Postcolonialism and China

Some introductory remarks

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In 2013, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping, gave a speech at the 12th National People's Congress. The speech introduced his vision of the »China Dream« that was to become the slogan guiding his political program. In the course of the speech he made a series of proposals for the future of China:

> Our goal is to build a moderately well-off society, to create a prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, socialist, and modern country, and to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people. In order to do so, we must create prosperity for our country, a prospering nation, and happiness for the people. This goal deeply reflects the ideals of today's Chinese people and our ancestors' glorious tradition of relentlessly pursuing progress. […] To accomplish the Chinese Dream we have to take a Chinese path. This is the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This is not a path that opens up by itself, but it is the outcome of thousands of years of history: over 30 years of great practices and experiences; over 60 years of continuous explorations since the establishment of the People's Republic of China; the hard lessons of over 170 years of developing the Chinese nation in modern times; the heritage of 5000 years of history of the Chinese civilization. The sum of these experiences provides this path with deep historical roots and realistic foundations.[1]

1 Translation by the authors. The original quote goes: »实现全面建成小康社会、建成富强民主文明和谐的社会主义现代化国家的奋斗目标，实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦，就是要实现国家富强、民族振兴、人民幸

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Readers familiar with Chinese political rhetoric will recognize many claims typical of the official discourse of mainland China: Xi affirms the aims of previous general secretaries to create a »moderately well-off society« that is meant to be prosperous, civilized, and harmonious, and both modern and socialist. But he insists on connecting this aim specifically with Chinese culture and history. Not only is the term »well-off society« itself a concept derived from traditional Confucian texts, but Xi also stresses that this aim reflects the tradition of China's ancestors, and he roots it in a continuous history that reaches back for thousands of years. These historic roots, however, are not limited to ancient tradition. Xi refers extensively to the history of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and notably makes references to colonialism by invoking the Opium Wars in the 1840s in his reference to 170 years of »hard lessons.«

This speech, in our opinion, shows us the vital need to understand the entanglements of modernity and colonialism in contemporary Chinese thought. It articulates and reaffirms the desire to »develop« and to »become modern« that has been debated in postcolonial and post-development studies for a long time (e.g., Chakrabarty 1992; Escobar 1995; Quijano 2000; Ziai 2006). But this »becoming modern« is not about repeating the history of Europe, as Chakrabarty (1992) has described for India. Rather, Xi stresses the notion of creating a distinctive and self-determined Chinese future. He seems to depart from the discourse that Vukovich in his analysis of representations of China in the beginning of the twenty-first century has described as a discourse on China »becoming-the-same as the West« (Vukovich 2012, 9). Rather, Xi's speech raises anew the question of the nature of modernity, and he ties this to the problem of Chinese identity and culture within the world. At the same

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福，既深深体现了今天中国人的理想，也深深反映了我们先人们不懈追求进步的光荣传统。[…] 实现中国梦必须走中国道路。这就是中国特色社会主义道路。这条道路来之不易，它是在改革开放３０多年的伟大实践中走出来的，是在中华人民共和国成立６０多年的持续探索中走出来的，是在对近代以来１７０多年中华民族发展历程的深刻总结中走出来的，是在对中华民族５０００多年悠久文明的传承中走出来的，具有深厚的历史渊源和广泛的现实基础。«

time, Xi's speech is clearly concerned with the experiences of colonial history and the question of Chinese self-determination. Its worldview thus fits well with postcolonial theory: it mirrors a similar concern as developed by Barlow (1997a) in her concept of *colonial modernity*, where she stresses the fundamental relevance of colonialism and colonial experiences for modernity in East Asia.[2] Chinese political rhetoric, as presented in Xi's speech above, precisely underlines this relationship of modernity and colonialism. But it also expresses a desire for this modernity, and even an entitlement to be modern rooted in China's historic experiences. The »China Dream« therefore tries to envision not an alternative to modernity, but an alternative modernity shaped by the concerns of Chinese elites. Because the »China Dream« combines all these concerns in a single political vision, it is in every respect a postcolonial dream: it can be placed in a long history of debates on the »question of modernity« (Wang 1998; Zhang 1994b) and China's place in the world (Karl 2002; Shih 2001). And it articulates a desire to successfully practice a modernity different from Western liberalism that will entangle rather than contrast tradition and modernity and that will overcome the humiliation of being colonized.

