. As Baptandier (2010) pointed out when discussing the research and teaching of anthropology about China, anthropology is primarily a Platonic maieutic and secondarily a discipline seeking theoretical and empirical knowledge. Anthropology needs to be interrogated and compared between different facts, viewpoints, and exchanges between scholars of different generations and backgrounds. In a recent book, Bruckermann and Feuchtwang (2016) also called for a dialogue between Chinese studies and anthropological theory to benefit both. It is thus an appropriate choice to start this dialogue by understanding the works of Chinese anthropologists. We cannot presume its outcome, but we expect to “see an unexpected object arise” (Baptandier, 2010: 233).

In addition to answering the call for a dialogue, this special issue is also part of a long-term plan for the internationalisation of anthropology promoted by *cArgo, Revue Internationale d'Anthropologie Culturelle e³ Sociale*. Contemporary Chinese anthropology has already attracted interest from Western anthropologists, especially English-speaking colleagues (for example, Liang Hongling, 2016; Chen Gang, 2017; Song Ping, 2017; Malighetti and Yang Shengmin, 2017). However, a comprehensive introduction to the new themes, methods and theoretical orientations of Chinese anthropology is lacking. To this end, we will be inviting a group of young and promising anthropologists in China to make comprehensive and critical presentations on the latest developments in Chinese anthropology. Since we will be presenting to those who do not usually read publications written in Chinese, we will limit our scope to publications written by Chinese anthropologists in Chinese and we will not cover publications in Western languages. As the title of this issue shows, we are interested in the new Chinese anthropology rather than an anthropology of China.

In this special issue, Zhang Yahui introduces us to historical anthropology in China. Through a summary of key empirical and theoretical works, his article explores this important field that revolves around two themes: modernisation and the origin of Chinese civilization. Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe's article further analyses

contemporary relationship between Chinese historical anthropology and French thought, especially with *École des Annales* and *Année Sociologique*. The latter provides a key inspiration for Chinese scholars' ideas about the anthropology of civilisation. Though vibrant religious revival is a noteworthy phenomenon in China, the anthropology of religion is rather fragmented and diffused. Liang Yongjia analyses the political and academic reasons for such a situation of the anthropology of religion and summarises new trends in the field. Aga Zuoshi's paper reviews the anthropological study of *minzu* 民族 (ethnicity), a concept pivotal to the making of contemporary China and Chinese anthropology. It examines how the field emerged in the 1950s and was later institutionalised in academic institutions. Her paper focuses on three research clusters: the ethnographic studies on "ethnic areas," the studies developed from Fei Xiaotong's "pluralistic unity," and the dispute over "ethnic policies." Chen Bo's article highlights that although studies of overseas societies are new to Chinese anthropology, the field has valuable historical heritage, including the studies conducted during the first half of the 20th century, and the records of overseas societies before anthropology entered China. He also gives a comprehensive introduction to different approaches and major institutions in this field. Based on her participant observation and some other ethnographic studies, Wang Jing analyses the political interpretation of an "intangible cultural heritage" in China and its influence on the research and teaching of Chinese anthropology. Finally, we have invited Professor Wang Mingming to respond to the abovementioned articles. His afterword not only reviews the issues of religion, ethnicity, overseas studies but also examines in depth some major issues that were not sufficiently covered by other authors. Professor Wang Mingming provides a rare insight for understanding the breadth, depth and complexity of Chinese anthropology.

We will also translate an article into French and publish it for the first time. It is a paper about the Zuñi people done by one of the founders of Chinese anthropology, Li Anzhai (or Li An-che) 李安宅 (1900-1985) in the 1930s. The paper symbolises the global vision of nascent Chinese anthropology, and it is a source of inspiration for Chinese anthropologists who conduct overseas studies. Finally, we will publish five book reviews on contemporary Chinese works that are closely related to the theme of new Chinese anthropology.

Last but not the least, the guest-editors would like to thank Professor Francis Affergan and Professor Erwan Dianteill. This special issue would not have been possible without their support. Though they might not have studied about China, their open-mindedness to different academic traditions has encouraged us to take up the challenge of renewing the dialogue between European anthropology and Chinese anthropology. As Professor Wang Mingming pointed out in his afterword, we expect that the communication between anthropologies will again validate the ethical values of this science.

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