

The Predicament of Indigenisation: Constructions and Methodological Consequences of Otherness in Chinese Ethnography*

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This article addresses the topic of the Chinese “native researcher” with illustrations taken from anthropology, psychology, and sociology. While movements for indigenous social sciences have the potential to aid the development of anthropology, the “native researcher” is an idea that is also highly compatible with a kind of cultural nationalism that has both excluding traits and negative methodological implications. The culturalist assumptions underpinning the methodological stance implied by sinicized anthropology are bound to obscure more than promote a fruitful understanding of social reality, but it would be naïve to dismiss this native/non-native dichotomy as wholly fictitious or regard it as nothing but a political slogan. However, it is argued here that an understanding of the “native researcher” in terms of organisational belonging, rather than in primordial terms of blood and culture, would make for a more satisfactory understanding of the researcher’s relation to the people he or she studies, to his or her research, and to other, “non-native” researchers.

Keywords: native researcher, indigenisation, sinicized social sciences, alterity, research organisations

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Writing the present is always dangerous, a biased project conditioned by distorted readings of the past and utopian hopes for the future.

—Lincoln and Denzin 1994:575

In this article I will address the topic of the Chinese “native researcher,” which I link to the broader issues of postcolonialism and orientalism, and especially to the culturalist logic of indigenisation, the latter a current crosscutting several disciplines in the social sciences. While it is beyond the scope of this article to give exhaustive coverage of all relevant debates, I will show how the notion of the native researcher can be construed with illustrations mainly taken from anthropology, psychology, and sociology.

Movements for indigenous social sciences will ideally aid the development of anthropology both in China and abroad. However, the “native researcher” is also, I believe, an idea that is highly compatible with, and already tangled up with, the kind of cultural nationalism often found in post-Mao China. This aspect of the notion has both excluding traits and negative methodological implications.

Much has been written in China on the topic of indigenous, or sinicized, social sciences over the last two decades, but comparatively little has been said about the methodological implications for the researcher. This at first may seem somewhat peculiar, given that the remedy of methodological shortcomings is theoretically central to these movements. One reason for this lack of problematisation is, I believe, that indigenous social sciences—contrary to what is often put forward by their advocates—presupposes the basic validity of the anthropological dichotomy of insider/outsider, as understood by colonial anthropology. The dichotomy is not questioned, only “stood on its head,” supposedly subverting former relations and empowering the “natives.” Even if so far little commented on, one might expect the topic to become increasingly salient since the present international trend of ethnicity substituting class as the “master category” in the social sciences inevitably will lead to a closer scrutiny of this and related concepts.

To the extent that social science purports to take us closer to truths about our existence, it also runs the risk of confusing its theories and findings with this elusive goal. There is no point in arguing for or against the explicit or implicit claim of the innate superiority of the “native researcher” as posed, but there are reasons why one should question and reject the theoretical foundation of this claim. Nativeness, I will argue, is an epistemological quality neither primordial nor absolute. Regardless of whether “we” or “them” end up as native, this is always the result of a double process of “nativisation” and “othering,” usually of a political nature. I will suggest that the culturalist/nation-

alist assumptions underpinning the methodological stance implied by sinicized anthropology, if taken seriously, are bound to obscure more than promote a fruitful understanding of social reality. By and large, Chinese movements for indigenous social sciences have not yet produced the radical alternative to Western learning that they often purport to do; nonetheless, one cannot disregard *de facto* differences in research, and it would be naïve to dismiss this native/non-native dichotomy as wholly fictitious or regard it as nothing but a political slogan. However, I will argue that an understanding of the “native researcher” in terms of organisational belonging, rather than in primordial terms of blood and culture, would make for a more satisfactory understanding of the researcher’s relation to the people he or she studies, to his or her research, and to other, “non-native,” researchers.

Cultures and Natives in Western Anthropology

Anthropology in its childhood was conceived of as a discipline much like biology. The early anthropologists, in a very Linnaean way, busied themselves with inventing and classifying cultures and, by comparison, investigating their relations to each other, as a rule in order to use the findings to prove the general theory of cultural evolution according to which they themselves belonged to the most evolved and superior culture. Their superiority was a “fact” that not only justified colonisation and domination of the “more simple” cultures studied, but also gave to these endeavours an air of unavoidable determinism as well as a streak of compassion and Christian love—a male heterosexual love as it were.

In the anthropological profession as taught in the West, the distinctions between “regular” scholars—those who studied alien cultures—and “native” scholars, who were seen as studying their respective cultures from within, were, and are still in many institutions, part of the discipline’s received wisdom. In fact, since studying and understanding the other was what defined the discipline, upholding the two categories of us and them was essential to the anthropological project. Thus, a distinction was made between “native” and “real” scholars. A distinction, one might add, which reified the cultural identity of scholars from both camps and—as I will argue later—made oblique other reasons for variation within the scholarly community. The position of the native scholar was unique since his status as “native” was independent of academic training and rested solely on his “ties of blood” with the soil on which he worked. This was sometimes seen by anthropologists as something positive, given the basic drive in anthropology to get the “native’s point of view,” but it was more often interpreted as a hindrance to the scholar’s much-valued objectivity. The peril of “going native” and the advice to new field-

workers to “stay off the women” both reflect this side of the anthropological stance (see Evans-Pritchard 1973).

On Chinese soil, the example of Fei Xiaotong is a good illustration of the obviously relative nature of this nativeness. Fei’s teacher in England, Bronislaw Malinowski, wrote in a foreword to Fei’s (1939) study that Fei possessed local knowledge that would be almost impossible for a Westerner to acquire. In China, on the other hand, Western educated Fei was regarded by himself and others as the professionally trained student of the other (Fei 1993b).

However, after the Second World War and the following de-colonisation, the anthropological scene fundamentally changed. First world researchers, having no longer any “undiscovered natives” to map out, and responding to a reflexive critique of their own discipline’s colonial past, increasingly turned to their “own turf” for material. This turning to their own culturally highly diversified societies coincided with the discovery of the complexity of the peoples that only a scholarly generation ago had been seen as primitive—or “barbarous and semi-civilized” as de Groot (1989[1892]:1) referred to the Chinese. As a consequence, later researchers have seriously upset the traditional and overly simplistic notion of culture that Margaret Archer (1996 [1988]) deservedly calls the “myth of cultural integration,” according to which cultures are clearly delimited, internally homogeneous and wonderfully stable over time. In fact, the core concept of culture has become so called into question that many social scientists now regard it as not only difficult to use or theoretically misleading but possibly even harmful. The deflating and reductive tendency of “culture” lingers as a ghost from the German mid-eighteenth century Historismus and its notion of one people with one culture. This pre-anthropological notion of culture was part and parcel of the romantic quest to find, conjecture, or invent the German nation, *das Volk*.

