

Issues in Social Science Debate in Xi Jinping's China

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The social sciences are intimately linked to understanding the societies in which we live. This is why the question of the historical and political anchoring of this knowledge arises. As postcolonial studies have shown, the social sciences have produced theories, concepts, and paradigms in Southern societies conveying a discourse on "modernity." According to Edward Said, scientific knowledge is a form of power that confers authority on the person who produces it. However, knowledge is largely controlled and produced by the West, which therefore has the power to name, represent, and theorise (Said 1995). By entering into the field of these theories, indigenous researchers impose on themselves a representation of themselves and the other that endorses these power relationships. In order to finally break with this type of domination, indigenous societies are encouraged to move away from the Western ethnocentrism carried by the social sciences, and their particular vision of modernity, in order to construct their own narratives. Issues of domination are therefore at the heart of the social sciences, and in China as elsewhere, in the modern and contemporary period, these issues have not ceased to be taken into account, discussed, and thwarted.

Historically, the birth of the human and social sciences in China at the turn of the twentieth century is closely linked to the desire of intellectuals to contribute to the emergence of a "powerful and prosperous" China (*fuqiang* 富强) following its traumatic encounter with the Western powers during the Opium Wars. As an integral part of the "self-reinforcing movement" (*yangwu yundong* 洋务运动), which consisted of learning from the West in order to better counter it, the human and social sciences, in China as in other non-Western societies, from the start engaged the relationship to the Other (the West) and to the Self. Trained for the most part abroad and especially in Japan, a country through which Western concepts first passed, Chinese researchers quickly strove to situate themselves in relation to this Western knowledge. As early as the 1930s, in the wake of the sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong in particular, many sought to "indigenise" the social sciences, in order to better understand the issues specific to their country and to move in the direction of a specifically Chinese modernity. The same dynamic is found in the aftermath of the Maoist period, marked by the isolation of China and the ban on social sciences. The "feverish" re-introduction of Western theories to fill the three-decade gap, which marked the 1980s, was followed by a movement of critical re-appropriation of these theories (Merle and Zhang 2007).

The lecture given by Xi Jinping in May 2016, during which the President of the PRC called on Chinese researchers to "accelerate the construction of a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics" (*jiakuai goujian Zhongguo tese zhexue shehui kexue* 加快构建中国特色哲学社会科学), raises the question of the extent to which national characteristics are linked to the social sciences of each country and to question the validity of epistemological relativism. Is the assertion of a national specificity of the dis-

ciplines compatible with the aim of the human and social sciences, and to what extent can a scientific discourse or approach have cultural or national characteristics? Xi Jinping's speech also calls for an update on the long-standing opposition between Western and Chinese social sciences, inherited from postcolonial studies, which this discourse seems to mirror. What is the significance of such an injunction today in China, and how do Chinese researchers respond to it? Ultimately, this special issue aims to question the relationship between knowledge and power, science and ideology in the light of the Chinese case.

Differences that need to be addressed

The denunciation of ethnocentrism as it is formulated by postcolonial studies is based on the assumption that the scientific production on colonised societies was anchored in and produced by relations of domination guiding the construction of research objects in the human and social sciences. Can we identify differences in the approach of the Chinese and Western social sciences and in particular in the values that underlie scientific discourse? First of all, it should be remembered that ethnocentrism is far from being concerned only with the way Western researchers might look at indigenous societies. Ethnocentrism of culture, class, or even state is likely to influence the approach of any researcher, regardless of their nationality and their object of study. In China itself, cultural ethnocentrism dominated for a long time the departments of studies of ethnic minorities (*minzuxue* 民族学), while in the 1990s and early 2000s, ethnocentrism of class and state burdened many sociological studies carried out on migrant workers. For a long time, these studies designated these migrants as "peasant workers" (*nongmingong* 农民工) even though a growing proportion of them had never cultivated the land and did not work in factories (Florence 2006; Froissart 2013), while the difficulties of integration of these migrants in urban areas have often been explained by an essentialist discourse – attributing these difficulties to the "excessively low intrinsic quality" of migrants (*suzhi tai di* 素质太低) – obliterating the responsibility of institutions such as *hukou*, the political system, or public policies in the lack of integration of people of rural origin in urban areas (Froissart 2013). As elsewhere, many Chinese researchers have deviated from these ethnocentric biases thanks to observation that "leads to access to the Self and to others at the methodological level" (Rouleau-Berger 2011: 34), less thanks to self-reflection on the position of the researcher, a method more widespread in the French social sciences.⁽¹⁾

