

Lost and Found:
Re-connecting Knowledge as Ethical Security of China Studies

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The social science community has responded to the cultural studies challenges in various ways. The result is not encouraging in the sense that the two epistemologies find no ready platform to engage in dialogue. Similar challenges appear in the China studies indirectly. Interaction among identities of China, China scholars and China scholarship together cast doubt on the validity of knowledge in our community. In brief, the challenge is that if knowledge is an identity statement of those who produce the knowledge, then past research, which presumes the objectivity of China knowledge, should all be disposed as sheer product of identity politics. A framework that is epistemologically tolerant enough to bring together scholarship based upon different philosophies of knowledge can provide an ethical relationship among all the knowledge of different nature. Such a framework allows each research agenda to have its own identity and enables the scholars to learn knowledge of a different nature without feeling threatened. I call this the ethical relationships of China knowledges.

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Identity and Knowledge

Epistemological issues do not usually attract too much discussion in the China studies community. Sporadic reflections in this regard nonetheless raise a few challenges that are worth serious examination. They primarily concern the relationship between area studies and social science, in addition to methodological issues.¹ There are likewise debates over the relationship between the scholars and their objects of study, vaguely considered to represent China. This latter type of debate questions the legitimacy of the problematiqué of the mainstream area studies agenda, suggesting an inevitable connection between scholarship and politics.² While the academic community has not yet tried to systematically respond to any of these epistemological critiques, and few recent Ph. D theses have picked up epistemological issues, pressure for response is still mounting to those who endeavor to promote social science in area studies. The pressure has three sources at least. These pressures compel social scientists, in whose circle that China studies recruit newcomers, to have to tackle epistemological and even ontological self-evaluation.

First of all, there is the cultural studies perspective that rocks the Cartesian certainty upon which the scientific knowledge is thought to base. Interpreted meanings substitute for universal theories to become the new focus of scholarship in the cultural studies. The earliest effective intruder from cultural studies to social science is probably feminism, following which postmodernism and postcolonialism enter the scene. Despite its various and diverse analytical

¹ David Shambaugh (ed.), *The American Studies of Contemporary China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

² Bruce Cummings, "Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies during and after the Cold War," *Bulletin of the Concerned Asian Scholars* 29, 1 (Jan-Mar, 1997): 6-27.

interests and approaches, the field of cultural studies has developed a minimal consensus that almost all share, specifically their common focus on identity. The cultural studies whose epistemology seeks to deconstruct knowledge, conceive of a research agenda as no more than another text, to reproduce or invent identities desired by the scholars. It happens that at the same time that the cultural studies accuse the social sciences of being essentially political construction, the national identity composition of China scholars is witnessing drastic changes with more overseas Chinese social scientists joining the English-language China studies community³. This development makes the discussion on the ethical relationship between the China scholars, China scholarship and China increasingly pressing. Third, and finally, globalization that brings scholars and those carrying the China identity in and out of China frequently further obscures the border of China that scientists used to assume to be just out there. Once China as a researched object is opened up, mutual constitution of the scholars and scholarship cannot be easily hidden any longer.

Interaction among identities of China, China scholars and China scholarship together casts doubt on the validity of knowledge in our community. In brief, the challenge is that if knowledge is an identity statement of those who produce the knowledge, does not this mean that past research, which presumes the objectivity of China knowledge, should all be disposed as sheer product of identity politics? Or, that knowledge is still knowledge, except that it is not universal, law-driven or time-neutral. This is not the first time a challenge of this sort appears in China studies. Earlier denouncement of area studies as counter-productive from the social science community once threatened to discredit the China research that was not oriented toward universal theory building. However, the earlier challenge is largely methodological, not touching the identity issue that intrinsically links the identity of scholars to the scholarship. This ontological reconceptualization has prompted some responses from the social science

³ Andrew Walder, "The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies, 1977-2002," *University of California Edited Volumes*, Volume 3, Article 8 (2002).

community⁴, but not yet led to similar reflection in the China field. The challenge is additionally about research design. How could scholars, after recognizing their subjective intervention in the production of knowledge through the problematiqué that motivates their research, feel comfortable about the result that to an extent responds to their own identity needs, consciously felt or not. This recognition means that one's scholarship represents at best a relative truth to another's.⁵ Scholarship is therefore more than representation of truth. It is at the same time texts through which readers collect evidence that reveal the scholars' own inner world. The scholars examine China while the readers examine scholarship. Alas, scholarship and patients' self-report are of similar nature.

Indeed the social science community has responded to the cultural studies challenges in various ways. The result is not encouraging in the sense that the two epistemologies find no ready platform to engage in dialogue. Similar challenges appear in China studies indirectly, mostly not presented in epistemological terms⁶. Before these epistemological and ontological challenges question the moral foundation for research in the China studies community, the need for a framework that can deal with knowledge of a completely different nature seems present and urgent. Without such a framework, possibly mutual estranging between scholars of different identities will surely negatively affect the process of learning as well as the quality of intellectual exercise⁷. Moreover, the scholars would need a sense of certainty or security from where to engage in intellectual activities, but the upcoming ontological controversy is going to

⁴ Anthropology and International relations represent the most contested fields in social science. See, for example, Marshal Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reasons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Michael Shapiro, J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997).

⁵ See the discussion by Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multi-cultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

⁶ In these studies, there is no such objective China out there to be studied. Specifically, China is not just China. See, for example, David S.G. Goodman (ed.), *China's Provinces in Reform: Class, Community, and Political Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997); Lily Ling, *Postcolonial Learning between Asia and the West: Conquest and Desire* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Chih-yu Shih, *Collective Democracy: Political and Legal Reform in China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, 1999); Tani Barlow (ed), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁷ James Glass has equated postmodern writings with delusional script of psychotic patients suffering paranoid, see, *Power and Psychosis: Threats to Democracy in the Self and the Group* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); David Campbell accuses the IR literature of being violent, see *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

destroy it⁸. A framework that is epistemologically tolerant enough to bring together scholarship based upon different philosophies of knowledge can provide an ethical relationship among all knowledges of different nature. Such a framework allows each research agenda to have its own identity and enables the scholars to read knowledge of a different nature without feeling threatened. This is the purpose of the following discussion.

