

‘Seeing Red’: Cultural Studies, Governmentality and Utility

Abstract

This paper critically examines “the vague and baggy monster” that much CS has become, how it has travelled, and what utilitarian forms it assumes in totally different contexts and periods. The field, once known for its activist intellectualism, has been everywhere re-articulated into and doing different kinds of work: translation, literary studies, marketing, audience, policy analysis and discourse analysis.

Cultural Studies’ hybridized nature is examined in its very different manifestations in different historical contexts, national debates and objectives. One particular Chinese appropriation will be compared to early British, Australian, South American, American and South African experiences. The discourse of Cultural China in understanding a globalized market economy following the end of the Cold War is examined. The implications for global cultural studies are discussed in terms of ideological metaphors of the color ‘red’ (as in revolutions [cultural, political, guerilla] and in fashion).

Keywords

Cultural China

Cold War

travelling theory

cross-cultural

comparative cultural studies

Cultural studies (CS) – the study of power relations - emerged during the 1970s in different ways in different places, often in response to similar political-economic impulses. From 1978, President Deng Xiaoping initiated liberalization of China’s communist economy, transforming China within 20 years “from a closed backwater to an open centre of capitalist dynamism with sustained growth rates unparalleled in human history” (Harvey 2005: 1), This shift was accompanied by intense intellectual analysis – known as the ‘culture fever’ (*wenhua re*) – in the search for alternative intellectual frameworks to replace “official ideology” (Gu 1999: 389; Wang 1996; Tsou 1986).

The North-West, during this conjuncture, coinciding with the Chinese “reform era” decade (Wang 1996), adopted inflation-curbing monetary policy. Trade union power was curtailed and stagnation was tackled through deregulation and privatization. The rise of the Asian Tigers had influenced China to substitute market socialism for central planning (Harvey 2005: 1).

The Deng and communist periods background my somewhat idiosyncratic journey through which I encountered the discourse of contemporary Cultural China and some kinds of comparative literature and intercultural teaching that are academic responses to the era of China ‘going abroad’ (Sun 2016) or what Dai Jinhua (2001:170) refers to as “encountering the world”, following rescue from the Cultural Revolution. National image-building, I learned at conferences during 2016/17, is indicated by China’s hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, the 2010 World Expo and simultaneously developing intercultural academic strategies to enable this continued opening of both economy and inter-cultural negotiation.¹

The global economy was by the turn of the millennium remade in the name of neoliberalism - a set of political and economic practices that claim that quality of life is most efficiently secured by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills managed within a state framework characterized by private property rights, free markets, rule of law and free trade. This is the economic world into which China is entering. As Wang Xioapeng expresses this condition in his Manifesto:

Appeals for 'modernization' swept the nation in the mid-1980s - anyone over thirty today will remember the slogans of that time: 'separate politics and business', 'stop price-fixing', 'destroy the common pot', 'smash the iron rice bowl', and the posters declaring 'efficiency is money'. Scholars were especially keen on the maxims 'change systems of ownership', 'the market economy is the height of efficiency', and 'the market economy is modernization'. The model of modernity, naturally, was Western Europe and America (1996)).

Cultural Studies. Cross-cultural Studies

As a new-era academic traveler to China, I have in this article ring fenced my object of study quite narrowly. Theories travel and the Cultural China framework enabled me to make sense

¹ This ‘going abroad’ discourse was the gist of a keynote delivered by Zha Mingjian at the 2016 International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies conference, strongly supported by students in their cross-cultural case studies between China and the US, often signifying their own attempts as positioning of self in different and unfamiliar cultural contexts as they shifted between them.

of my first *in situ* academic encounter with the East. My topic deals with CS as it was generally understood at the 2015 and 2016 International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies (IAICS) conferences², and others organized around my 2016 visit to various universities and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). In all, I examined over conference 500 abstracts, participated in many sessions, and studied full papers where these were available. The 2015 IAICS conference, my first port of call, included studies of Gangnam (Piyawan 2015), streets (Radwanska-Williams 2015), TV drama (Tu 2015) and tourism (Zhang 2015). Most drew on discourse analysis, examining branding, marketing and translation, amongst other topics. Presenters tended to take the CS and its methods for granted, offering theorized readings. Only two presenters critically grappled with received Western concepts.. None referred to critical Chinese scholarship that broke with Mao Zedong's "political winters". The 1979-1989 'culture fever' "engaged with great eagerness in searching for an alternative intellectual framework, derived from modern Western theories in social sciences and humanities, to replace official ideology" (Gu 1999:389).

