

## **Deconstructing Singular Modernity: The Modernization of China's Past and Present**

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The issue of modernity with regard to the construction of Chinese modernity, an alternative modernity or modernities, has become a key theoretical topic in both the Chinese and international contexts. Since in the Chinese context, Fredric Jameson's definition of modernity is most influential and controversial, the paper starts with elaborations and discussions related to his book *Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (2002). Although the author largely appreciates Jameson's association of modernity with postmodernity in today's context, he does not agree with the totalitarian conclusion that there is such thing as the so-called "singular

modernity.” To the author, there are different types of modernity that appear in different regions. In this sense, modernity should be thought in plural form, that is, there are different forms of modernity or modernities, not only in different times, but also in different regions. The author, then, will deal with the birth of modernity in the Chinese context in the last turn of the century, arguing that modernity in China is a “translated” concept, or more exactly, a “culturally translated” political and intellectual project. Modernity in China has undergone three periods:

1. as a project of enlightenment from 1919 to 1949;
2. as a totalitarian Maoist discourse from 1949 to 1976;
3. now as a “glocal” narrative category pointing to an alternative modernity of Chinese characteristics.

The birth of Chinese modernity has actually deconstructed the totalitarian singular modernity paving the way for the birth of pluralistic modernity or modernities in the global context.

As we all know, in the current Chinese as well as international cultural and theoretic context, modernity and globalization are two of the most heatedly discussed or even debated theoretic topics with regard to postmodernity in the age of globalization. One might raise these questions: why should we Chinese humanities scholars deal with these topics with such enthusiasm? Has modernity really brought about great benefits to the Chinese people as well

as humanities intellectuals? If we were confronted with these questions decades ago, we might well be puzzled and unable to answer them in an adequate way. But now, we cannot avoid the fact that modernity has long been with us, not only bringing China closer to modernization, but also influencing our way of life, our form of thinking and our academic research, as well as stimulating our material and intellectual production. Since we are now in an age of globalization, modernity has taken on a new look, or appeared as a sort of “modernity at large,”<sup>1</sup> or of a post-modern modernity, and even undergone a sort of splitting: from one singular modernity into different forms of modernity or modernities. In this sense, we are able to reconstruct an alternative modernity in the Chinese context in such an age of globalization. Obviously, these two are Western concepts brought into China through translation and frequently quoted and discussed by Chinese literary and cultural studies’ scholars in our theoretical debates. That is why we should start with translation.

### **TRANSLATION: FROM INTERLINGUAL TO INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE**

Although translation has been in existence for thousands of years, it is translation in its modern and postmodern

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1 As for the so-called “modernity at large,” or the modernity in the age of globalization, cf. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

sense that has attracted so great attention from scholars of both humanities and social sciences. When dealing with translation now, many people might well question whether we have deformed the basic meaning of translation in recent years, or whether translation itself has changed so much that we cannot even grasp the authenticity of translation. It is true that in the contemporary era, especially after the impact of the so-called “cultural turn” in translation as well as translation studies, the domain of translation has largely been expanded: from the originally pure “interlingual rendition” to the current “intercultural” or “intersemiotic” translation or transformation. Although different theorists have different opinions about the definition and function of translation, translation is, in the final analysis, inevitable to people’s daily life and interpersonal communication, without which men can only isolate themselves from the outside world, especially in the current age of globalization. Obviously, the most frequently used means for cultural communication is undoubtedly *language*. Just as Robert Young sums up, “As a practice, translation begins as a matter of intercultural communication, but it also always involves questions of power relations, and of forms of domination. It cannot therefore avoid political issues, or questions about its own links to current forms of power. No act of translation takes place in an entirely neutral space of absolute equality.”<sup>2</sup> I should

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2 Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 140.

say that it is particularly true of the Chinese case if we deal with the dynamic function of translation in constructing modern Chinese literature and culture under the Western influence. In the Chinese context, translation has not only brought advanced Western science and technology and democracy in China, but also brought cultural and political modernity in China's intellectual circles stimulating China's political and cultural transformation. That is, translation of culture cannot avoid being marked with ideological tendencies. In short, translation practice is always restricted to other factors than mere language.