The article by Aurélien Boucher, which opens this issue and is concerned with the methods used by specialists in social history and sociology of the

1. On how the deconstruction of the categories of *nongmingong* and *wailai renkou* 外来人口 (people coming from outside) by Chinese sociologists allowed the latter to influence the policies of integration of migrants in the city in a progressive direction, see Froissart (2013: 227-31).

state, recalls that state ethnocentrism – that is to say the resumption of state thinking conveyed by the categories and statistics forged by the state – is a given faced by any researcher, regardless of nationality, working on the action of the state, whatever that state may be. The scientific approach consists of deconstructing this datum using methods that have no cultural or national particularity, and whose validity is measured by the yardstick of their heuristic value. In other words, what guarantees that the social sciences maintain a scientific claim and are distinguished from ideology is the element of the universal contained in their methods, even if these must often be adapted to the particular constraints on access to archives – or to the field – that require researchers to implement tips and tricks to get around them. These tricks are an integral part of the scientific process, as they can be replicated in the study of different countries to cope with similar constraints (e.g. to study power structures in the totalitarian societies of the USSR and Maoist China) and in no way imply the similarity of the conclusions, which invalidates any accusation of hegemony of scientific methods.

If the social sciences are characterised first and foremost by a scientific approach with a vocation to universality, the fact remains that they have particular colorations specific to each country. There are different national traditions based on their own textual traditions and concepts within a given history, society, culture, and language. National traditions are also shaped by the aim of social sciences in each country, which guides the way the questions are asked. For example, the Chinese social sciences are more applied in the sense that they are primarily intended to help the state solve social problems (Frenkiel 2014), while the critical dimension is inseparable from the French tradition of social sciences. National traditions can also be distinguished by methodological preferences: American social sciences place more emphasis on quantitative methods and modelling than the French social sciences, which prefer qualitative approaches (Froissart 2018). In China, while the quantitative survey, in the form of a social survey, remains dominant among sociologists because of the mission attributed to this discipline by the authorities, some sociologists and historians use oral histories and life stories (Roulleau-Berger 2011), particularly to promote the voice of individuals in the face of the Party's monopoly on history and memory (Froissart 2002; Merle 2004). As Gilles Guiheux and Wang Simeng point out in this issue, institutional contexts, including academic systems and conceptions of education and research training, also influence how social sciences are practiced and taught in different countries. The article by Guiheux and Wang, which focuses on the socialisation of young Chinese scholars in France, provides an unparalleled perspective on how these differences are perceived and experienced by those concerned, and underlines the proper epistemological value of this experience. In fact, the experience of otherness, especially through the work of translation, allows us to abandon a substantialist and essentialist vision of concepts, thereby deconstructing categories.

These differences have constantly been taken into account by researchers, both Chinese and Western, concomitantly with increasing circulation of texts, ideas, students and researchers, as well as the opening of access to the field and to archives; it is true that this effort of awareness, indigenisation, and ultimately reconciliation is an integral part of the pursuit of a scientific approach in the social sciences.

In recent decades, Western researchers have constantly confronted their concepts, theories, and paradigms in the field in China. In political science, for example, researchers have extensively questioned the teleological paradigm of democratisation that was dominant from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. The work of Andrew Nathan, for example, which focused

