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Coordinates, Confusions, and Cultural Studies

Dai Jinhua

The Arrival of Cultural Studies in China

In the course of the 1980s, Cultural Studies emerged as one of the most popular of the humanities and social science disciplines in Europe and the United States. It is regarded as having waged a cultural war on the globalization of capitalism and the neo-liberalist/Washington consensus. However, ironically enough, the route traveled by Cultural Studies in regions outside Europe and the United States coincided with the spread of globalization. In fact, the introduction of Cultural Studies into China occurred simultaneously with the process of China's involvement in globalization.

During the post-Cold War period in the 1990s, Cultural Studies was introduced to the Chinese-speaking territories.[1] In light of the social realities of mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong during that period, it could be argued that Cultural Studies arrived at the right time. When the West triumphed over communism and capital investments flowed rapidly into the non-capitalist "virgin land," an Americanized mass culture and corresponding cultural industry were born. In mainland China, Cultural Studies began at the same time when media corporations and consumer culture were expanding rapidly, and when Hollywood as a symbol of multinational (cultural) corporations embarked on recovering the "lost territory" in China. Cultural Studies was just in time, and in the right position, to explain and respond to these new developments. However, it could also be said that Cultural Studies arrived at the wrong time. This claim could be made because in the different Chinese-speaking territories Cultural Studies started to flourish just when the global structural basis of critical or leftist cultural practices disintegrated. Neo-liberal political practices construed "culture" as insignificant, in the name of the market. On the other hand, the expansion of cultural and creative industries

led the way towards a consumerist lifestyle, which allowed the agenda of the Cold War winners to be maintained, but in an apolitical guise. In the 1980s, culture did play an important role during the so-called "period of great social change," as is evidenced by mainland Chinese campaigns such as "Reflections on History and Culture" (歷史文化反思運動) and "Cultural Fever" (文化熱). But Cultural Studies only really emerged when all these specific and effective political practices of culture had disappeared.

Today, the meaning and significance of "culture" have changed completely. When the battlefield of social and cultural criticism retreated to the universities and assumed the form of specialized discussions and the production of equally specialized knowledge, the vision of culture as social was buried by mass culture. The rise of a "knowledge economy" and of a "creative industry" allowed capitalists to engulf the vitality and creativity of culture at an unprecedented speed. It is also useful to mention post-modernism, which was introduced to the mainland slightly earlier than Cultural Studies, and ended up becoming the cynical theoretical background for developments in the post-revolutionary and post-1989 era. Cultural Studies tried to respond to all these phenomena, but first it needed to find a way out of the local reality, which was full of obstacles and winding paths.

Keyword Confusion

In major European languages, the word "Culture" is a huge and complicated signifier. Cultural Studies, which emerged in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the Cold War, needed in the first instance to face the word "culture" and actually benefited from its rich meanings. In mainland China, when Cultural Studies encountered the reality of mass culture (*dazhong wenhua* in Chinese) and the cultural industry, the first complicated keyword to be evoked was *dazhong* (大眾, literally "the people"), with its specific local historical background. The growth or rebirth of Chinese mass culture in the global context occurred at the edge of a cleft between history and reality, and what links the two, and illustrates the social change in the keywords that have been used all along. According to the premises of Cultural Studies, the term *dazhong wenhua* (大眾文化) in Chinese corresponds at once to the English "popular culture" and "mass culture" (both keywords in Cultural Studies). The integration of "popular culture" and "mass culture" in *dazhong wenhua* departs from the basic position of Cultural Studies, at least in its British variant, which opts for