As the very notion of culture has become contested, the distinction between “native” and “regular” scholars has also become more problematic. Rapid changes and increased social mobility in many of the countries previously seen as “primitive” as well as in the so-called first world are the basic societal reasons for this. With more non-Western students and scholars working in the West, and with an increasing number of “native scholars” in the countries once studied by the “Western gaze,” many of whom are also influential participants in international scholarly debates, the notion of any scholar having a fixed and unchanging cultural identity has become increasingly untenable (cf. Narayan 1993). The post-positivistic turn of the social sciences, largely building on older continental theories, has also seriously undermined the simplistic notion of the “native view” as still often given in the emic-etic dichotomy. In its place, an understanding of the researcher’s active participa-

tion in the creative process of any ethnography has been called for (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988; van Maanen 1988; Atkinson 1990).¹

All in all, one could well expect that the notion of “native scholar” should have become a closed chapter in most Western institutions. However, at approximately the same time as the colonial understanding of “natives” has been rejected by many researchers, the term has reappeared as a weapon in the hands of previously disadvantaged groups. These groups built on earlier movements such as those for black sociology and woman’s studies, but emerged in the 1980s together with notions of multiculturalism, applied anthropology, and postcolonialism. Early on used by Native Americans and other first nations, the claim—or attribution—of nativeness is now made by scholars purporting to represent from the inside marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, or their sub-groups such as Muslim feminists or black feminists. Indeed, even the reaction to de-colonisation has produced a new native—the “native foreigner” (Mamdani 1996).

These movements have put the spotlight on many previously marginalized groups and helped to voice their concerns, and have also provided new ground for anthropologists to explore. However, they have contributed little to breaking down academic compartmentalisations, with many of the scholars who claim the status of “native” exclusively conducting research on “native” problems, and writing and lecturing mainly for other “natives.” This arguably strengthens the in-group’s self-esteem through the right to self-representation and the creation of a new academic field, but it contributes less to the demystification of the anthropological other in the eyes of mainstream researchers, students, and laypersons. Ironically, the explicitly political and subjective voice used in these groups’ ethnographies, which could well have helped mainstream research become aware of its own political and subjective nature, seems more to have confirmed conventional scholarship’s original claim to be value-free, unbiased, and devoid of desires.

The status of “native” can of course be—and often is—utilized as a resource in the academic game. Any ethnographer would naturally stress his unique abilities or skills in situations where this would enhance his credibility or gain him advantages in some form. In many American research centres for Asian studies, to take one example, students and staff with Asian background now constitute a majority. While this may seem like a victory to these groups,

¹ Although I believe Marcus (1994) is correct when he suggests that most qualitatively inclined researchers have benefited to some extent from postmodernist insights, even if few are willing to admit this, to acknowledge the creative role of the researcher should not serve to licence social science to treat the object of study as only virtually real. That position seems to be a new but equally dissatisfying version of what Harvey (1996) named the Leibnizian conceit, but now with the researcher’s gaze turned out toward himself instead of in toward himself for absolute knowledge.

bestowing an air of authenticity to their studies, it has arguably not led to more cross-cultural understanding, and could well imply that Asian studies are something interesting only to Asians.² And as to their “nativeness,” it is noteworthy that a majority of these scholars are operating from within central positions in Western academia (mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom), and not from local universities in developing countries. Likewise, as Calhoun notes, they are often participants in discourses which have their origin not in the national or international third world culture to which their traditional culture may have partially given way, but in Western culture (1995:94). Indeed, the majority of these scholars are either born or educated in the West. It also seems that postcoloniality is less concerned with the present situation in the postcolonies than with the theoretical dilemmas in Western academia. Furthermore, there is the concern that the practices of multiculturalism may force upon people ethnic identities that are more theoretical artefact than grounded in these people’s self-understanding. To use Abu-Lughod’s (1991:139) expression, culture in anthropology has foremost been a “tool for making other.” But research in the spirit of multiculturalism would ideally have led to a polity of difference instead of a polity of othering. However, today culture must also be recognised as a “tool for making native,” even as this “native” continues to be the other in the eyes of the world, and indeed *has* to be construed that way in order to yield ethnographic authority.

However, these postcolonial native researchers are not the principal upholders of the concept of “native researchers” in Western academia. Despite the deconstruction, problematisation, and re-construction of the “native” researcher and the notion of culture, insufficient attention has always been given to the ethnic or cultural identity of “regular” scholars within the discipline. Although they are everywhere prevalent, too little has been written about “Africanised scholars,” “Asianised scholars,” etc. And less still has been written about the “undefined scholar,” that is, the supposedly white, male, heterosexual scholar who still stands as the implied paradigm of the culturally neutral researcher. Consequently, besides a widespread lack of explicit self-reflection among the “undefined scholars,” we have a politicised self-nativisation and a tacit notion of “traditional” native scholars, with native in both cases being a concept tied to crude notions of authenticity and cultural essentialism.

² This is a phenomenon also seen in society at large. Margaret Talbot writes in the *New York Times* (18 October 2001) how multiculturalism in America, despite its drive to include the other and “empower the subaltern,” instead seems to have dramatically lessened the interest in serious studies of foreign languages and cultures.

The Sinicization of the Social Sciences

Geographically closer, a school of thought that has significantly influenced the understanding of native research in Mainland China is the movement for sinicized social sciences (*Zhongguohua shehui kexue* 中國化社會科學, now usually referred to as indigenous social sciences, *bentuhua shehui kexue* 本土化社會科學). This is a movement whose battle cries were first heard among Chinese scholars in America, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the early 1980s, and later on also in Mainland China.

The academic discipline most vividly engaged in this movement is social psychology, with Yang Kuo-shu usually recognised as the founding father. Most of the social sciences are represented, however, and the movement has intellectual connections both to the field of literature and to philosophy, where New Confucians like Tu Wei-ming can be said to be brothers-in-arms.³

This is a movement with two explicit rationales. On the scholarly side, it was an attempt to construct descriptions and theories based on non-Western precepts and assumptions which would make the scholar's research more relevant to the local arena and less dependent on alien constructs that might possibly obstruct the understanding of Chinese society. Towards this end, they tended to unmask the tacit understanding of the "universal nature" of American research findings from the 1950s and 1960s. However, this rationale on its own, although valuable and hardly done without due to ethnocentric biases in Western social science research (see, e.g., Sinha 1999; Poortinga 1999), cannot account for the movement as such, since the prescribed revisions and reconceptualisations (see, e.g., Yang and Wen 1982; Yang Kuo-shu 1993) in the social science disciplines could well have been made within the main framework of these as they were.⁴ Indeed, today I believe only the most confirmed rational choice theorists would claim a universal validity for their models.

The Taiwanese movement was also explicitly rooted in a feeling of cultural displacement, and the second rationale was a quest for a cultural identity. In an early statement this feeling is given as: "In our everyday lives we are Chinese, but when we are involved in our research we turn into Westerners" (Yang and Wen 1982:ii). Observed sociologically, this side of the move-

3 In as far as the movement is a reaction to perceived Westernization, it has intellectual roots going back to the May Fourth Movement. Compare, for example, how Yu Kuang-chung (1994) deplors the "malignant Westernization" of the Chinese language of today and his arguments for a more "Chinese" Chinese.