Lei Feng (2015) was struggling with Stuart Hall's (1980) "Two Paradigms" article. He was wanting to understand the incompatibilities between CS (including EP Thompson's [1963] culturalism) on the one hand and conventional cross-cultural theory on the other. CS meshes structuralism (objectivity) with anti-theory culturalism (subjectivity) into a third way that analyses human agency in relation to overarching structures of class power regulated through an economy's relations and modes of production. Cross- and inter-cultural communication studies, in contrast, is located largely within structural functionalism.

Delegates were groping for a handle on a methodologically fuzzy but theoretically very precise field that one of the founding fathers, Raymond Williams (1989:158) once described as "a vague and baggy monster". Universality, ubiquity and utility are indeed one of CS's strengths but this quality is also its weakness. In contrast, cross- and inter-cultural approaches address clearly identified research questions, in familiar scientific ways that offer guidelines to inter-cultural and cross-cultural interaction.

² Organized by IAICS and the Chinese Association for Intercultural Communication, Hong Kong Polytechnic, June 2015. The 2016 conference was held at Shanghai International University. The CASS symposium on "Difference and Dialogue in the Context of Globalisation" enabled me to interact with 37 scholars on the topic. CASS is described by Gu (1999:392) as "reform-inclined" whose early members participated in the "Emancipating Mind Movement" that criticised Maoism, supporting Deng Xiaoping's struggle within the Party (Ding 1994-113),

With the exceptions of some plenaries (e.g., House 2015), most of the theories and methods were Anglo-American (see also Gu 1996:389) applied as idealized schematas awaiting application and critical interrogation (see Chen 2009), whether of the intercultural or less so, of the CS kinds. Chinese philosophy often filtered through, but usually in ahistorical, de-contextualized and idealist forms, lacking discussion of gender relations, class analysis and forms of governance and resistance. There was little evidence of the cultural strategies adopted by intellectuals in the 1980s who simultaneously concealed and articulated “their antiofficial stance through the seemingly nonideological means of cultural expression” (Jinhua 2001: 170).

Below, I examine “the vague and baggy monster”, how CS has travelled, and what forms it adopts in totally different contexts. CS started as a critique of Thatcherist supply-side economics that privatized state assets, imposed high culture morality, and restricted money supply, resulting in the soulless commoditization of social value. The field has been everywhere similarly tamed, de-historicized and simplified into undergraduate post-Leavisite desk-top text-based curricula as the new grand narrative, often evacuated of its social change imperative.

In short, some trajectories of CS have been trapped, tamed, trivialized and thereby conceptually traumatized. As Wang Xioapeng (2005) explains with regard to an affirmative and baggy CS in China. CS must track the new ideology:

without undue respect for disciplinary restrictions or specialized fields. Above all, cultural studies must not, in the name of becoming modern, let itself be trapped in the compartmentalization of life and regulation of knowledge operative in increasingly detailed academic administrative systems, that are themselves one of the conditions of nurturing the new ideology”.