But after all, translation is first a technique with which meaning in one language is rendered into another, and vice versa, thereby we have the so-called interlingual translation, which is always regarded as "translation proper."<sup>3</sup> But how shall we redefine and evaluate an ideal and most relevant translation? This question has long been heatedly discussed and debated ever since translation came into being. Almost all translators have tried to approach the original meaning expressed in the source language, and all the translation theorists have tried to develop a sort of theory which could be applied as a universally recognized guiding principle by practical translators. But almost all of them have found it really hard to reach the

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3 Cf. Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet ed., *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 145.

plane of “faithfulness” as the meaning in the source language is almost impossible to convey faithfully in the target language for numerous reasons, among which cultural factors stand out most conspicuously. Even if there is something like “faithfulness” or fidelity, it is still relative, for absolute faithfulness can never be achieved. It is true that when dealing with the issue of translation in its contemporary sense, scholars from cultural perspectives are most influenced by Walter Benjamin and later by Jacques Derrida. If we recognize that Benjamin’s challenging essay<sup>4</sup> on the task of the translator did anticipate a deconstructive approach to translation, then Derrida’s attempt has paved the way for the legitimacy of a deconstructive thinking of translation as well as modernity.

According to Derrida’s translation theory, no translator could affirm that he has grasped the truth; what he might have achieved is only approaching the truth. That is why translators of different generations have spent much time re-translating canonical literary works so as to meet the demands of the reading public of different periods of time. Actually, what we are now talking about translation has already transcended over and even deconstructed the logocentric mode of thinking, paving the way for a sort of cultural translation, in which sense translation simply means cultural representation and transformation.

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4 Cf. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in Hannah Arendt ed., *Illuminations*, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970, p. 69-82.

And the coming of modernity into China is a direct consequence of such cultural translation.

In exploring the aspects of translation, we cannot but think of Roman Jakobson's famous distinction of three senses of translation: interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic. His formalistic/structuralistic orientation in defining and locating translation is indeed very impressive. But in the current context of globalization, one more factor should be added: intercultural translation, which will play a more and more important role in the study of the issue of globalization with regard to modernity. Since globalization has hybridized one's national and cultural identity, it has also hybridized the disciplinary identity of translation studies. As a result, its identity is both pluralistic as well as constructive. Scholars in this field have realized that translation in today's sense should be both a linguistic rendition and cultural representation and reconstruction, with the latter more and more emphatic. That is why more and more scholars from different fields or areas come to deal with the issue of translation. But translation in today's context should shift its function from mere linguistic rendition to cultural representation and reconstruction. The former could to some extent be done by translation machine, but the latter can only be accomplished by human beings, for it is human beings that can grasp most appropriately the very subtlety of culture and represent it in a most relevant way.

In the next part of the essay, I will deal with China's modernity as a direct consequence of such cultural

translation, in the process of which a metamorphosed form of modernity, or a sort of alternative modernity of Chinese characteristics, has come into being, which has not only contributed to the project of global modernity but also largely influenced the process of China's modernization in an overall way.

### **TRANSLATED MODERNITY AND RECONSTRUCTED MODERNITIES**

Having got a clearer idea of what translation means to us in the present time and how it is relevant to modernity and China's modernization, we will come to focus on the more controversial issue of modernity. Although modernity is no longer a new topic in the Western context, it is still attractive to Chinese literary and cultural studies scholars. Following some of my Western colleagues such as Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton and Matei Calinescu,<sup>5</sup> I will chiefly deal with the issue from the perspectives of literature and culture. But unlike them, I rely mainly on the Chinese experiences and examples taken from Chinese literature and culture. In other words, in dealing with

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5 All these Western scholars or theorists are well known and frequently quoted and discussed in the Chinese context: Jameson is best known for his lecture tour to China in 1985 and his work on postmodernism; Eagleton is best known for his critique of postmodernism and cultural theory from a Marxist perspective; Calinescu is best known only for his book *Faces of Modernity*. The former two theorists have been to China several times and keep contact with some Chinese scholars, including myself.



