21st Century Post Colonial Theses

Dai Jinhua

In December 2013, Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, passed away. The mourning from all over the world sounded like a lost song, an echo of the remote 20th century, a moment of ending after the end. The curtain of five centuries of history of brutal imperialism and racist colonialism appeared to finally come down in 1994, a moment of the end of white supremacy in South Africa. The end of imperialism seemed further sealed at the death of Nelson Mandela, even though South Africa was still in turmoil, still torn by conflicts after the disintegration of extreme racism and colonial rule. In 2015, another movie based on his biography came forth, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*. Once again, the glorious life of the great warrior of peace was being narrated. In a similar historiography, Mandela fought peacefully, imprisoned in a cell for 40 years, finally turning the scales of power upside down.

 In fact, it is the most important, most legitimate narrative, if not the only, of the post Cold War historiography of the war-trodden 20th century. From Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, the dominant narrative is about peaceful struggle of “non-violence, non-cooperation” that eventually brought the end of colonial/racist rule, shaping these great historical figures, national heroes of *patres patriae* status. Nevertheless, before and after his death, there exist, and persist, some sort of untimely gossips. Interestingly, in the Chinese world, the effects are of “revelations” and “scandals”, for instance, talk about his short-lived membership of the South Africa Communist Party, his discourse of Mao Zedong’s “armed struggle”, his admiration of China’s revolutionary path, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the bomb attack that led to his imprisonment…. although these are supposedly simple facts marked with clear and deep historical scotching. At the same time, during the power transition and Mandela’s election, and naturally around his death, the media abound with reportages and narratives about the last period of his imprisonment when negotiations took place in the jail, about the actions and roles of various persons. Nevertheless, a long-lasting secret negotiation which kick started the historical change was lost in the narrative fissures like a needle in a haystack. Interestingly, this lost epic was in fact an open secret. This secret history has been reported in Robert Harvey’s *The Fall of Apartheid: The Inside Story from Smuts to Mbeki,*[[1]](#footnote-1) and adapted into the film *Endgame* (*2009*）. According to this story, as early as in the late 1980s, the African National Congress (ANC) leaders in exile had secretly contacted the South African white government and started negotiations. Intriguingly, the agent who midwifed the contact and negotiation was not a politician, but a representative of British mining companies. The negotiation took place in a private mansion in the United Kingdom. This negotiation lasting for years was not only the first contact of ANC and South African white racist government after decades of blood-shedding confrontation, but also the final substantial resolution of South Africa’s politics. This “inside story” seems to be merely an anecdote, an interlude. However, what is really interesting is the identity of the key person: the representative of British mining companies, as well as the venue of secret negotiation. The film and the book do not reveal the secret at the happy ending. But obviously in the final consensus, the interests of British mining companies were guaranteed or safeguarded as an additional condition. A small corner in contemporary South African history actually reveals a universal and important fact of former colonies before and after they emerged as nation-states: besides a few countries born in the fire of bloody revolution and war, most nations gained independence by conceding economic sovereignty and interests to former colonizers to different extents in all sorts of negotiations and compromises. Needless to say, former colonizers permitted limited independence to colonies on the premise that their economic interests be protected to the greatest extent, so as to continue extracting gains from former colonies by greatly cutting managing or governing costs. Nevertheless, these political and economic facts are missing in the post Cold War narrated and re-narrated stories of great peace warriors of the 20th century. These premises are also not so much studied in post-colonial theories as a branch of post war critical theories and third world studies in general.

 No doubt, post-colonial theses and theories come into being as a cultural legacy of national liberation movements, echoing the stormy establishment of independent nation-states in former colonized regions. Borrowing terms from Baudrillard, post-colonial discourses, in certain sense, successfully establish a new binary opposition, or coding: colonized/decolonized, colonial/post-colonial. A prevalent discourse is as such: in World War II, especially on the battle grounds of Europe, people from former colonies fought bravely and contributed greatly to the victory of the Allies against the Axis Powers; because of this, national independences in Asia, Africa and Latin America were the stakes former colonizers had to turn over afterwards. Discourses like this may have exposed an aspect of historical truth. However, it has also covered up the scenes of bloody revolutions and independence wars in the global history of decolonization. Former colonizers finally surrendered (part of) their power because they had no other choices or were defeated. If fact, to many former European colonizers, the independence movements in the three continents have been wounds yet to be completely healed till today.