Epistemological Dimensions of China Knowledge

How should China scholarship be divided into kinds that are epistemologically mutually related on the one hand and respect the distinctive identities of the scholars on the other hand? No deductive method can do justice to the ever-changing ways of organizing knowledge. For example, the familiar level-of-analysis debate in international relations is decreasingly relevant in today's literature. To organize different kinds of knowledge, to address the evolution of a specific problematique and to inform the meanings of scholarship require philosophers of social science to attend to those sensibilities that are in actuality present in the literature. In this paper, three such dimensions emerge through the quick glimpse over a selected portion of the literature. (Figure I) The first dimension is Euro centric vs. China centric (or looking in vs. looking out) knowledge, a dimension derived from the reading of Paul Cohen,⁹ Phillips Kuhn,¹⁰ Wang Hui,¹¹ Gan Yang,¹² Mineo Mizoguchi,¹³ and Phillip Huang,¹⁴ etc. The second dimension, which is about synchronic vs. diachronic (or a-historical vs. evolutionary) knowledge,

⁸ The debate between Jurgen Habermas and Jean-FrancoisLyotard. see Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

⁹ Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

¹⁰ Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹¹ Wang Hui, *The Empire, the State and the Identity of China* (diguo, guojia yu zhongguo rentong), a lecture given at Chinghua University, Hsingchu, Taiwan (2003.12.18), mimeo.

¹² Gan Yang, *We Are Creating Tradition* (women zhengzai chuangzao chuantong) (Taipei: Lianching, 1989).

¹³ Mineo Mizoguchi, *China as a Method* (zuwei fangfa de zhongguo) · (trans.) Lin Youchong (Taipei: National Institute of Compilation and Translation, 1999).

¹⁴ Philip C. Huang, *The Crisis of Paradigm in the China Studies: On the Paradox of Social Economic History*(zhongguo yanjiu de guifan renshi weiji: lun shenhui jingji shi zhong de beilunxianxiang) (Hong Kong: Oxford, 1994).

appears in the literature represented by Harry Harding,¹⁵ Andrew Nathan,¹⁶ Yang Kuoshu,¹⁷ Kuo Hualun,¹⁸ Naitou Konan,¹⁹ and Jin Guantao,²⁰ etc. The third dimension concerns structural vs. agential (or, materialist vs. interpretive) knowledge, that shows in Lucian Pye,²¹ Stevan Herral,²² Chou Rei,²³ Prasenjit Duara,²⁴ Joseph Needham,²⁵ and Wang Der-wei,²⁶ etc. Together, perhaps with some other dimensions not mentioned here, they divide knowledge into different kinds. These lack channels of communication to the extent that when communication does take place, it questions the legitimacy of any particular research agenda by rocking the ontological foundation of each particular kind of knowledge.

Paul Cohen records the origin of criticism toward Euro centric knowledge of China, attending especially to the stimulus-response mode of analysis that portrays China in a backward, passive position only to be moved by Western enlightening forces. By contrast, for example, Cohen encourages a historiography that discovers the forces of modernization from within Chinese history. Similar reflections come from Philip Kuhn, who painstakingly traces the evolution of Chinese history to the fall of regime capacity since the late Ming Dynasty. In the same vein, Mineo Mizoguchi argues that social changes in the past century are primarily a

¹⁵ For efforts to establish universal law, see Harry Harding, *The Study of Chinese Politics: Toward a Third Generation of Chinese Politics*, *World Politics* 36, 2 (1984).

¹⁶ Andrew Nathan, "Is Chinese Culture Distinctive?—A Review Article," *Journal of Asian Studies* (November 1993): 923-936.

¹⁷ Yang Kuoshu, "Why Do We Want to Establish Chinese Indigenous Psychology?" (women weisheme yao jianli zhongguo ren de bentu xinlixue), *Indigenous Psychology* 1 (1993): 6-88.

¹⁸ Kuo Hualun, *Collected Work on Chinese Communist Issues* (zhong gong wenti lun ji) (Taipei: Chengchi University, 1976), Ch. 4.

¹⁹ Naitou Konan, "On the Demise of Qing Dynasty" (qing chao shuaiwang lun) in Naitou Konan, *Chinese General History* (zhongguo shi tong lun) (trans.), Qian Wanyue (Beijing: Social Science Literature Press, 2004).

²⁰ Jin Guantao and Liu Qinfeng, *Collected Work on Issues and Methods* (wenti yu fangfa ji) (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1986).

²¹ Lucian Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Culture* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988).

²² Stevan Harrell (ed.), *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

²³ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁵ Joseph Needham, *Moulds of Understanding: A Pattern of Natural Philosophy* (eds.), Gary Werskey (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Gregg Revival, 1974).

²⁶ David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

product of China's own history. He denies the Japanese China scholarship to be too much Japan centric, which falsely assumes that China would take the same path Japan has done. He parallels Japan's modernization with the analogy of a two-legged tadpole maturing into a four-legged frog, criticizing Japanese scholars for mistakenly thinking it is a mature two-legged chicken, i.e. China, as a retarded frog. Phillip Huang likewise explores different meanings of the seeming rise of civil society in China, defending Chinese folk society from some Euro centric interpretation. Interestingly, Wang Hui contends that these critical reflections may continue to carry the Euro centric problematiqué. Wang feels that these critical analyses are still embedded in the modernization teleology. He is particularly sensitive to Naitou Konan's historiography that treats China as an empire, the breaking up of which would eventually serve as the origin of modernization and would have to rely upon internal forces.²⁷

China centric knowledge denies the validity of Euro centric knowledge; the validity of China centric knowledge itself is questioned for keeping Euro centric problematiqué. Is mutual denial of validity the only solution to their competitive relationship?

