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Keywords: anthropology — history — civilisation — insider-outside relations — hierarchy

Afterword: A View from a Relationist Standpoint

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For sure, Chinese anthropology has been prosperous since its reconstruction was launched 40 years ago. However, has it achieved anything intellectually stimulating? Has it made such breakthroughs as to justify our use of the phrase “*La nouvelle anthropologie chinoise*” (the title of the special issue)? On the part of our Western colleagues, has it been so creative that even those working in the Western homes of human science must get ready to receive it as important contributions to the “common fund” of the world’s ethnographic wisdom?

In the universities (e.g., Zhongshan 中山大学) where anthropology was re-established in accordance with the American model of the “sacred bundle of four fields,” physical, linguistic, and archaeological anthropologies have continued to be taught and researched. However, in most teaching and research programmes, anthropology simply meant the ethnographic study of society and culture. In Chinese anthropology in this sense, in recent decades, there have been good studies on a wide range of contemporary topics, including urbanization, migration, health care, environmental issues, arts, disasters, tourism, landscape, and heritage.

Nonetheless, in the articles gathered here, the contributors have not addressed these new themes; instead, they have focused upon a set of less novel topics¹. These involve those of history (Zhang Yahui), civilisation (Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe), religions (Liang Yongjia), “*minzu* 民族 (ethnicity)” (Aga Zuoshi), and “foreign societies” (Chen Bo). These topics may seem outmoded to those who prefer to follow the new fashions or the “emergent realities.” But the contributors of the special issue have regarded the reconsideration of the older topics as more fundamental to the evolution of the discipline.

Summing up the recent accomplishments in each of the subjects and showing solicitude for their novelty constitute the joint task of these reviews. However, the contributors are not the outsiders of the game. They do not see things from a

¹ They have done so for good reasons: most of the new studies, springing either from following constantly shifting Western – especially American – fashions, or from the utilitarian social science fulfilments of the State’s projects of “construction” or “rescue,” have dwelt little on the epistemological and political issues of the discipline.

distance and are not romantic about them; as insiders, for the sake of adding more intellectual power to their disciplinary propensity, they are also critical, and perhaps, self-critical.

From history to civilisation

The narratives begin with Chinese historical approaches to anthropology.

In his review, Zhang describes the evolution of these developments. According to Zhang Yahui, a small group of historians focusing on local studies began to combine their discipline with anthropology. They (e.g., Zheng Zhenman 郑振满, Chen Chunsheng 陈春声, Liu Zhiwei 刘志伟, and Liu Yonghua 刘永华), almost all from universities in the South, have specialised in the history of late traditional (imperial) China. Engaging such anthropological concepts as “lineage” and “popular cult,” together with their colleagues from abroad (e.g., Kenneth Dean, David Faure, and Helen Siu), they have examined the “civilising process” of “*shishenbua* 士绅化 (gentryfication)” of rural villages and the “*shuminhua* 庶民化 (popularisation)” of gentry class and elite models.

Since the early 1990s, more and more scholars have moved along the two-way street between history and anthropology. While the above-mentioned historians have continued to progress further toward archive-based local studies, a number of scholars from anthropology (including myself) have turned to ethnographic history. In studying the local worlds of social life, culture, and agency, they find that all over China “local knowledge” is deeply historical, “historical” in the two senses of “the past and the past in the present”. Thus, not only have they followed the trajectory of “civilising process” in pre-modern China (Wang Mingming, 2009), but they have also paid closer attention to the core paradox of “civilisation” – the simultaneous unfolding of the post-traditional nation-state cultural politics in the local communities and the revitalisation of the “backward” vernacular traditions in the same locations.

Moreover, in Chinese archaeology and classical history, a certain anthropological line has also been pursued. Along it, an expanding number of archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists have moved toward the understanding of the cosmologies and their transformations between late Neolithic and early “dynastic” periods.

Today’s China has thus seen the rise of several historical anthropologies, each of which has its own characteristics. Nonetheless, the study of the kind of relations definable as “vertical” can be said to form the ultimate basis for the underlying unity of the different approaches. Existing historical anthropological studies have all focused upon the top-down or bottom-up circulation of social and cultural items between higher learning and “low culture(s)” (be it the top-down “popularisation,” or the bottom-up “gentryfication”), upon local cultural responses to the “empire” of official modernity, and upon the changing political cultures of early Chinese kingdoms.

Like Western anthropologies of China, most of the studies have concentrated upon the “core” population of China – the Han, and in consideration of the fact that the whole of the society in which they have carried out their research has been “covered” by a large state whose civilisational ideologies and encompassing

justifications of authority have endured various historical changes (Bruckermann & Feuchtwang, 2016: 268). They have also emphasised – quite sensibly – the “verticality” of cultural “class relations.”

However, in restricting their scope to the core, the majority of the Chinese-speaking historical anthropologies have inevitably disremembered the “Other Chinas” (Litzinger, 2000) – the non-Han groups in the ethnic regions – which, as components of the “unity of diversity” of the Central Kingdom, have, through their constant interactions with the core and the groups beyond the frontiers, played a major role in the making of history in the East Asian Continent.

If we may categorise such interactions as parts of the “horizontal relations” (those between the co-existing regions, groups, “cultures” and religions across broader geographic space), then, regarding them, a lot more work remains to be done.