 However, what I want to add is about another differential structure and coordinate parameter which has been blurred or even erased in this new binary opposition of colonization/de-colonization, colonial/post-colonial. That is the Cold War setting of two confrontational super-powers. After the war, the formation of the socialist bloc, headed by the Soviet Union, for the first time delineated in the modern world realms of power as equals to the West. The success of the Russian Revolution and especially the Chinese Revolution became alternative paradigms of independence and establishment of sovereignty, independent economy and industry. This is the reason why many nations in Africa bore the name of “People’s Republic” when they were born. In fact, these nation-states in the three continents, especially in Asia and Africa, rising in national liberation movements, became ambivalent and “fragile zones”[[2]](#footnote-2) between two confrontational blocs. In the rather long period of Cold War, they became valuable objects the two super-powers competed for. Precisely in the backdrop of the Cold War, the USA, in response to the Cuban revolution, Chile’s socialist regime and the Nicaraguan revolution, consolidated its presence in the region through military intervention, assassination and *coup d’etat* orchestrated by the CIA, militarizing Latin America with the pretext of helping its modernization at the lowest institutional cost. In Africa, the USSR exported the revolution by supporting anti-government military forces, militarizing the continent against former European colonial powers. The USA, on the other hand, made use of peace-keeping forces and NGOs financed by big foundations as an open way of exporting its ideas and modernization plan. As for the lifeline regions of energy and transportation, the USA does not hesitate to take extreme measures including military campaigns. In Asia torn apart by the great divide of Cold War, besides the persistent regional “wars of territories” (Korea, Vietnam and then the whole Indochina), there were military and ideological confrontations between countries and regions along the Cold War frontline. Exactly along this frontline, the “Four Little Dragons” created economic miracles in this Cold War backdrop under non-democratic regimes.

 It seems to be a proper example of the theory of Subject-Object. In the process of objectification by the USA and USSR in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the formation of new international subjects and mutual recognition between countries was greatly consolidated in these regions. In 1955, the Bandung Conference held by 29 Asian and African countries took place by clearly excluding colonizers and former colonial countries for the first time. It shows a new type of international alliance under the banner of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Bandung Conference with its resolution, as well as the regional movements against the Super Powers before and after it had put on international stage a serial excluded by the binary coding in the so-called principle of difference, the “Third (World)”. The highlighting of the Third World was a product of the Cold War structure. The self-awareness of the Third World along with its authentic appeals for political alliance tore apart the binary structure of the Cold War by the actual Tri-partition setting.

 Interestingly, the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Third World has reshaped the world map in the true sense of the word. It put forward political theses like “national sovereignty” under new parameters. It also highlighted the invisible writing underneath: what had replaced the old colonial structure was a new colonialism, or the political-economic reality known as globalization. The emerging countries born in negotiation, playing of strategies and compromise, either are far from being genuine sovereign states, or have economic structures maximally dependent on suzerain states. Even though being nation states with intact political sovereignty, they are still under the yoke of a monolithic economic structure shaped by colonial rule, or in a state of destitution, short of necessary capital and resources to initiate industrialization and economic reconstruction. It is the important subtext of “re-departure” in the glorious vibe or sorrowful end of the story of Che Guevara, the red legend of the 20th century.