the above theoretical and cultural topics I will start from the angle of modern Chinese literature and culture. Chinese-Western comparatists know that modern Chinese literature, which is very close to the mainstream of world literature, is a very important part of it. But for a long period of time, the study of this phenomenon was largely confined to the sinological circles in the West. Seldom does a non-sinologist touch upon Chinese literature and culture in his/her discussion of world literature and global culture.<sup>6</sup> As compared with the enthusiastic translation and critical and creative reception of Western literature and cultural theories in China, modern Chinese literature is little known to scholars and ordinary readers in the West. This unbalanced cultural translation is indeed inconceivable in such an age of globalization when the function of nation-states grows progressively weak and mutual exchange among different cultures and literatures should be increasingly frequent and common.

Since globalization is also a concept “translated” or “imported” from the West to the East, or more specifically, from the West to China, it is undoubtedly marked by its strong West-centric hegemony. When discussing this in China we often hear the simplified affirmation:

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6 In this aspect, David Damrosch may be one of the very few exceptions. In his *What Is World Literature?*, he spends some space discussing Chinese diasporic poet Bei Dao’s poetry and the metamorphosis caused by the English translation. See “Introduction” of the book, p. 19-24, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2003.

globalization is nothing but Westernization, and Westernization simply means Americanization as the West is the richest part of the world and the United States always stands on the forefront of the Western countries. This is partially correct, but those holding this opinion usually overlook another remarkable factor: in the process of globalization, imperial hegemonic cultural notions and values quickly penetrate into non-Western societies, yet some non-Western cultural notions and values are also steadily moving to the imperial center, thereby increasingly hybridizing it. Modern Chinese culture and literature are also deeply influenced by Western culture and literature, but they are also attempting to dialogue with mainstream world culture and literature. Translation has indeed played a vital role in the former, but it appears rather feeble in the latter. Consequently, modern Chinese literature and culture are little known to the outside world.

It is true that because of its long-standing isolation from the outside world and its conservative attitude to foreign influences, classical Chinese literature developed almost cut off from Western influence. In contrast, the unique tradition of modern Chinese literature was forged directly under Western influence. One cannot avoid mentioning its existence when dealing with international modernity and world literature, for modern Chinese literature widely participates in the metamorphosed and “glocalized” practice of modernity. As a result, different versions of modernity have been produced in China: economic, political,

cultural, literary and aesthetic. These together constitute a sort of alternative modernity or modernities that has deconstructed the “grand narrative” of “singular” modernity dominated by Western culture and ideology.

As in political and theoretical discourse, the different versions of modernity that exist in China also assume different faces geographically: on the mainland, modernity is often viewed as an open, developing and democratic concept closely related to China’s economic, political, cultural and literary modernization and post-modernization. However, because of their past colonial experiences, Hong Kong and Taiwan modernities are usually related to the decolonization of their culture, while among overseas Chinese, modernity is often associated with their diasporic status and indeterminate identities in the age of globalization. Modernity here is undoubtedly associated with various factors of postmodernity. Hence, Chinese modernity is not similar to the West’s, for its various versions are represented differently in literature and culture. In this way, the appearance of Chinese modernity, as an alternative modernity or modernities, has certainly deconstructed the myth of singular modernity of West-centricity.

In recent years, with China’s closer involvement in the international community, major Western literary scholars have increasingly become interested both in Chinese and its classical and modern literature and culture.<sup>7</sup> Since we

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7 Apart from Fredric Jameson, who has been to China many times, J.Hillis Miller has become more and more interested in

now live in an age of globalization, where literature has gone far beyond fixed national and linguistic boundaries, it is necessary to re-examine modern Chinese literature that has been under Western influence from a cross-cultural and global perspective. If put in a broader cross-cultural context of world literature, modern Chinese literature is actually a process moving toward the world that is attempting to identify with world literature within the process of cultural globalization. In this respect, translation has indeed played important and dynamic but different roles in pushing China closer to the world, Chinese literature closer to world literature.<sup>8</sup> In the past, when China was poor and backward, it was absolutely necessary to modernize itself by largely translating all the advanced sciences and academic thoughts from the West. But now, due to the unbalanced import and export of knowledge and culture, Chinese culture and literature are little known to the outside world except to a few sinologists. In this way, it is all the more necessary for us Chinese scholars to translate China, including its literature and culture, into the world, or more specifically, into the major Western languages, of

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Chinese literature. He has not only read excerpts of Chinese literature from antiquity to the present time in English, but also written something about it. Cf. J.Hillis Miller, "Reading (about) Modern Chinese Literature in a Time of Globalization," *Modern Language Quarterly*, v. 69, n. 1, p. 187-94, 2008.