4 Although a few Taiwanese scholars seem to make a point of writing in an oldish style distinctively not Western standard scientific writing, most scholars working within this movement are interested in adjustments and revisions well within what Kuhn (1962) called the normal science paradigm.

ment was a social science version of the “obsession with China” (pace C. T. Hsia). Traditional Chinese ideas and values were to be examined and utilised in order not only to get a better understanding of local society, but foremost to bring about a Chinese understanding of society and local culture among a general public, seen to be on the edge of totally abandoning their “original” identity in the process of modernisation. What was worse, some even seemed to take pleasure in this shedding of skin, “mistakenly” believing that all things modern were better than all things traditional (e.g., Yang Kuo-shu 1988).

In trying to bring about this sinicization of the social sciences, they frequently turned to the revered Confucian classics of the “great tradition” for concepts and definitions (e.g., Hwang Kwang-kuo 1988a, 1988b; Tsai and Hsiao 1986). The bond to the “great tradition,” which is a prerequisite for upholding the image of the eternal Chinese as a single object of study, also accounts for the fact that major areas of Chinese tradition, such as Buddhism with its rich psychological insights, are played down or missing in Taiwanese scholars’ overwhelmingly Confucian accounts of the tradition.

With their starting point as the sense of being mispositioned somewhere neither “traditionally Chinese” nor “modern Western,” the logical answer—“both traditional and modern” (Yang Kuo-shu 1992)—has the unintended side-effect of simplifying and further polarizing the notions of “Chinese” and “Western”—the former term seldom specified but supposedly extended to “a group of people with common ancestry with regard to race, culture, language, script and history” (Yang Kuo-shu 1993:63), and the latter almost never defined but for all practical purposes referring to white middle-class Americans. As with the non-Western “native researchers” in anthropology, scholars engaged in this Taiwanese development were as a rule educated in the West—mainly in the United States—and their scholarship often had an air of “*Zhongti Xiyong*” 中體西用 (Chinese essence, Western use), with Chinese Warring States concepts juxtaposed with the most positivistic calculations inherited from the America research tradition against which the movement rebelled.

The rapid economic and societal development in Taiwan, in many respect an Americanisation as it were, made the Taiwanese scholars highly aware of this “loss of Chineseness.” It also prompted their reaction, which expressed itself as a recovery of familiarity lost, and reflexive action based on the recognition that they themselves were part and parcel of this process. The emergence of *bentuhua* studies (as opposed to earlier “modernisation theories”) further coincided with America’s official recognition of the People’s Republic of China and the subsequently changing political situation in Taiwan, which certainly influenced the academic climate by allowing for more variation and encouraging the testing of new grounds. Intra-disciplinarily, the movement also gained power from a regional trend toward the development of distinctly

indigenised psychologies in many countries in Asia.

Since a fundamental distinction of indigenous social science anywhere is the conscious use of concepts and notions from everyday life, the literature abounds with studies on “typically Chinese concepts” such as *yuan* 緣, *renqing* 人情, *mianzi* 面子, and *guanxi* 關係. In this theoretical framework these concepts, as well as the basic categories of us (Chinese) and them (Westerners), are objectified, not questioned or challenged. At the same time, they fit smoothly into an analysis where the social categories that are studied are already well defined through, and with, these very same cultural concepts. This problem is far from uniquely Chinese or non-Western. The very same problem exists in social science research in the West, although most scholars tend to use a technical language and avoid undefined everyday terms in order to get around the problem.⁵

The movement for the sinicization of the social sciences has opened the door to scientific understanding and explanations of social phenomena previously marginalized either due to their “poor fit” with established (American) concepts or because they were seen as totally unique and best treated on their own as “things Chinese.” Nevertheless, the purpose of this article is not to present a comprehensive presentation of this scholarly trend. For my present purpose, it is enough to point out that, as with all scientific approaches, this movement too has its sunspots and that some of these are related to our main concern, the “native researcher” in Chinese ethnography.

Many of these studies commit a series of mistakes which in the Chinese context we can call “Liang Shuming’s errors,” commemorating problems with Liang’s (1921) early study on cultural differences: they tend to simplify the content of cultures (often to the extreme); to dichotomise differences; to reify certain historical facts into essentialistic characteristics; to explain away internal and/or external phenomena which do not fit a simplistic presentation; and to base part of the presentation on factual mistakes. There is, however, nothing uniquely Chinese in this. Tommy Dahlén (1997), in an anthropological study of professional Western “interculturalists” has shown how they regularly tend to use old (although often presented as new) essentialistic and simplis-

⁵ There has been a tendency, especially in American social sciences, to present findings not only in a language detached from everyday use, but also in a decontextualized and ahistorical mode in line with the notion of middle-class white Americans being the universal norm. However, using detached “scientific” terms by no means makes these resistant to theoretical challenge and/or abandonment, as can be seen with, for example, the concept of race in anthropology, Parsons’ categories in sociology, and Freud’s in psychology. Psychology, being the social science discipline closest to the natural sciences, is undoubtedly most likely to commit the mistake of treating its object of study as naturally given, subjecting it to experiments mimicking those done in “the real scientists” laboratories. This is, however, a problem obvious also to many Western researchers (see, e.g., Argyle 1992).

tic concepts and descriptions of culture in their professional careers, and how this one-sided overemphasis on cultural differences works to legitimise their profession and enhance the need for their services.⁶

The frequent merging of classical concepts from the “great tradition” with everyday Chinese life, as well as the often almost ridiculous comparison of contemporary American practices with Chinese ideals—often void of any temporal aspects—more often than not only serve to confirm and defend old generalised notions of the anthropological other (cf. Gabrenya and Hwang 1996:319-320). This is, I would think, most acutely felt by those of us who stand outside this mystifying Chinese-American dichotomy. The scientific quest for a tangible non-Western Chineseness, and the frustration when this cannot be found (e.g., Yang Chung-fang 1999), is symptomatic of the urge to find clear distinctions, likely at the expense of a balanced self-understanding. The cultural essentialism in many of these studies is also often echoed in the innumerable comparative cultural studies which have flooded the Mainland’s book market since China’s opening to the West. Geoffrey Blowers (1996) further notes a tendency to exclude non-Chinese readers when it comes to the study of typically Chinese phenomena (e.g., calligraphy, *fengshui* 風水) using Chinese concepts, a concern also voiced from “within” by Hwang Kwang-kuo (2000).⁷ Many studies are primarily meant for a Chinese public only and they often use different theories of uniqueness (*teshulun* 特殊論), claiming that things Chinese can only be understood within an already-existing framework of Chinese culture and that it is only natural that so much research has been devoted to “uniquely Chinese” concepts such as *guanxi* and *mianzi*. This is not only wrong to start with, since no uniquely Chinese reality can be found to warrant such claims of intranslatability, but it is also misleading because the lives of modern Chinese, in Taiwan and elsewhere, are lived in an extremely untraditional reality formed by modern international capitalism, a reality that as a rule is all but absent in this research (Kjellgren 2002). In fact, the cultural displacement felt by Chinese researchers is basically the same as that described in the *Manifesto* of the Communist Party (Marx and Engels 1995 [1848]), arguably the most famous of all depictions of the constantly chang-

6 Many of these Western interculturalists figure in the Taiwanese cross-cultural studies as authorities on cultural differences.