 In other words, after WWII, the world order seems to be overhauled completely. In fact, thanks to the rise and domination of financial capital and capital monopoly of new technology such as “green revolution”, which is actually irrelevant to and even contrary with ecological issues, the Third World/former colonies, semi-colonized regions have been “integrated” and “reconstructed” as cheap production zones of physical economy (so-called world factory) and fields of mono-crops or cash crops. On the precondition of regional “division of labor” of the global economy, West Europe and North America transfer abroad industry and a “portion” of proletarians, and evolve into “post-industrial”, “post-modern”, “consumer” society.[[3]](#footnote-3) Therefore, the thesis of Third World is associated with and correspond to the Cold War structure of confrontation between East and West, written as the opposition of rich and poor countries, the North and the South. A phenomenon thus highlighted is the astronomical debt carried by the South, usually imposed by former suzerain states. Such is the direct and miserable economic (political) reality of the Third World. It is probably superfluous to further elaborate that the Cold War confrontation of East/West and the North/South opposition of global gap of wealth is not so much an illustration of the second half of the 20th century by a quartering of East/West/North/South as belonging to different closed systems of difference and academic disciplines. The key words of the former are socialism (communism) vs capitalism, represented as dictatorship vs democracy after the Cold War; the latter is about the First and Second World vs the Third, developed vs developing countries, rich vs poor countries, sorts of economic or sociological discourses. In this coordinate system of different dimensions, post-colonial theory seems to bring back another coordinate of East and West. In the initiation of modern history, on the Eurocentric world map, the East of former colonized countries and regions is facing the West of Europe (West Europe and North America). Needless to say, in this new set of representation of East/West, a kind of “history and human geography” is being re-narrated, with the WWII and the Cold War as its folds of representation. Such is the motivation in the West for the publication of like *The Chrysanthemum and Sword* and the rise of regional studies in the USA.

 What I would highlight here is the significance of the Cold War as the “fold” of post-colonial narrative in the literal meaning in Chinese. Not only do I attempt to highlight this history deliberately obliterated and buried in oblivion, but also emphasize that its basic parameters are exactly its strong political relevance and economic parameter. I have repetitively emphasized that the highlighting of “cultural” theses in post-war US-European social realm and human sciences (“counter cultural movement”, “cultural studies”, “cultural politics”, or “cultural revolution”) may have been a critique and refusal of Soviet dogmatic political economy or economic determinism. However, the strength and vitality of cultural theses is no doubt dependent on the global political setting of US-USSR confrontation and the economic systems of (more than) two categories of difference. In other words, it is due to the pervasive diffusion of political culture and the politicized (and even militarized) representation of Third World economic theses in the age of the Cold War that critical theses of cultural politics thus have significance and strength in social practice within the USA and Europe. Therefore, despite discrepancies in terms of appeals, subject identity of speaking, disciplinary and discursive fields, post-colonial discourse or post-colonialism no doubt has potential or direct association and dialogue with Immanuel Wallerstein’s Modern World System, Samir Amin’s Dependence Theory, and other post-war social-economic–political critical theories.

 After the Cold War ended, a fast-changing post-Cold War world has changed the reality structure and coordinates on which critical theory was once mapped. The world has emerged into the era of capitalist globalization in the real sense. On the one hand there is no longer externality and alternative to capitalism. On the other hand, we do not see different types of capitalism within the USA and Europe. What has vanished is not only the particular political culture of the Cold War era, but also the space in reality for political practices of global critique and resistance. Indeed, not very long after the Cold War, anti-capitalist globalization forces have again re-assembled, from Seattle anti-globalization protest, the World Social Forum, to Occupy Wall Street movement. However, resistance movements of this sort could not really converge into new resistant forces. Except having the same enemy, they could not reach consensus on a constructive solution or point a way out. “One No, Many Yes” so they say. Similarly, due to failing or refusing to respond to the question of what is and whether we should be naming, summoning and shaping new historical subjects, the ideological struggle between (New) Left vs Right within US-Europe, once different from the opposition of US vs USSR/capitalism vs socialism, finds its political coordinate and orientation shattered and obscured in a new global context. Nowadays, cultural theory including post-colonial discourse has lost its political base in reality, becoming debilitated and even losing its momentum as effective social practice. The thesis of cultural politics begins to show its limit and even hallucinatory nature.

 At the same time, what is erupting at the end of the Cold War is a global flow (of capital, population and ideology) at an unprecedented scale and magnitude. This tidal flow may be forcefully integrating global capital. However it is also destroying the international society or trans-national associations formed during the Cold War. What has vanished as “names disappearing on map”[[4]](#footnote-4) along with the USSR not only are the disintegrated former socialist bloc and capitalist camp, but also the pan-Latin American and pan-African movements once assembling the Third World identity and forces of counter struggle by the Non-aligned Movement. Now the nation-state once again becomes a suspicious, fragile but seemingly irreplaceable unit of international theses. In contrast to the integration of Europe in EU after the Cold War, we witness separatism and frequent conflicts rising and falling here and there in the world, especially among former socialist countries. As for the post-colonial narrative, colonial/post-colonial begins to obscure its critique, reflection and history of anti imperialist colonialism, becoming a functional rhetoric in different contexts and positions of speaking.