"popular culture" rather than "mass culture" as a means of identifying certain research targets. The point of opting for "popular culture" is to highlight (working-)class issues, the subjective actualization of the people in the act and process of cultural consumption, and the opening up of the discursive arena of culture to daily life — especially as it is lived by workers. Chinese Cultural Studies researchers made an effort to draw a distinction between "popular culture" and "mass culture" by translating "popular culture" into *liuxing wenhua* (流行文化) or *tongsu wenhua* (通俗文化). Yet these translations just led to more confusion, because while *liuxing wenhua* or *tongsu wenhua* illustrate the characteristics of "popular culture," they efface the meanings of "of the people, for the people and by the people" carried by the word "popular." Moreover, when we translate "popular culture" as *liuxing wenhua* or *tongsu wenhua*, we also cut off all the resonances with "populism," another word that has been key in terms of understanding the history of modern intellectual and social movements. The debate surrounding "cultural populism" constitutes an important chapter in the history of British Cultural Studies.[2] On the other hand, when we use *dazhong wenhua* to translate "mass culture," the historical background carried by the word "mass" disappears.[3] At the same time, what also disappears are the multiple discourses and myths of "mass society," all of which offer probing criticisms of a newly developed capitalist society from an aristocratic standpoint. These intellectual backgrounds form the basis of Leavisism, which is directly related to British Cultural Studies.

Sometimes the above meanings lost in translation can be slightly recaptured in the Chinese term *dazhong* (大眾) and related terms like *laoku dazhong* (勞苦大眾, toiling masses) or *gong nong dazhong* (工農大眾, factory workers and farmers), but the vastly divergent history and reality of China resulted in very different and complicated cultural and social practices. In fact, in modern Chinese *dazhong* carries fewer negative connotations than the word "mass" does in English. Twentieth century Chinese history made *dazhong* a term of unquestionable virtue, as is reflected in current usage. This is the case in spite of the connotations of *zhong* in a Chinese Buddhist context. As a word of foreign origin *zhong* (眾, mass) is sometimes understood as the opposite of *fo* (佛, Buddha) and can be derived into negative terms like *yong zhong* (庸眾, the vulgar people) or *wu he zhi zhong* (烏合之眾, a mob), which means something like "masses" in English. The sense of virtue that is associated with the term *zhong* mainly stems from the adoption and spread of the term by Marxism and (especially) from the historical practices of the Chinese

communist revolution. The term appeared everywhere from the 1950s to the 1970s. The term *dazhong* signified the idea of the master of society and of the historical subject (*laoku dazhong* or *gong nong dazhong*). It was sometimes used interchangeably with *gong nong bing* (工農兵, workers, peasants and soldiers), more of a Maoist term. *Zhong* was placed in the middle of the spectrum of terms used to describe people, which ranges from *renmin* (人民, which is entirely positive) to *qunzhong* (群眾, which is relatively negative). Thus, in the theory of socialist humanism (or revolutionary humanism), *dazhong* became synonymous with "the overwhelming majority" and had unquestionable legitimacy. When the term *dazhong* was used in relation to culture, it was mobilized in debates on the popularization of art and literature aimed at defining their functions in modern society. Another debate on the "language of the masses" (大眾語, *dazhong yu*)[4] was a major event in modern cultural history, and illustrated the controversial nature of modern Chinese/colloquial Chinese. This debate brought to the surface a specific issue concerning the reception of cultural products, for as Mao Zedong declared in his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature," "[To be] loved by the masses is the basic criterion of Literature and Art criticism."

Interestingly, when *dazhong wenhua*, characterized by commodities, consumption and amusement, arrived in mainland China in the 1990s, the modern history of the term *dazhong* and the absolute standard of "loved by the masses of people" provided the discursive support for its legitimacy. What belongs to *dazhong* must be just, what is "loved by the masses" must be good. Ironically, the mass culture products that were first imported into China were all reproductions of US mass culture sold at relatively high prices. On account of this, the first receivers/consumers were not, and could not be, the majority of "urban China," let alone the whole country. As a result, the first prominent mass culture products to come under the scrutiny of Cultural Studies were those enjoyed by only a minority group. These products included Hollywood movies, Hong Kong *mo lei tau* culture, fashion, advertisements, mega-cities, pubs, cafés, lofts, magazines introducing luxurious lifestyles, and computer games. The consumers in question consisted of the Chinese new middle class who were once given the title "petit-bourgeoisie"; they mainly lived in Chinese first-class cities (Beijing, Shanghai, and cities around the Zhujiang delta). They were young, well educated, and worked in foreign corporations or famous state enterprises. Most of them belonged to the first generation to have grown up under the one-child policy. They were the winners or survivors