The »China Dream« is a political slogan designed within an institutionalized discourse produced by the state. But it is not simply a part of an elite discourse disconnected from other parts of society. Concerns with modernity and colonialism go far beyond the realm of state discourse. However one may evaluate the lines above, it should be clear that they are typical of the way colonial memories appear in Chinese discourses. Be it in political speeches, online debates, or daily conversations in the streets—the nexus of colonialism-modernity-identity may appear almost anywhere: in official and unofficial memories on national humiliation, Japanese invasion, and American imperialism meddling with Chinese sovereignty; in debates on who is backward or modern as well as in the various movements and government interventions aiming to modernize China; in the paradoxical and highly emotional relations to the West and

2 This argument strikingly resembles the concept of modernity/coloniality in South American decolonial scholarship, as debated in Meinhof's contribution to this issue.

the ambivalent notions on Chinese national characteristics. These concerns are overlooked far too often by Western observers, because—just as in Xi's speech above—they are usually discussed without explicitly using the word »colonialism« and without explaining what is implied by it. But they are there, and they matter in daily life and in political practices.

The entanglement of modernity and colonialism in China

This issue of *InterDisciplines* tries to deal with this unnamed entanglement of modernity and colonialism on an empirical as well as a conceptual level. By debating »postcolonialism and China,« we would like to show how postcolonial approaches can be used as sensitizing concepts that help us to explicate and translate the concerns that structure this quest for modernity and sovereignty. This is certainly an experimental intellectual journey with an uncertain outcome. But it is surely worth undertaking. Xi Jinping's quote above shows more impressively than any theoretical argument that postcolonial concerns matter for China, and that they must be reflected anew with respect to this country: they matter because the desire to be modern is obvious in a wide variety of discourses and practices in China, and they matter because this desire for modernity is connected to colonial history and memories of colonialism. But the quote above also reminds us that postcolonial arguments have to be reflected and problematized in a specific way in the context of China, because they are similar to, or even part of, the official government discourse in China. Unlike the European context, postcolonialism and the state cannot be separated nor seen as opposing forces with respect to China. Research on China—and we would argue that this is true of the rest of the world—requires a specific, localized version of postcolonialism.[3]

Such a perspective is of relevance for European historians and sociologists, not simply due to the Western urge to make sense of China's »rise« or »return.« Postcolonial perspectives, and especially their challenge to established notions of modernity, are rapidly gaining relevance in history

3 For a similar argument for Indian and Latin American subaltern studies see Pinto (2013).

(Chakrabarty 2000; Conrad and Randeria 2002; Epple 2012; Stoler and Cooper 1997) and very recently also in sociology (Costa 2005; Go 2016; Reuter and Villa 2008; Rodriguez 2010). But East Asian colonial and postcolonial perspectives—and especially Chinese perspectives—are often overlooked in these debates. This is surprising because China is obviously a perfect place to study such issues.[4] Indeed, thinking about postcolonialism and China provides an inspiring challenge for postcolonial thought: China was not colonized by one single power or in one single fashion, but suffered from multiple overlapping and sometimes conflicting colonial agendas (Goodman and Goodman 2012). This fact has inspired many attempts to make sense of colonialism in China: Marxists have talked about semi-colonialism (e.g., Mandel 1985) in order to point out a colonial dependence of a formally independent country. Gallagher and Robertson (1953) suggested the term »informal empire« to describe an imperialist domination that reaches beyond the sphere of formal colonies, while Barlow (1997a) talks about a »colonial modernity« that entangles colonial logics and projects of modernization in all of East Asia and comprises multiple forms of colonialism. This unique form of colonialism has numerous consequences for postcolonial thinking about China: unlike the regions mainly debated in postcolonial studies, China was never entirely subject to coherent colonial cultural policies. Even after the Opium Wars, Chinese officials did not simply receive foreign influences, but they actively traveled abroad, investigating the Western powers and relating their findings to much older discursive concepts (M. Wang 2014, 6–7). Accordingly, many discursive shifts were actively designed and promoted by Chinese who conceived of them as strategies to rescue the country and (later) the nation. These discursive shifts thus rarely constituted absolute discontinuities or »catastrophes« in the Chinese discourse, even if they produced many results strikingly similar to those in other colonized countries.[5] Furthermore, China's decolonization was strikingly successful, making it much harder to claim an unbroken legacy of colonial modernity. In the 1940s, China

4 For a more detailed argumentation on the relevance of postcolonial perspectives see Daniel Vukovich's afterword to this issue.