 It is well known that post-colonialism as a critical theory and a kind of “ism” is born in universities in North America and produced in the works of scholars of English-American literature from the Third World (mainly from Asia). At its starting point, it has shown a reversal, dislocation or paradox of subject/object position in multiple senses. As far as its birthplace within North American academy is concerned, it first of all is an insightful re-discovery of colonialist culture and narration in the history of European/English American literature. It discovers and reveals that becoming Other, sub-human, non-human, or objectification of former colonies and the Third World is necessary for the construction of European/US imperialist Subject. It tears apart European and US colonizers’ Subject role, seemingly natural and intact as it was before. As a critique of cultural imperialism and modernity, it has accomplished brilliant achievement. New subject position of speaking from the Third World is achieved by re-discovering and giving voice to the Other in European and American classical literature, by occupying and appropriating this particular object position. Probably needless to say, it is not so much highlighting the subject position of the formerly colonized or the Third World as creating and acquiring the subject position of cultural diaspora, a new subject in the age of globalization. This theoretical achievement highlights the reversal “journey of the ‘Heart of Darkness’” in the age of globalization, so called by post-colonial theorists. The particular subject position of cultural diaspora also highlights a complicated reality of identity.

 Post-colonialism as a new critical theory from the West, taking advantage of the growing hegemony of English and the USA as major hub and exporter of theories after WWII, is disseminated to non-western / Third World / former colony regions. During its transmission, it has triggered new socio-cultural problems, swap in Subject-Object positions and its paradox. Doubtless, post-colonial theses, addressing the universal and profound colonial culture (then colonial structure in society, politics and economy) in non-West and former colonized countries, are exposure and reflections on pervasive cultural imperialism. It serves as poignant warning against “Self-Orientalism” prominent in the “interflow” of international cultures. Nevertheless, for most of the Third World countries, the urgent and realistic problem has always been political and economic modernization (or “westernization”) – political sovereignty, national self-determination and monetary sovereignty…. Fredric Jameson asserts that Third World writers are still writing fables in a “Sherwood Anderson” manner[[5]](#footnote-5). Even though his suggestion has been heavily questioned and criticized, it is indeed true that the representation or reflection of reality by Third World writers and artists, with all vigor and fervor of “life or death struggle”, usually takes place deviated or totally different from the post-colonial reality context. In most of Third World society, that is to say, the cultural reality, post-colonialism is not as realistic as neo-colonialism. Moreover, the coordinate of “race” highlighted in post-colonialism is not as constantly hurting as class and gender. As operators of foreign theories, Third World local scholars hold a peculiar position, a double position of Subject-Object, speaking the language of other and self-uttering. Even more profound than this peculiar cultural experience of accepting Third World discourses from the West is the following fact. In a reality context of capitalist globalization with no alternative, many western/colonial thoughts and ideas packaged as “universal values”, being carried violently by colonialism, have become internalized or re-written as one’s own cultural resources in the long history and even during the process of anti-colonial struggle and national modernization. It is no doubt the best example of “appropriation” in post-colonial theory. My favored expression is “the Other is not far away but deep inside ourselves”. Such is the universal cultural reality of the Third World and former colonies also a proper description of their political and economic realities.

 Here, what is important is not after centuries of capitalism there is no longer any pure local culture and cultural “self” of the Third World. Or not only had imperialism and colonialism destroyed violently the social structure and background on which local culture depended to exist, but also created a gap of episteme between traditional culture and modern society. Post colonial theory has once and will continue to spark the cultural awareness of the Third World/non-western countries. But after critique, the problem of finding creative solution in reality becomes a social dead end. On the one hand, it is difficult to directly revive plentiful and plural traditional resources. Therefore “modernization of traditional culture” becomes an urgent and self-contradictory socio-cultural thesis difficult to put into practice. On the other hand, cultural particularism often becomes slogans of political conservatism serving Third World political elites who maintain their rule in the name of tradition and nation/people, whereas the suspicious western ideas often become strategic banners of local resistance. These ideas, being double-edge swords, also reconstitute during the resistance in reality a cultural “internal exile” as a debt of colonial history, and even reality of new political colonization.