As I (2015a) have argued, for the kind of study to be pursued, the perspective of “the phenomena of civilisation” – set by Marcel Mauss (2006a) against both the notion of human evolution and the ideology of the nation, as the social phenomena “common to a number of societies and to a longer or shorter period in the past of these societies” (59-60) – becomes essential.

In their joint article on the French factor in Chinese anthropology, Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe provide a summary history of the transmission of *Année Sociologique* in China, and then spend several pages upon Chinese appropriations (including my own) of the Maussian notion of “civilisations.” As Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe indicate, as it was intellectually associated with the French school, the Chinese anthropology of civilisations (regarding which, Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe kindly point to my contributions) initially relied upon Marcel Granet’s creative study of Chinese history (1930), but by the end, it has proven to be a broader synthesis. Its conceptual foundation has remained Granet’s contrast between Chinese cosmology of relation and Western theory of power; but having also drawn inspirations from the work by Mauss, Liang Qichao 梁启超, Wu Wenzao 吴文藻, Owen Lattimore, Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, and many Chinese ethnological forerunners, and from historical and ethnographic experience, the Chinese anthropology of civilisations has re-conceptualised “Chinese culture” as a much more complex and dynamic system, conceived in terms of the “*sanquan* 三圈” (three circles: the core, the intermediaries, and the outer rings). Through the synthesis, it has presented the civilisation of the Central Kingdom as a much less bounded, internally varied and externally related world.

Within a newly conceptualised civilisational whole, China is re-presented as a dynamic social world, a complexity of relations between different “central places,” *minzu* (nationalities), and “religions.” Within the “supra-societal” system, the consideration of the “vertical” relations is seen as inadequate unless combined with the enquiries into the “horizontal” circles and networks (Wang Mingming, 2015a).

The issues of the religions and minzu

While the synthesis of the relational perspectives was getting further expounded, a large number of new studies of the religions and “nationalities” (*minzu* 民族) were being completed. Because the critique of the one-sided story of “verticality” came,

at quite late a stage, from the self-reflection of “sinological anthropology,” more or less naturally, it has not been seriously considered by the anthropologists of religions and *minzu*, whose scopes had conventionally gone beyond the confines of the Han world. Not surprisingly, even though religious and *minzu* issues are closely related with what Mauss defined in terms of the “phenomena of civilisation,” few Chinese anthropologists working on these problems have examined them from this perspective.

Then, what are the new Chinese anthropologies of religion and *minzu* like? Following the two articles on history and civilisation, the third and fourth reviews offer us two good outlines.

In his article, Liang Yongjia offers a comprehensive overview of several new approaches to “religious revival.” Liang Yongjia does not claim his article to be exhaustive of all approaches, but he actually touches upon a complete set of themes. According to Liang Yongjia, the overall setting in which Chinese anthropology of religion has become a much-explored subject has been constituted with both the “post-Culture-Revolution” religious revival and the restoration of the social science disciplines. Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, several ethnographic studies brought back the issue of religion in Chinese anthropology. Quite soon, the revival of both “folk beliefs” and institutionalised religions has called for focused studies. In the beginning, the issue was examined within broader ethnographic frameworks. Gradually, the religions in the broad sense of the term have come to be construed as forming an independent field for research.

Along with the growth of international scholarly exchanges, many new Western ideas have been imported. Meanwhile, those who work with the Confucian tradition have also developed certain approaches with Chinese characteristics.

“Market theory” from American sociology and “ecology/balance thesis” from the Confucian legacy have been a pair of manifestations of what may be called the “rivalry of brotherhoods” – that of Chinese academic “internationalism” and “nativism.”

Other “anthropologies” of religion can also be found in the fields of “culturology,” folklore, and heritage studies.

Liang Yongjia gives a positive appraisal of these approaches. But he also expresses his reservation toward a hidden tendency in them. Liang Yongjia is particularly worried about the secularism in all the new studies – to him, these are still “anthropologies of anything rather than religion.” Liang Yongjia argues that the bureaucratic pattern of academic power distribution and the political sensitiveness of “religion” have partly explained the limitedness of Chinese religious anthropology. In addition, he points to “the imported-ness of the term ‘religion’” itself for a further explanation.

Liang Yongjia’s reflection on “the imported-ness of the term ‘religion’” has impressed me as an important one. Had this critique been associated with the “ecology/balance thesis,” it would have led Liang Yongjia to consider the discussion of civility (*li* 礼) instead of “religion” in the pre-modern East. However, Liang Yongjia has also been critical of the Confucian factor in the “ecology/balance thesis.” To balance between East and West, in conclusion, he has instead argued

that for a better Chinese anthropology of religion to rise from ambiguity, new syntheses are needed: “Neither English-speaking anthropology nor Chinese ancient classics alone can help Chinese anthropologists produce world-class studies.”

In her article, Aga Zuoshi paints a full picture of Chinese “nationality research” (sometimes translated as “ethnology”). As she points out, the Chinese idea of *minzu* first came from the Japanese translation of the Western concept of nation. In the first half of the twentieth century, as a “conjectural concept,” it had induced much heated debates among anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and policy researchers. The debates continued after the Liberation. The Maoist regime designated the idea of *minzu* as useful to “socialist reconstruction.” Trying to terminate the life of Western imperialism in the East, it quickly abolished the social science disciplines including anthropology. But for purpose of making new China a “great socialist family of peoples,” the post-revolutionary regime unconsciously allowed the concept of *minzu* to shelter much anthropological knowledge. Consequently, the concept itself not only contributed a great deal to the institutional making of the new “multi-national state,” but also set the foundation for restructuring both the Chinese ethnoscape and the discipline formed in the post-Mao era.