The diminishing of originary British CS as a historically informed agent of fundamental social change into a disciple of textual analysis regulated via the neoliberal academy could be conceived of as ‘red panty’ approaches³. These trajectories diligently search texts (anything

³ ‘Red panty’ is used ironically, and as *parole* (accent), to signify the sexy sub-textual regimes of signification that often mask *langue*, the structural determinations that order the capitalist political economy. My point is that much contemporary CS is frivolous rather than engaging in social praxis. This use of red also counterpoints well with the Chinese experience of the Red Guards, a different kind of policing involving connotations of red. Wang (1996) uses the metaphors of ‘yellow’ to describe accumulation via sexual activity, ‘black’ for the criminal subterranean economy and ‘red’ for the political, as they apply to the “new rich” of

that signifies) for hidden meanings, society's grubby underwear, discursive patterns of oppression, class and gender subjugation and tries to explain the hegemonic relationship between consent and coercion. The metaphor is intended to connote 'red' as signifier of different kinds of relations in the North-West vis-a-vis China. In the West hedonistic consumerism is often driven by hi-octane sexualized advertising regimes. In China during the Mao era, a contextual cultural communitarian revolution drew on connotations of red as communism that was anti-individualistic and anti-consumption for consumption-sake. Politically-inclined individuals during the 1980s who were considered more 'expert' than 'red' were excluded from revolutionary currents (Gu 1999:395). In contrast, in the West, 'red' evokes a double connotation, sexuality (individualistic, the sexually secretive come-hither) and the 'red' menace (i.e. communism).

Textualization is certainly one useful approach. But its literary adherents often insist that this is the *only* kind of CS that has merit. While original CS has always been self-reflexive, textual approaches offer close readings that do not themselves critique methods, theories or researcher position. Much contemporary CS has harnessed itself to a circularity of constructing deconstruction, argued by Yiwei Du (2015) to be parasitic and of limited value in understanding Chinese modernity. Emphasis on discourse analysis and translation offer comparative insights between the US and China especially, involving differing representations of sexuality in *Cosmopolitan* (Wu and Chung 2015), modern women professionals (Wu and Chung 2011) and in politics (Wu 2008). While such studies themselves discuss activism they are not themselves activist.

Scepticism occurs when reminders of CS as activism, one that takes sides, one that demands social justice, human rights and evidence, are offered. This latter cultural studies originary is disorientating, discomforting and always grounded. Its "critical cut" (Chambers 2014) has a political objective – in the broad sense – to change the world. CS is not just research for research sake, or deconstruction for deconstruction sake, or discourse analysis for its own sake, though in China 'culture fever' offered a critique of Chinese feudalism, via the Emancipating Mind Movement which proposed "academics for the sake of academics" as a way of securing autonomy from the political sphere (Gu 1999:422). It is much more than mere content or

Shanghai. The new class formation soon adopts conspicuous consumption and 'red' as a signifier of virility and enticement comes into play within new classes across the global economy.

discourse analysis (see Connell and Hilton 2016). Cultural Studies does matter (Grossberg 2010; Jinhua 2001), it must make a difference, never the more so in a world experiencing recurring massed intercontinental refugee crises, genocide, human trafficking, huge and growing disparities in wealth, and new forms of neo-colonialism via the globalization of the relations of production, internationalization of poverty, and often inhumane living and working conditions for the many that feed excessive consumption for the few. Add to these crises the human factor in rapid climate change and the emergence of pandemics like HIV, Ebola and Zika and the loss of potency of antibiotics. Governments thus have started planning for potential environmental and public health catastrophes that arise from war, drug immunity and post-Cold War 'marketization' and allied "interests" represented in the 'clash of civilizations' (Xia 2015).

A very schematic historical overview of global cultural studies trajectories follows:

Early British scholars constituted themselves as organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971) whose analyses of power relations, circuits of culture and text-context relationships attempted to counter the rise of Thatcherism in the context of the Cold War when capitalism and especially, Soviet communism, had lost their humanistic dimensions. British CS dismissed the conservative morality of 'social deviancy', recasting such practices as legitimate forms of collective resistance to dominant hegemonies exhibited by ordinary people who expressed themselves through subcultures of style (Hebdidge 1979).

CS's alter ego was anti-theory Thompsonian (1963) culturalism which eschewed Marxist class analysis in favor of the concept of class-as-consciousness. This workerist emphasis was similarly opposed to Stalinism and capitalism; both were considered as anti-humanist structures that reduced humans to unfeeling wage slaves.