 Nowadays, toward the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, we bring up again the post-colonial theses to look at the reality of today’s world in cataclysm. The end of white rule in South Africa has become an echoing end of colonial/racist history. Interestingly, colonial/post-colonial discourse is however not fading away. On the contrary, it becomes a recurring global thesis in the new century. Doubtless, it corresponds to the new tussle of financial capital fighting to construct an empire of capital and for exploitation, to the open or covered currency war or resources war, to the widening wealth gap internationally and within nations in a dividing world. In most cases, “colonization” becomes more a rhetoric. Borrowing from the brutal and bloody history of colonialism, it connotes the barbarism and cruelty of global exploitation and oppression against the poor in the post Cold War era when international and domestic balancing power has disappeared. People, including myself, always use the term “internal colonization” to describe how brutal the progression of capitalism in China has been at the turn of the century. However, it is not as much a naming in reference to colonial history as a trope dissociated from the memory of colonial history. At the turn of the century, the concentration of public wealth in the hands of a few has taken place not only between the center and the periphery, geographically and politically, but also between urban and rural, and coastal and inland regions. It also takes place in core cities, in medium and large state-owned enterprises which once were the pillars of society. Under an unequal structure of Urban-Rural dyadic system, rural youths are swarming towards cities into sweatshops known as world factories. They have in fact become the creators of surplus value necessary for primitive accumulation of capital. However, it is the former state-owned factory workers who have fallen to the bottom of society, into despair and helplessness. Swarming across the vast land of China, more than 200 million peasant-workers have in reality become the primitive proletarian army. However, their situations and stories are still occasionally visible through reportage. Their suffering (“problems”) can be interpreted through the logic of modernization. Nevertheless, those laid-off workers have long been in a nameless and aphasic state as there is no counterpart in the modern history of Europe and USA, until 2011 and 2014 when they made first appearance in two low-budget art films.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although *The Piano in a Factory* did poorly in box office in a film market dominated by big capital, it is through this family tragic-comedy that the brutal deprivation during 1995-1997 made its first appearance in the prudent discourses of sociologists and contemporary history. Even more interestingly, it is not a reality exclusive to the Third World or emerging countries, but universal to worker communities in former industrial cities during the process of industry transfer from advanced industrialized nations toward the Third World in the post Cold War era. Also meaningfully, apart from a tragedy performed in comedy form, similar sufferings are totally absent in report and discourse, whether by writing or non-writing. If it is a universal scene of “internal colonization” happening in former suzerain nations and (semi) colonies, then its proper reference is historical progress of modernity or bluntly the logic of capital rather than the logic of colonization.

 In similar examples, “colonization” as rhetoric is still pregnant with social critical force. As a social trope, it highlights the atrocity of exploitation and deprivation. However, it is not the whole or even major usage of “colonization” as trope in the 21st century. It may be said that after the Cold War, the rapid and drastic process of globalization has unfolded the world as “masterless space”, “masterless time” and “masterless land”. The world once again moves into an era of global competition for hegemony. “Colonization” then also becomes a term applied by global left-wing critique and movement to describe global flow of capital from different sources and its occasionally destructive impact and aftermaths on local economy, production and livelihood (first of all in the Third World or developing countries). Just as the barricades on the streets of Paris in 1968 by the rebels were not so much fortifications as symbolic constructions. Long gone are the narrow streets and alleys in the times of the Paris Commune. The barricade no longer has any function of military defense or occupation. It is rather an appropriation of historical memory. Once a barricade is constructed, the rebels’ opponent on the other side is “defined” as tyrant, royalist and executioner. The memory carried by barricade can confer upon the insurgents righteousness, and condemn the opponents to injustice. The rhetorical yet non-historical usage of “colonization” can also be used to emphasize how formidable, atrocious, unjust enemies/foreigners are and remind us how bloody the history of capitalism is. However, at the same time, it might obscure our recognition and understanding of the condition of post Cold War global capitalism, and shade the historical context that the present reality is fabricated of. Most dangerously, “colonization” as social naming and imagination must directly or implicitly carry an identity politics of nation-state and even race, also an “identity” position preconditioned by absolute difference.