The second dimension has to do with the familiar debate between theory-driven research and history-driven research. The focus is whether behavior under study is a result of those laws that are spatiotemporally neutral, or a specificity produced by conjectural historical streams. The difference between science and history in China studies is not unlike that between neo-realism and the English school in the IR literature. Law-driven research produces knowledge that penetrates the disguise of local specificity or connects the seemingly unrelated phenomenon to disclose underpinning causality. In this view, knowledge does not change along time, but is about relationships among variables that has no time tag. Mainstream social science expects area studies to contribute to the discovery of laws. Harry Harding responds with a mixed feeling, being confident that China studies may generate law-like hypothesis

²⁷ Chih-yu Shih criticizes Benedict Anderson in the same vein as the latter tries to draw analogy between an Euro centric understanding of nation-building and Taiwanese nationalism. See "Darling, I've Made a State out of Taiwan," (qinaide wo ba tiawan bian minzu le), *Straits Review* (June 2000).

ready to be tested elsewhere instead of always testing propositions imported from elsewhere, but on the other hand, worrying there has inappropriately been too much dependence on the Chinese authorities as the source of wisdom when composing a theoretical hypothesis.²⁸ Chinese scholars who join the English-language China studies community may alleviate this ambivalence, according to Andrew Walder, because they are fluent in both scientific and area studies languages. However, universal laws are yet to dominate the China studies agenda as many, such as Yang Kuoshu and his team on Chinese indigenous psychology, continue to believe that the pursuit of universal laws is either pre-mature at this point or meaningless at all to China scholarship. There is the view that living through the way of lives of those under study is key to knowledge. In short, China is not a case of comparison for the sake of finding universal laws.

There can be two ways to present this epistemological position: that there are China-specific laws not ready for mutual translation into universal laws; and that there is even no such law governing so-called Chinese behavior.

The rise of cultural studies introduces the third dimension. Ontologically, knowledge is not certain; those under study exist in forms that are fluid, contingent and coincidental. The possibilities of switching and cycling are results of simulation and practices over time. The key organizing theme is about identity, a term that has no fixed contents in itself. Knowledge that incorporates the concerns for identity is interested in the strategy of adapting or responding to changes as well as the practice of agency or self-empowerment. In this regard, knowledge is situational. In addition, knowledge connects the scholars and China not as an intellectual instrument for the scholars to access the analyzed object, but as a process of mutual constitution between the scholars and the Chinese under study. In that knowledge is about how living people interpret the situation, their response and their desire, the scholars cannot escape

²⁸ Also see Harry Harding, "From China, with Disdain, New Trends in the Study of China," *Asian Survey* 22, 10 (October 1982).

the same scrutiny that alludes to the identity strategy practiced by the scholars themselves. Here the psychological condition of the scholars and the needs derived become an intrinsic part of knowledge. Moreover, for the cultural studies agenda, methodologically, all texts are meaningful, making the obsession with the statistical design of random selection irrelevant. Peripheral or marginal voices are among the best topics on the agenda, including Duara's in-depth research on modernity in a puppy Manchurian regime, torn between its ethnic, Chinese and Japanese identities; Chou Lei's upside down strategy that trivializes the grand discourse while amplifying feminine sensitivities; and Wang Der-way's over-interpretation that demonstrates how the self-empowering possibilities of modernity can exist between lines of feudal literature through imagining tacit resistance or adaptation. Even if material conditions can be relevant, it is certainly not the major attribute of knowledge from the cultural studies point of view.

Euro centric Knowledge of China

Knowledge that falls in the category of Euro centrism is the kind that opens the research on China with a question that the historical context, to which the scholars, not those under study, belong, informs. (figure II) Euro centric knowledge drives the research agenda implicitly toward a transformation project by setting up a system of reference to measure the distance of China from the scholars' society. Underneath the research agenda is the conviction that all societies follow the same laws of behavior. The distance between the two societies should be a difference in historical stage, instead of a fundamental difference. Those factors that have transformed one society into a future stage should do the same to another yet to experience transformation. Knowledge ceases to be Euro centric if a research agenda does not have such an assumption. Anyone can learn to write from some Euro centric problematiqué and acquire a discursive position that puts one outside China to look in. This privileged position is conceptually a non-position that presumably represents universality, or a position of God to

reveal what God's law of behavior is. The criticism from the China centric agenda is that no such universal law exists between China and the scholars' own society.

Euro centric knowledge can be divided into synchronic and diachronic types as well as materialist and interpretive types. Four possibilities follow. Synchronic, materialist knowledge shows in the study of international systemic structures and global political economy. The research agenda of this type is interested in structural forces that motivate and constrain actors' behavior, regardless of actors' identities being foreign policy maker, state enterprise manager, local county director, inland immigrant worker, or military general, and so on. Once the scholars grasp the laws that inform the overall material constraint, each actors' position in the structure automatically determines the choice of action. (Figure II, upper right). There is no need to trace the history of specific actors or the situation to explain the behavior. Laws are eternal and all events are conceptually timeless cases of law. By contrast, Synchronic, interpretive knowledge acknowledges that meanings matter, calling for those agendas that seriously treat cultural symbols and values. Since behavior is a process of meaning-giving, scholars allow agency in actors. (Figure II, lower right) The theme of clashes of civilization is one archetypal example that cares about the self-understanding of the actors, the juxtaposition of self and Other, and the reproduction or simulation of the identity difference. Immigrant as well as diasporic studies belong here, too.

Diachronic, Euro centric knowledge includes the mainstream China studies that strive to transform China into a type to fit in the global political economic and discursive structures. At the materialist level (Figure II, upper left), there is the neo-institutional agenda pushing reform that introduces right incentive structures enabling China to enter the global market, away from central planning or collective productive and consumptive styles. The same agenda speaks also in terms of state-society relations that tackle the rise or fall of regime capacity. At the interpretive level (Figure II, lower left), there is the popular agenda of citizenship studies, especially political participation and identity, pertaining also to the study of patriotism. These

are the most expensive agendas, often involving large-scaled surveys.

Euro centric knowledge does not question that China is a clear object of study. China is not a matter of subjective construction accordingly and is independent of scholarship as well as the production of scholarship. The purpose of Euro centric knowledge is to allow the scholars an analytical tool to access China as an object and explain behavior that represents China. This epistemological position corresponds to scientific realism, making the empirically unknown part of China known. The key lies in theory building. When the agenda is closer to the materialist level, theory can better reflect the reality. Logical deduction is an appropriate method then. On the contrary, when the agenda is closer to the interpretive level, empirical induction through falsification should be a better method. Constructive realism, which sees the social world as a man-made artificial system, but nonetheless law-driven, recognizes the changeability of law. The two seemingly irreconcilable methods go actually hand-in-hand to promote Euro centric knowledge.

Comparing the right-hand side and left-hand side, the difference is how much significance the scholars attach to historical contexts. Traditionally in China studies, change is always an important topic. This is not just about those specific changes themselves, but also about the law of change. The diachronic level points to modernist teleology embedded in the contemporary European model that guides the writing of survey questions as well as institutional reform. It is this shared teleology toward modernity that puts logical deductive neo-institutionalism and empirical deductive political participation on the same platform. The law of change anticipates the rise of a new form of contemporary society while the old, transformed historical stage testifies to the taking place of change.