in particular on questioning the designation of the 1989 movement as a "democratic movement," on elucidating what the Chinese and the reformers of the 1980s meant by the word "democracy," and on explaining "authoritarian resilience," was a first step that opened the way for new questions (Nathan 2008, 2003; Nathan *et al.* 2010). The abandonment of the paradigm of democratisation has enabled researchers to gain the means of understanding how the Chinese regime functions and maintains itself, despite the growing development of protests and social organisations (Chen 2012; Cai 2008; Teets 2014), and to refine their understanding and definition of the Chinese regime vis-à-vis other authoritarian regimes, as evidenced by the emergence of new paradigms such as "consultative authoritarianism" (Baum 2007; Teets 2014; Truex 2014), "responsive authoritarianism" (Heurlin 2016; Weller 2008; Su and Meng 2016), "deliberative authoritarianism" (He and Warren 2011), and "participatory authoritarianism" (Duckett and Wang 2013), an invitation to consider how the Chinese regime presents and articulates certain forms of hybridity. A further step is taken in the deconstruction of paradigms when Western theories and concepts are not only put to the test of the Chinese fieldwork but redesigned from it; in other words when one wonders what the Chinese case brings to theories of the social sciences. The work in political sociology by Kevin O'Brien and his collaborators is a reference in this field and has influenced many of the studies cited above. Basing oneself on the field and on interviews to show what the Chinese mean by the terms "representation," "institutionalisation," or "election" makes it possible, as a first step, to become aware of how these concepts are for Western researchers rooted in a liberal conception peculiar to pluralist democracies and thus do not constitute operational analytical tools for understanding politics in China, where they have very different meanings (O'Brien 2018). As a second step, this approach is an invitation to elaborate new concepts with the yardstick of the Chinese experience, which makes it possible to apprehend the latter otherwise than as a mere negative (which it is not). O'Brien's work on protest in China embodies in an emblematic way this double movement of deconstruction of Western concepts and development of new concepts through the dialogue between theory (of social movements in this case) and Chinese terrain. Having shown that collective actions in China are neither "transgressive" nor "contained" but have characteristics of these two categories clearly distinguished in the work of MacAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly⁽²⁾ (O'Brien 2003), O'Brien and Li come to develop the concept of "rightful resistance," a concept that also reflects a type of resistance that is not specific to China but is found in other countries (O'Brien and Li 2006). The mobility of the concept of "rightful resistance" testifies to its scientific nature while denying the exceptionality of the object "China." The work of testing the normative categories inherited from the Western social sciences carried out by many political scientists of China in the wake of O'Brien leads some researchers today to question what is political in China at a level below open opposition to the CCP and challenge to the regime, and to take an interest in different forms of civic engagement and mobilisation (Froissart 2014; Wu and Shen 2016; Wu 2017) demonstrating the capacity of actors to "negotiate authoritarianism" (Froissart 2017). These researchers do not abandon themselves to relativism, since they do not completely question the normative categories and show, on the contrary, how these forms of mobilisation, civic engagement, and participation contribute to the stability and sustainability of a regime that remains characterised as authoritarian.

2. "Neither transgressive nor contained but boundary-spanning contention."

Nor are Chinese researchers the victims of Western paradigms that they might reproduce in a non-critical way. Since the 1930s, they have sought to adapt the social sciences, which emerged in a Western context, to the Chinese context in order to be able to grasp the questions that were specific to it. Sociologists and anthropologists, including Fei Xiaotong, have devoted themselves to the work of indigenisation of essentially exogenous concepts and theories. If the years 1980-1990 constituted a period of all-out reintroduction of Western theories to make up for the backwardness of the three decades of the Maoist period, which were marked by the closure to the West and the disappearance of the Chinese social sciences, this period of indiscriminate reintroduction (*nalaizhuyi* 拿来主义³) has today given way to an effort of re-appropriation paving the way for the hybridisation of knowledge. The impressive panorama of Chinese sociology provided by Laurence Roulleau-Berger testifies to the way in which Chinese sociologists reclaim and sharpen the concepts derived from both American and French theories in the light of a Chinese field increasingly better taken into account as ethnographic methods develop. Far from the simplistic opposition between Western and Chinese social sciences, which does not account for the differences in traditions and approaches within the social sciences of a given country, some Chinese researchers give evidence of a detailed and specific approach to the various currents of the social sciences, which they grasp in order to situate and adapt them to the Chinese context (Roulleau-Berger 2011, 2016). For example, Shen Yuan, a professor at Tsinghua University, contributed to the sociology of action and sociological intervention inspired by Touraine (Shen 2007). Jean-Louis Rocca's work reports on debates about the category of the "middle class" among Chinese sociologists and how this notion adapts to the Chinese context (Rocca 2008, 2017). Beyond the mere adaptation of Western theories, some Chinese researchers have managed to question the so-called universality of certain paradigms and thus to permanently influence the social sciences. This is the case, for example, with the anthropologist Cai Hua – trained in France and inspired by Françoise l'Héritier – whose study of the Naxi ethnic group, *A Society Without Fathers or Husbands*, hailed as a major turning point in France and in the United States, challenges the Levi-Strauss paradigm of the universality of marriage (Hua 1997). As Aurélien Boucher (2018) aptly points out, "Hua's epistemology lies within the social sciences, not against them."