7 It should again be noted that the movement for indigenous psychology in Taiwan and Hong Kong is not a homogeneous school of thought. As with most other academic groupings of today, the movement is marked by a relatively high degree of self-reflection and internal critique. As to Blowers’ (1996) critical remark that many studies labelled as Chinese psychology are exclusively meant for a domestic readership and consequently are only published in Chinese, I cannot see that one should have to apologize for using one’s mother-tongue, or be criticized for choosing to address an audience whose language is not English. Furthermore, I think one should bear in mind that Chinese is hardly an obscure language in terms of numbers of users.

ing and thoroughly revolutionary state of modern society: “All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned”

From this culturalist position it is but a small step to the advocacy not only of “native theory” but also of “native researchers.” Many of these studies are but weaker versions of the usually more rabid Japanese *Nihonjinron* 日本人論, which claims that Japanese culture (and everything else Japanese) can only be understood in its own right and only by the Japanese themselves.

Making culture part of the researcher’s considerations is surely the basic remedy to culture-blind research, but danger lurks when culture gets pronounced the new “master category” of social science. Insofar as any researcher’s thoughts on societal differences boil down to culture being the chief line of battle, as in Huntington’s scenario (1996), I believe one has not only overlooked more important differences related to class and gender but also, however insignificantly, helped to obstruct the way to international solidarity.

Following Spivak’s (1992) notion of “strategic essentialism” and Calhoun’s (1995) discussion of relativism and constructed standpoints as bases for social criticism, as well as acknowledging that identities usually are rooted in ideals and moral aspirations rather than in the world as given, I believe one cannot dismiss the kind of research carried out in the name of indigenous psychology. One should, however, be clear about the nature of the enterprise and sensitive to its pros and cons. To build a research platform based on the notion of culture may be a legitimate project but it also has the potential of becoming or supporting modes of nationalism historically related to the suppression of national minorities, be these based on culture, colour, religion, sexual preference, or other criteria. The clear-cut division of cultures paves the way for a double-edged danger of exclusion when brought down to the personal level of analysis: on the one hand individuals from “foreign cultures” are—for positive or negative reasons—excluded from the agenda on account of their being different, while on the other those from the “indigenous culture” who do not meet the scientifically devised standards are judged culturally deviant and possibly in need of rectification.

Anthropology, the State, and Its Policy on the Other in China

It has been said that Chinese institutional anthropology, in contrast to Western anthropology, from its inception in the late 1920s centred on the cultural self, and as a form of national learning served as a tool for state-building (Chun 2001:573-579; cf. Guldin 1994). This was and is true in a basic sense;

neither Academia Sinica nor the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences has a tradition of sending anthropologists overseas to conduct research. In this respect, China is like most other third world countries. But, one can question the depth of this difference, since the Chinese goal of nation building mirrored the Western empire building, to which it was a reaction, in that Chinese researchers' descriptions of national minorities served to put these minorities under the control of the central (Han) government in much the same way as Western anthropologists served colonial administrations. And this was of course nothing fundamentally new, since the Chinese state as a historical project has to a large degree been a project of cultural assimilation and expansion from the cultural centre outwards (Harrell 1995).

There existed, however, a major difference that is relevant to the present discussion. Western colonial administrations needed anthropological knowledge to help them uphold their minority domination through a cultural "divide and rule." To call into question the distinction between "us" and "them" would be to question the difference between high and low, rulers and ruled. In the light of these associations, one can understand both the often disparaging view of native researchers and the fear of anthropologists "going native." In traditional China, long before the advent of "cultures" and social sciences, the others were also often seen as potential threats, but with few exceptions, this threat was neutralised by the cultural assimilation made possibly by the ideological universalism of Confucianism. Where the Western colonisers strove to uphold distinctions—an enterprise in which the notion of culture came in handy—the Chinese "colonisers" strove to eradicate them.⁸

Today, this assimilation seems on the surface to be a reversed process in Mainland China. The national minorities, frozen in their officially assigned groups, enjoy certain preferential policies, and—arguably for this reason—make up an increasingly large part of the nation's population, according to official statistics. At the same time, however, the unsentimental logic of the market, which knows of no uncrossable borders, together with the general assimilationist tendency in China (i.e., sinicization—explicitly in the form of a wish to improve the minorities' "spiritual and material civilizations") has widened the initially existing gap between the administrative units of national belonging, the *minzu* 民族, and the subjectively felt ethnic groups, the *zuqun* 族群 (cf. Naran Bilik 2000; Harrell 2001; Chiao 1999). And while the *minzu* is increasingly recognised as an unpractical unit of research, politicians and also

⁸ If we allow ourselves to apply the same terms to the empirical past as we do to the scientific present, we find that both race and culture are central to the notion of Chineseness, but that culture as a rule has been the more important factor. It is significant that ethnic divides have been most actively enforced in periods when China has been under non-Han rule, as during the Yuan and Qing dynasties.

researchers still often talk of the “Chinese nation” (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族) as one unit, or, in the words of Fei Xiaotong (1989), as “a pluralistic unity” (*duoyuan yiti* 多元一體).⁹ The perfect overlap of national and cultural borders is also a most important postulate for promoters of “indigenised history” (e.g., Chao 2000; Zhang Guogang 2000), and, indeed, this new national unity of the diverse has even been proved with the help of modern DNA analysis (Du and Xiao 1997). Although this multi-faceted Chinese nation is clearly propagated for political reasons—ethnic separatists being among what the central government loathes and fears the most, this unity is not a totally empty political concept (cf. Peng 1999). With mass media and standardised education, nations tend to have a cohesive effect on its members, reinforcing feelings and thoughts of felt communality, and it would be very strange if no feeling of unity had been created (Anderson 1983). Furthermore, although Chinese anthropology still focuses on the study of national minorities in their rural settings, during the last ten years increasing attention has been given to cities and the Han people—a process not unlike that in Western anthropology (see, e.g., Xu 1999). Either way, the Chinese researcher is becoming increasingly “native.”

Debates in post-Mao China

As it was during the early Republican days, and in Taiwan, the other in the above-mentioned process of nativisation has always been the West, often meaning only America and Great Britain, countries whose scholarly literature was, and is, seen as representing both the most advanced and the most standard form of research. No sooner had “softer” sciences such as ethnography and sociology been allowed to reappear on the Mainland academic scene than a debate started on the nature and future of these disciplines. In the lively intellectual climate of the 1980s, culture was at the very centre of many debates, and the choice was often portrayed as that between a uniquely Chinese development and a wholesale Westernisation.