8 Cf. Wang Ning, "World Literature and the Dynamic Function of Translation," *Modern Language Quarterly*, v. 71, n. 1, p. 1-14, 2010.

which English certainly ranks the first although Chinese is becoming increasingly important in the current world.<sup>9</sup>

It is well known that Chinese literature once had a long tradition and grand cultural and literary heritage. Both Western Sinologists and domestic scholars agree that classical Chinese literature developed almost isolated from foreign influence, and it is this autonomous national literature that influenced neighboring literatures, especially Japanese and Korean. But along with the swift development of European countries after the Renaissance, Chinese culture and literature were “marginalized” for a long period of time due in the main to corruption and the inefficient government of feudal and totalitarian regimes isolating the country from the outside world. Upon entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese literary scholars increasingly acknowledged the “marginalized” position of its literature in the broad context of world literature. To regain its past grandeur it must move from the periphery to the center by identifying with a prior dominant force: Western cultural modernity or modern Western literature. That is why these scholars strongly supported the widespread translation of Western literary works along with cultural and academic reflexions on this practice as the best way for China to emerge from its state of isolation. Through large-scale linguistic rendition and cultural translation,

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9 As for the rise of global Chinese as apposed to the hegemonic power of English, cf. Wang Ning, “Global English(es) and Global Chinese(s): Toward Rewriting a New Literary History in Chinese,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, v. 19, n. 63, p. 159-74, 2010.

all the major cultural trends or literary currents, romanticism, realism and modernism that dominated Western literary circles for over a hundred years, as well as representative works of art and authors, were “imported” into China, thereby exerting a profound influence on its 20<sup>th</sup> century literature at the threshold of cultural modernity. Indubitably, this effort to translate Western literature promoted the internationalization or globalization of modern Chinese literature and culture, giving it a different turn of its own. Indeed, largely under Western influence modern Chinese literature has formed a unique tradition that could dialogue both with classical Chinese and modern Western literature. Here, translation indeed played a very important yet pragmatic role in bringing modern Chinese literature closer to the world. Although some domestic Chinese scholars accuse translation of promoting foreign literature and culture while giving it an “overall Westernized” or even “colonized” orientation I still maintain that translation has actually played a dual role: both of “colonization” (if there were one) and “decolonization,” the latter becoming increasingly conspicuous.<sup>10</sup> Without the pioneering efforts made by those translators, current Chinese literature and culture could not have been so close to their international counterparts.

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10 As for the double role played by translation as both colonization and decolonization of Chinese culture, cf. Wang Ning, “Translation as Cultural ‘(De)Colonization,’” *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, v. 10, n. 4 p. 283-92, 2002.

It is widely known that Western discourse has shaped the orientation of literature in the broad context of world literature. Consequently the process of Chinese literature opening up onto the world is actually one of Westernization, much in the same way as the globalization of the economy and culture. Yet in this process, in its interaction with globalization, or we could say a sort of “globalization,” national culture waxes and wanes. If the entire objective phenomenon is not taken into account and the action of any one aspect over-emphasized while the others are overlooked, the orientation of contemporary world culture and literature cannot be clearly grasped, nor can modern Chinese literature be relevantly periodized.