In view of the work of reflexivity, observation, and dialogue conducted by Chinese and Western researchers, levelling charges of colonialism or hegemonism at the social science work on China produced in the West today appears in many ways to be unjust and outdated. The processes of circulation and hybridisation of the social and human sciences from one country to another have come to belie the opposition between Chinese and Western social sciences, themselves highly reifying and essentialising categories. In political philosophy, for example, the theory of liberalism and the paradigm of transitology have often been presented as utterly Western. But there is a Chinese liberalism, embodied in the 1920s and 30s by figures such as Hu Shi and today by intellectuals such as Xu Youyu, Zhu Xueqin, Qin Hui, and Liu Junning (Froissart 2001; Frenkiel 2014), while an intellectual such as Xiao Gongqin, leader of the neoconservatives, subscribes to the paradigm of transitology to give his own version of the Chinese transition (Xiao 2012). This paradigm has also been widely revisited by Chinese sociologists seeking to understand the transformations of Chinese society without necessarily assigning an *a priori* finality to these transformations other than that of progressing in a properly Chinese way; that is to say, without presupposing the point of arrival (Merle and Lun 2007). While there are differences between the social sciences in each country, these differences are destined to

be absorbed in scientific work and the globalisation of knowledge: theories, concepts, and paradigms are bound to be refined, challenged, and replaced by researchers from all countries and all origins. Similarly, more than researchers in the hard sciences, researchers in the humanities and social sciences are dependent on their subjectivity and in part determined by their cultural and political values in the choice of their research subject, in the questions they pose, and the way they seek to respond to them. But the particularising prism of these values is bound to fade away in the face of the logic of a discourse that becomes more coherent as it responds to contradiction and integrates new empirical data. It is this very movement of the scientific process that constitutes the common substrate for the social sciences, which makes them remain sciences, and which enables the dialogue and the progress of knowledge to continue.

The article by Guiheux and Wang, however, invites us not to minimise non-epistemological differences – such as the differences in the conception of the figure of the researcher and what is expected of him by the authorities on which he depends, as well as in research funding and how research is assessed and valued – which establish the framework in which researchers practice in each country. Young researchers trained in France are confronted with a labour market in China where the scientific skills acquired in France (such as critical thinking and interdisciplinarity) are not valued, while they are asked for skills to meet the CCP's calls for projects and professional strategies, especially publication strategies, that allow China to figure prominently in the new global research economy, in which France is marginalised. These differences in university systems need to be taken into account, as they may constitute obstacles to the internationalisation of researchers and research and thus to the progress of knowledge.

The return of hegemonism, or what talking about a "model" means

Now it is the maintenance of this fear of Western hegemonism in the social sciences that leads to wanting to impose a Chinese hegemonism in return. Widely reported by the State media, the lecture given by Xi Jinping provides a *vade mecum* of "Chinese" research,⁴ which we can try to summarise in a few sentences. The social sciences are from the start invested with a political and strategic role "of the highest importance" insofar as they must allow China to place itself "at the forefront of the world." Researchers are called on to support the leadership and governing capacity of the CCP, not only by helping it to make better-informed decisions through expertise to inform public policy and address the risks of destabilisation of the regime, but also by contributing to "theoretical innovation." This theoretical innovation aims to give meaning and coherence "to the 30 years of development" during which China has established itself as the second largest economic power in the world, to create new concepts of development to accelerate the transformation of the mode of development at the global level, and thus promote a world civilisation of Chinese origin, bringing economic prosperity and spiritual direction to humanity. For this, researchers