Australian CS. Less riven by intractable class struggles during the 1990s, scholars like Tony Bennett developed an affirmative trajectory that adopted and adapted Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality into a strategy that was applied to the generation of organisational practices enabling civic management in the creation of cultural and creative industries policy (see Sterne 2002). Simultaneously, it critically examined issues of representation, identity and contexts out of which these arose. Where British CS was decidedly oppositional, Australian CS was collaborative and tactical, enabling civic developments within a much more benign

political public sphere. Australian academics operated more like technical intellectuals working in conjunction with municipal and state agencies in embedding popular access within government structures.

South American CS. Like that of the 1980s South African trajectory, this home-grown praxis took its cue from Marxist scholarship and activism, engaging in revolutionary actions against neo-fascist states. Middle class academics in these contexts did not necessarily think of themselves as organic intellectuals, but as facilitators and theologians (see Martin-Barbiero 1993) working alongside labor and social movements in identifying and enabling organic intellectuals from the working classes and lumpenproletariat to resist and overthrow state repression.

American CS, initially indebted to the British derivation, lost much of its activist and political economic dimension as it crossed the seas becoming a text-bound close reading activity. Such topics confirm oppressive red panty regimes but eschew an affirmative dimension, an essential ingredient in the work of any social movement.

The Cultural China approach. Much published work tends towards translation studies and discourse analysis, especially applied to advertising, business linguistics, branding and understanding the idea of markets, as the economy shifted after 2002 from *danwei's* pre-marketization era characterized by “high accumulation for the nation and low consumption of the mass” (Feng 2013: 61). Overlaid on these structural cultural economy imperatives read through linguistic, discursive and business frames are attempts to make sense of the other - Western culture, economy, and industry and consumerist ways of doing things that interpellate citizens as individualistic and hedonistic.

My impression is that Cultural China scholars are attempting to address a number of simultaneous questions (Wu 2008) as the society shifts from a state-owned means of production to a market economy in a globalizing world that is extracting the country from its previous isolation, interfacing it with other “dominant cultures” globally (Shi-xu 2008:244). Questions arising include:

- understanding marketization, financial integrations and associated practices of consumerism and market economies through a study of Western theories and examples of branding?⁴
- How the study of advertising explains shifts in the contemporary Chinese political economy as it globalizes.
- How Chinese scholars interact with American analytical discourses trying to make sense of a different imaginary?
- What degree of cultural defensiveness is evident when discussing these questions in China? (See Shi-xu 2012)
- What critical frameworks have been systematically imported into the cultural China discussion to mobilize the dialectic better (e.g., Wang 1996; Jinhua 2001; Gu 1999).

These questions are flagged as driving an emergent CS strand as articulated at the 2015 and 2016 IAICS conferences, and from the broader literature now emerging from Chinese cultural scholarship, particularly in the areas of business and advertising studies, identity and globalization. From an analysis of conference abstracts Chinese students studying at US universities and in China, leveraged CS to:

- a) reposition themselves from unspeaking national subjects to speaking global subjects, even if through Western frames of analysis, in order to address both Chinese and human problems beyond the binary limitations of either Oriental or Occidental. Multiculturalist in-betweenness' research position is proposed (Shi-xu 2008: 248);
- b) draw on local intellectual legacies when engaging and taming "the rampant generalization of Eurocentric concepts and values" (ibid p.248);
- c) link the historical Cultural China with the economic in a period of change;
- d) help reposition China from product fakery and counterfeit culture to creative industries in a regulated world (Yang 2016), and;

⁴ As China enters the capitalist economy and is increasingly influenced by the culture-ideology of consumerism, studies discussed by Wu (2008:100) reveal distinctive changes in Chinese advertisements: from promoting values such as family and tradition to promoting modern Western values such as hedonism and self-fulfilment. The different value systems are beginning to overlap and be used in mutually complementary ways.