5 See, for example, Wang (2014, 101–14) on Chinese nationalism.

broke free from political and economic dependency, gaining considerable »soft power« and influencing anti-imperialist movements in all three »worlds« of the Cold War. Today, China is without a doubt one of the most powerful countries in the world, with the ability to undermine the »global standards« of Euro-American hegemony to a considerable degree. Hence, considering postcolonialism and China forces us to reconsider if and how heterogeneous forms of colonialism could produce a relatively coherent colonial modernity and how the legacy of this colonialism could work even after the end of political and economic dependency. Reconsidering postcolonialism for China raises some decisive questions: How can postcolonial critical thought be possible in a context where the state uses similar concepts in its own discourse? Can the postcolonial narrative prevail if a country actually does break free from dependency, or will we find that postcolonialism invariably needs its victims? In other words: can the postcolonial mode of thought be useful for understanding China at all, or do we need something else?

This issue of *InterDisciplines* is the result of two workshops on »Postcolonialism and China« held in Bielefeld in 2016 and in Cologne in 2017.[6] We initially started to organize the workshops out of a feeling of dissatisfaction toward our disciplines, especially sociology: we were dissatisfied with research on China that was often based on only superficial regional knowledge and an application of ready-made methods or theories developed in the West, and that was largely conducted in ignorance of the depths of already existing sinological research. But we were equally dissatisfied with many works from (Anglo-American) China studies, which we perceived as often patronizing and dismissive toward Chinese scholars as well as hostile toward the government of the People's Republic of China. In contrast to such perspectives, we hoped to experiment with new narratives that could help us move away from what we felt to be the »old« framework of thought: the sociological idea of diffusion and convergence that Vukovich has termed the discourse of »becoming-

6 The workshops were funded by the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology and the Global South Studies Center in Cologne, respectively.

sameness« (Vukovich 2012); the political idea of a clash or confrontation between a liberal »world« and an authoritarian, local, and all-too-often »evil« Chinese state; and the narrative of a mysterious »middle kingdom« that believes itself to be »everything under heaven« and can only be grasped within an ancient local history. Instead, we hoped, postcolonial approaches could help us focus on simultaneities of (asymmetric) entanglement (Randeria 1999) and difference (Bhabha 2012, 49–51) in a way that takes Chinese claims to change the world order of modernity seriously without depicting it as threat to »Western civilization.«

The articles assembled in this issue clearly show that colonial modernity and the urge to overcome it can be seen as the common thread that has connected various systems and regions in China since the Opium Wars—a thread that allows us to connect attempts to »learn« or »create« modernity and nation, to secure self-determination and dignity, and to enunciate Chinese identities in the modern world. It can also connect China's history with global history by regarding the Opium Wars as colonial wars, informed by exchanges of knowledge and power practices between various colonial projects, thus placing China within a colonial and later within a postcolonial world. In short: postcolonialism, if reflected and adapted properly, may allow us to link various different disciplines and areas of interest with each other as well as with important concerns of many people in China, and it can also reconnect historical, sociological, and sinological knowledge.

Postcolonial concerns with China

Our aspiration to use a postcolonial perspective raises the question what such a postcolonial perspective might actually be. Postcolonialism is clearly not a finished and coherent »theory« in the sense of a system of concepts such as Marxism or systems theory, and it cannot be reduced to any one theory or attributed to any single scholar. Rather, postcolonialism is a shared *concern* that revolves around a struggle to point out the social and epistemic legacies of colonialism and informal empire in order to overcome it.