As for the new anthropological studies of *minzu* since the 1990s, Aga Zuoshi draws our attention to the efforts made by the younger generation anthropologists to combine their understanding of Western and Chinese experiences and concepts.

As she describes, along with the increase of international scholarly exchanges, more and more new Western theories of ethnicity and critiques of nationalism have become available. But as they were not satisfied with these, the new-generation Chinese anthropologists have sought to “test” them in their ethnographic settings. At the very juncture, the idea of “*duoyuan yiti geju* 多元一体 (pluralistic unity)” proposed in the late 1980s by the old-generation anthropologist Fei Xiaotong has returned to the scene. Fei Xiaotong’s idea of “in-betweenness” has been re-defined in terms of the mutuality of centres and margins and intermediary uncertainty. Meanwhile, among the scholars who have been more concerned with policy issues, the controversy between “fusionalism” and the “constructivism” has caught a great deal of attention.

Through a century of “Sinification,” *minzu* has hence become a word untranslatable back to its original Western languages; but paradoxically, the “identity” of *minzu* as a borrowed concept has continued to burden Chinese anthropologists.

Aga Zuoshi is clearly aware of the fact that such an imported concept has carried with it a number of original Western concerns that may not be so relevant to China as they initially seemed. However, she insists that precisely the concept makes the history of the discipline, which, having treated *minzu* as “keyword,” has in turn contributed a great deal to the remaking of China’s ethnic “pluralistic unity.”

“The past and the past in the present”

In the two articles on Chinese studies of civilisation and *minzu*, the “shelters” of the disciplinary traditions under which Chinese anthropology has renewed its vitality are considered. As Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe inform us, the current Chinese anthropological

explorations in civilisations are connected not only with the recent Western rediscovery of Maussian theory of inter-societal relation, but also with a sort of “recursion” between “now and then” (the early twentieth century Chinese sociology and ethnology). In her overview of Chinese *minzu* research, Aga Zuoshi reconstructs a whole sequence of changing perspectives on the relation between nation and state, in which the Republican “shelters” have formed an important part.

Obviously, the new achievements in Chinese anthropology have not come out of thin air; rather, they have been full of connections with the old legacies (as I should emphasise, because these were transformed versions of several modern Western intellectual traditions, they and the connections with them should not be seen as “indigenous”). But what are these particular legacies like? In what sense can they be regarded as having blazed a trail for the new approaches?

Let us have a brief look into the history of the subject.

As has been widely known, Western anthropology first entered China in the late 19th century as a body of evolutionary ideas, borrowed by such late imperial reformers as Yan Fu 严复, Kang Youwei 康有为 and Liang Qichao to enlighten the Chinese. Slightly later, diffusionist ideas were also imported by the late imperial historians endeavouring to find the cradle of the civilisations in the intermediaries between the East and the West. However, as a discipline or a group of disciplines, anthropology did not come into being until the late 1920s.

The disciplinary formation of Chinese anthropology (Dirlik, 2012) took place in a period in which nationalism took deeper root in the Far East, and was bound with the work of nation-building.

The historian of anthropology George Stocking Jr. (1982) points out that anthropology in the West cannot be said to be unitary. As he argues,

“Within the Euro-American tradition one may also distinguish between anthropologies of ‘empire-building’ and anthropologies of ‘nation-building.’ The character of anthropological inquiry in Great Britain has been primarily determined by experience with dark-skinned ‘others’ in the overseas empire. In contrast, in many parts of the European continents, the relation of national identity and internal otherness tended, in the context of nineteenth century movement of cultural nationalism, to be a more focal issue; and strong traditions of *Völkenskunde* developed quite distinctively from *Völkerkunde*. The former was the study of the internal peasant others who composed the nation, or potential nations within an imperial state; the latter was the study of more distant others, either overseas or farther back in European history” (*ibid.*: 170).

The disciplines of modern Chinese anthropology were devised by Chinese intellectuals and politicians to make research in social sciences useful to the modernization and nationalisation of the Central Kingdom. From the beginning, they were designed in accordance with the model of “anthropology of nation-building.”

The disciplines were established in two major intellectual institutions: Yenching University 燕京大学’s department of sociology (led by Wu Wenzao 吴文藻) and Academia Sinica’s research group of ethnology (formed by Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, Ling Chunsheng 凌纯声, and their colleagues) (Huang Yinggui, 1984). Both

Yenching (Yanda 燕大) and Academia Sinica anthropologies (named alternatively as “sociology” and “ethnology”) were constructed to deal with issues to do with the “internal others.” The former was more focused upon “peasant others” and their modernisation, and it relied more heavily upon Anglo-American sociology and anthropology; the latter attempted to assist the nationalist (KMT) government in bringing the non-Han *minzu* (ethnic) groups into the integrated “family-state” (*guojia* 国家) of the Chinese nation, and it was more oriented toward continental European ethnology.

In terms of ethnography, Yenching anthropologists tended to emphasise the “method of community study” (*shequ yanjiufa* 社区研究法), while Academic Sinica ethnologists promoted larger scale *minzu* historical ethnography.

Both schools accomplished great achievements – the Yenching group, with their synthesis of Robert Park’s human ecology, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown’s comparative sociology, and Bronislaw Malinowski’s ethnographic science, opened “a Chinese phase of social anthropology” (Freedman, 1979); and Academia Sinica group, taking advantage of the continental European ethnological guidelines for ethnographic research, made equally important contributions in their relational studies of *minzu* (Wang Mingming, 2017).

