

## Introduction to Cluster Articles

### *China and Postcolonialism*

WANG NING AND SHAOBO XIE

THE THREE ARTICLES published in this cluster on China and postcolonialism are written by three Chinese scholars who are more or less involved in the current debate on postcolonialism or postcoloniality and are interested in the empirical research on this issue: Wang Ning's essay starts with a critique of the three major Western postcolonial theorists, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, whose works are largely quoted and discussed in the Chinese context in regard to the attempt to decolonize Chinese culture and literary discourse. To him, the debate on postcolonialism or postcoloniality in current China is conducted in a way that implies misunderstanding or misreading: the misunderstanding is due to lack of ready-made Chinese translation, and the misreading to the fact that Chinese scholars and critics deliberately misconstrue these Western theorists so that some new significance (decolonizing Chinese culture and literary discourse) could be constructed. His critique might well receive some response or reaction from scholars in the West and elsewhere. Xie Ming, a Chinese scholar living in Canada, is more interested in the so-called Chinese modernity, which is often discussed as an incomplete project in the process of China's modernization; his article explores the complicated issue of postmodernity in the Chinese context in regard to the problem of postcoloniality. In Xie's view, postmodernism is redeployed by Chinese cultural intellectuals in their efforts to "project hybridized and disjunctive temporalities into the space of global progress defined by the West." Xie's position recalls the postcolonial anxieties of such figures as Homi Bhabha to move beyond the boundary between self and other, or between the universal and

the particular. Zhou Xiaoyi's article provides a subtle, round-about, carefully elaborated critique of Oscar Wilde's orientalism. His position readily evokes a certain continuity with Edward Said's rigorous questioning and dismantling of Orientalism as a Western strategy of objectifying and dominating the Orient. He examines the West's modernist or imperialist invention and violation of the Orient without using Said's terms. Wilde's aestheticist invention of Japan, Zhou argues, is informed and underwritten by the desire and logic of consumerist culture in late nineteenth-century, which dictates the convergence of aestheticism and consumerism. In Wilde's Orientalist imagination, Zhou remarks, Japan is reduced to the status of an emptied or abstracted object used to feed the Westerners' consumerist imagination.

The issues of postmodernism and postcolonialism have been attracting more and more scholars and cultural and literary critics. This is largely due to two reasons: some Chinese scholars take pains to introduce the most recent advances in Western critical study and debate in China; and both these issues are relevant to the current Chinese situation, political, economic, and cultural. Although China as a Third World country is comparatively poor economically, its political influence in international affairs cannot be ignored. Because of uneven development, China today can be best regarded as a space of co-existence of modes of production, to borrow terms from Louis Althusser and Fredric Jameson. In other words, it is mixed up with several elements: premodern in the broad rural areas as well as in the few minority regions, modern in many medium-sized and big cities and some coastal areas, and postmodern in a few coastal cities and such metropolises as Beijing and Shanghai. So one could say that postmodernity in China is a "metamorphosed" one with different versions. In much the same way, postcoloniality in China runs a defamiliarized course as well. China has never been a totally colonized country, not even during the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945), for in those years it still had large areas untouched by foreign invasions. The recent successful takeover of Hong Kong, a former British colony, especially proves that China has indeed made great advances in the process

of world-wide decolonization. But still, there are two types of postcoloniality in the Chinese context: domestically, it points to the undermining of the so-called “master narrative” of official ideology; internationally, it speaks to the deconstruction of Western imperialist dominance over world culture and discourse. That is why the issues of postmodernity and postcoloniality are engaging so many scholars of this Oriental and Third World country, which has not fully undergone the phase of modernism and has never been fully colonized.

WANG NING

*Peking University*

SHAOBO XIE

*University of Calgary*