On the other hand, the synchronic level alludes to a kind of universalism that prompts the scholars to look for laws that are not spatiotemporally bound. Only laws that apply to cases across time and space are legitimate knowledge. As a result, all events and actions can be linked together in a very delicate global structure. Laws that govern behavior today are also

laws that govern behavior in the past. It is the emergence of global space as well as the imagination of a universal, observing position, such as Euro centrism, that makes possible the dialogue between materialist political economic structure and interpretive civilization and immigrant studies.

China centric Knowledge of China

If the scholars attempt to open their agenda with an issue that comes from the historical context of those under study, the knowledge thus produced is China centric. Being China centric or Euro centric is therefore an intellectual judgment. It is not the judgment that matters, but the intentionality that draws the scholars out of their own cultural contexts that matters. Intentionality matters to the extent that it sensitizes the scholars to issues not familiar from the vintage point of their own society's history. It is not unlikely that a scholar with China centric sensitivity ends up with a research agenda that more deeply, and thus effectively, reproduces a Euro centric problematique. However, there is always the opportunity for adjustment as long as the sensitivity toward knowledge of a different nature is present. Often China centric knowledge originates from repeated and deep reading of Chinese texts. It may also come from practicing the Chinese way of life in a real situation for a period of some length. To pursue China centric knowledge implicitly denies the validity of any claimed universal law or the possibility of an eventual situation where knowledge is area-blind or culture-blind. Methodologically speaking, the abstract research language not sensitive to indigenous conception is inappropriate. Empathetic participation in the Chinese life in various ways, directly as well as indirectly, is the necessary component of knowledge.

Synchronic, China centric knowledge (Figure III, right) is about knowledge derived from the eyes precisely of those under study. The first question to be answered by the scholars should be the same question that those under study strive to answer. This is problem-oriented research instead of theory or method oriented research. By practicing to answer the same

question that puzzles those studied, the scholars learn the purpose, the constraint and, most importantly, the affective need of the actors. The scholars have an extended mission, though. The scholars should continue to ask how different actors develop different needs under the same decision-making situation. In addition, under what historical context a question becomes a question for the actors? Synchronic knowledge is materialist if it is about behavior guided by China-specific structure such as China's role in a bi-polar world. The knowledge is interpretive if it is about meanings derived from China-specific discursive context such as Chinese nationalism. The call for indigenous social science can hear the echo more clearly in this column. The research agenda in this column specifically challenges the universality of social science knowledge. The scholars should let the actors guide the research to avoid the imposition of the scholars' own *problematiqué* upon the actors. From the vintage point of universal law, indigenous knowledge of this sort makes little contribution because it is not able to speak to another society about the reason for action in the indigenous society.

Diachronic, China centric knowledge (Figure III, Left) is about knowledge that traces the evolution of a phenomenon from a China-specific context. When the scholars believe that the phenomenon evolves along an objective track of movement that is independent of subjective intervention of any actors, the knowledge about the phenomenon is materialist. By contrast, it is interpretive if it is about behavior that incorporates cultural values and meanings resulting from China-specific history of discourse. Refusing single teleology, knowledge of this sort recognizes relativity of knowledge to contrast universalism. This relativity corresponds to the rise of historicist methodology that opposes the mainstream historiography that emphasizes historical facts. Facts are relative; their meanings depend on identities as well as situations. For the materialist knowledge, the relativity of knowledge of China is defined by the historical context and in each historical stage actors share the same relative knowledge that is relative to knowledge in other stages. Important facts are different in different stages. For example, what constitutes power is different for Qing emperors than for Republican presidents. The scholar

should develop knowledge of China for each stage. The interpretive relativist, by contrast, would argue that not only knowledge concerning a particular historical stage is different from another stage, but also that even knowledge about any specific stage changes over time. Knowledge considered useful to those under study cannot be faithfully represented later once the stage is over. Later historical stages, including the one in which contemporary scholars operate, produce new knowledge of earlier historical stages from the contemporary point of view. That the contemporary scholars are outside of earlier historical stages of those studies is not unlike Euro centric scholars being outside of China.

The upper level of Figure III connects materialist knowledge that is separated by the scholars' time consciousness. The evolution of the state's capacity on the left and the interest structure that constrains the state on the right together compose the materialist dimension of the China centric knowledge. This knowledge is in essence different from the knowledge at the lower level where citizenship and nationalism are either product in a specific historical stage, with its past constantly reinterpreted to inform the present and the future, or a psychological condition that can exist any time across historical stages. Standpoint theory (Figure III, upper level) Cultural relativism (Figure III, lower level), instead of scientific realism and constructive realism, connects different kinds of knowledge on the China centric plane. Relativism is notorious in its rejection of universal law. However, relativism does not necessarily deny the existence of a reality out there, to be discovered by scholars through knowledge. Indeed many a relativist accepts that the scholars and those under study are in such a separate relationship that the observer is not intrinsically part of the observed. Broadly defined scientific realism may tolerate this view, which parallels the standpoint theory of knowledge. However, if a relativist believes that the scope of China is sheer construction of the scholars, or even that those under study can participate in defining the scope of China, the designation of reality out there would be destroyed. A more radical view would further allow the scope of China to be constantly changing over time and always different for different scholars and actors. As a result, who is a

legitimate object of study in China studies is up to interpretation by all to the effect that China is turning into a temporal and fluid concept. Scientific realism would be completely inappropriate for this type of knowledge.

Synchronic and Diachronic Knowledge of China

The synchronic knowledge of China treats China as a system. In this system, there is logic of behavior to be discovered. If this logic is structurally determined from a materially based reality, (Figure IV, right upper level) knowledge is about law across time and space. If it is interpretive in nature, (Figure IV, right lower level) the knowledge is a constraining discourse that the actors internalize, interpret and reinterpret. If it is Euro centric, (Figure IV, right, frontal column) the knowledge can be applied to a much wider global scope. If it is China centric, (Figure IV right, back column) the knowledge is locally conditioned. Synchronic Knowledge can include information gathered from different historical periods, but does not treat information from different periods essentially different. Information about behavior of different periods is only different in cases of the same logic. Even at the interpretive level, whereas the actors are allowed agency to interpret meanings and motivation, synchronic knowledge concentrates on the relationship among agency, discourse and practice, instead of contest and inconsistency over time.