During the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), both Yenching University and Academia Sinica moved to the mountainous provinces of the Southwest. In these provinces, the two groups of anthropologists were involved in intensive dialogues (including debates). Had they been given more time, they would have allowed their rival perspectives to get synthesised in a third type (more or less what we now know as “historical anthropology”) (Yang Qingmei, 2017). Unfortunately, shortly after the War, civil war broke out; the scholars, sided with rival political parties, lost the opportunity of giving a shape to the synthesis.

After the Liberation, many members of the Academia Sinica group went to Taiwan. Yenching University ceased to function and was abolished in 1952. The members of the Yenching group who had been removed from their old campus were mobilised by the new regime to participate in the campaigns of “socialist reconstruction.” One of their undertakings was to identify, by means of ethnographic and socio-economic historical research, the existing *minzu* or “nationalities” and record them in a list for the State Council’s endorsement. As Aga Zuoshi shows, by the time, the Western type disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, and sociology had been abolished; alternatively, Soviet *ethnographia* was promoted. To do the work of “*minzu shibie* 民族识别 (ethnic identification),” the anthropologists and sociologists from the “old society” formed new research teams.

Later these research teams were expanded to include a large number of historians, economists, linguists, local historians, and younger generation field researchers the pioneers quickly trained, and they were further entrusted by the government the mission of recording socio-economic historical conditions of the ethnic groups whose “backward” social structures were to be rapidly “upgraded” to the “socialist stage.”²

² The land reform movements quickly changed the structural contents of different *minzu*, while ethnographic outcomes were much slower. It took the research teams almost ten years to accomplish the first set of reports. By 1964, approximately 340 research reports had been written and more than 10 documentary films were made. On the basis of these, some 57 brief histories and records of the ethnic groups were compiled.

Reflecting on the situation of anthropology in the world during the post-War period, Lévi-Strauss referred to it as a paradox:

“It was out of a deep feeling of respect toward cultures other than our own that the doctrine of cultural relativism evolved. It now appears that this doctrine is deemed unacceptable by the very people on whose behalf it was upheld, while those ethnologists who favour unilinear evolutionism find unexpected support from peoples who desire nothing more than to share the benefits of industrialization; peoples who prefer to look at themselves as temporarily backward rather than permanently different.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1973: 53)

Cultural relativism, introduced as early as the 1930s, was never fully accepted by Chinese anthropological ancestors. Both Yenching and Academia Sinica groups had known of the doctrine. However, both groups, deeply involved in China’s modernising campaigns, did not find the “doctrine” of benefit to their work (instead, they chose Anglo-American universalism and their own version of *Volkskunde*).

The situation changed radically in the 1950s. During the period, the transformation of ethnology went straight into the direction worrying Lévi-Strauss. To change the “temporarily backward” condition of China, Chinese social scientists were assigned the task of bringing historical and ethnographic testimony to the “superstition,” “feudalism,” and “wastefulness” of the folk Han and non-Han ethnic cultures.

Between the launching of the projects of land reform in the ethnic regions (1956) and the mid-1970s, Chinese anthropologists themselves were classified as carriers of “backward cultures,” and they underwent several ordeals including the “anti-rightist movement” (beginning in 1957) and the “Culture Revolution” (1966-76). In those periods, ethnographic knowledge, treated as “counter-revolutionary,” became a “forbidden zone.”

The new Chinese anthropologies began to be developed two decades after the restoration of the discipline.³ They have now been re-built upon the premises removed from historical materialism promoted in Mao’s time.⁴

Focusing on the study of the “marginal small social areas” of the Han villages and the ethnic regions, the majority of Chinese anthropologists have continued to be the members of the “anthropologies of nation-building.” But the new generation Chinese anthropologists, inspired by Western neo-functionisms, new structuralisms, and post-modernisms, have been able to find the “errors” in the earlier ethnographic texts. They have abandoned the historical materialist version of evolution, which brought drastic changes to the cultures of the “internal others.” Alternatively, they have opened their eyes to the new Western trends and recovered, by various means, the sociological positivism and ethnological historicism of the “Republican scholars” (*minguo xuezhe* 民国学者).

³ If anthropology in the first two post-Mao decades was full of discussions regarding the “elementary” issues as to what anthropology really meant, how it could be differentiated from other disciplines, and what contributions it could make to China’s modernisation, then, in the last two decades it was far more creative.

⁴ Twenty years ago, there were still anthropologists discussing the rights and wrongs of Lewis Henry Morgan; twenty years today, no anthropologists mention the notion of evolution.

Going back to the “time-before” in order to facilitate favourable continuity has not contradicted change; rather, change has come with continuity.

With the new understandings of history, civilisation, religion, and *minzu* in hand, since the 1990s, Chinese anthropologists have succeeded in re-filling the old containers (the concepts of community and *minzu*) with new contents. Now, the peasant communities under observation and speculation have been opened to the age-long “vertical” systems of relation and the temporal dynamics of traditions (ancient or modern); and the *minzu* groups, having ceased to be described as “societal isolates” waiting to be classified by the state and as the collective carriers of “backward cultures,” have also been reconsidered from new standpoints.