The movement for *bentuhua* was not only associated with pre-Communist ethnographic works by Fei Xiaotong and other early champions of indigenous versions of Western models, but also with China’s contemporary political quest. Thus, some voices argued for *you Zhongguo tese de shehui kexue* 有中國特色的社會科學 “social sciences with Chinese characteristics” (Pan Shu 1984; cf. Yang Xinhui 1997) as an academic brother-in-arms to the official ideology

⁹ The “pluralistic unity” is a continuation of the early Republican thought of the “unity of the five races” as well as being an idea directly related to Edward Tylor’s definition of culture as a “complex whole,” via Fei Xiaotong’s teacher in England, Malinowski.

of post-Mao China. In as much as the concept of *bentuhua* was discussed in Mainland China during the 1980s and early 1990s, however, it was raised together with the more urgent question of “regularisation” (*guifanhua* 規範化) of the reborn social sciences. Was regularisation, much needed if China’s social science research was to be taken seriously in an international context, the same as Westernisation? If so, this could land the Chinese researcher in the trap of Eurocentrism—which “would be very embarrassing for any Chinese scholar,” according to Mainland sociologist Huang Ping (1997:219). And what was the alternative, if any? How could one successfully sail between the Scylla of questionable research and the Charybdis of Western paradigms and definitions?

To this day, given the Mainland’s political quest to become an international actor, the focus has been on becoming familiar with already accepted (Western) concepts and methods, while the movement for *bentuhua* has neither been left uncontradicted nor gained support from any substantial quarter of the academic field (Shi 1998). As an example, Zhao Liru mentions nothing at all about any “sinicized psychology” in a 1996 recapitulation of Mainland developments in psychology, and this despite the fact that Pan Shu, the foremost advocate of psychology with Chinese characteristics, is centrally positioned at CASS.

This could of course be construed as the final capitulation to the Western “right” to define the standards of the field. Huang Ping (1997:218-219), although highly aware of the heterogeneous reality glossed over by the terms “West” and “Western,” states that the problem of *bentuhua* is hardly a global concern: Except for some non-western scholars working in the West, American and European scholars are not concerned with the problem of *bentuhua* in the way Chinese scholars have to be when applying Western paradigms to their own societies.

The debates on the future of the social sciences during the 1980s and early 1990s in many ways echoed the debate of the May Fourth Movement. But, although Li Zehou (1994[1986]:40) asked “Is this not a sorrowful, farcical practical joke of history? Going round in a circle, after seventy years, bringing up the same themes?”, the debates in the post-Mao period did in fact transcend those of the May Fourth Movement, if only because they included them as a historical lesson. And even if between the extreme options alive in the May Fourth era—“complete Westernisation” (*quanpan xihua* 全盤西化) and culturally conservative “nativism” (*benweizhuyi* 本位主義)—China once again seemed to chose the first, the point of departure was radically different.

Even if sociologists, economists, and most psychologists have left the debate behind, the topic of indigenisation has recently become topical among Mainland anthropologists. Although no distinct school can be said to have

crystallised, the scholars involved seem to regard the now commonly used conceptual pair of indigenisation and internationalisation (or globalisation) as complementary rather than mutually exclusive (e.g., Shan 1998; Liao 2000; He 2000; Zhang 2000).¹⁰ However, Chinese researchers certainly have no plan to close the door and reinvent the wheel. Instead they are striving to find their own brand of internationally recognised anthropology, very much in the spirit of Chinese reform politics at large, even if the other remains, as always, the mythical Westerner. And with the same kind of nativist logic used in Taiwan and elsewhere, the “native” researcher is thought to possess certain advantages over the (Western) other. Often only tacitly recognised, these advantages include the ability to find interesting data in the field faster and to write superior and more objective descriptions, being in an unambiguous relation to the society under study, as well as being able to incorporate and use the long Chinese history in the process of understanding (e.g., Wang 1997a, 1997b; Pan 2001).

Chinese Nativism—Merits and Dilemmas

The strengths and weaknesses of nativism in Chinese anthropology are the same as those found in other movements for indigenisation, be these based on ethnicity, descent, nationality, gender or other attributes. But, compared with similar movements elsewhere, they are magnified as a consequence of the extraordinary claim that Chinese nativeness encompasses such a long history, such a large territory, and so many people. Although I see the native researcher as basically a political device, this should not be misconstrued as a dismissal, only as a starting point for evaluation. The weapon of nativism can, I believe, be a useful way to strengthen the discipline by creating dynamic research centres, questioning old paradigms, enhancing the self-esteem and self-confidence of its practitioners, and attracting more students and a wider readership. This point is also relevant to the Taiwanese movement. Nonetheless, there are plenty of pitfalls on the nativist road, and many researchers, as far as I can judge, are unaware or untroubled by them.

A major reason for the need for indigenous social sciences is said to be the bad fit of foreign theories with Chinese reality. I will not dispute this. However, there seems to be a conspicuous unawareness that most old theories are as misleading and “forced” to non-Chinese researchers as they are to Chinese ones, and new academic trends and “paradigms” often appear just as “for-

¹⁰ Articles have been published in many Mainland journals, but *Guangxi minzu xueyuan xuebao* 廣西民族學院學報 stands out as a major forum for these discussions. Most of these articles are also found in Rong and Xu (1998) and Xu (2001).

eign” to “Western” students and scholars as to their Chinese colleagues. Moreover, any new theory of class formation, of ethnicity, or of any other social phenomenon may—or even must—be historically tied to older debates within one Western sphere or another, since no scientific discipline comes without a history. However, this certainly does not mean that “Westerners” would have any automatic understanding or unequivocal view on new academic developments in the West. I do not mean to suggest here that we live in a world of cultural equilibrium, for this is not the case. However, the fact that of two equally educated individuals from Europe and China (or India, Japan, Korea, etc.) the Chinese (or Indian, Japanese, Korean, etc.) would be more familiar with cultural concepts and trains of thoughts from Europe than the other way around, is not only a sign of the much loathed Western cultural hegemony forcing “our” tradition on everyone else, but also a tremendous resource available to few Europeans. Correspondingly, when Hwang Kwang-kuo (1999) states that researchers raised in the West have at least a basic understanding of concepts like “logical positivism,” “logical empiricism,” “realism,” “pragmatism,” “structuralism,” etc., I think this can be interpreted not as a fundamental misunderstanding of Western academics but as a rhetorical device in Hwang’s educational campaign.