To put the postcolonial concerns of this issue in a nutshell, it might be best to understand them as revolving around three central topics: Firstly, a *heritage of colonialism* structures modernity even after the fall of the colonial empires. This means on the one hand the influence of memories of colonialism in China and on the other hand the power of colonial modernity (Barlow 1997b) as forces that shape the structures of modernity until today. Postcolonial scholars believe that modernity was born from and shaped by colonialism that connected the globe long before the industrial revolution (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Cooper and Stoler 1997; see also Pomeranz 2000) and that it still carries and reproduces at its core asymmetries grounded in this colonial origin (Moraña et al. 2008; Quijano 2000). The contributions of this issue reflect on this heritage of colonialism from a postcolonial perspective. For example, both Lili Zhu and Marius Meinhof try to make sense of the deep impact of colonialism on Chinese modernity: They show how colonialism has given birth to new discourses that are not entirely »Western« or »Chinese,« but that nevertheless transport a heritage of colonialism and keep it alive in modern Chinese society.

Secondly, this issue tries to deal with the asymmetric, often Eurocentric structure of *knowledge production* in the world. Postcolonial scholars argue that colonial power was and is rooted in the production of orientalist knowledge and its internalization by the colonized (Chakrabarty 2000; Said 1978), including the academic problem of »asymmetric ignorance« (Chakrabarty 1992) and the tendency to build theories of modernity solely on Euro-Amercian experiences (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). This is true for China, too, as the power to define scholarly »truth« in international debates is still held by authors in some centers in the Anglo-American world. If any group in China wants to enunciate a modernity with Chinese characteristics, then they must do so within a world still dominated by an Anglo-American discourse. Both Yan's and Sandfort's contributions deal with this problem and reflect on the role of academia in it. They focus on different strategies through which Chinese deal with orientalist knowledge in a subversive or complicit way, and in

doing so highlight the entanglements of knowledge production between China and »the West.«

Thirdly, a concern with *modernity* is present in all contributions to this issue of *InterDisciplines*. This concern with modernity makes our articles connect to other postcolonial debates on a fundamental level: most postcolonial scholars understand postcolonialism as a new approach to understanding modernity—they aim to contribute to a new postcolonial description of the world that challenges the old story of an ideal-typical modernity invented in Europe and disseminated around the globe. They understand modernity as an intrinsically »colonial modernity« (Barlow 1997a) as well as asymmetrically »entangled modernities« (Randeria 2002) that can neither be reduced to one single ideal type nor be separated into multiple national or regional modernities. All the contributions in this issue approach the question of modernity in a way that more or less explicitly relates to this postcolonial perspective. They all challenge to some degree the distinction between »modern« on the one side and »non-modern,« »traditional,« or even »backward« on the other. Most of them agree on a perspective that understands »modernity« as an ideological discourse rather than an analytical concept that fits reality: they ask what modernity means for China and what kind of local experiences of modernity became relevant for people in China (Zhu, Meinhof). They ask how the discourse on »modernity« is rooted in colonial notions of temporality (Meinhof), and how power asymmetries were negotiated in China before this colonial temporality was internalized (Zhu). They ask how identity can work beyond the dichotomy of tradition/modernity (Sandfort) and how it can be subsumed under a universalist ideology of modernization (Yan). And all contributions argue that articulations of modernity and modes of belonging are constructed through entanglements between different places and positions, rather than within singular cultures.

We do not claim that this is a »Chinese« perspective. *InterDisciplines* is published within the dominant (or semi-dominant) position of academic knowledge production: in English and by academics who are affiliated with the German university system, even if some of us speak Chinese as our native language. Postcolonialism is easily knowable within German

universities only because it was previously taken up by Anglo-American scholars. And it appears to us that »Postcolonialism and China« is new territory because it is marginal in the US—even though a broad discourse exists within mainland China. However, we do assert that the articles assembled here revolve around postcolonial concerns, and that these concerns connect them with concerns about colonial modernity in China. And we do claim that these concerns are shared with public debates and concerns about everyday life in China. Our postcolonial approach may view these topics from entirely different perspectives. But they still view them, and therefore share a basic concern with many Chinese.