Out of complex historical and academic political reasons, Chinese historical anthropologists and “ethnologists” are still divided: the former, by and large, limit their scope to the “sinological,” the latter mostly represent China as if it were a world of *minzu*. Dialogues between different “ethnographic regions” (Fardon, 1990) are critical to the further progress of Chinese anthropology. And these, as I believe, much depend upon the contests between the differentiated intellectual sub-traditions such as those of Yenching ethnographic sociology and Academia Sinica historical ethnology. However, these have not taken shape.

It does not mean that there have not been inter-traditional transpositions.

Now, most of historical anthropologists are from the South, and are more historical than most of the other social scientists, but in their ethnographic studies they have unconsciously followed the “method of community study” developed decades ago in the North; “ethnology” was first re-established in the North, but the main members of the “circle,” being direct or indirect descendants of the Yenching mentors paradoxically, lack the Academia Sinica kind of training in archaeology, history, philology, and continental European-style ethnology, and thus very easily overlook the historical part of the story of *minzu* (the “ethno-historians” in the 1950s used to specialise in the study of this part; but they are now separated from the “ethnologists”).⁵

These phenomena can be depicted as certain “customary” transpositions of the intellectual sub-traditions,⁶ which, being far from based upon the critical re-engagement of the older models, should not be equated with dialogues.

The place is not where each aspect of continuity and change is specified. It suffices to say that there has been, in the past two decades, an implicit tendency to opt out of the post-revolutionary discourse of progress, which has virtually come hand in hand with the revival of the pre-Liberation non-evolutionary perspectives of society and history. I have, as I hope, also made it clear that the revival has obviously been achieved in the intellectual reaction against historical materialism. However, as I should emphasise, if the revival can be seen as inevitable or necessary, it should be made more consciously in order for the older sub-traditions to be critically reconsidered and selectively regenerated as the old foundations for new dialogues.

⁵ The consequence has been that the historical anthropologists in fact know little of ethnological historicism and they are more like sociologists when doing fieldwork, while the “ethnologists” are little interested in cultural history.

⁶ The expansion of the Yenching school of ethnographic sociology in the “Reform” decades, resulting in the singularisation of perspectives, explains the “unconscious” transpositions.

Vertical and horizontal

In their joint article, Xu Lufeng and Ji Zhe point to the new direction of the anthropology of civilisations. Let me reaffirm that this has stemmed from a recent attempt to combine the Republican sociological and ethnological perspectives with the Maussian theme of the inter-societal systems.

If the achievement, as it were, has been the idea of the complexity of “supra-societal” relations defined in terms of both the “vertical” and “horizontal” planes, then, the idea has in fact been intended as furthering the syntheses of different legacies and perspectives.

Our point is simple. It comes from the standpoint of holism, and is targeted at the kind of “division of labour” which has resulted in non-holistic and thus non-relational interpretations. These, once applied in the fields of history, religion, and *minzu*, can result in various misunderstandings of history and reality. Our point thus demands not only further dialogues between different, or even rival sub-traditions, but also further relationing of the co-existing contemporary perspectives reviewed here.

Let me expound the point with reference to the problem of Chinese historical anthropology.

If the field of historical studies in Chinese anthropology has its problems, then, these have stemmed mainly from the way in which the chosen facts have been examined as “objects.” In these studies, genealogies, ancestral halls, and territorial cult temples have been the core phenomena taken into consideration. In making their arguments, most Chinese historical anthropologists make good efforts to relate such “objects” to other “objects” (especially those found in the substrata of socio-economic and political phenomena). Nonetheless, such efforts have somehow failed to yield sufficiently anthropological outcomes. The problem has stemmed from the fact that the scholars, feeling little concerned by the “objects” they, as “local outsiders” or “intellectual elites,” have “looked at,” have largely neglected the “mana” or religiosity of the things considered – such highly “magical” and “religious” aspects of social life as genealogies, ancestral halls, stele inscriptions, and temples.

To me, this reveals the paradox of “indigenous anthropology”: though claimed as an alternative to the anthropology from the outside, it virtually has all the dispassionateness the latter has been criticized for having.

More relevant to what we intend to discuss here, it is quite obvious that in all these “sacred objects,” certain “vernacular” perspectives of history have also been inscribed. These, removed from the hegemonic temporality of linear transformation to which Chinese scholars have been so accustomed since the beginning of the twentieth century, are “vernacular models” of historical time, and they deserve more focused study.

If the speculation is appropriate, then, its implication is quite straightforward: before these models are seriously considered from the combined perspective of history and religion, the creativity of Chinese historical anthropology will continue to be limited.

The reverse is also true. Religious revival and the “national problem of *minzu*” have become two of the burning issues in contemporary China. But being contemporary does not amount to being “a-historical;” rather, the contemporary issues are deeply rooted in the civilisational complexity of the past.

Let me discuss the issue with reference to the Maussian perspective, from which the religions and *minzu* can be considered in terms of the broader category of the historical “phenomena of civilisation.”