The study of China's role in world politics is a quintessential point of departure in pursuing synchronic knowledge. The knowledge produced from this node is about international systemic structures (i.e. materialist), the constraining forces of which are allegedly universal (i.e. Euro centric). Opposite in the node of China centric knowledge is China's own calculation of national interests in terms of peace and development, derived from the decision makers' point of view as constrained by China's power place and productive role in the world as well as its current level of development.

Diachronic knowledge of China treats China as a changing process. Knowledge is no

longer necessarily about the operation of a close system, although it still can be. For example, the Euro centric column deals with the law of change (Figure 4, left, front). This law of change continues to lock China in a teleological track. Even at the level of interpretive knowledge (Figure IV, left, lower front), change is premised upon a set of indicators that tell how well Chinese citizens move toward a mature civic culture. Compared with synchronic knowledge, diachronic studies of the law of change rely on studying history from a historical point of view, not from an a-historical systemic point of view. The scholars must know the change in citizens' attitude toward participation or the progression of market-oriented reform, for two examples, in order to judge where the road leading to modernity is. In fact, to discover the diverse style of modernization is the dominant problematique in contemporary China studies.

The China centric column deals with the historical evolution of a certain phenomenon that has no fixed end. Knowledge becomes open end and no predetermined indicators should be used to trace the evolution of behavior pattern. As a result, what constitutes the material aspect of history that objectively constrains social behavior (Figure IV, left, upper back) must be gathered from reading locally produced evidence. In contrast, the interpretive aspect (Figure IV, left, lower back) of historical evolution is about knowledge of a constantly evolving process of reinterpretation by those under study. The material and the interpretive knowledge may look unacceptable to each other when met, but in one way or another connected if a second dimension, such as diachronic is added.

Diachronic knowledge integrates the seemingly irreconcilable difference between the materialist and interpretive knowledge. Linear historiography, for example, connects neo-institutionalist deductive methodology to civic cultural inductive methodology. Historicist knowledge excludes teleology toward the end stage that Euro centric knowledge prescribes for China. But, it may acquire its own teleology or its own track toward the Euro centric teleology. For example, Naitou Konan was interested in the eventual demise of the Chinese empire and the liberation of indigenous forces of modernization. Other historicists may treat Chinese

history as an evolution toward no fixed end or as part of a cycle. Nonetheless, the materialist knowledge that traces the disintegration of the Chinese state and the interpretive knowledge that traces the evolution of a civic consciousness can become mutually constituted when the scholars of these two modes of epistemology meet each other in the common neighborhood of the diachronic, China centric column. Similarly, indigenous social science approach integrates policy necessity of peace and development and local motivation of immigration and nationalism in the synchronic, China centric column.

At the diachronic level, neo-Marxist epistemology (Figure IV, left upper level) similarly integrates the materialist Euro centric and China centric knowledge by exposing the mutually constituting relationship between superstructure and understructure. Market institution is accordingly discursive hegemony to reproduce as well as reflect understructure such as state capacity or social economic productivity. At the interpretive level, (Figure IV, left lower level) the cultural studies connect knowledge about civic cultural change with the evolving discursive representation of identity. Accordingly, participatory values are, for instance, simulations of historically sensitized civic duty consciousness. At the synchronic level, (Figure VII, right upper level) neo-Marxism, again, establishes a relationship between policy agenda of peace and development as discursive superstructure and the underlying global economic productive relations. The cultural studies approach (Figure VI, right lower level) constructs the mutual constituting relationship between the emotional investment in China's unification felt by those under study and the *problematiqué* embedded in the knowledge that portrays China as a threatening civilization. Neo-Marxism takes away the interpretive component of knowledge while cultural studies see intervention both by the scholars and by those under study as an inevitable element of knowledge. The juxtaposition of various epistemological standpoints trivializes the difference between synchronic and diachronic knowledge.

Structural-Agential Division of Knowledge of China

The materialist and the interpretive scholars cannot easily appreciate each other. The materialist knowledge (Figure V, upper level) deals with causal relationships to explain behavior while the interpretive knowledge (Figure V, lower level) emphasizes the agency in constructing meanings that inform purposes and motivation. The role of the scholars is unrelated to the contents of the materialist knowledge to the effect that there is no such worry about using an inappropriate problematiqué, but only worry about inappropriate methodology that cannot disapprove the unsuccessful theoretical propositions. The scope of the materialist knowledge can include social structure, such as incentive mechanism, policy-making process, national interest setting, and international system. All social structures that constrain behavior possess some materialist component. It is this materialist component that makes social structure objective and independent of the mind of the scholars and those studied.

The interpretive knowledge, in contrast, regards knowledge as construction of meaning. A causal explanation cannot sustain if not applicable in a different case at a different time. Both the scholars and those studies participate in the construction of meanings. These include values, consciousness, need, discourse, motivation, identity, purpose, and so on. Behavior reproduces meanings; meanings motivate behavior. Accordingly, no meanings can be fixed and no behavior pattern can remain permanently stable. The capacity of reinterpretation measures the power of agency of a particular actor. The scholars' ability to over interpret can also read agency into the actors who are not conscious of their own agency, preserving as well as improving the possibility of enhanced agency of the actors in the future.

Adding the structural-agential dimension helps to reconcile the differences on other epistemological dimensions. Both Neo-Marxists and cultural studies epistemology reconcile the Euro and China centric knowledge. Neo-Marxist epistemology guides the scholars to pursue the right mode of knowledge by exploring how to design the appropriate incentive mechanisms to reflect China's political economic structure, how this political economic structure evolves over time to give rise to the policy necessity and national interest conception, and how these

incentives mechanisms can eventually transform China into a modern society. Neo-Marxist epistemology also directs attention to China's role in global political economic structure. The knowledge of China should explain why China has or has not succeeded in adapting to the external systemic structural change and continuity. Many liberal scholars interestingly adopt the Neo-Marxist notion of knowledge in a broader sense. They treat their subject of study as a sheer case of capitalist mode of production. In contrast, the cultural studies perspective asks to what extent modernity is a goal diffused from an external source. Through learning and practicing, to what extent Chinese modernity is a simulation of incentive rules to satisfy purposes completely unrelated to the Euro centric teleology, hence agency for reinterpretation? And to what extent the global systemic structure is also an imposed scheme that reflects not the need of the Chinese and therefore cannot mobilize sufficient support inside China to evolve into a non-threatening civilization?