Internationally, particularly in Western literature and culture, the postmodernism debate that started in the late 1950s and early 1960s was at the time undergoing a shift from North American cultural and literary circles to European intellectual and philosophical ones. Those involved in the debate were more or less aware that literary modernism, which had been on the decline immediately after World War II, had gradually come to an end. As a new episteme or cultural dominant, postmodernism had dethroned modernism. But in China, though imported from the West, postmodernism is intertwined with other elements, especially those characterizing Chinese modernism. Similarly, cultural modernity as a project of enlightenment was also undergoing a profound crisis, as it was first questioned and challenged by postmodernity emerging in post-industrial society before being lashed

by the wave of globalization in the late 1980s. Studied both by Chinese and Western scholars within the English context, postmodernism came to China and a number of different versions were produced in contemporary Chinese literature and culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>11</sup> As an historical discourse, globalization has recently taken the place of modernity and postmodernity, while bridging both. Modernity has thereby taken on a new look, both in the West and in China.

As is known, globalization has indeed impacted all the aspects of contemporary people's life and work. In the process of globalization, China is one of the very few countries of the world that has greatly benefited from globalization not only economically but also politically and culturally. The rapid development of its economy has enabled the government to set up hundreds of "Confucius Institutes" worldwide for the purpose of promoting Chinese language and culture. China is now in a post-revolutionary and post-socialist state, experiencing a sort of "depovertization" (*tuò pínkūnhuà*) and "de-third-worldization" (*qū dìsān shìjiè huà*), and transforming itself from a "theory consuming" country into a "theory producing" one. In this aspect, translation will no doubt play a more demanding role: not only merely linguistic

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11 As for the historical mapping of postmodernism or postmodernity in China as well as its different versions metamorphosed in the Chinese context, cf. Wang Ning, "The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity," *boundary 2*, 24. 3 (fall 1997), p. 19-40.



rendition but also cultural mediation, transformation and reconstruction. Since literature is first of all an art of language representing the spirit of a culture and an age, due attention should be given to Chinese literature in the modern period. In any event, to be considered either objective or comprehensive any comparative history of world literature must include the achievements of modern Chinese literary creation, theory and criticism.

### **DECONSTRUCTING SINGULAR MODERNITY AND RECONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES**

As I have already pointed out, modernity has always been a heatedly discussed or debated theoretic topic both in Western and Chinese academic circles, especially in literary and cultural studies, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Obviously, in our discussion of the issue of modernity from a cultural and philosophical perspective, such Western scholars as Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, Matei Calinescu, Arjun Appadurai and Fredric Jameson as well as their works are frequently quoted or discussed not only in the Western context but also in the Chinese context. Since Jameson's close relations with Chinese academia and his description or critique of modernity with regard to postmodernity and postmodernism is most influential and controversial in China, this part of the essay will focus on his book *Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (2002), in which he tries to construct and critique a sort of singular modernity, chiefly

in the Western context, but in the process of which he has actually deconstructed this seemingly grand narrative. According to Jameson, there are four theses of modernity:

- 1) One cannot not periodize.
- 2) Modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category.
- 3) The one way not to narrate it is via subjectivity (thesis: subjectivity is unrepresentable). Only situations of modernity can be narrated.
- 4) No “theory” of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern.<sup>12</sup>

When Jameson tried to elaborate his four theses of modernity by promoting his book mentioned above in China, it aroused severe debates among Chinese critical circles due more or less to mistranslation or misunderstanding of his ideas.<sup>13</sup> But actually, he does not want to expand the usage of modernity, but rather, he intends to restrict it to “its aesthetic category or adaptation, which necessarily posits an experience of the work in the present, no matter what its historical origins.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, he would rather regard it as a “narrative category” renewed

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12 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, London and New York, Verso, 2002, p. 94.

13 As for the debate round Jameson’s description and critique of singular modernity, see [www.culstudies.com](http://www.culstudies.com).