Throughout the twentieth century, there has been a tendency in “sinological anthropology” to perceive Chinese or Sinic civilisation in terms of its Chineseness. Undoubtedly, such a civilisation has existed. In pre-modern times, the Chinese or Sinic civilisation was highly systematic, and its “sphere of influence” went well beyond the imperial frontiers. But this does not mean that civilisational transmission in the opposite direction did not take place. The other civilisations were also expansive in history. These different civilisations found their locations in what we now understand as “China.” The “great traditions” of Buddhism, Islam, old and new Christianities, and the like are from outside the “Sinic world,” but they have flowed into China. One consequence of their spread into the East has been the re-grouping of the localities and groups in Han and *minzu* areas. In the Chinese world, the religions seem to form a certain intermediate plane between the “central” and the “marginal,” the official and the vernacular. The re-grouping of localities and *minzu* has functioned at once to “integrate” and “divide” – it has not always been “balance-making.” The situation has continued to be complicated by the constantly shifting relations between the “central” and the sectarian and between the ruling class and *minzu* (it should be noted that in several periods in Chinese history, e.g., those of the great empires of North Wei 北魏 [386-534], Yuan 元 [1271-1368], and Qing 清 [1644-1910], the rulers of the “Chinese” were in fact from the “nationalities” other than Han 汉).

Over the pre-modern centuries, China not only nurtured its own “religions,” but also accommodated various foreign “world religions.” As for *minzu*, while we should not easily deny its modernity, we should admit that in the country now defined as “China,” the “ethnic” situation was rather similar. The relations between religions and *minzu* have been “horizontal,” forming across extensive geographic space. Nonetheless, they have also been “vertical,” patternable in terms of inter-religious and inter-*minzu* hierarchies, altered from reign to reign and dynasty to dynasty. In the study of these hierarchical relations, the historical anthropological perspectives of “gentrification” and “popularisation,” if adapted to the complex relations in the realms of empire, religion, and *minzu*, will become more revealing and creative.⁷

Between inside and outside

To be truer to the realities in which they study as reflective subjects, Chinese anthropologists should tackle a further task: substituting regional and civilisational perspectives for the “anthropologies of nation-building.” As a border-crossing mission, this would mean further deriving inspirations from the anthropologies of the more distant others for the sake of reforming the “self-concerns” of the national anthropology. But should this in turn imply the inevitable decline or eradication of the existing intellectual traditions? More specifically speaking, should we base our anthropological re-structuring entirely on the re-orientation toward the “anthropologies of empire-building”?

⁷ Recently, a few significant efforts (e.g., Shu, 2010; Zheng, 2016; Wang & Shu eds., 2016) have been made in the intermediate localities in which an old civilisation with all its internal regional, hierarchical, religious-cosmological, and ethnic diversities and external relations has been re-constructed as a “system” whose life in the modern world has become a central issue.

To answer the questions, let us first follow Chen's review and reconsider the newly emerging "Chinese ethnographies of foreign societies."

It has been a delight to see that in the past decade, not only have more ethnographic monographs on the places within the borders of China been published, but an increasing number of anthropological works on foreign cultures has also been produced. As Chen Bo outlines in his review, some of the new "ethnographies of foreign societies" have been the outcomes of the "natural" extension of Chinese anthropological scope beyond the "intermediate circle," while others have derived from the attempt to follow the hegemonic fashion of anthropology – "a science of culture as seen from the outside" (Lévi-Strauss, 1973: 55). In both of these directions, Chinese anthropologists have further absorbed the core factor of what Stocking (1982: 171) has specified as the underlying unity of "international anthropology" – reach into otherness.

However, it is the new movement that has worried Chen. As he has convinced us, most Chinese ethnographies of foreign societies have not been based on true participant observation and holistic comprehension of local human relations in the broad sense of the term. What is worse, although all these monographs are written in Chinese language, they, with rare exceptions (e.g., Luo Yang, 2016), are lower versions of Western anthropologies of the distant others, being neither solid ethnographic studies, nor independent perspectives.⁸

To some, the Chinese ethnographies of foreign societies may have seemed quite new. However, as Chen Bo also points out, in fact, there had been precedents. In imperial times, records of foreign countries had existed; in the early half of the twentieth century, while inventing their "anthropologies of nation-building," some of our anthropological ancestors (e.g., Wu Zelin 吴泽霖 and Li Anzhai [Li An-che] 李安宅) had set out to explore ethnographic possibilities in advanced Western nations and among remote "primitive peoples."

The point Chen Bo makes, in recapitulating my own theme of the anthropological relevance of ancient Chinese perspectives of the others (Wang Mingming, 2014), deserves an elaboration.

From 630 A.D., Chinese books began to be catalogued according to the system of the Four Categories (Si Bu 四部). The Four Categories, devised by the great Tang official-scholar Wei Zheng 魏征 (580-643 A.D), consist in Jing 经 (Confucian classics), Shi 史 (historical records), Zi 子 ("philosophical" works), and Ji 集 (miscellaneous writings). Of course, none of these categories included any subcategory for "anthropology," a term invented in the West much later to refer to the science of culture, comprising ethnographic descriptions, ethnological comparisons, and social theoretical or humanistic theorisations. However, one finds little difficulty in seeing expressions of certain "anthropological sensibility" in the pages of ancient Chinese texts. Many ancient Chinese descriptions and ideas close to those currently conceived as "anthropological" had been in circulation among ancient Chinese intellectuals. Perhaps it can even be said that ever since the time when the Chinese writing system came into being, it has had the capability to function as an effective

⁸ Paradoxically, Chinese ethnographies of foreign societies have been quite dissimilar to Western ones also for the reason that they, having been "restricted" by ancient ideas of the originally superior, heavenly, and civilised others, have been hardly concerned with the fate of the primitives.

means for “representing the others.” Particularly, to a great extent, such texts as those resulting from the work of ancient astrologers and geographers (e.g., *Shanhai jing*, 山海经, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*) and from Poetic (Ci 词), Daoist, or Buddhist “sacred journeys” to the foreign lands (e.g., Qu Yuan 屈原’s journey into the magic mountains, Zhuangzi 庄子’s & Liezi 列子’s “mental travels” to the intermediaries between Earth and Heaven, and Fahsien 法显’s pilgrimage to the Buddhist kingdoms) can indeed be read as a sort of intellectual reach into otherness.