 As mentioned above, after the Cold War, what is developing along with global capital flow is widening social division and unequal distribution of wealth. As Mr. Li Meng says, “At the end of the last century, radicalism received a hard blow. Left-wing has been in its weakest state since the 17th century. The society at present is in its most unfair condition after WWII, yet people bear with it never like before.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Here I do not plan to argue with him in detail. The quote is meant to delineate the reality from a certain point of view. Social inequality becomes increasingly serious. People’s “tolerance” with it is related with the decline of the left-wing and its social mobilization. People “bear with” inequality because they choose to deny the left-wing explanation of the cause of social inequality and most importantly the left-wing solutions of social equality and justice. Doubtless, they do not really bear with the deteriorating inequality. In fact, there is a growing despair and helplessness spreading among the middle class (especially young generation) in the world. Therefore we witness different social groups again and again meet and gather in street struggles, social movements or violent conflicts caused by social incidents: the enlarging social bottom (the “economic outcast”) and middle class youth who become angry and hopeless before the closing social mobility. We may for the moment set aside discussion of the forms and natures of social movement and social resistance at the turn of the 21st century (for example special features like internet mobilization, conscious and unconscious semiotic performance, borrowing from cultural texts of popular culture, instant transmission of countless images and videos…). A prominent change in the social movement trend different from the second half of the 20th century is the debilitation of left-wing power of social interpretation and mobilization. As a result, right wing narratives, often right wing populism, appropriate social sufferings, inequality, injustice, the helplessness of lower class and youth, and even the rhetoric of critique of “colonialism” from the global left. Purged of the coordinate of class and critique of capitalism, what these social narratives and mobilization count on are religious fundamentalism of various sorts, blunt or implicit nationalism and racism. It is a paradox theme in the 21st century: by the side of “radical” political conservatism, we find a peculiar social effect by the rhetorical usage of “colonization”. Emotional mobilization by populism of this sort expunges the parameters of capital and class. Domestic and international flow of population/labor (upper and lower class, but first of all lower class) in the era of globalization becomes the scapegoat of particular social problems and “local” sufferings. The fundamental rhetoric of Us/Them necessary for political mobilization is converted into local people/foreigners, our race/the other. When transnational flow of capital and labor becomes equivalent to colonial expansion in this imagination, the historical facts of colonialism such as military invasion, political domination and economic exploitation become invisible. The local memory of imperialism and colonialism is also blocked by sufferings and threat in reality. It successfully creates a social imagination and pathos, and it also rewrites or creates a new kind of emotional structure.

 At the turn of the 21st century and afterwards, the situation of the world itself has constituted a “post colonial” discursive field: from Rwanda massacre to 911, from Tea Party to ISIS and the rise of various right wing and extreme right political forces. It is no doubt an echo of colonial history and imperialist atrocity. Moreover, it also represents global political-economic structure becoming increasingly unequal on a setting reminiscent of the former colonial system after the eventual end of colonial history. Once again, post-colonial? Or neo-colonial? Colonialism or capitalism? A historical stage of imperialism or its universal logic?