- e) engage in cultural transformation that rearticulates the terrain of global relations from that of cultural imperialism - the domination of one geographically bound national culture by another - to the amorphousness characteristic of supranational imagined communities where the market is regulated by international agreements.

The ‘Cultural China’ (usually thus capitalized) imagination of culture equality is different to the above mentioned national derivations, in that it has been from the outset geared towards understanding how to make meaning of, and harness global market-driven economies. It does this through the study of branding and TV characters as cultural indicators of a “deterritorialized” and “de-ideologized” China that admits difference but talks of a single homogeneous society. “Marxism is slipping away in favour of a critique of Confucian capitalism”, a kind of “Daoist libertarianism” that has the protection of communist state ideology. Capitalism, under these circumstances, cannot “improve anything other than living standards (Kelen 2009:297; Wang 2005:8). Cultural China remains the affirmative discursive mechanism examined through a kind of CS -framed structural functionalism.

This approach is both affirmative, but also defensive, and culturally re-assuring, a trajectory superficially similar to the Australian re-articulation of governmentality as a way of moving CS beyond critique and into usefulness. Similarly, in South Africa during the 1990s, an affirmative CS drawing on the Australian cultural policy impetus contributed to the forging of national policy. This is not only a form of intercultural communication, but more crucially of inter-cultural, inter-generational and inter-periodized negotiation. During the same decades American and British CS came under siege from Authority, and remained unrealized, in opposition, though British CS remains defiantly activist.

Cultural China is about ‘fitting’ in, moving industrially from ‘Faked in China’ to ‘Created in China’ (Yang 2016). China wants to globally integrate economically, but to retain an imagined local homogeneous wisdom. Red panty CS must be as vigorously examined as should be the Cultural Revolution and the *Little Red Book*, and the Red Guards who dismantled state structures, and who enforced proletarianization and what was later to be denounced as ‘left deviationism and a cult of personality’.

Responding to post-World War II anxiety, and like British CS, the socially alienating effects of Soviet communism on the one hand and of Western liberalism on the other, Mao’s also

rejected “the technological subjugation of humanity in the eras of mass production” (McDonnell 2014). The prominence of the book was ensured by limiting or cancelling the printing of other influential work by Karl Marx, one by Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and Vladimir’s Lenin’s *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*. Historically-induced silences that were imposed so as “not to interfere with the learning of *Quotations*” (McDonnell 2014) killed the social dialectic, preventing historicization, later reactivated by Wang (1996), Jihua (2001) and Gu (1999), amongst others. The Red Book moment responded to the coming of age of the postwar generation; the unresolved legacies of totalitarianism; the disenchantment with state socialism and liberalism; the Cold War; the unfulfilled promises of national liberation in the post-colonial world; the globalization of capitalism; and the radical appropriation of popular culture. Where early British CS ruptured structuralism and culturalism, *The Little Red Book* exploited “fissions and fusions” within and between American capitalism, Soviet socialism, and the non-aligned world (Cook 2014: xv). The Sino-Soviet split was key to understanding the Cultural Revolution.

Where *The Little Red Book* embodied the Maoist assault on Soviet socialism (McGuire, 2014: 163), China being “a perfect negative image of the Soviet Union” (p159), the de-emphasis on education resulted in mass ignorance (p. 156), a consequence of the book’s attempt to rejuvenate leftism (p.147). The book was a weapon that could be used against re-Stalinization following the liberalization period that characterized the Khrushchev government (p. 154). In contrast, British CS aimed to disrupt conceptual continuities, to effect critical cuts in what’s taken for granted, and to question Authority, as did the students in Tiananmen Square, the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong, and Falun Gong, movements that cast shadows over hegemonic practices, experiences that should be studied and critiqued for what they can teach us (see, e.g., Binyan et al 1989).