Existing debates on postcolonialism and China

This issue of *InterDisciplines* is certainly not the »first step« in the direction of a postcolonial approach on China. Rather, a number of scholars both in China and in Anglo-American China studies have already started debates on this topic. Our issue can build on and connect to these emerging but still largely marginal debates on colonialism, postcolonialism, and colonial modernity. Postcolonialism was debated in China at the same time, or even a little before, its popularity skyrocketed in the US in the mid-1990s—and far over a decade before German scholars started to pay attention to it. Postcolonial ideas were articulated in China during the late 1980s by authors such as Zhang Yiwu, Wang Fengzhen, and Wang Yichuan, who sought to distance themselves from the occidentalism of the New Enlightenment Movement. Edward Said was first introduced by Chinese literary theorist Wang Fengzhen (1988) in his collection of interviews with fourteen renowned contemporary literary critics such as Frederic Jameson. The most intense debate about postcolonialism in China, however, emerged in the mid-1990s (Sheng 2015, 119). It started with the publication of three essays introducing postcolonial criticism in the journal *Dushu* in 1993. Zhang Kuan's (1993) *The Others in the Eyes of Europeans and Americans* pointed out that the Chinese discourse on modernizing the nation is the same as the discourse of Enlightenment, and the latter is complicit in colonialism. Zhang criticized that Chinese intellectuals' self-criticism took on a derogatory form while romanticizing and idealizing the West at the same time (see also Zhang 2000). Qian

Jun's (1993) *On Said's Review of Culture* debated a postcolonial understanding of Chinese culture. He argued that

> China's history has its own experiences, but other historic experiences are not irrelevant to it. Thus an understanding of culture is necessary to be wary of an essentialist orientation toward »difference,« but also to be wary of the interpretation of a rupture of modernity that ignores all continuities in history.[7]

Lastly, Pan Shaomei's (1993) *A New Trend of Criticism* argues, with references to Spivak, that a combination of postcolonialism with Marxism and critical feminism is needed in order to understand how Western imperialism, local masculinism, nationalism, and class struggle are interrelated.

Following these three publications, an intense debate of postcolonial theories and postcolonial topics took place in China, often only loosely related to Said and the early articles in *Dushu* (Sheng 2007; see on this: Song 2000). Today, the postcolonial discourse in China is so vast and heterogeneous that it cannot possibly be introduced here. For example, in the database of China Academic Journals alone, we found 391 hits for »postcolonial« (后殖民) in articles published in 2016, and some related articles from the turn of the millennium have been cited hundreds of times and downloaded thousands of times. A large number of Chinese scholars devoted themselves to a comprehensive study of postcolonial studies (Luo and Liu 1999; Wang 1999; Wang and Xue 1998, Xu 1996; Zhang, Jingyuan 1999). In addition, numerous translations of Anglo-American works have been published since then.

Soon, this debate left the confines of the works by Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, and started to include concerns within Chinese academia, so that new (or partly new) topics could emerge. The most influential and controversial topic among them was probably that of Chineseness. Several famous postcolonial scholars presented the idea that Chinese should give

7 »中国的历史有其自身经验，但亦非同其它历史经验毫不相干。因而对文化的理解既要谨防本质主义›差异‹取向，又要谨防割断历史的断裂性›现代‹诠释.«

up the Western colonial concept of »modernity« and rather search for their own »Chineseness« as a new model of improvement and desire for change, embedded in everyday practices rather than in Enlightenment theory (Zhang et al. [1994] 2003, see also Meinhof in this issue). The ideal postcolonial scholar should strive to become a »post-intellectual« who does not advise the people, but observes them from the margins, trying to help put in words the Chineseness they articulate in their daily practices (Zhang 1994a, 1994b). A second important topic was that of self-colonization of Chinese intellectuals. For example, Lydia Liu (Liu 1999) criticized negative depictions of Chinese national characteristics during the May Fourth Movement for reproducing colonial stereotypes. In a more nationalistic fashion, Cao Shunqing bemoaned the loss of Chinese intellectuals' ability to articulate themselves in their own language and based on their own theoretical concepts, which would make it impossible for Chinese to have a »voice« that can be heard in the world (Cao and Li 1996). In a similar fashion, but less concerned with international politics, Zhang Yiwu criticized intellectuals for self-inflicted othering (他者化), which would emerge from describing Chinese culture entirely by references to a Western culture: this would, Zhang claimed, compel Chinese to place themselves at a spatial and temporal distance to modernity (Zhang 1994b) and to portray themselves in a manner adapted to Western stereotypes and tastes (e.g., the critique of Zhang Yimou's filmmaking by Zhang, Yiwu 1993). There are many more important topics in postcolonial debates in China, such as postcolonial debates on translation theory and the Chinese language (Ge 2002; Luo 2004).[8] Recently, new topics seem to emerge, such as the question whether China can be seen as »colonial« (in the Qing Dynasty) or »neocolonial« (today). For example, a recently published paper by Yue Shengsong (2017) uses postcolonial approaches to analyze descriptions of China as a »neocolonial power« as a discourse aimed at affirming US hegemony and neglecting the possibility of symmetric South-South cooperation between China and Africa. Due to the immense number of publications and diverse debates, we cannot give an overview over these topics. However, we find that