3. For a critique of "*nalaizhuyi*," see for example Qin (1999).

4. "哲学社会科学. 习近平为何强调中国特色" (Zhaxue shehui kexue, Xi Jinping weihe qiangdiao Zhongguo tese, Philosophy and Social Sciences, why Xi Jinping focuses on Chinese peculiarities), *Xinhua wang*, 12 June 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-06-12/c_129036629.html (accessed on 16 November 2018); "习近平:构建中国特色哲学社会科学" (Xi Jinping: goujian Zhongguo tese zhaxue shehui kexue, Xi Jinping: building a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics), *Xuexi Zhongguo*, 22 May 2016, http://news.china.com.cn/2016-05/22/content_38509942.htm (accessed on 16 November 2018).

are enjoined to set out from Marxism, guarantor of “a right understanding and a right belief,” and to stick to that system of thinking that has allowed China to reach the level of development and influence it enjoys today. Marxism provides both an ideological “guide” and “a correct method for better observing and interpreting the phenomena of nature, human society, and human thought, and revealing the laws they contain.” Chinese researchers must assimilate the social sciences contributions of other countries “without forgetting their roots and their culture” and synthesise these contributions through Marxism. They must also excavate traditional Chinese culture and demonstrate its excellence while adapting it to modern society⁽⁵⁾ to give it a power of attraction across borders and times. In order to build a “scientific power,” the Chinese social sciences must respond to “six characteristics”: to be part of a heritage, a nation, an originality of their own, but also of the contemporary era and display a systematic and scientific professionalism. In short, it is about “creating disciplinary systems with Chinese characteristics and universal significance.” Finally, the challenge of developing a “discourse system peculiar to Chinese philosophy and social science” is intimately linked to combating the “humiliation” of which China is a victim and is necessary to “achieve the goal of a struggle that has lasted for two centuries and achieve the great revival of the Chinese nation.”

The indigenisation of the social sciences and philosophy advocated here by Xi Jinping is rooted in a “fetishisation of cultural difference” (Dirlik 2013), a difference characterised by a methodological particularism and a political aim imposed on the disciplines. In other words, the notion of model refers as much to the prescriptive character of an exogenous approach to science imposed on researchers as to the ideological and domineering aim attributed to knowledge, these two dimensions being intimately linked. The characteristic of the model, in which it is fundamentally part of a relationship of domination, is that it is intended to be exported, or even imposed, by means other than its sole strength of scientific persuasion. This is the meaning given by Xi Jinping to scientific collaborations, partnerships with foreign universities, the establishment of Chinese research centres abroad, and Chinese scientific journals of international rank, which are an integral part of Chinese soft power, and which the President calls, in his conference, to develop. The social sciences are ultimately summoned to serve the nationalist ambition of the “Chinese dream” by allowing China to take revenge for the humiliation inflicted by the Opium Wars, as a result of which intellectuals and reformers forged a Western model – be it technical, political, or philosophical – to emulate in order to fight the West, while feeding a rejection of their own culture on the yardstick of this model. The injunction that is given here to Chinese scholars is that of winning the battle of ideas against a largely imaginary enemy, in other words certainly more internal than external, by proposing a model of alternative modernity capable of competing with the Euro-American conception of modernity, of liberal and capitalist inspiration. Thus the renaissance of the great Chinese nation will be completed by its ability to theorise and export this alternative model of modernity and “civilisation.” And what matter that this Marxist civilisation that the CCP calls for is rooted in a Western theory, since it is indeed a Marxism with Chinese tendencies, one of the postulates being that the PRC is a “socialist” country, and therefore prohibits Chinese scholars from using paradigms such as “class consciousness” or “class struggle,” which are inappropriate to account for China’s political and cultural reality.⁽⁶⁾