Emphasising the long Chinese history as crucial to the process of understanding is another theme which Mainland anthropologists have in common with their Taiwanese colleagues. That the very first sentence of the Preamble to the Chinese constitution from 1982 reads “China is one of the countries with the longest histories in the world,” points to the importance customarily paid to the long and continuous history of China. This sentiment for time is limited neither to the Communist regime nor to the present age, and makes some anthropologists refer to a national history of up to a staggering ten thousand years. Prasenjit Duara (1998) clearly was in the right when he wrote that: “the linear History of modern nation-states projects a territorial entity (the nation) backwards in time as its subject (or actor or agent) which evolves or progresses to the present and future. In projecting the presently constituted or claimed territorial nation into the past, national histories seek to appropriate for the present nation-state the peoples, cultures and territories which actually had scant relations with the old empires.” With the “native soil” thus stretched in time and ethnic space, almost anything can be found to be Chinese. In a recent article, Fei Xiaotong (2000) states that the roots to modern phenomena in China—and presumably anywhere else—are to be found in the local tradition.¹¹ And this is exactly what, for example, Hwang Kwang-kuo (1988b) finds

¹¹ The judgemental division of scholars into the China-West dichotomy is sometimes heard also in respect to such time-wise remote research areas as ancient poetry and pre-Qin

when he seeks the deep structures of Chinese behaviour in the pre-Qin traditions of Confucians, Daoists, Legalist, and the Martial schools. Thus, the identity dilemma is solved; modern Western behaviour is really traditionally Chinese after all.¹²

On the Researcher and the Object of Study

We ought, I believe, always to bear in mind the “snapshot nature” of a cultural description, since, unfortunately, the snapshot is often confused with the reality depicted. A problem with the notion of the Chinese native researcher’s superiority is related to the claim that they would be “more efficient” given their language skills, sensitivity, and pre-existing local knowledge, a thought which perhaps seems self-evident but which nevertheless is fallacious in a number of important ways.

First, the argument implies that there is but one Truth out there in the field for the fittest researcher to find. This view echoes an older understanding of the ethnographer as a clinical explorer of already-existing ideas, and a mapmaker of never-changing cultures, and ignores the fundamental post-positivist understanding of the social scientist as an active and innovative interpreter of a social reality in which he or she interacts and as a generator of a certain presentation. Such an understanding has a bearing more on the epistemological and methodological levels than on the level of research techniques. What makes a phenomenon or question interesting in a specific research situation is hardly self-evident or objectively determinable, but something for the researcher, and the reader, to determine subjectively, with the choice usually based upon an array of considerations, some of which we will return to later. As to the “technical” aspect of the argument, it is self-evident that most researchers from outside a given society have to work for years to acquire some extent of the language skills and accumulated knowledge of those who have grown up in that society. But this is of course equally true with respect to a researcher who is studying, for example, a minority group (and not necessary ethnically defined) in his or her own country, whose language or customs the researcher has to learn. Moreover, I strongly feel that

religion, which of course appears rather ludicrous if they are not seen as quests for cultural identity and national pride, which may be legitimate projects albeit projects with the potential of becoming or supporting nationalistic modes that are historically most often related to suppression of national minorities (based on colour, religion, political views, sexual preferences, or whatever).

¹² More clearly and persistently than anyone else in the movement for indigenous psychology, Hwang has since the early 1980s stressed the difference between reality and theory, or, in his words, lifeworld and microworld. But his microworlds are also parts of the lifeworlds of his students and readers, where they no doubt help promote a certain kind of understanding of reality.

one should not here confuse the two levels of sufficiency and mastery. As any trained researcher appreciates, being a “native” is far from enough to become a good researcher, and personal differences between researchers, such as academic training and the abilities to listen to and respect the people with whom one is dealing, far outweigh any quality coming from national affiliation (cf. Hsu 1973; Fine 1993; McCrae, Costa, and Yik 1996).

Now, one could argue that personal factors are exactly what is hinted at: no doubt a person familiar with the relevant cultural codes of behaviour is more likely to make a non-objectionable or non-obtrusive appearance on the scene of investigation, thus more easily getting access to relevant data. But, as Marx noticed (1983[1894]:825), “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.” Indeed, to procure “the native view” is often neither the most difficult part of an anthropological study nor necessarily the most useful way to understand the object of study in a fruitful manner.

The logical negative implication of this line of argument—that one should not study cultures other than one’s own—raises serious difficulties related to the terms “native” and “own society” and constitutes the second major problem with the argument. As with the “native scholar” in American anthropology, the designation “native” only works through contrast, and the problem of defining ethnicity appears somewhat easier in the China vs. West scenario than in the American case, especially since the ethnic registration system in contemporary China prevents the hyphen-American situation from emerging. Mainland China’s ethnic classification and registration system, following Stalin’s principle of “one language—one people,” does away with all ambiguity on the superficial level by printing the official ethnic nationality of every citizen on their ID-cards. But this only obscures the basic problems related to ethnicity, it does nothing to help us confront much less resolve them.

Argument about the special qualities of the native researcher would be feasible if one believed in clearly demarcated cultures in which all members were wholly socialized—be it like the old “myth of cultural integration” (see Archer 1996[1988]) or more up-dated versions of the tale like Samuel Huntington’s “Civilizations” (ibid.). Most researchers have a more sophisticated understanding of this question (e.g., Peng 1999), but even if, for the sake of argument, this postulate were to be accepted, problems would remain. The first would be where to draw the lines between the many possible cultural islands: Can someone from Fujian claim to be a native to Sichuan? Can a Hakka be understood by a Cantonese? Can a foreign educated Han Chinese claim nativeness in Tibet? Can anyone from the city do meaningful research in the countryside? Can any man understand the lives of women? Can a middle-class intellectual write about the marginal man? Can a middle-aged researcher

really understand youth culture? Can anyone today write with the native's insight about the late Qing period? And so on, ad infinitum. This is the rationale for increasingly small units of nativeness in Western applied anthropology: from women, to black women, to black Muslim women, and so on, until the number of people involved is so small that the group can be politely dismissed by the larger audience as totally irrelevant. The embryo to such a development can be seen in China, where it is almost exclusively women involved in gender studies and Hakkas doing Hakka studies. However, if carried out in the critical spirit exhorted by postcolonial theorist as well as champions of minority rights, such research runs the risk of questioning basic tenets of the national project and one can predict that the government will monitor it closely. State-critical research findings made public are, as we know, not something the Chinese government generally approves of. But, even if we believed in these small cultural fields of nativeness, how could a "true native" in this sense possibly convey his or her findings to those of other cultures, given the postulated cultural gap? And if not, what would be the purpose of the whole enterprise, since members of the "native" culture are already supposed to be fully aware of what happens in their own culture?

On the practical side, an imagined insider status generally comes with the risk that the researcher may find all information needed in his or her own head and therefore slight methodological rigour. If, as Yang Kuo-shu (1996) in a review article laments, much has been written on indigenous concepts, but little actual research has been done on them, such introspective epistemological self-sufficiency may well be one of the reasons. More alarmingly, however, Fredrik Barth (1995:65), writing on contemporary debates on cultural identity, warns that they "provide an extremely fertile field for political entrepreneurship; they allow leaders and spokesmen to claim that they are speaking on behalf of others; they allow the manipulation of media access; and they encourage the strategic construction of polarizing debates that translate into battles of influence. Such battles create hegemony and reduce options; they disempower followers and reduce the diversity of voices." These are all concerns that should be taken particularly seriously in the Chinese context given the uncommonly extended space-time claim to nativeness often found in sinicized anthropology.