Linked to the idea of Cultural China is Cultural Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposed by Shixu (2012; 2013) as a way of reconnecting Subject with Object (to use the European Enlightenment phrase) within a Confucian context where language is “considered as limited in meaning, asymmetrically limitless, where taciturnity, intuition and reinterpretation are central to communication (p. 487). For Chinese/Asians, the Western model is one-sided, vested in the speaker/meaning, whereas for Chinese/Asians, the hearer is (or should be) part of the relationship, though Mao’s rule cautions this claim. Research is not just about finding out the hidden ideologies, intentions, or indeed the social functions of the speaker’s speech/text but

also about what and how the hearer and the researcher, can and should make of it, and how society or culture should react to it (Shi-xu 2012:489). This approach perhaps remains researcher-centric, as the subjects can speak, be heard, but they cannot decide, be openly deviant or engage in open resistance. They engage in different kinds of counterfeit resistance, product fakery, Intellectual Property Right (IPR) theft and copyright resistance. This was tolerated by the global regulatory institutions in an isolated society, but not now in Cultural China that must adhere to international agreements (Yang 2016).

Western applications tend to eliminate language limitlessness and the hearer also. Red panty frameworks that study society's metaphorical secret underwear and sub-texts question the effects of capital in representation, but do not tame it, manage it or retain a humanistic ethic – the CS third way. Brands have become fetishized in the Marxist sense - they have taken on totemistic lives of their own, filling imaginary ontological lacks and needs.

Broader Chinese CS is *not* red panty CS. Like Australian CS it offers a way of 'finding out', enculturating, shaping intellectual processes, rather than being simply applied as a practice of resistance⁵. This affirmative CS emerged as China moved from traditionalism, *danwei* ("work unit", relating to state or collectively-owned factories), through an alienating collective industrialized modernity into a hyper-individuated consumerist-led postmodernity, and as a way of navigating out of one of the worst "ideologizing battle" (Ouyang 2000:10) in planetary history as exemplified in the Cultural Revolution. Red panty postmodernism and *The Little Red Book* are perhaps two sides of the same coin, both distracting, both all-consuming and each in their own ways individuating into very different kinds of deterministic collectives/markets/constituencies. Each has or had their own kinds of guards, who act[ed] differently. But in both trajectories, the enemy is constructed as bourgeois tendencies which is why advertising under Mao was restricted to propaganda of the social collective, while red panty analyses aim at exposing individualist consumerist tendencies leveraged by a different kind of collective - the corporation. Both discourses are characterized by sloganeering, quotations and exhortations.

⁵ Few IAICS papers studied civil disobedience, such as Yang and Kang (2015) on the Taiwan Sunflower movement. None dealt with the Umbrella Movement. At the 2016 IAICS conference, the chair of a session deflected a question from a Philippine scholar (Taguba II 2016) about whether similar studies on resistance in China exist. Some students whom I encountered in my travels also exhibited timidity, though I would not characterize their caution as "political clientelism" (Gu 1999:426).

Danwei advertising refers to the descriptive promotion of work units, which supplied their members with daily needs, sporadically promoted through ‘necessity advertising’ (medicines, appliances, wristwatches) (Feng 2014: 77) rather than hailing individual consumers, whose individual needs were subordinated to the mass, the nation, and heavy industry (p. 60-1). After 2002, advertising took on more familiar Western visual contours hailing affective responses (p. 127). Indeed, Wendy Feng’s very detailed discourse analysis of two newspapers separated between *danwei* and marketization eras confirms that “advertising serves as a battlefield of the rival ideologies in China” as the nation shifted from communism to consumerism (p. 149).

The state aims to reduce its presence from the market and quotidian social spheres, that is to move from *danwei*, to enabling the growth of civil society institutions, a neo-liberal society, and permit advertising, banned during the Cultural Revolution as being associated with corrupt capitalism (Feng 2014: 20-1). The methods applied to analyzing advertising genres as representative of transitional political economic arrangements however, is not that common in Western CS and certainly not business studies. CDA remains confined to the “textual space” (Feng 2014: 19) though it incorporates the dimension of power.