In addition to the mediation through the Neo-Marxist and the cultural study epistemology, cultural relativism in general and standpoint theory, in particular, pose another kind of reconciliation between the synchronic and the diachronic knowledge by asking how relative China is. Is China so relative that culturally alien actors cannot share the same material pattern of behavior? Can the Chinese interpretive style be represented or reproduced once outside China? Given the relativity of the knowledge of China, is this relativity historical inevitability or is it coincidental? Scientific realism as well as constructive realism reconciles the synchronic and the diachronic knowledge, too, except that here it is a quest for universal laws rather than uniqueness that unite the synchronic and the diachronic knowledge.

Four epistemological approaches connect the materialist and the interpretive knowledge. To begin with, historicist epistemology traces the concepts of "China" and "State" back into history to give the notion of "state capacity" meaning in the evolution of various historical texts. Once meanings are certain, measuring the rise and fall of state capacity can proceed. Secondly, linear historiography sets China toward modernity without specifying which route China will

take to get to its destination. Reform of incentive mechanism footnotes, but does not determine the evolution of civic culture. The interpretive agency remains in the hand of those under study although they do not get to choose the materialist end state. Thirdly, indigenous social science fixes those under study on a particular Chinese identity in order to support the claim of unambiguous, indigenous China. The scope of China is reproduced each time when policy makers acting in the name of China reify the demarcation of border through the calculation of national interests. When these actors can be identified by a structurally determined scope, their collective consciousness can be a legitimate text to be interpreted and enacted by the scholars together with those participating in practice. Finally, universalistic epistemology explores knowledge pertaining interpretively to the range of all possible roles that can be taken by those under study but leaves them to make the rational choice for themselves to achieve a materially defined good life. Knowledge is about these materially bound choices and how they are interpretively made sensible.

China Scholars in the Ethics of Knowledge

In addition to clarifying the epistemological position of research agendas and scholarship in order to mediate meanings among them, comparing the scholars' epistemological identities is equally important in facilitating intellectual communication. Scholars with different epistemological identities may produce completely different kinds of knowledge even though they share a similar research agenda. For example, the *problematiqué* that opens the research with the rise of China may lead to either the materialist agenda of power competition in the international system or the interpretive agenda of the clash of civilizations. Both because the same research agenda may represent different identities for different scholars, and because the scholars may see themselves in identity positions different from where others see them, it is possible to learn how particular scholars can be relative to themselves judging from their different positions. This means that all one's decisions on another scholar's epistemological

identity and the identity of another's research are fundamentally a self-revelation of one's own epistemological identity.²⁹ Just as each research agenda can find specific identities on the three epistemological dimensions of Euro-China centric, synchronic-diachronic and structural-agential divides, the scholars can do the same. There are two sub-dimensions where the scholars can be identified in the three dimensional diagram: the research community with which the scholars identify themselves and the research institution with which the scholars affiliate themselves.

The scholars' affiliation with research institutes has more to do with personnel training, research funding, and resource allocation among projects and between research and personnel. In the background are the macro-structures of funding, which can be composed either of Euro centric or China centric problematiqué. Both problematiqués reflect the cultural hegemony that serves to reproduce certain political economic forces, with Euro centrism reproducing primarily those research agendas oriented toward modernity and globalization and China centrism involving local institutional support to remain indigenous and independent. Regarding the identity of research institutes, the materialist quality is a more important reference than the interpretive quality. The material quality addresses mainly the sociology of knowledge.

On the other hand, the identity of the research community can be different from that of the research institute. Scholars can identify with many groups other than their affiliated institute, such as the disciplinary community, ethnic community, national community, religious community, part-time think tank, or some civil society, etc. Which of these is the primary community for the scholars pertains to their inner condition and thus to the motivation of research. This addresses mainly to the psychology of knowledge. The research agenda, the research institution and the research community forms a triangle in the epistemological cube, whereby knowledge

²⁹ Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

produced reflects the balance among these three forces. The plane that incorporates the triangle is the spatial identity the scholars assume in the epistemological ethical network.

For the scholars, there is more than one triangle (Figure 6) that competes to identify them in the epistemological cube. Everyone else may have an opinion about how this triangle should be placed in the cube as it is applied to a particular scholar. For any particular observing reader who seeks to establish dialogue with the scholars, there can be an additional triangular identity. For scholars to understand their own identity comprehensively, consulting with different decisions on the identities of their community, institute and agenda is necessary. So, Mineo Mizoguchi may place himself much closer to the China centric plane than Wang Hui would place him. The gap enables the scholars to ponder over their identities and adjust research agenda, primary identification community, and even institutional affiliation accordingly. Implicitly Figure 6 shows that a change in affiliation, rank, funding or training, etc., affects the sociology of knowledge. Similarly, how well the scholarship is received, how strong the nationalist mood spreads, and how integrative a disciplinary field becomes, etc, all affect the psychology of knowledge. The combination of the change in the psychology and sociology of knowledge reshapes as well as relocates the triangular identity of the scholars.

Knowledge of China Informed by Globalization and Identity

The scholars of China studies seem not to want to question the observation that China has changed enormously in the past decade and will remain in a changing situation in the decade to come. Economics concern new mechanisms of resource allocation; politics concern enhanced participation and reformulated state-society relations, international relations concern the rise of China; and, sociology concern immigrants and social changes. Still, the assumptions regarding what knowledge of China is essentially about are different between and within them. One major difficulty to define the scope of the knowledge of China lies in the dubious scope of China itself, which cannot be defined artificially. The identity of China that is under study is as

obscure as the scholars' identities. It is often the research and the scholarship that, through simulation and practice, gives both the scholars and China an operational identity.³⁰ The loss of an essential China is both a cause and effect of changes in their own identities that scholars and those under study witness together. The challenge is felt beyond China studies. In fact, humanities and social sciences at large similarly experience the loss of a clear identity of both the disciplines and the subjects of research.