If one, however, does not believe in this radically conservative version of cultural confines, as I would assume no Chinese researcher does, then there can only be relative, highly individual advantages and disadvantages connected to the matching of researcher and their fields of research. Furthermore, if one believes in the interpretive function of the researcher, and takes the notion of the researcher as co-creator of his object of study seriously, then it seems highly desirable to get as many different scholars as possible to do re-

search, in order to get more versions. This polyphony—or perhaps cacophony—would also help to minimize the risk of negative side-effects to the study of other people, that is, of forcing narrow definitions on people in subordinate positions and simplifying reality by claiming the authority of only one voice, which was the case in many anthropological studies carried out by agents of colonizing powers in the early years of the discipline's history, and, as Barth writes, perhaps still is.

Almost contrary to Barth's concerns, one argument in favour of the native researcher is that he or she avoids certain epistemological problems related to the study of the other. If the epistemological problem is that of "being in the know," then the same arguments as mentioned above would apply, but with a focus more exclusively on the research situation, the interaction with informants, and so forth. Again, I believe that this argument is badly underpinned. Seldom is the researcher seriously caught up in the local social structure of the field in which he is doing his research, be this in his own country or not. Even if the chief problem for the foreign researcher is becoming familiar with the Chinese scene while that of the Chinese researcher is to detach themselves from the familiar so as to be able to see things at all, I would still say that the generalisation of researchers into the two categories of "foreign" and "domestic" conceals more than it reveals, especially in a highly complex nation such as China. While it appears like it could mean something distinct in terms of community involvement when Dakota scholar Crazy Bull (1997) gives her advice to "non-native researchers," to claim the status of "Chinese" is not giving away much information about one's personal qualities as a researcher, and in so far as one believes this ensures "native knowledge" it is likely to be misleading. Falsely believing one has a "native understanding" has led scholars astray before, as Igor Krupnik (1996) shows in his article on how the early Russian ethnographer Bogoras came to overlook important aspects of a Siberian tribe he was studying precisely because his deep understanding of other local people made his observation biased in their direction.

If on the other hand this epistemological argument is understood as being: "one avoids putting oneself either in the colonial or orientalist position if one keeps to one's own culture," then the argument is indeed forceful, for who in his right mind would voluntarily put himself in those positions?! However, the colonial or orientalist notions are then presented in a suspiciously simple way. When it comes to more qualitatively inclined studies carried out by a single, or a few, researchers—from whatever cultural or social background in whatever cultural or social setting—one should be careful not to commit the "ecological fallacy"; to wit, not all female researchers are feminists. Few would argue today, I hope, that a colonial or orientalist position is automatically

connected to the colour or nationality of the researcher, or that one could make a critical assessment of any researcher without having read his or her specific works. One could, however, argue that all knowledge works in “colonial ways” if in the hands of the powerful. Unfortunately, though, the problem is that in the overwhelming majority of social studies this is the case. One could further argue that Chinese researchers in general hold more power, and are far more determined to use their power in relation to their objects of study, than foreign researchers in China.¹³ Social scientists working in their own country, with the motivation, opportunity, or even commission to influence decision makers, are often involved in social engineering in ways not readily open to ethnographers working in foreign countries. This is not least true in contemporary China, where the anthropological determination to help underdeveloped areas is coupled both to a wide-spread desire among intellectuals to reconnect in a positive way to the classical function of the scholar-official, and to the feeling of being marginalized by neighbouring disciplines like sociology and economics.

Any ethnographer will keep, or will be kept at, a certain distance in the field, whether working in their own culture or a foreign one, as Fei Xiaotong (1993a:165) maintains. And even if one welcomes Hu Xiaohui’s (2000) proposed Buberian relationship between the anthropologist and the people he studies, this utopic idealism will not eliminate the fundamental difference. In fact, a difference will likely exist as long as does the practice of anthropology, for, as Hastrup (1993) writes, one cannot—*per definition*—simultaneously be both anthropologist and “native.” However, even if we as anthropologists cannot be natives, in our informants’ eyes we are nonetheless likely to be performing other, very non-anthropological, tasks connected to our position in society and to power, though not exactly *personal* power.

That Which Remains

Having critically examined the concept of the Chinese native researcher, a real and widely felt difference between researchers (or rather their works) from different camps does exist. This difference needs to be confronted.

Following Durkheim I believe that a psychological explanation of a social phenomenon is bound to be incorrect. Although the felt difference may often co-vary with the passport of the researcher, I refuse to believe that the reason

¹³ Lack of power is most likely one of the major reasons for an ethnographer to end up far from a colonial superior and more like what Laura Adams (1999) named the “mascot researcher.” Whether such a field research situation in turn give rise to a perhaps unconscious need to “get even” with words when back home in the safety of one’s own study is a question worth pondering.

for the difference is to be found in the idea of national cultures as stamped upon the blank minds of the “natives.” The first hint as to the real source of the feeling of otherness comes from thoughts known, I believe, to many scholars: Huang Ping (1997:206) remembers British sinologists at SOAS as being preoccupied with what he at the time (the late 1980s) saw as a lot of “never-ending common-sensical non-problems,” a conception analogous to an often equally disparaging lack of interest felt by many non-Chinese readers of Chinese scholarly literature. This, however, is not a question of the national or even ethnic belonging of the researcher; indeed, the “native” researcher can also fall into this pit, as is obvious from the sometimes fierce debates taking place in Mainland China.¹⁴

I would argue that differences in research (both as process and product) basically stem from two sources: The first, already touched upon above, is personal. Who you are—including your cultural backgrounds (in the plural, *nota bene*), education, training, and experiences. Since the ethnography in the end is a written thing, the way you write or how you account for your views is not only a matter of taste but also very much part of the product. Do you use a detached “we-voice” as a veil against personal disclosure and act the objective mirror, or are you the scientist-cum-artist whose monograph reads like a novel? To a certain extent these are personal choices, but only to an extent, limited as they are by the more fundamental factor—the structural or organisational one.

Structural influences are basically tied to the organisation in which one works. As the Swedish sociologist Goran Ahrne (1994) notes, we give up large parts of our individuality and personal freedom everyday when we go to work, doing the deeds of an organisation and being part of an organisation. Every academic organisation, or position, is haunted by longings and fears tied to explicit and implied rules or guidelines postulating, among other things, goals for the research and codes of conduct. Codes also hint at what deviations from the “ideal activity” can be tolerated and what discussions are permissible. In our role as researcher with an institutional affiliation, our ethnicity and nationality are often secondary to academic politics, which inform us about what is academically interesting and condition how our words can be presented and to whom (Sangren 1988).¹⁵

14 In the late 1990s, the “internal” critique led to a general discussion on the proper ways of conducting scholarly critique. Articles on the topic can be found in 1998 and 1999 issues of *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, *Wenhuibao* 文匯報, and *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學—the last journal even devoted a whole issue (no. 4, 1999) to the topic.