of a Chinese examination-oriented educational system. They shared and enjoyed the individualistic culture characterized by consumerism. When the term *dazhong wenhua* was used inaccurately to refer to the consumption practices of a minority culture, the result was the suppression of the real *dazhong* (majority of the people) and their local mass culture: traditional newspapers, especially evening papers; popular magazines targeting second- or third-class cities or middle-to low-income groups (for example *The Reader*, *The Girlfriend* and *The Family*); TV series, especially those that were not circulated through the internet and had no talking points; and films mainly screened in villages. None of these cultural products was given priority by members of the Chinese Cultural Studies circle who worked on *dazhong wenhua*.

The phenomenon of "minority culture" being mistaken as *dazhong* did not occur only in China, for many newly modernized countries experienced something similar when they became caught up in globalization. In the 1990s, the Chinese concept of *dazhong wenhua* was based on Western, or more accurately US, mass culture. In a sense, the globalization of culture was equivalent to Americanization. Of course, Hong Kong and Taiwan — both places where the development of mass culture was relatively mature — served as an important window too. In these exporting countries or regions of mass culture, the middle class is the major consumption group and also the overwhelming majority in society. It was during the Cold War and the era of financial capitalism that this middle class-dominated social structure took shape. While the established social structure was seen as "just," it was in fact based on an increasingly unjust pyramidal global structure.

It is important to point out that the mass culture of developed countries is destined, when reproduced in developing countries, to become a minority culture. Consumers belonging to a minority group bestow a sense of elite culture, or a standard of elite taste, on these products of popular culture. This phenomenon of mass culture becoming minority culture demonstrates the hegemonic position of Western — or, more accurately, American — culture. Globalized capital and the mobilization of the elite class combine to create the imagined identity of "world citizen" and a culture of consumption that works everywhere in the world. What this process demonstrates is that the new Chinese middle class finds the basis for its self-identification and self-imagination in the construction of mass culture in the era of globalization. But apart from this, it needs to be emphasized that the new Chinese middle class has a natural affinity with Western mass culture. The reason for this is twofold:

on the one hand, members of the new Chinese middle class identify themselves with the status and order established by globalized capitalism; on the other, in this unified capitalistic world, members of the young and new Chinese middle class actually occupy a position in the social structure that is similar to the one occupied by the mature American middle class in the United States. As a result, they are able to share essentially the same representational value system, the same form of self-regulation, and the same everyday lifestyles.

The relationship of the term *dazhong* with communist history gave *dazhong wenhua* an entry pass into mainland China, yet paradoxically the arrival of *dazhong wenhua* also symbolized the end of a political era. As the subject of "literature and art for the workers, farmers and soldiers" in the 1950s to 1970s, *dazhong* provided a justification on the discursive level for the cultural industry and the *dazhong wenhua* of the 1990s. However, the deeper reason motivating the acceptance of this new *dazhong wenhua* was that it practiced a new agenda of apolitical cultural politics. In this new trend, entertainment took the place of politics, while marketing took the place of propaganda. These substitutions explain why Chinese commercial cinema was once dubbed "amusement film," and why various elite intellectuals took the initiative to promote *dazhong wenhua*. In this context, the Chinese term *dazhong wenhua* usually was used interchangeably with the term "civil culture" (*minjian wenhua*, 民間文化), which is different from folk culture. *Minjian* (民間, civil) was a keyword in the 1990s for the Chinese intelligentsia. The term finds its roots in the discourse of the public sphere and civil society, and its meaning is the opposite of "official." To arouse the idea of justice embedded within the term *minjian* as the underlying message of *dazhong* in a new social imaginary was to utilize the confrontational characteristics of *minjian* against what was specifically official.