Research agendas in contemporary social sciences and humanities center around globalization and identity. Knowledge concerning globalization tends to be materialist, Euro centric and synchronic while knowledge of identity is more likely to be interpretive, indigenous and diachronic. It is at the right, upper, frontal corner (Figure VII) that knowledge of China connects most easily with the research on globalization; at the left, lower, back corner, the knowledge of China connects most easily with the research on identity. The epistemological cube of China studies creates such a relationship among the scholars, the subject of China studies and social science at large that allows the scholars to move freely in and out of their own locus of knowledge without having to rock the foundation of their original epistemological position. In fact, identity studies is the focus of contemporary cultural studies, whose interpretive epistemology characterizes the connection between the China centric discourses of nationalism and patriotism, the Euro centric values embedded in civic culture and the theme of clash of civilization. On the other hand, mainstream globalization studies have evolved into the political economic and cultural dimensions, falling into neo-Marixian conception of knowledge, which constitutes both super structures and under structures. The China scholars in their epistemological cube now have access to knowledge of seemingly different nature in and out of China studies.

This ability to compare the relative position of one research agenda with another is the

³⁰ I have tried to convey this message in my *Negotiating Ethnicity in China: Citizenship as a Response to the State* (London: Routledge, 2002) and *Navigating Sovereignty: World Politics Lost in China* (London: Palgrave, 2003).

ability to move along the epistemological columns and levels from one corner to another, to leave China studies to tour mainstream social science external to the cube, and to locate the scholars themselves within a moveable triangle composed of the research agenda, research community and research institution. The ability to see the relative position of the scholars' vis-à-vis that of those under study is the ability to see the distance between Euro centric and China centric, the structural and the interpretive, and the synchronic and the diachronic kinds of knowledge. These abilities enable one scholar to tour the research agenda of another scholar by knowing how and why one can move and how one can return. An actual visit to another research agenda based upon a different epistemological identity may very well bring adjustment to one's own research agenda. Mutual visit of this sort will probably move all the research agendas toward the center of the cube, and may have the effect of either regrouping the research community or generating new synthesis. The originally mutually threatening epistemological positions on all three dimensions are henceforth reconcilable. The two opposite ends of a particular dimension find common agendas on the other two dimensions. Supposedly unrelated, remote epistemological identities are connected in the cube. Those under study can each have their own triangle when reading the knowledge of China and participate in identifying the relative position of a particular research agenda. The possibility of eventually having all this self-consciousness in the process of producing knowledge is, in my opinion, the minimal promise that an ethical China studies asks from scholars