Like many of the modern anthropological narratives, the ancient Chinese accounts of others are ridden with “romance” of the source and the primeval stage. If we can regard ancient Greek thinking as one source of anthropology (Kluckhohn, 1961), then, we can also take ancient Chinese accounts of others as other sources.

Nonetheless, we do not mean that these accounts are the same as modern anthropology.

One of the differences between the two lies in the fact that some of the texts (e.g., *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*) allow the source and the primeval to be seen as the mythical mixtures of humans and non-humans; others define the original in terms of the “naturally” superior, heavenly, and civilised (e.g., The magic mountain, South Gate of Heaven, and India); neither of the two kinds of texts places the idea of the unitary “savage” at the centre of their narrative performance.

Between the ancient and modern traditions, there are other differences, one of which is: while modern anthropology relies heavily upon dichotomies (Fabian, 1983), the ancient Chinese “ethnographic accounts” do not draw clear-cut demarcation lines between self and other, “nation” and empire.

At the top level, these accounts were produced as the reflections of the broadness of the world perceived as *Tianxia* 天下 (all under Heaven). *Tianxia*’s world order was a multi-layered and hierarchical geo-cosmic organisation and, as a system of relations, it was dynamic. It was a way of life quite different from that of the nation; instead of living on the inside-outside dichotomy, it flourished as techniques and wisdoms for treating the complex relations within each of the layers and classes and between them.⁹ Because of their being integral parts of such a world as *Tianxia*, the ancient “ethnographic accounts” were themselves expressions of the relatedness of self and other.

The concept of relation was a geo-cosmic principle of organisation for a large scale, complex “supra-societal system;” but it could also be small, found in local communities or even in specific persons. Not only does it cross the scales (Strathern, 1995), but it also crosses the boundaries between persons, objects, and divinities (Wang Mingming, 2015b).

Now, following the modern Western way of dichotomisation, the new Chinese ethnographies of foreign societies have divided the world into culture and nature, inside and outside, self and other, and Chinese and foreign, in such ways as to make all societies and cultures “self-contained.” These studies seem novel; but precisely

⁹ One may see certain ethnocentricity in the system: like the ancient cosmo-geography of the Five Zones (Wu Fu), this is concentric; it has the core in the center, while locating the familiar others in the middle and the “strange” others in the outer. Nonetheless, intellectually and politically, the concentricity is reversible, particularly when the center is marginalized and the intermediary or the outer is “centralized.”

these new studies have the potential of adding “self-power” to the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991). By turning away from “anthropologies of nation-building,” they have in effect run the risk of also turning against the senses and landscapes of relatedness, which are not only deeply traditional to the civilisations of the Central Kingdom but also relevant to our reconsiderations of contemporary anthropological issues – including that of the “exclusion” of others in the broader sense of the term in the ethnographic “inclusion” of the Other.

One of the solutions to the problem of present day Chinese anthropological dislocation can be found by re-engaging the “archaic” perspectives. If the proposition has sounded too “archaistic,” then, a consideration of the modern ethnological tradition seems a suitable alternative.

In the early twentieth century Chinese ethnology, a lot of attention was paid to the relation between the Han and the ethnic peoples. As “anthropologists of nation-building,” the Chinese ethnologists were at pains arguing against those Western sinologists and ethnologists who perceived the marginal groups living on China’s borderlands as “foreign.” In so doing, they somewhat over-emphasised the boundedness of the Chinese nation. Nonetheless, in the process, they also brought forth a relational perspective of self and other. To a great extent, the ethnological histories they produced were good arguments for the “participation” of the others in the self. In the opposite direction, the ethnological ancestors also developed their own approaches to “assimilation,” whereby the ways in which Chinese civilisations became parts of the “interiors” of other cultures were explored.

Chinese anthropology should not be restricted by the conventional practice of *minzu* studies. But this does not mean that we cannot draw new inspirations from them. Should the relational ethnology get rejuvenated with the vitalities of geocosmic and “ontological” perspectives, it would become a great source of creativity.

In the future, younger generation Chinese anthropologists, as inventors of their own “world anthropologies” (Escobar & Ribero, 2006), are bound to continue extending their “reach into otherness.” Consequently, they will make their ethnographic regions more diverse. Freed from the geopolitical limits of the conventional core and intermediate circles of peasant and *minzu* others, they will conduct fieldwork among hunter-gatherers, Sub-Saharan Africans, Melanesians, Europeans, Americans, and other Asians. In each of the ethnographic regions, they will encounter not only “natives” but also other anthropologists from the local social areas and from different continents. With these colleagues, they will develop social and intellectual relations. Making their points comprehensible to others will be a pre-requisite of these relations. But for the relations to develop on a more permanent basis, they will feel obliged to contribute their own ideas and models to the community of anthropologies; for a greater benefit to be derived from the reciprocity of perspectives, they will find it ever more necessary to go back and forth between their own experiences and ideas and the images of relations, established and re-established in the anthropologies of a civilisation-turned-nation their forerunners developed.