The Role of Chinese *Dazhong Wenhua*

It was in the context of all these complications about keywords that Chinese *dazhong wenhua* made its appearance at the beginning of the 1990s. The timing of its arrival was by no means a coincidence. In fact, between the tragic end of the 1980s and the flamboyant arrival of the 1990s, there was a blank period that lasted almost three years. *Dazhong wenhua* appeared quietly in that period to fill in all the "blankness." It then continued to expand, to the point of dominating the cultural horizon at the turn of the century. This "blankness" refers to the gap between two grand narratives. The period in question was marked by

the 1980s coming to an end, and by the end of the Cold War. It was also a time when a feeble Chinese society and equally feeble Chinese culture lost their anchor, a time defined by an ideological vacuum. The dominant discourse of legitimacy was seriously challenged, to the extent that it no longer functioned. At the same time, the confrontational discursive system of the 1980s was operative at a subterranean level, but unable genuinely to break through. As a result, the Chinese cultural arena at the beginning of the 1990s was full of "delirious aphasia," but the stage was empty. When Chinese *dazhong wenhua* finally stepped on to the stage, it had to take up many important tasks: to vent social misery, but also to assuage it; to use cynicism to alleviate the sense of trauma and aphasia; to reconstruct human desires and rewrite the principles and standards of social lives; to cover up the exacerbated class divisions and social conflicts; and, finally, to identify and calm the hatred in society by manipulating the logic of the dominant narratives of the past. At that point, the country's image that had reached such a low point rose up again. In the 1980s, Chinese intellectuals endeavored to promote *dazhong wenhua* with the aim of confronting authority through an apolitical agenda; in the 1990s, *dazhong wenhua* successfully utilized its apolitical image at full capacity, to implement a cultural politics reflecting the risks of the times. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, *dazhong wenhua* had in effect assumed responsibility for constructing the new mainstream ideology. Its most significant function has been to fill in historical gaps imaginatively, to dismiss real differences, and to provide a new discourse of legitimacy.

One effective method along these lines was the activation of different mechanisms of forgetfulness for the purposes of displacing memories. In this context, many popular versions of historical stories were brought into the spotlight. Viewed in terms of the heights of their achievement, the Qin, Han, and Tang dynasties were narrativized. As such, they became substitutes for the late Ming and late Qing dynasties, and carriers of contemporary metaphors for reality — the representational vehicle for China's self-imagination. The dramatic representations of history (including modern and contemporary history) in the form of TV series and films provide imaginary solutions to conflicts that are real. Interestingly, it is popular culture — though not high culture — that supplies the new mainstream culture with an effective way of evading the bloodiness of history, of healing the multi-layered wounds of modern China, of "overcoming" the confrontations of the Cold War era, and of "achieving" (impossible) reconciliations between history and reality. Up until

now, I have been discussing a part of China's *dazhong wenhua* that circulates among the majority of the population. It is now time to look at another part of it, one that circulates among members of a minority.

The element of minority culture that is attached in this instance to mass culture entered China through different channels in the second half of the twentieth century, but it only became genuinely popular when the internet was properly established in China in 1997. It was then transmitted throughout society by means of traditional media, in the form of stylish texts or "petit-bourgeois classics." This part of China's *dazhong wenhua*, which once circulated only among members of a minority, remained anonymous within society for a long time. The reason for this anonymity was that many of the relevant texts were introduced into China through informal channels from the other side of the Cold War. These types of cultural consumption, which were outside the horizon of mainstream cultural criticism for some time, actually nurtured a whole generation of urban Chinese youth during the period, which was marked by great social change and by an ideological vacuum. Pirated Hollywood films on DVD (especially action, science fiction, and disaster films), Hong Kong martial arts fictions (featuring Jin Yong and Gu Long as the masters of the genre), Eileen Chang, Japanese and Korean TV series, American TV series, Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop music (Taiwan singer Lo Da Yu has a special position in this category) provide the basic texts in the family tree of this minority part of *dazhong wenhua*. Other essential components include Japanese and Korean animations and comics, TV games, Hong Kong movies (*mo lei tau* or Stephen Chow, John Woo, or crime and gangster movies, post-modernist aesthetics or Wong Kar Wai). To be added is a stack of petit-bourgeois "must reads": apart from Eileen Chang, who is an enduring priority, there are Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Hakuri Mirakami, Marguerite Duras, Yu Hua, Wang Xiao Bo, and so on; and "petit-bourgeois classic movies" — Andrei Tarkovsky, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Eric Rohmer, and Pedro Almodóvar, among many others. In recent years, the list has included the books in the *Harry Potter* series, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Asimov's science fiction.