14 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 94-5.

in the postmodern era than merely a theoretic “concept,” for a category should not necessarily be “fixed” in meaning. It could be used to describe or narrate a literary or cultural or ideological phenomenon or concept. Similarly, he emphasizes that “only situations of modernity can be narrated,” which means that modernity is not a historical phenomenon, but rather, closely related to the present reality. Modernity is not a fixed thing, but it is constructible in different times and periods. So the appearance of different situations or forms of modernity is certainly possible. Since the present era is marked by various postmodern symptoms, modernity in today’s context should be associated with postmodernity. Therefore, he reaches his fourth thesis: No “theory” of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern. Thus modernity is just like a broad umbrella covering a wide range of cultural and theoretic trends and currents and crossing time and space. It is therefore not surprising that modernity in today’s Chinese context has aroused another enthusiastic curiosity and interest among both literary and cultural theorists and humanities scholars.<sup>15</sup>

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15 One of the most recent examples is the International Conference on Translating China and Reconstructing Alternative Modernities, which was co-sponsored by the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at Tsinghua University, the Centre for Research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Cambridge and the Council of East Asian

In this respect, Jameson, is obviously inspired by Jean-François Lyotard, who always thinks that the post-modern is “undoubtedly a part of the modern,” and a “work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.”<sup>16</sup> He tries to stimulate the almost emaciated theoretic debate on postmodernism endowing it with new and continued life. It is very clear that Lyotard, in constructing an inclusive grand narrative of modernity, has actually deconstructed its fixed meaning and deterritorialized its narrow domain. The same is almost true of Jameson. For Jameson also puts in the preface of his book:

The revival of the concept of modernity is an attempt to solve that problem: in a situation in which modernization, socialism, industrialization (particularly the former, pre-computerized kind of heavy industry), Postmodernism, and the “rape of nature” generally, have been discredited, you can still suggest that the so-called under-developed countries might want to look forward to simple “modernity” itself.<sup>17</sup>

That is, the existence of modernity should depend on different situations, especially in those under-developed or developing countries where modern elements are often mixed up with premodern ones and where there might be

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Studies at Yale University on November 20-22, 2009 in Beijing.

16 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 79.

17 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 8.

some postmodern elements in some newly developed regions.<sup>18</sup> And modernity obviously manifests itself differently in different times and places. In the case of China, the modernity we are discussing in the global postmodern era is no doubt different from the one we advocated in the May Fourth period in which the most demanding thing for the country is to modernize itself in a comprehensive way so that it would catch up with the advanced scientific and cultural trends in those developed countries. Postmodernity is characterized by two features: both a break with modernity and a renewal of the latter. Thus modernity today is still dynamic and energetic in our theoretic discussion and academic studies.

So in China today we must recognize that modernity is a “translated” theoretic concept or a cultural and literary discourse imported from the West that has been metamorphosed and subject to various constructions and reconstructions. Hence, in this part, I will focus on the alternative modernity (or modernities) that I have reconstructed within China mainly from literary and cultural perspectives. Some scholars, in dealing with modernity in China, point out that modernity in China has undergone three stages: cultural, political and economic.<sup>19</sup> To

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18 Such examples are easily found in such newly emergent big third world countries like China and India in the 1980s and 1990s where economy developed in an uneven and rapid way in the past decades.

19 As for the three stages of Chinese modernity, especially cf. Wang Fengzhen, “Translators’ Preface,” to the Chinese version

exclusively discuss modernity in the context of literature and culture, I would rather argue that modernity within this context has undergone the other three stages: (1) its introduction and translation as a literary project and the reconstruction of modern Chinese literature and culture from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century till the 1970s; (2) the introduction and translation of postmodernity as an extended modernity in an attempt to define either an alternative modernity, or extended or “metamorphosed” modernities with specific Chinese characteristics; (3) the advent of globalization which overlaps the discourses of modernity and postmodernity forming a sort of “modernity at large,” or modernity in a global context. As a result, Chinese (alternative) modernity or modernities have finally become involved in the grand discourses of global modernity but, as has been noted, distinguishes itself through its unique characteristics.

In this way, to me, just as Jameson points out, there are different types of modernity that appear in different regions. Modernity should thereby be represented in plural form, that is, there are different forms of modernity or modernities, not only in different times, but also in different regions. Modernity in China has undergone three periods: (1) as a project of enlightenment from 1919 to 1949; (2) as a totalitarian Maoist discourse for China’s modernization from 1949 to 1976; (3) now as a “glocal”

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of Fredric Jameson’s *Singular Modernity*, Tianjin, Tianjin People’s Press, p. 10.

narrative category pointing to an alternative modernity of Chinese characteristics. The birth of Chinese modernity has actually deconstructed the totalitarian singular modernity both characterized by the Maoist grand discourse as well as the translated Western hegemonic category, paving the way for the birth of pluralistic modernity or modernities in the global context. It is the theoretic discourse of China's grand project of modernization both in the past and present.