 Doubtless, the highlighting of colonial and post-colonial theses in the world, especially in East Asia, is related to the global race for hegemony, the integration of Europe and the “Rise of China” after the issuance of the Euro currency in 1999. The 2008 financial crisis has facilitated the “Rise of China” becoming an outstanding global “reality”. Then Chinese capital and industry march into its Asian periphery and then Africa. In recent years, we have the initiation of Shanghai Free-Trade Zone, the unrolling of “New Silk Road Belt” on the world (though with a lot of setbacks) and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which trigger increasingly vociferous discourses such as “Chinese Imperialism”, “Chinese Colonialism”, “China Threat Theory” (strangely accompanied by “China Collapse Theory”). One of the prominent changes after the Cold War has been the integration of Europe by the winner (West Europe) with former Soviet and socialist nations of physical economy as its trophies. The rise of Euro impelled Europe’s endeavor to have a finger in the pie of the global financial empire monopolized by the USA and US dollar, kick starting a new round of competition between the Old and New Continents, which seems to tear apart the former Cold War Alliance. Then the “Rise of China” is one of the important marks of what I call “After Post Cold War”. Rather interestingly, the Wall Street financial crisis sweeping across Europe and the world is both the background and also the significance of the “Rise of China”. China’s relatively “closed” currency policy has somehow protected it from major trouble. Its relatively under-valued assets become global attraction. The astronomical wealth of physical economy accumulated since the socialist era is still under process of capitalization. The vitality of the Chinese economy with its vastness and depth for capital makes China the frontier of global capitalism and even the savior. The “global expansion” of the Chinese economy has given rise to the concept of US-China fight for hegemony in global geopolitics and intensified multiple tensions around China. As for the theory of Chinese colonialism(/imperialism), it does highlight as a kind of rhetorical description the speed and scale of the Chinese economic growth and its global expansion, and the impact of Chinese capital and products on the world economy. Apart from this, however, it fails to raise and even conceals a related major question, not to mention stimulate thinking: has China today achieved the political and economic status comparable to the former USSR so as to be powerful enough to be an “Empire” of equal rival of the USA? We may say that US-China confrontation has become a fact. However, it does not contain ideological opposition as in the old Cold War. It is no longer about capitalism vs socialism. Then does China represent a new type of capitalism or its potential? Or we may have the argument in reverse. If China has become a global empire, then why is it still registered as an “emerging/developing” country? Do the examples of interrupted blooming and even disintegration of emerging economy support the various versions of China Collapse Theory? If US-China confrontation is a valid statement, then how do we choose a position in theory and practice criticizing the double/multiple hegemony of capitalism and imperialism? How does the “Rise of China” accelerate the crisis and collapse of capitalism? Or does it create new momentum and new possibilities for global capitalism?

For me, a highly realistic and ethical problem is: what is the position for a social critic facing the world today? Before the reality of global capitalism with no alternative, should we just choose to take a “better” side? Or we should refuse to take side and insist on critique? If critique inside and outside the academia is still possible, what is the meaning of critique in practice? In other words, should social critic take the responsibility of new construction? A related question is: for the Third World, is the rise of China making the disaster worse? New disaster? Or a new possibility (as a new model, or creating new fissure of power as a rival to the USA)? Does the rise of China still represent an alternative path? Today does “China’s Path” imply the significance of Chinese revolution, or its betrayal? International communist movement of the 20th century to what extent has achieved alternative path of modernization (and therefore de-colonization)? I have no answer for these questions. No answer, not because of my Chinese identity. It is rather because I am still searching for new coordinates, new language and new possibilities for theory and practice in the era of global capitalism, facing the reality of various crises in China. Today, what is highly intrinsic to the theses of colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial is not only the structure and reality of financial capitalism, but also the historical end of capitalism brought by the ecological and energy crises.

1. Robert Harvey: *The Fall of Apartheid: The Inside Story from Smuts to Mbeki,* UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Spanier: *American Foreign Policy since World War II*, 9th edition, Holt McDougal, 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Soviet regime established a system of “international division of labor” pivoted around nation-state interests within its new empire. The difference is the plan and orientation of socialist nations including the USSR except East Germany was the acceleration of industrialization (militarization for arms race) and “modernization”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is the Chinese title of a 2003 Russian film *Коктебель*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Fredric Jameson, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, *Social Text*, No. 15 (Autumn), 1986, pp. 65-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *The Piano in a Factory* directed by Zhang Meng, 2011; *Red Amnesia* directed by Wang Xiaoshuai, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Zhou Zhe: “Interview with Li Meng: the humanities education should allow students to understand that it is difficult but worth it to be a good person.” *Pengbai News*, 29 May 2015. 周哲《李猛专访：人文教育要让学生明白，做一个好人难且值得》,《澎拜新闻》，2015-5-29。 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)