To draw up a list of popular culture items — especially those circulated amongst members of a minority group — is not a clever gesture, because the speed of change is simply so high in the post-modern internet era that this year's popular works become next year's classics, only to be entirely forgotten soon afterwards. The aim here is not only to recapture that one-off moment of

popularity, but also to visualize the traces of a specific era. In fact, apart from Yu Hua and Wang Xiao Bo, all of the people on the list were from "the West," in terms of both cultural geography and ideology — that is, they were from what was the Western camp during the Cold War, compared with the Socialist East. When we look at the list from this perspective, then it becomes not only the "symptom of the schizophrenia of our era," but also an occasion for noting the logic of a certain internal integration. This internal status of "unanimity" testifies in a subtle way to how Chinese social culture was seized by the logic of the Cold War in the last twenty years of the twentieth century: the normal order was reversed while at the same time the whole society was led in a single direction. It also illustrates how a strange cultural "takeover" succeeded in Chinese society. Furthermore, when we look at the list from the perspectives of contemporary history and reality at that time, it appears to be "history without an axis" and "reality without a context," like an enclave. This "cultural recipe" that has nurtured a whole post-Cold War and post-revolutionary generation actually wipes out the memories of modern history. Furthermore, it white-washes the traces of twentieth century Chinese culture, cuts off many foreign texts from their historical background, and presents itself as something pure that is far removed from the actual bloodiness of the Cold War. In this pure enclave — one forged out of the pollution of politics — the depths of twentieth century history become some fragmented bloodstains, some soul-less textbook passages, or some indistinguishable interludes in the vast history of civilization. One of the major symptoms of mainstream neo-liberal culture in the global era is the disappearance of the depth of history, and this enclave actually helps to realize the construction of this global mainstream culture.

On this family tree of minority culture, there is an unidentified group of pre-modern Chinese literary texts, none of them apparently stylish or fashionable. It includes mainly poetry (*shi, ci, fu*), drama and informal essays (sometimes historical texts). This partly hidden and partly visible Chinese element does not change the characteristics of the Chinese minority/mass culture enclave. All foreign components of the enclave originate in some distant place, in terms of spatial geography or political geography; the elements in the Chinese category are also distant, in a temporal sense — that is, they are from before the 1919 May Fourth Movement. The pre-modern Chinese literature in question looks like an old Chinese pagoda inside a cultural theme park belonging to the age of globalization.

However, this under-current of minority culture, which ran parallel to the mass culture of traditional media, was not only an illustration of the rich leisure class's stylish consumptions. When this culture finally became prominent as a result of its dissemination through the internet, a profound social reality was evident: the generation nurtured by this minority version of mass culture has become the core of society in the new political and economic structure. Its members constituted the new elites in the political and economic arenas. The cultural fast food on which this group was raised determined the boundaries of its cultural horizon and became the source of its value system and self-imagination. In September 2000, white-collars and "gold-collars" in their thirties flew in chartered planes from Beijing and other cities to Shanghai to attend Lo Ta Yu's live concert, with the media describing the event as "the 80,000 people's altar of youth." This spectacle provides a footnote to this narrative, aimed at understanding the social functions of the Chinese majority/ minority dimensions of mass culture. This reality, which has a context, is also a floating bridge. It floats on the phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution having come to an end, and indeed on its having been buried; it also floats on the disruptions of the end of the 1980s, and offers a route for sending people and social security to the frontline of global capitalism. There is another profound symptom that is also a reminder: Western mass culture and post-modernism arrived in China at the same time, and the latter lent legitimacy (although not in any necessary and sufficient way) to the former, through elitist cultural criticism. Paradoxically, from the end of the 1980s to the moment at the outset of the 1990s when mass culture and post-modernism arrived, members of the new elites did not engage in criticisms or confrontations but rather became a constructive force supplementing mainstream political culture. On the one hand, these new elites ended the elite culture that in fact had been brought to a standstill by political violence earlier; on the other, they also participated in the establishment of the new system of economic or political elitism.