8 See also a brief debate in English by Chan (2004).

much of the debates revolve around concerns of orientalism, Chineseness, self-colonization, and China's »voice« in the world, for which the above-mentioned topics provided foundational impulses.

These debates have been highly contested and criticized from the beginning. Chinese scholars publishing in English have criticized Chinese postcolonial critique for being nativist and affirmative to the existing regime (Sheng 2007; Wang 1997; Xu 2001; L. Zhang 1999). Within mainland China, this criticism has been voiced, too, but paradoxically its main thrust was directed against importing theory from Western academia (Shao 1994; Zhao 1995, 2000). Authors such as Said, and more so Spivak and Bhabha, were seen as conducting a discourse of Anglo-American academia that debated migrants' problems in the West and that were not to be applied in China.[9] Unfortunately, these often polemic critiques have disguised the strengths of the postcolonial discourses in China. Postcolonial works have indeed influenced popular nationalist literature such as »China can say no« (Song et al. 1996) and »Unhappy China« (Song 2009), which polarized scholarship and loaded postcolonialism with strong emotional elements. But they have also influenced the non-nationalist critical discourses of the »new left« (e.g., Wang 1998, 2014).[10] However, almost none of the original postcolonial works have been translated into English, and they are largely ignored both by postcolonial studies and China studies. The authors of this introduction have met several renowned China specialists who believe that China has had no postcolonial debate at all. Even the writings of the overseas Chinese scholars mentioned above have almost never debated postcolonial arguments in detail, but rather issued one-sided critiques aiming to affirm the authors' liberal positions. These critiques often obscure the fact that many of the Chinese postcolonial authors debate on a very high level of intellectual reflection and with a critical stance toward the established ideas of Indian and Anglo-American

9 This style of criticism was also employed in English-language publications and some translated works, for example by Chen (1995), Lei (2012), and Zhang, Longxi (1999).

10 The new left is discussed briefly by Vukovich in the afterword.

postcolonial authors.[11] This complete marginalization of Chinese postcolonial debates in Western scholarship cannot possibly be justified with the valid critique of postcolonialism's alignment with neo-conservative nationalism. Hence, from the point of view of a German (or Anglo-American) audience, there is a lot of work yet to do on postcolonialism and China—and much of it may be translational work.[12]

Given this weak reception and insufficient translation of postcolonial works from China, it is not surprising that pioneering Anglo-American works on postcolonialism and China have often overlooked these Chinese debates. However, these perspectives from »outside« of China, too, have often revolved around concerns similar to those of the Chinese debates. Especially three topics seem to be of main concern within the Anglo-American literature. Firstly, a large debate has emerged around the concept of colonial modernity (Barlow 1997a; Dube and Banerjee-Dube 2006; Shin and Robinson 1999) as an (Asian) modernity shaped and structured by colonial encounters. This debate, which was triggered in 1993 in the journal *positions*, has made a debate about postcolonialism and China possible in the first place because it was the first to explore the possibility of using the concept of »colonialism« in respect to East Asia and specifically to China. Most importantly, the concept of »colonial modernity« has introduced the idea that even without one single, coherent

11 We found just one article in English that discusses the substance of postcolonial works rather than the political alignments of its authors (Xu 1998)—this article, too, is written from a classical »Enlightenment« perspective directed against postcolonialism, but it outlines the arguments of postcolonial works in China before criticizing them.