Despite its obvious lack of coherence, this *vade mecum* of Chinese research is part of a research governance that allows the CCP to impose it. While the universities and research institutes have always been under the tutelage of

the Party (a Party secretary is attached to each institution, and within it to each faculty), the influence of the Party and in particular of its First Secretary has grown considerably in recent years. Western textbooks have been banned, ideological work has been stepped up, criticism has been strongly discouraged, and teacher-researchers have been explicitly called on to support the PRC’s political system (Froissart 2018: 358). Following the aforementioned conference and the enshrining of Xi Jinping Thought in the Constitution at the 19th CCP Congress in October 2017, “institutes for the study of Xi Jinping Thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” were created in many universities in China. Funded by the Party School of the CCP Central Committee, the Ministry of Education, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the National Defence University of the People’s Liberation Army, the municipalities and provinces, and universities themselves, these institutes aim to promote Xi’s thinking and favour his interpretation.⁽⁷⁾ Even before the establishment of these institutes, Chinese academics were already being regularly invited to “study” meetings that some people describe, often with great distance and humour, as “brainwashing” (*xiniao* 洗脑), while their writings have been scrutinised by the censorship of Party committees in the universities. When they turn away from orthodoxy, it is not uncommon for researchers to be banned from publishing or teaching, to be unable to get a job or a promotion, or even to be dismissed from office.⁽⁸⁾ This political influence is reinforced by the fact that research is entirely driven by sources of funding monopolised by the CCP. Each year, the Leading Group for Research Planning in Philosophy and Social Sciences (*Quanguo zhexue shehui kexue guihua lingdao xiaozu* 全国哲学社会科学规划领导小组) publishes research funding programs (*guojia keji* 国家科技) accompanied by a guide (*zhinan* 指南) indicating the topics that will be funded for the year in each discipline. At the forefront of the disciplines are “Marxism and socialist scientific thought” (132 subjects proposed for the year 2017 as against 85 for 2016) as well as “the history of the Party and the construction of the Party” (108 for the year 2017 against 96 for 2016).⁽⁹⁾ The disci-

5. This approach is supposed to allow the “most fundamental cultural genes of the Chinese nation to be adapted to contemporary culture.”
6. On the sinisation of Marxism, see in particular Dirlik (2000). On the perplexity in which the ban on using the paradigm of class struggle has plunged some Chinese researchers, see for example: Xia Xiyan 夏夕烟, “中国社会科学网: ‘以阶级斗争为纲’ 的标签不能乱贴” (Zhongguo shehui kexue wang: ‘Yi jieji douzheng wei gang’ de biaoqian buneng luan tie, Website of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: One cannot misunderstand the meaning of the formula ‘take the class struggle as main axis’), *Ifeng*, 5 October 2014, http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141005/42141206_0.shtml (accessed on 23 November 2018).
7. Tsinghua University Newsletter, January-February 2018, <http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/thunews/index.html> (accessed on 19 November 2018).
8. Informal interviews with academics at Tsinghua University in Beijing, Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou and East China Normal University in Shanghai, between 2014 and 2018. Lay-offs or even imprisonment of well-known researchers in China have been widely reported by the press, see for example: “Peaceful advocate for Muslim Uighurs in China sentenced to life imprisonment,” *The Guardian*, 23 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/23/xinjiang-china-short-ilham-tohti-muslim-ugur-life-in-prison> (accessed on 23 November 2018); “Modern Chinese intellectuals are spineless: Peking University Vice Dean reportedly resigned after provocative essay,” *SupChina*, 27 March 2018, https://supchina.com/2018/03/27/modern-chinese-intellectuals-are-spineless-peking-university-vice-dean-reportedly-resigns-after-provocative-essay/?fbclid=IwAR3zWG_Bn6m75edqagqurQhd16oKCVUuTxDRzRvckj6HtheAinJEFIVvC8 (accessed on 23 November 2018).
9. 全国哲学社会科学规划办公室 (Quanguo shehui zhexue kexue guihua bangongshi, National Office of Social Science and Philosophy Planning), 国家社会科学基金项目 2016 年度科技指南 (Guojia shehui kexue jijin xiangmu 2016 niandu keji zhinan, Guide for the year 2016 of state funded human and social sciences projects), 15 December 2015, <http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n1/2015/1215/c219469-27929558.html> (accessed on 19 November 2018); 全国哲学社会科学规划办公室 (Quanguo shehui zhexue kexue guihua bangongshi, National Office of Social Science Planning and Philosophy), 国家社会科学基金项目 2017 年度科技指南 (Guojia shehui kexue jijin xiangmu 2017 niandu keji zhinan, Guide for the year 2017 of projects in the humanities and social sciences financed by the State), 16 December 2016, <http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n1/2016/1216/c220863-28956126.html> (accessed on 19 November 2018).

plines with the most subjects being financed are law (165 for 2016), management (155 for 2016), and economic theory (135), as against 18 for world history. It should be emphasised, however, that this steering of research by the authorities through funding is not unique to China, and that, as elsewhere, Chinese social scientists are now familiar with the art of “packaging” their research projects in the Newspeak of the Party in order to obtain the funds they need to conduct research over which they still retain partial control.