The Merging of Majority and Minority Culture, or the Creation of Hegemony

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Chinese mass culture and the minority culture that is an aspect of mass culture are no longer separate. The new Chinese middle class that grew up with the minority version of mass culture became the dominant consumer group. Members of this class started to

develop their own tastes, values, and morality, and they influenced the production of local mass culture. In the singing contest *Super Girl's Voice*, organized by Hunan Province's Entertainment Channel in 2004, what has been referred to as "China's biggest fan club"[5] mobilized supporters via the internet. In the final round, 3.5 million people voted for a female singer (with an androgynous or bi-gender style) and "pushed" her to the championship and even to the front page of *Time Asia* magazine as one of "Asia's Heroes 2005," for allegedly representing "the mechanism of democracy in China."[6] However, it was no secret to anyone that the crucial element in her victory was her supporters' comprehensive economic power as subjects of cultural consumption. Directors of multi-national corporations provided an effective business model: *Super Girl's Voice* enabled China to become the newest part of the global media production chain, and demonstrated that cultural enterprises have the capacity to earn huge profits. This success story illustrated the power of members of the minority/new middle class in their capacity as consuming subjects, and linked the mass media to the consumption practices of a minority. At this point, the *dazhong* of *dazhong wenhua* is no longer related to mass society or to society's majority, for the term no longer identifies "the audience" in a general sense, but picks out a group that has become an important and organic component of the chain of "capital/(cultural) production/(cultural) consumption." What this means is that those who have little or no power to consume are left behind by the market. What we see here is how confusion about keywords became the origin of a social screening system. The Chinese characteristic of this phenomenon is that when the majority became negligible in a statistical sense — on account of its lack of any power to consume — it nonetheless remained very much present in the mass cultural arena. The majority was simply constituted as a mere "audience" — as the voiceless receivers of mainstream ideology. It might be the view of some that although the relevant minority culture successfully occupied a place in the mass media, those who consume it remain a minority in the context of China's huge population. However, with their growing power to consume, and growing demand for stylish cultural products, these people (who were a cultural minority in the past and now make up the new middle class) are qualified to negotiate with the cultural institutions and cultural enterprises of the state. New interactive and collaborative relationships have been created as a result. These people established subject positions reflecting patterns of cultural consumption and a sense of moral consciousness based on belonging to a new class. This group went from enjoying the subject position associated with the

"drifter generation"[7] to trying to occupy the vacant space in China's "civil society," and from believing in cultural cynicism based on consumer-oriented individualism to getting involved in social issues driven by common interests. As a result of these shifts, this group was motivated on occasion to identify and join forces with the middle and lower classes. Practices exemplifying the shifts can be found in the little theatre phenomenon (a format typical of minority culture). In 2007, there was a famous stage production directed by National Theatre of China's director Meng Jinhui, *The Life Opinions of Two Dogs*, which ran continuously in major cities in China until 2009. Through the production's staging of self-mockery and self-pity from the standpoint of the middle class, members of the various audiences were offered an opportunity to reconcile themselves with certain realities. What was new about this production was the friendly and comical depiction of "migrant workers" on the stage of minority culture. What needs to be noted, however, is that the effect of petit-bourgeois audiences in the large cities identifying with this comical representation of the lower class is more appropriately described as an instance of hegemonic consolidation than as a process of social reconciliation.