12 Authors writing on postcolonialism in China who were translated into English include Wang Hui (1998; 2014) and Wang Ning (2010). They have, however, attached their writing more closely to the »classical« leftist argumentations of the so called »new left« in China. Nevertheless, especially Wang Hui's translated works may provide a glimpse of the way in which Chinese postcolonial and critical authors argue, as he, too, is concerned with the questions what »China« is (e.g., H. Wang 2014) and what new kind of modernity this China may approach in the future (e.g., H. Wang 1998, 2009).

colonialism at the »national« level in China, colonial structures could be understood as the broader context in which the multiple, contradicting forms of empire were shaped. Secondly, some influential scholars have explicitly picked up postcolonial approaches in order to debate the origin of Chinese historicist and modernist narratives (Shih 2001; Yang 2011) as well as their relationship to Chinese nationalism (Duara 1995; in comparison to India: Seth 2013). Thirdly, there are many works debating orientalism and China. On the one hand, works on the production of orientalist knowledge within China have contributed to a theory of orientalism, for example by showing that self-orientalization can be a strategy of empowerment for Chinese elites (Dirlik 1996), or that the glorification of the West can sometimes serve as a counter-discourse against local governments (Chen 1995). More recent research has warned against a hasty application of theoretical concepts by showing some majority-minority relations in China's history for which the notion of orientalism is actually not appropriate (Wilcox 2016). On the other hand, there is a long tradition of critiques of Western representations of China, which stretches back even before the time of Said's orientalism (e.g., Isaacs 1958; Jones 2001; Vukovich 2012). In addition to raising critical awareness of the political ideologies underlying Western representations of China, these works have shown the shifting and often ambivalent nature of orientalist discourse: orientalism has not created generations of exoticizing depictions of China that are always the same, but rather a discursive power structure in which images of China could shift according to political and economic demands within the centers of knowledge production—including, as Vukovich has famously argued, a shift from exoticization toward discourses of »becoming-sameness« (Vukovich 2012).

These existing debates provide a basis for debating postcolonialism and China. We nevertheless feel that the works accessible to Western scholars are scarce and fragmented, spread across various disciplines, and rarely represented in historical and sociological debates. The Chinese works are large in number, but many of them are not yet recognized in Western academia. As of now, debating postcolonialism and China in European

academia therefore remains pioneering work that cannot yet build on an established discourse. Hence, »postcolonialism and China« remains a concern with a still open, vague path to be taken—a path on which we aspire to take another step, and to which we hope to draw some attention especially in European academia.

The structure of this issue

The contributions to this issue of *InterDisciplines* are related to these postcolonial writings in different ways. Some build extensively on parts of this literature, such as Meinhof's and Yan's contributions. Others, such as Zhu and Sandfort, have only adopted a general postcolonial perspective without debating the above-mentioned works in detail. However, all the contributions are brimming with the feeling of »discovery«—discovering a new perspective, a new theoretical concept, or a new concern, or putting something we have tried to articulate for a long time in a nutshell. As editors, we have embraced this feeling of »discovery,« and we have encouraged the authors to make bold theoretical claims and to dare to go against the mainstream of argumentation in sociology and history as well as in China studies. The result of our work—those articles that passed the processes of paper selection and peer review—are four independent articles on different topics and different times.

The first article by **Lili Zhu** points at the probably most important yet often ignored aspect of colonialism in China: the ability to use violence. She argues that after the end of the first Opium War a sudden shift in the perception of war took place among officials in the coastal provinces when they tried to make sense of their country's defeat in war. They attributed their loss mainly to the Western powers' superior weapons—and in consequence tried to buy stronger weapons and later to »Westernize« the military. While today many scholars call these officials' reform attempts »modernization movements,« the nineteenth-century officials did not interpret the conflict as an encounter between a modern and a backward civilization, but as a question of weapon technology and violence. This argument has a wide range of implications for the overall

narrative of this issue: Zhu not only shows how the impact of colonial war and violence structured Chinese experiences of modernity, she also shows how the victims of colonial violence could make sense of asymmetries without references to temporality or modernity and beyond colonial discourses of »civilization.«