Making Sense of it All

Cultural studies has emerged in different places, at different times, to address similar and different questions. In each case, specific methods, theories and pragmatisms emerge that are both different and similar. The de-Westernizing trajectory is debating the spatialization of British-derived conceptual footprints (e.g., Willems 2014). While interventions from African scholars, who have feet in both hemispheres, multiple ontologies and scrambled development periodizations have rewritten CS’s very different African origins and global negotiations (see Tomaselli et al, 2013). South American and Cuban approaches have developed out of anti-Western imperialist frameworks. The Cuban model broke in 1966 with static Soviet theory alleged to be Yankee aligned (Kronenberg 2009:259; 2011).

My overall impression of Chinese CS is that it is technically very sophisticated but that it also some eschews self-critique (see also Shi-xu 2013:5). Like with most solid discourse analyses, a preferred method, scholars go where the method takes them. This seems to be a strategic decision given the political nature of that society and the sanctions that maintain it, even as they soften in the era of marketization. As Wendy Feng concludes, with implicit reference to the national trauma imposed by the Cultural Revolution, “... this strong inclination to avoid

ideologizing tendency, discourse analysis in China also tends to avoid linking the discourse events with macro ideologies” (2013: 150).

This “de-ideologizing route” contains the strategic seeds of its own cultural opacity: a glocalization perspective of Cultural China entails that research is rendered in the service of cultural solidarity and prosperity in the global context. For example, 1) this occurs by recognizing that cultural boundaries are dynamic and socially constructed and have become increasingly interconnected and interdependent; and 2) by trying to understand how the global/Western/modern elements intertwine, coincide and reinvent as well as compete with the local/Eastern/traditional elements in the discourses of Cultural China (Wu 2008: 6).

Where British, French, Italian and early South African CS confronted the issue of ideology, and sought not only to de-familiarize (or deconstruct it), they also sought to mobilize ideological discourses in opposing oppression. The impression conveyed throughout Feng’s (2014) and Wu’s (2008) books is there safety in remaining within the ‘textual space’, much as is the case with Western literary approaches claiming a CS mantle. However, a *Critical Arts* special issue on media discourses and cultural globalization does critically examine processes and products of competition, conflict and struggle between global/Western/modern and local/Chinese/traditional forces, as indicated in media (Wu and Mao 2011), taking the analysis into the realm of critique of structure, culture and practice.

A systematic critical phase emerging from the smoke of Tianamin did venture beyond the safety of the circumscribed textual space. It was similar to the activist conceptual ethos as bequeathed by Cold War British, Latin American and African CS. Chinese CS not only critiques methodological and theoretical assumptions and taken-for-granted embodied in the chauvinistic idea of Cultural China, but broke through the hermeneutic circle of strategic textual safety, though the IAICS approaches need to critically examine not only Chinese histories but also that of Western branding, which itself has become a fetishized, highly ideologized, totemized set of beguiling discourses that massively over-emphasize the ecstasies promised by hyper-individuated over-consumption at the expense of the broader collective.

Where the collective, signified by the ‘nation’ aims to counter global brands by building Chinese brands regulated by IPR, the counterfeit culture, ‘faked in China’ remains, though is perhaps less visible. Counterfeit is a form of popular resistance, countering state sanctioned

projects, defying globalizing IPR regimes, while at the same time subverting them, acting like a “pre-modern’ bandit” through the “adoption of the ‘postmodern’, post-Fordist modular mode of production (Yang 2016: 172).

Like early CS, which sought a middle way between capitalism and communism, between structuralism and culturalism, and between coercion and consent, the Cultural China idea debates and influences contemporary processes in positive and socially responsible ways. Critical cut CS emerges in moments of transition, it petrifies in periods of social stability, and academics too often find security in forms that are reified, ossified and de-activated in our neoliberal world.