If we compare *The Life Opinions of Two Dogs* with another hugely popular TV series, *Shi Bing Tu Ji* (Soldiers' Raid), of the same year, we achieve further insight into the more general context. *Shi Bing Tu Ji* was only one of many TV series that featured lower class people and soldiers' lives and brotherhood, but it was the only TV series that achieved a rapidly growing popularity without much media hype, to the point even of breaking through the boundaries that usually contain TV series and into the arena of social discourse. Elite intellectuals, petit-bourgeois/new middle class and migrant workers were all unanimous in their praise for it. Much as in the case of other popular texts, *Shi Bing Tu Ji* attracted the attention of a large number of people on the internet, and many fan clubs devoted to the series were set up. A wide spectrum of audiences praised the series from quite different perspectives; the popularity of this TV series demonstrated just how important a role mass culture plays in the construction and spread of hegemony. As Chinese writer Han Shao Gong put it: "This is the triumph of a particular worldview and view of life, this is an effective presentation of our 'core values.'"[8] If *The Life Opinions of Two Dogs* illustrates the way in which the petit-bourgeois/middle class implemented a downward-looking process of social identification and integration through a minority culture format, then *Shi Bing Tu Ji* demonstrates how mass culture

co-opted members of the petit-bourgeois/middle class who normally looked down on local TV series.

Antonio Gramsci's idea of "hegemony" is used here to describe a series of social phenomena after 2007 — phenomena such as the emergence of a comprehensive form of social identification, the merging of cultures, and the reconstruction of the imagined community. In Gramsci's theory, "cultural hegemony" emphasizes the idea that domination in an area of thought is not achieved through violent conquest; in contrast, it is achieved by winning the hearts and minds of the majority. For this to happen, concessions need to be made to the exploited people in society through certain social/political negotiations, and these same people have to be afforded a space of personal identification.

Louis Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses claims that the seamless operation of mainstream ideology depends on the provision of a series of mirror images that allow various people in society to identify with the subject position, which is also a social position, of "I." When people gave their comments on the TV series, some concentrated on its apparent critique of the prevalence of pragmatism, utilitarianism, mammonism, and consumerism in post-revolutionary times, and on the resurgence of idealism, sacrifice, and altruism; some were encouraged by its message of perseverance;[9] some were intrigued by the story of brotherhood and even saw hints of an alternative erotic practice in the narrative; some were angry about the disciplinary violence depicted in the series and saw it as promulgating conformism. Although the world of the series abides by "winner takes all" dictates, the "master soldier" or working ant still has his/its social value.

The point that requires reiteration is that when people within and outside the People's Republic of China cheer the triumph of "civil society" and "democracy" (though sometimes it is "rule of thumb democracy," or grand events built up with capital) over and against the "authority" and "centralization of power" in the arena of mass culture, and when the national audience ratings of popular TV series get close to or sometimes even surpass China Central Television's "News Simulcast" program, there is quite simply a failure to recognize the extent to which mass (minority) culture has been merged with capital and the ways in which mass culture is undergoing a process of restratification. Mass culture's social function has also changed, for whereas it once filled a certain vacuum and provided a certain reality without a context, it now contributes

to a deliberate process of establishing the new mainstream ideology that is to be operative until such time when the new social cultural hegemony matures. After thirty years, a grand and bizarre historical metamorphosis is close to completion.

In fact, it is the unrivalled importance of Chinese *dazhong wenhua* that determines the position of Chinese Cultural Studies: if we admit that during the twenty years before and after the turn of the century, Chinese *dazhong wenhua* occupied a position that was essentially that of mainstream ideology, then Cultural Studies is destined to become the most important of intellectual battlefields. If we admit that in the course of society's restratification, Chinese *dazhong wenhua* has become the major engine of the new mainstream discourse and effectively equips the machine of power with its legitimizing discourse, then the deciphering work of Cultural Studies provides an alternative path for society and culture. If we admit that the mainstream social culture that mass culture represents functions through anti-politicization or depoliticization, then the attempt at repoliticization that Cultural Studies offers is not only about critique but reconstruction. Although Cultural Studies in China and Asia lagged behind the West and arrived belatedly, it occupies a specific intellectual, cultural, and academic position, and has a whole range of tasks to take up. These include responding to a whole range of social and cultural realities, confronting the poverty of the humanities in the post-Cold War era, participating in the process of repaying the "historical debt," and trying to discover and develop new intellectual resources and visions for the future. Cultural Studies is somewhere between social and cultural history, history of the cultural industry and intellectual history; somewhere between academic production and social involvement. Cultural Studies should become — indeed must become — an effective practice of alternative cultural politics.