But the power of Party-funded research funding is not to be underestimated. In 2017, China spent 1.75 trillion *yuan* (US\$ 279 billion) on research and development, according to the Chinese Minister of Science, an increase of 14% over the previous year.⁽¹⁰⁾ In other words, the CCP is now able to implement the hegemony that it hopes for because of the colossal resources at its disposal to fund research not only by Chinese but also by foreign researchers. An increasing number of academic institutions around the world are now dependent on Chinese funding, which can come through project funding, Confucius Institutes, or sending students who pay high tuition fees abroad. Under these conditions, only a few major American universities have the means to put an end to their partnerships with Chinese universities when they believe that these partnerships challenge their values of freedom of research and researchers, as Cornell University did recently following the persecution by Renmin University of students who consider themselves Marxists and who had helped Shenzhen workers asking for the creation of a union in their factory.⁽¹¹⁾ Similarly, there is now a convergence between the imperatives of economic profitability of major publishing houses in the social sciences and the censorship objectives of the Chinese government, as recalled by the fact that Cambridge University Press (CUP) and Springer, under the threat of no longer being able to distribute in China, have agreed to block access to articles and censor passages of books that are deemed to be sensitive. Only the vigilance and mobilisation of Western researchers forced *China Quarterly*, owned by CUP, to restore access to censored articles during a scandal that marked the summer of 2017.⁽¹²⁾

As for Chinese researchers, confronted with contradictory injunctions both to contribute to the development of an ideology peculiar to China and to universal scientific knowledge, do they succeed in maintaining a real scientific agenda and, if so, how?

Chinese researchers' answers to the injunction of power

This injunction is of course far from unanimous among Chinese researchers, and the way in which they respond is not univocal. Some professors, such as Xie Yu, director of Peking University's Social Studies Centre and a Professor at Princeton, even try to translate the CCP's injunction into more meaningful and constructive terms for their colleagues and students. If, according to Xie, the way of asking the questions by Chinese social scientists is relatively well contextualised, “the application of Western theories still has insufficient local relevance, because of sociologists' lack of understanding the way of doing good research.” This way of underlining that the “grafting” of theories lurks in the path of any researcher in the process of learning his profession, and is not necessarily to be blamed on any hegemonism, makes the question of indigenisation appear in some respects as a “pseudo problem.” And to conclude: “If we can take into account the sociological context while adhering to the codified nature of sociology [as a scientific discipline], Chinese sociology will inevitably maintain its academic inde-

pendence and originality.”⁽¹³⁾ These statements show that even in Xi's China there is a place for the researcher's critical distance and autonomy of thought. There is also room for quality research that is well reflected in sociology in the great work of knowledge transmission performed by Laurence Roulleau-Berger, to whose books we refer. The last two articles in this issue offer a more contrasting picture of Chinese research, Samuli Seppänen's article highlighting a suffocation of creativity in the theory of law, while Coraline Goron's article, concerning theories of sustainable development, emphasises the ability of researchers to negotiate with the authorities within certain limits, and therefore to show some creativity.

Seppänen's text shows how the political constraints on research have partly contributed to the development of an anti-formalist current in the theory of law in China. While this trend, as in other Western countries, was partly motivated by the recognition that a certain degree of flexibility in the application of the law is necessary in order to better meet social needs, it is primarily aimed at encouraging judges to take into account the fundamental interests of the state and the Party, which fear above all the subversive power of a judgment of law that would be rendered autonomously. Also, according to Seppänen, China presents a particular form of anti-formalism to the extent that it supports the authoritarian political system, where in the West it was an integral part of the movement for the promotion of social democracy. In other words, the strictly scientific justification of this stream of legal thought is not peculiar to China, since it corresponds to a model that has been tested since the beginning of the twentieth century at world level, while the specifically Chinese elaboration of this theoretical position cannot be exported, since it has no scientific value, and only has a political value that meets the authoritarian constraints of the Chinese context. In this, Seppänen is in accord with Boucher: the validity of a theory or a method – and therefore its capacity to be exported – can only be established by reference to its heuristic value, which would seem to undercut any ambition of the CCP to develop and export a Chinese social science model.