15 Here, one must keep in mind that I am pointing to structural influences. As Margaret Archer (1995) states over and over again, structures condition people’s behaviour and give them reasons for taking certain actions, but they do not cause or determine these.

In the Chinese context, the closer the organisation producing ethnographic knowledge is to the field, the stronger the traditional claim to native validity would seem to be. However, in reality these researchers experience a relative lack of intellectual freedom compared to those of elite institutions such as national key universities and research institutions. Locally funded research institutions, although highly aware of local problems, as a rule have imposed codes of expression stipulating that they must only make known, or create, as it were, positive aspects of the local culture and debunk less glorious aspects as stemming from outer sources, e.g., the so-called floating population. Only problems already defined on a higher level of government can be articulated. Consequently, these researchers' primary function becomes the production of scientific propaganda.

A researcher's institutional belonging can also substantially influence his or her work in terms of access and entrance to the field, as well as power to conduct specific research. Because large field research groups working in cooperation with local governments are one of Chinese anthropology's "special characteristics" (Guldin 1999), the relationships among the anthropologists, as well as between them, the government, and the population under study all become natural points of interest.

Structural influences do not only stem from the researcher's own organisation. Politically charged lists of priority as a rule come down from above, and participation in popular debates depends both on the institutional embeddedness of the universities in the public sphere and on more or less direct instructions from central authorities.¹⁶ In China, as in most countries where funding for research is distributed by special institutions (often governmental) designated for this purpose, the demands and expectations of such institutions are very much a part of the researcher's considerations, even if the research itself is not directly politicised. Since Chinese elite institutions were originally established to serve the nation-building project, it is not surprising that they are also home to most scholars advocating national sciences.

To the extent that the researcher aspires to be published, academic media also have interests to which the researcher must to some degree adjust—which is one reason behind the quest among researchers, institutions, and even disciplines for their own media, as expounded on by Bourdieu (1988) and many others. In the Chinese case, the combination of scholars trained in the United States or Great Britain and the political urge in both Taiwan and Mainland China to "join ranks with the world" (*yu guoji jiegui* 與國際接軌) will probably

¹⁶ This is the case in Taiwan, and also in Sweden, where the participation of university personnel in non-scholarly activities now officially is named "the third mission" (teaching and conducting research still being the first two missions).

ensure that journals catering to indigenous social sciences will continue to stay within the “normal science paradigm,” as is the case with the Taiwan-based Indigenous Psychology Research (*bentu xinlixue yanjiu* 本土心理學研究).

While we must keep a wide array of analytical tools sharpened in order to understand social reality, an understanding of the “native researcher” in terms of organisational belonging, rather than in primordial terms of blood or culture, would, I believe, make for a more satisfactory understanding of researchers’ relation to the people they study, to other researchers, and to the ethnographic knowledge produced. To argue this is not only to argue for the immediate revision of misleading notions of nativeness, but also to advocate self-reflective ethnography with this structural view in mind. From the vantage point of the organisational insider, Allen Chun (2000, 2001) has done this with the topic of Taiwanese anthropology, but his account of the discipline’s history and embeddedness in political, organisational, public, and personal contexts is as rare as it is informative.

Conclusion

My point is not that national or cultural background or ethnic belonging are void of content or implications for ethnographic research, but that these very notions must be recognized as the social constructs that they are. Like any social concept or theory, they accentuate some things and level out or exclude others; they tell us something about the world, but at the same time they hide other aspects of it. In the case of Chinese indigenous research, I have argued that it has the potential to obscure much more than promote a fruitful understanding of social reality. We live in a world where we should, I believe, strive less to emphasize the boundaries between people and try harder to see both the community and complexity beyond us/them dichotomies. We cannot, of course, ignore real differences and inequalities. However, we should do away with the idea of “nativeness” when this is connected to crude notions of authenticity and cultural essentialism, and instead pay more attention to the substantial factors that influence research, writing, and reading—those factors labeled personal and structural in this article. No doubt, more cooperation is one very important way of addressing the problem; another is to make structural influences more visible by means of critical self-reflection. Since the world is a truly multiplex place, scholars will—as this article exemplifies—continue to disagree with each other’s points of view even when we are basically in the same boat. This is something I consider good. But in order for this critique to lead somewhere, an expanded and broadened dialogue between scholars from different institutional backgrounds is necessary. Indeed, together with explicitly stated methodologies, these on-going critical discus-

sions may well be the best source of authority available with respect to ethnography. I sincerely hope this article, in its own modest way, will contribute to such a dialogue.

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本土化的困境： 中國民族誌中「異己性」的建構及方法論的後果

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本文以中國「本土研究者」為主題，將這個主題放在後殖民主義及東方主義更寬廣的議題中討論，特別是有關本土化的文化論邏輯問題；後者正是社會科學跨學科的一種趨向。本文並未含括所有相關的爭論，而主要是以人類學、心理學和社會學為例，闡明「本土研究者」這個觀念。

理想上，本土社會科學運動有助於中國及海外人類學的發展。然而，「本土研究者」這個觀念與後毛澤東時代的中國所常見的文化國族主義高度相容、糾纏不清，並具有排他性及負面的方法論意涵。

過去二十年，社會科學本土化或中國化在中國已有可觀的論述，相對地，較少論及方法論對於研究者的意涵。乍看之下，這樣的現象頗為奇特，因為方法論缺陷的修正，正是該運動理論上關注的核心。缺乏這種問題意識的一個原因是：恰與他們倡導的論點相反，本土社會科學對於殖民人類學理解的當地人／外來者二分法的根本正當性視為當然，未加質疑，反而想像只要顛倒以往的權力關係，就可以賦權給「土著」。在社會科學以族群性取代階級做為「主要範疇」的國際趨勢下，可以預期將對這個主題與相關的概念做更詳盡的探討，凸顯「本土化」這個議題。

當社會科學聲稱可使我們更貼近真實的同時，也冒著理論與研究結果跟這個不明確的目標混淆的危險。我們沒有必要辯論或反駁「土著研究者」所明示的或隱含的先天優越性的主張，但是有理由質疑和拒絕其理論上的基礎。本文認為本土性的認識論性質，既非原生的，也不是絕對的。不論「我群」或「他群」是否終將成為土著，這通常是「本土化」與「異己化」雙重過程且具政治性的結果。人類學中國化的方法論立場，是由文化論的／國族主義的假設所支持；嚴格地說，這些假設模糊了而不是增進社會現實的理解。

大體而言，中國的本土社會科學運動尚未如他們所倡議地提出全然不同於西方學術的另一種可能。雖然如此，我們不能忽略研究中實際的差異；將本土／非本土的二分全然摒為虛構或視為一種政治教條，是天真幼稚的想法。本文主張，與其從血緣和文化的根源性，不如從其歸屬的學術機構來看待「本土研究者」，這將對研究者和被研究者、研究者與研究工作，以及研究者與「非本土研究者」之間的關係，可以有更令人滿意的理解。

關鍵詞：本土研究者，本土化，社會科學中國化，他性，研究機構