As we largely agree that there is such a thing as Chinese modernity, as an alternative modernity among global modernities, what are characteristics of this alternative modernity? This is what I want to deal with briefly in the rest of this essay. To my preliminary observation, I think there are at least the following characteristics of the alternative Chinese modernity or modernities.

First, it is both centripetal and centrifugal. As compared with the fragmentary status of postmodernity, modernity is indeed "grand" and centralized, characterized by West-centrism. But ironically speaking, since modernity is viewed as a "universal" standard, it should move or travel from center to periphery and function both at the center as well as at the periphery. It is thereby both centralizing and decentralizing, or both territorializing and deterritorializing with the monolithic center splitting into pluralistic centers.

Second, it is both modern and postmodern, and sometimes even premodern in a particular Chinese situation. Since China is one of the largest countries with the biggest

population in the world, it has been developing in an uneven way. In Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and some other coastal cities, postmodern symptoms appear as if they were Western developed metropolises. But many of the medium sized cities in the interior part of the country are still modernizing themselves toward the goal of a real modernity. In those frontier areas and ethnic minority regions, premodern condition still exists in the process of their modernization. So modernity is still an incomplete project, both economically and culturally. Just as Terry Eagleton, from a cultural perspective, pertinently points out,

As for postmodern theory, nothing could be less to its taste than the idea of a stable, pre-modern, tightly unified culture, at the very thought of which it reaches for its hybridity and open-endedness. But the post-and pre-modern are more akin than this would suggest. What they share in common is the high, sometimes extravagant respect they accord to culture as such. In fact one might claim that culture is a pre-modern and postmodern rather than modern idea; if it flourishes in the era of modernity, it is largely as a trace of the past or an anticipation of the future.<sup>20</sup>

Although Eagleton chiefly addresses to the Western audience, it is also true of the current Chinese conditions.

Third, it is both constructive and deconstructive. Domestically, since the cultural soil of China is very poor for modernity to settle down, it is still being under construction. But internationally, the construction of Chinese

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20 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, p. 29.



modernity has proved that there is no such thing as the so-called singular modernity unless it deconstructs the temporary and spacious limitation. Actually, the practice of Chinese modernity in the past decades has deconstructed the totalitarian grand discourse of singular modernity paving the way for an alternative modernity or modernities of Chinese characteristics to appear in the Eastern part of the world. It is mixed up with both the Sinicized Marxist doctrines and the reconstructed Neo-Confucianist doctrines.<sup>21</sup> Thus the achievements made by Chinese intellectuals in the process of Chinese modernity will in turn contribute a lot to the grand and universal narrative discourse of global modernity if there were indeed one.

Fourth, it is both global and local, or global in the local as is described by Arif Dirlik.<sup>22</sup> It is true that the advent of globalization has enabled China to change rapidly, and the country is one of the very few in the world that directly benefits a great deal from the process of globalization. But as a matter of fact, globalization cannot be truly realized unless it is localized in a particular (Chinese) cultural soil.

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21 As for the detailed description and significance of this “reconstructed” Neo-Confucianism, cf. Wang Ning, “Reconstructing Confucianism in ‘Glocal’ Postmodern Culture Context,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, v. 37, n. 1, p. 48-62, 2010.

22 Arif Dirlik, “The Global in the Local,” in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. eds. Rob Wilson and Wimal Disanayake, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996, p. 35.

Economically speaking, China should observe the various regulations of the WTO and other international organizations, but politically and culturally, it still has its own stubborn and unique tradition and condition. In this way, a “glocalized” practice of global modernity in the Chinese context is both possible and effective.

Undoubtedly, modernity is still developing in many places of the world beyond one’s recognition. It serves the purpose of modernization in a particular country, including China. As the above descriptions of Chinese modernity show, its development is certainly uneven and diversified. Thus, the reconstruction of Chinese modernity may well contribute a great deal to this grand and incomplete global project.