Goron's article, which deals with the circulation of a “concept” – that of ecological civilisation – produced primarily by the authorities between the political and academic spheres, leads to a more nuanced conclusion. The theoretical ambition around what would be more accurately called a slogan corresponds in every respect to the ambition of the Chinese government

10. “China spends \$ 279 billion on R & D in 2017: Science Minister,” *Reuters*, 27 February 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-economy-rd/china-spends-279-bln-on-rd-in-2017-science-minister-idUSKCN1GB018> (accessed on 19 November 2018). In comparison, the sum devoted to research and development by France at home and abroad amounted to 53.3 billion euros in 2015, https://cache.media.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/file/2017/81/4/NL_RetD_2017-11_num_873814.pdf (accessed on 19 November 2018) and continues to decline: “Budget research 2018: the truth is in the blue,” *Blogs Le Monde*, 8 October 2018, <http://huet.blog.lemonde.fr/2017/10/08/budget-de-la-research-2017-la-verite-est-dans-le-bleu/> (accessed on 19 November 2018).
11. Monkey Cage, “Cornell University suspended two exchange programs with China Renmin University. Here's why,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/01/cornell-university-suspended-two-exchange-programs-with-chinas-renmin-university-heres-why/?utm_term=.ee329f8d76eb (accessed on 19 November 2018).
12. Nicolas Loubere and Ivan Franceschini, “How the Chinese censors highlight fundamental flaws in academic publishing,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 21 October 2018, https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/10/21/chinese-censors-highlight-fundamental-flaws-academic-publishing/?utm_source=HRI&utm_campaign=3e1ca9685aEMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_10_17_10_17_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b537d30fde-3e1ca9685a-250138429 (accessed on 21 October 2018).
13. Xie Yu 谢宇, “中国社会本土化是个伪问题” (Zhongguo shehuixue bentuhua shi ge wei wenti, The indigenisation of Chinese sociology is a false problem), *Zhishi fenzi*, 19 March 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/BexhEnzZ8xwBVqUp_W4y0A (accessed on 19 November 2018).

to export an ideological model, which would in this case be able to revolutionise a world economic order that is predatory for the environment. But while the scientific investment of the term "ecological civilisation" serves the political agenda of the Party and contributes to its political legitimisation, it is also used as a cover by some researchers to put forward scientific criticisms of the Chinese environmental governance system and formulate suggestions for reform. On the one hand, the concept of ecological civilisation circumscribes scientific and public discourse to what is acceptable to the Party by preventing critical debate on capitalism, democracy, and authoritarianism. On the other hand, researchers are re-appropriating this concept and helping to develop it scientifically according to their respective disciplinary approaches, thus contributing to the global scientific discussion on sustainable development. In other words, the article shows that the constant tension between propaganda and science that characterises Chinese academic circles can also give rise, in certain circumstances, to innovative scientific developments, thus joining the tried-and-true principle that constraints can also be a source of creativity. But at the same time it should be made clear that the opposite can be just as true. In legal theory, according to Seppänen, "attempts to make sense of 'Chinese realities' are thwarted

by ideological taboos that prevent researchers from assessing the Chinese system of governance in frank and honest terms," as much as by the constraint imposed on them to start from ideology rather than from concrete reality, and the absence of an adequate discursive environment.

To conclude briefly, we could emphasise that if there is a particular and probably irreducible specificity to the Chinese social sciences, it is the political hold of the CCP on research with which researchers must constantly contend, and the injunction to create a model that does not exist in countries where research autonomy is institutionalised. Undoubtedly, it is this hegemony that helps to curb the efforts at dialogue by Chinese and Western researchers, and prevents the Chinese social sciences from taking their rightful place in the international scientific arena. But it is also for this reason that these efforts at dialogue constitute an urgent task of the highest importance.

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