Substituting regional and civilisational perspectives for the “anthropologies of nation-building” should not simply amount to the eradication of the existing traditions; and the “anthropologies of empire-building” – whose far reach into

otherness has undoubtedly exerted positive effects upon the anthropological minds – should not be taken as a ready-made solution to the problems contemporary Chinese anthropology has encountered. Between the two kinds of anthropologies, there is an intermediate level, one at which the epistemological and methodological issues of anthropology can be historically reconsidered.

The synthesis of the “vertical” and “horizontal” perspectives will require the ethnographers to “scale up” from their ethnographic “smaller social areas” to the regional and civilisational worlds of inter-cultural existence. However, the understandings of inter-cultural existence – relational in nature – we achieve by means of *scaling up* our ethnographic localities should not be said to be irrelevant to our ethnographies of the “small social areas.” It is always possible, or even necessary, for the anthropology of civilisations to *scale down* to the conventional ethnographic areas whereby the imagined “isolates” are opened up to their original complexity of relations, which we see more clearly by focusing upon the greater scale “supra-communal” and “supra-societal” systems.

Conclusion

As daughter to an era of violence, in its modern form, anthropology was either the outcome of a historical process which “made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other” (Lévi-Strauss, 1973: 54-55), or the product of the movement which turned the “ethnos” or the self-awareness of culture into national mutual isolations, prejudices, and hatred (Mauss, 2006b: 42-43). Since the early twentieth century, reflecting on the two “fates” of the science, several generations of Western anthropologists have struggled in a heroic manner to find a way out. Despite the fact that no achievement can be said to be perfect, anthropology has been internationally accepted as a roughly legitimate pursuit, having transformed into a charitable science of cultural translation, a science of the other “sciences,” or a civilisational self-critique.

However, Western anthropologists have not been able to ensure that their non-Western followers take the routes they had planned and avoid all the gaps and trappings they once created.

Out of the pursuit of sharing the benefit of civilisational flourishing, Chinese anthropologists first became nation-builders, then, after a few decades of decline, they have now become torn between “anthropologies of nation-building” and “empire-building.”

But Chinese anthropology has still been successful at making itself creative. The successfulness has not easily come by. The “double personality” stemming from the epistemological paradox just specified has made its undertakings difficult. In addition to it, the particular political ontological condition under which Chinese academics have worked has heavily burdened Chinese anthropologists. Just a couple of years after the re-establishment of the discipline, anthropology was accused by the propaganda officials of spreading the idea of “alienation” – i.e., the feeling of meaninglessness and emptiness. Between 1989 and 1995, the Chinese anthropological discourse, taken or mistaken by the state as a “liberal intellectual field,” was silenced. Fortunately, in the past two decades, Chinese anthropology has enjoyed a period of peaceful expansion – perhaps over-expansion. However, even during the period, the national situation of anthropology has not

fundamentally improved. Chinese anthropologists, in their “mental travel” between Western and Eastern anthropological traditions, have found it extremely difficult to pay enough attention to the constantly renewing anthropologies from the West and the surprisingly numerous ancestors’ teachings from the Chinese own past. What has added to their hardship has been the fact that they, in conducting their research, have had to adapt their projects and writings to constantly changing policies. Just in twenty years, the basic policy of the state has changed from economism to political stabilism, from political stabilism to “harmonious society,” and from “harmonious society” to “new phase socialism.” Each of the political “concepts” has arrived as a political demand and thus as a burden, and each demand or burden in turn has come as a newly formatted redistribution of funding among the social sciences, always favouring the pragmatic ones. But the outcome has been the same: Chinese social sciences have become ever more attached to the ideological state apparatus. Under such a condition, it has been easy for the academics to become members of the new bureaucracy and difficult for them to maintain the boundary between the spaces of intellectual thinking and the spaces of ideological propagation.

Regarding the traditions on which anthropologists all over the world have focused, we must pay special attention to their alternating “fortunes” in China. During the “Culture Revolution,” all of these were treated as signs of “backwardness” and were recklessly eradicated; but now, “culture” has quickly become a highly desirable political item. Chinese anthropologists no longer work in the situation in which “culture is disappearing;” on the contrary, they live in a new “civilisation” where the quantity of “cultural forms and contents” increases in the way similar to the growth of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Thus, many Chinese anthropologists have felt it urgently necessary to quickly adapt their academic strategies to the politics of culture by virtue of updating the “anthropology of nation-building” into the study of heritage.

No situation of anthropological existence is ideal, let alone that of the difficult life of the subject of Chinese anthropology. But it also holds true that the situations have often failed to become the intellectual interiorities of the thinking subjects; they have not hindered them from moving into other temporal-spatial realms.

In one of such realms, we revisit what Confucius said about learning:

“Setting our heart upon the Way, supporting ourselves by its virtue, learning upon Goodness, seeking distraction in the arts.” (*Analects* 7)

We should not demean the classical philosophy of the Way by treating it as a mere method in the human science. But it will be fruitful to locate the Way, as Confucius himself did, at once cosmologically and sociologically, in the civilisational intermediary between the wilderness and the ornamented. This is the place where we can derive a concept of relation, and offer it as an expression of the efficacy and the “virtue” of the connection between persons, objects, and divinities and their collectivities, in accordance with which the ethical values of the exchanges between different traditions, including anthropologies and the situations in which the anthropologists have lived as contemplating subjects, can be rendered a relative certainty.

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