Figure I. Epistemological Dimensions of China Knowledge

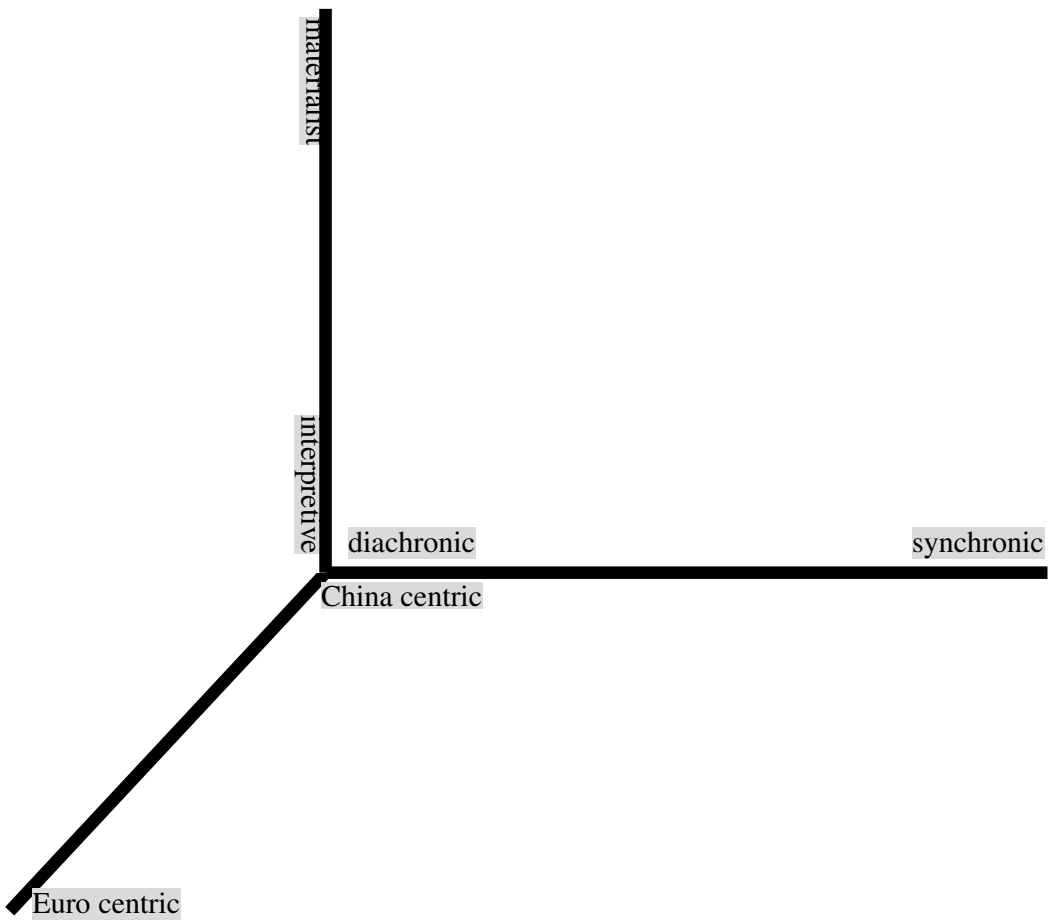


Figure II. Euro Centric Knowledge of China

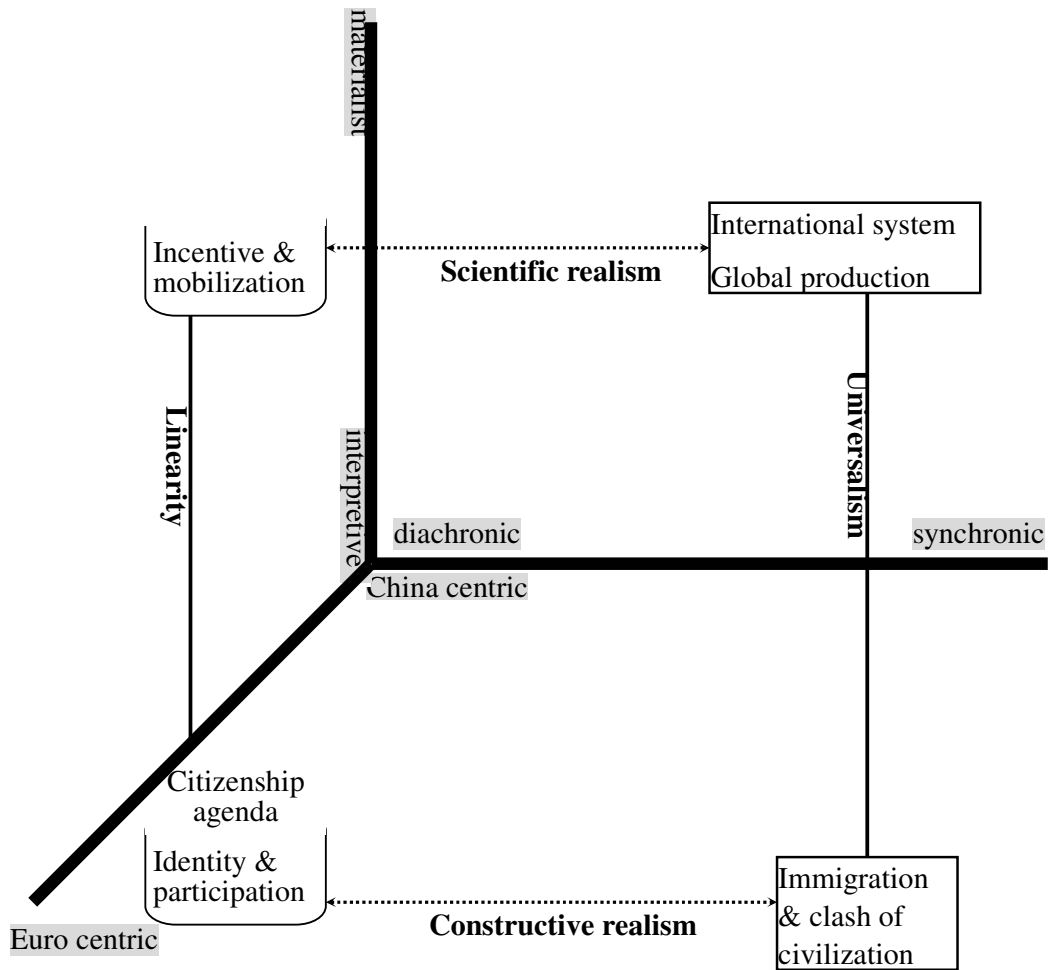
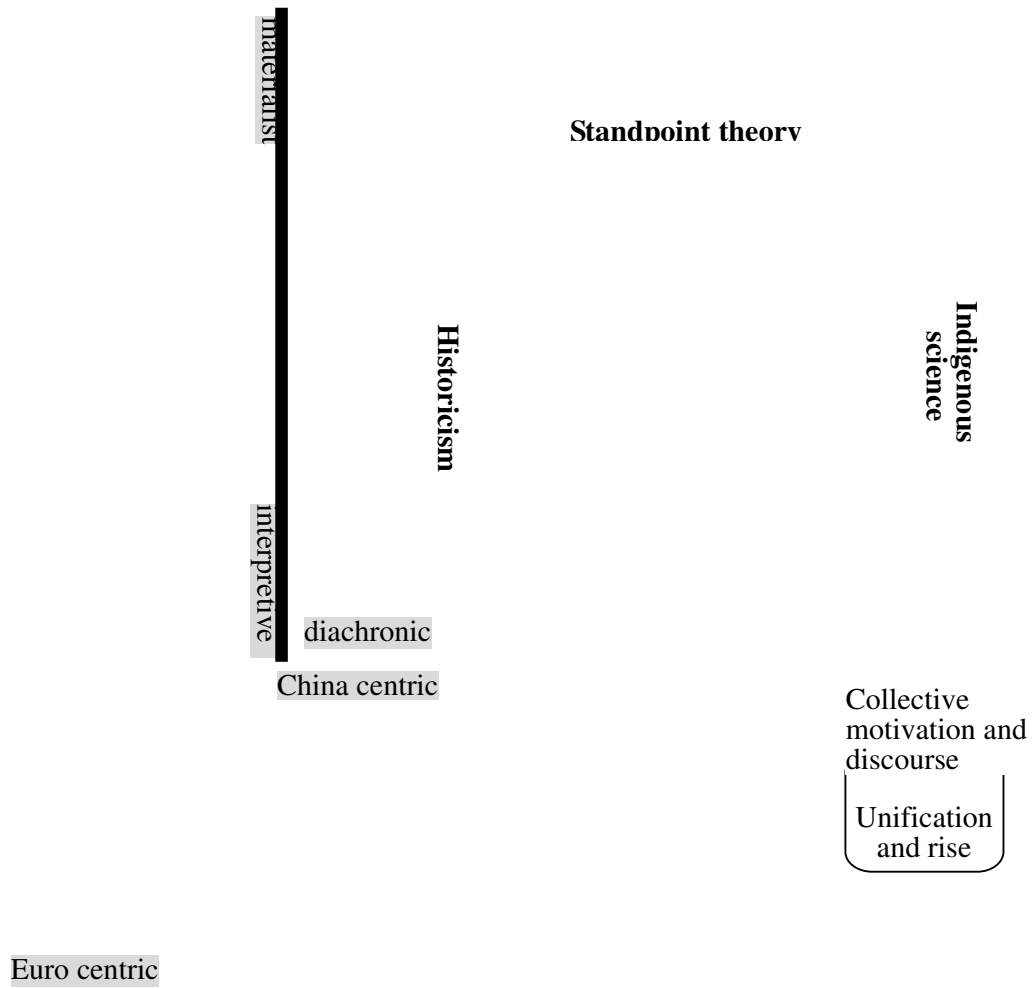


Figure III. China Centric Knowledge of China



ERROR: rangecheck
OFFENDING COMMAND: .buildcmap

STACK:

-dictionary-
/WinCharSetFFFF-VTT491A9C96t
/CMap
-dictionary-
/WinCharSetFFFF-VTT491A9C96t