This directly connects to the contribution of **Marius Meinhof**. Meinhof draws attention to »colonial temporality« as a discourse that interprets inequality in wealth and power in temporal terms, such as »modern« and »backward.« This colonial temporality, Meinhof argues, is pervasive in Chinese discourses and constitutes a continuity throughout the many reforms and regime changes of the twentieth century. Meinhof shows three main features of this notion of temporality: It is produced not from one single center but among different groups with differing ideologies. It places China in the middle of history, thus labeling it as backward but also creating a hope for improvement that triggers agency. And it is rooted in ideas of Chinese deficiency, which compels authors to constantly compare China to the West. Its great success comes from its ability to merge with all kinds of power projects. In arguing like this, Meinhof draws a line from the discourses of the early twentieth century to contemporary Chinese debates, transcending established binaries such as East/West or socialism/capitalism. This line connects several of the contributions to this issue: On the one hand, the notion of colonial temporality asserts the persisting relevance of Zhu's insights on colonial violence and modernity. On the other hand, it prepares the stage for Yan's following argument on the cooperation between ideological discourses in Anglo-American and Chinese political sciences.

Yan Junchen's article leaves the topic of colonialism and takes a closer look at entangled modes of knowledge production in Chinese and Anglo-American social sciences. Through an in-depth analysis of a small number of texts, Yan shows how Western liberal political scientists and Chinese social scientists supporting the government could cooperate in constructing a group of »waiqi white collar professionals.« The Western scholars constructed and essentialized this group, because their concern with democratization in China required them to have »groups« with »values«

that could be for or against democracy. Chinese social scientists took up these Western works because the idea of essentialized groups with healthy or harmful values was helpful for their concerns with regulating individuals and integrating them into the existing regime. Thus, while both groups have opposing political ideologies, they nevertheless both essentialize the »waiqi white collar professionals« and ascribe »values« to them. More than the former contributions, Yan reflects on the modes of knowledge production and on the construction of categories that accompany it—including the categories of »Western« and »Chinese« discourse. His idea of a cooperation between the two discourses reminds the authors of this issue of the futility of contrasting and separating »Western« and »Chinese« discourse, while he insists on the fact that the seemingly »same« concepts can be connected to entirely different political projects in different contexts.

Taking a different perspective on a similar problem, **Sarah Sandfort** describes the artist Hung Keung's digital artwork »Dao gives birth to one,« which attempts to break through colonial dichotomies of »Western« »modern« art versus »Chinese« »traditional« art. The Hong Kong-based artist does so by employing what Sandfort calls a »self-conscious deconstructive hybridity« that ultimately creates an individual experience of the artwork for each of the visitors, who are encouraged to position themselves in relation to the work. In doing so, her article corresponds with the other contributions on two levels: it challenges the pessimistic positions of Meinhof and Yan by showing ways in which Chinese artists invent new modes of identity and new forms of negotiating modernity beyond the poor alternatives of Western modernity or Chineseness. Interestingly, by focusing on work based on transforming Chinese characters, she shows practices beyond text that are nevertheless related to and entangled with practices of writing. This shows how the Chinese language and writing system may provide possibilities for writing multiplicity and hybridity that may in some ways be employed to undermine the fixed and essentialized concepts that colonial discourse works with.

With this, the articles in this issue cover a relatively wide range of postcolonial topics and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of a

postcolonial world. Far away from ideas of total Western domination or Chinese subjection to Western hegemony, the contributions insist on Chinese agency and even on a political desire to change the current, US-dominated world order. This agency, however, does not necessarily point in a different direction than the colonial discourse: while Zhu and Sandfort describe cases where colonial discourse was either not yet internalized or consciously challenged, Meinhof and Yan describe cases in which Chinese agency is complicit to Western and/or colonial discourses. In many of these contributions, one can clearly recognize differences in discourses that can best be expressed by references to »Chinese« and »Western« positions. But China and the West are more often entangled than separated, cooperating as often as opposing each other. Therefore, insisting on »difference« does not imply dichotomy or total separation. We hope that these various contributions can give readers in sociology and history a glimpse of a multiple and steadily contested world whose global entanglements go beyond »diffusion« and that has a future not controlled by laws of modernization or world society—a world full of conflicts and negotiations that cannot possibly be grasped by dichotomies of East versus West, but that are nevertheless shaped by stable asymmetries that all too often still revolve around advantages of the former colonizers/the West over the formerly colonized/the non-West.

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