A discussion of ‘Middle East’ CS generated studies that offered what its guest editor called “a third voice” that speaks in a “third space” that brings diversity of experience and history into a dialogue (Jayyusi 2007:2). This metaphor enables me to connect the kinds of CS evident at the 2015, 2016 IAICS and CASS conferences - comparative Chinese-US studies of role representations in TV dramas and sitcoms - with the works discussed above. Insider-outsider relations are at work here. The inside (China) studies tended to be defensive, those emanating from Chinese citizens outside tend to use CS as a form of intercultural negotiation and cross-cultural examination. This is a positive development as, unlike the Islamic theory of communication that is based on the exceptionalist idea of ‘authentic culture’ (Khiabany 2007), these student-led studies recovered - if implicitly - a George Gerbner *et al* (2002)-type cultural indicators approach that enables them to cope in both US and Chinese societies and in-between.

China is at a crossroads. It has significantly improved living standards, retaining political centralization. CS in China has a positive role to play as did it in 1990s South Africa, when it was briefly on the winning side (Tomaselli 2012), just prior to a regression into neo-fascist governmentality, legitimated by an imagined and brutal patriarchal pre-modern, pre-enlightenment traditionalism in contestation with a globally connected economy and postmodern condition. The tensions characterizing both countries are similar in the current conjuncture. Where South Africa is now sliding backwards with besieged democratic institutions but a corrupt and declining economy, China is inching forwards without Western-style democracy but with a growing economy.

In Conclusion: How Vague, How Baggy?

Articulations of CS in different contexts, historical conjunctures, for different purposes, can be of oppositional, critical and also aid in governmentality. This is the utility of the field, its flexibility, in that it evades being fixed into a single position. The trajectory with which I have been concerned is the narrower Cultural China framework and its associated methodologies as applied to an understanding of marketization, branding and globalization, while retaining indigenous philosophical emphases. At IAICS conferences what is labelled as CS is in other contexts named as communication studies of good old positivist kinds. The different orientations I encountered included the Shanghai School of literary, arts and transmedia⁶, and the philosophical approach promoted by Hiumin Jin at CASS. The trajectory offered by the Shanghai International Studies University's School of English Studies leverages the discipline of comparative national literatures to project soft power as a means of understanding 'target cultures' in reframing China's international image.

At root, cultural studies' strength is its dialectical and historical engagement with the world. To lose this interaction would be to lose its utility. Writing this paper has been a voyage of discovery for me. Its briefer presentation at IAICS 2016, Shanghai and at Hangzhou Normal University to a group of PhD discourse analysis students was instructive. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, but, the journal's two reviewers were less convinced. They questioned my use of the metaphor of 'red panty', labelling it "sexist"; now I hope better semiotically elaborated. But they did direct me to the critical historical literature that I had previously not found; neither had I been alerted to this literature by any of the hundreds of scholars with whom I had interacted at the IAICS, Shanghai and CASS conferences. The

⁶ As anywhere, different approaches exist. In film is the work of Mao Sihui, amongst others. Perhaps the most paradigmatically coherent group that draws on familiar Western scholars is the literary, arts and new media trajectory (Tuo Li (李陀), Xiaoming Wang (王晓明), Dongfeng Tao (陶东风), Yuanpu Jin (金元浦), Xian Zhou (周宪) and Huiming Jin (金惠敏). At Shanghai University is Xiaoming Wang (王晓明), Chunling Guo (郭春林) and Dongchao Min (闵冬潮) Xiaoming Yi (易晓明) and Jun Zeng, named as "Shanghai school of cultural studies" by YIM Choon-sung (林春城), Mokpo National University, Korea. He edited a book named as "Shanghai school of cultural studies". Discussions by these scholars occurred at the "New style of life: Education and Cultural Studies international conference" held by Beijing Normal University and Beijing Language and Culture University on 24-25 June, 2016. The Beijing Academy of Social Sciences' 2016 International Symposium on 'Difference and Dialogue in the Context of Globalisation' and the Fifth Forum on East-West Studies Program 6-7 July. CASS revealed a strongly Western philosophical engagement in developing a parallel intellectual strategy relating to China's speaking position in a world in which it is becoming a global power. This too, is a different paper for another time.

metaphor of academics as travelers learning things on the way, is one that could be very usefully developed methodologically.⁷

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⁷ See Critical Arts special issue, "researchers as Tourists and Travellers, 26(3), 2012.

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