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# EUROPEANIZED CULTURE, HYBRIDITY AND THE QUESTION OF THE INTERCULTURAL IN 1930s CHINA: THE POSITION OF QU QIUBAI (1899-1935)

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IETT

The so-called ‘intercultural’ approach challenges the academic world’s temptation to adopt a universal, metacultural locus of enunciation; it challenges the idea that we can hide our geo-cultural, our historical and even our linguistic positions to speak from a pure, scientific theoretical situation. This tension between a claim for theoretical universalism and the reality of local culture was very strong in the 1930s among Chinese writers, and especially for a revolutionary intellectual such as Qu Qiubai (1899-1935) who was convinced by the universal dimension of Marxism in the face of Chinese local history and culture.

In recent years, the movement of economic and cultural globalization which has spread over the world has been much discussed, as if it was a new historical stage. China, which has effectuated an economic opening-up policy since 1979, has been facing a massive implantation of foreign investment and foreign firms as well as foreign cultural products and foreign ideas. And yet, in China’s case (and in most countries which have endured colonization in the past), globalization and intercultural issues cannot be considered as a recent phenomenon. As Gregory Lee points out in the introduction of his book dealing with Chinese modern history and culture: ‘Much of China’s cultural production has consequently been marked by the desire to participate in resistance to foreign domination, or culturally to negotiate otherwise the painful modernisation of Chinese society’.<sup>1</sup> In the discussion of the discourse of reception of this Europeanization in China in the 1930s, the example of Qu Qiubai, a paradigmatic Chinese modern intellectual, is enlightening.

Qu Qubai, a prominent character in China’s modern history, is famous both as a political leader and as an artist. He was engaged in communist revolutionary activities and was elected in 1927 one of the first Chinese Communist Party secretaries. Besides he was a major writer of poetry, essays, political pamphlets, and literary criticism.<sup>2</sup> Qu Qiubai was also a prolific translator, especially from Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory, B. Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers, Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and Its Others*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995, p. XI.

<sup>2</sup> *Qu Qiubai, Wenji wenxue pian* [Qu Qiubai collected works, literary part], 1-6, Beijing, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1985 ; for further details about his work on literary theory, see Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China : The Influence of Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981.

into Chinese. He translated novels by Maxim Gorky and Leon Tolstoy, theoretical works about literature by Vladimir Lenin, Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx and Georges Plekhanov, among others and was, symbolically, the first Chinese writer who translated the *Internationale*. He is nowadays considered as one of the few Chinese intellectuals who tried to transform Marxist theory and adapt it to Chinese conditions. What gives Qu Qiubai his singularity is that he was both a political figure facing political and geopolitical issues and a scholar deeply engaged in the literary and cultural field.

Born near Shanghai, in a declining local gentry family at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, Qu Qiubai lived through a time of transition for the mandarin scholar class. It was the moment when intellectuals began to see both their cultural capital and their social position eroded. The decline of the mandarin scholars' status which followed the abolition in 1905 of the hitherto prestigious civil service examinations went hand in hand with the decline of the Empire. Having received a mix of traditional Confucian and modern education during his childhood, Qu Qiubai left in 1917 for the former imperial capital, Beijing, with the aim of entering a modern university.<sup>3</sup> Beijing along with all the big cities in China was undergoing a cultural revolution which was partly sustained by a strong movement of cultural Westernisation. There Qu discovered and absorbed all the newly imported and recently formulated ideas. This new culture diffused by magazines, literary societies and educational institutions, was pioneered by progressive intellectuals who promoted European modern philosophical, political and literary culture. Many of these young intellectuals had just returned from studying in Europe, the United States or Japan.

In 1921, Qu spent two years in post revolutionary Russia as a journalist and, after his return, converted to communism and joined the Communist Party. From then on, he took part in political leadership and revolutionary activities and wrote, until the end of the 1920s, many theoretical texts dealing with Chinese politics and revolutionary strategy.

At the beginning of the 1930s, he put an end to his activities which were directly political because of the Party's internal conflicts. It was an extremely difficult period for the Chinese communists since they were persecuted by Chiang Kai-Shek's right-wing government. The young communist forces had not managed to mobilize the proletariat in the cities and all their uprisings had failed due to the fact that they had to face the strong repression of nationalist forces while lacking popular support. Qu had to live underground in Shanghai from where he wrote many articles dealing with popular culture, the Europeanization of the elite's literature and language, and the reform of language and writing.

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<sup>3</sup> Between 1912 and 1949 the administrative capital of the Chinese Republic was Nanjing or Nanking.

## OVERCOMING THE “GREAT WALL” AND SEIZING THE CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

For Qu Qiubai, one of the main reasons for the failures of the Chinese communist revolution lay in the field of culture, and in particular with literary language and forms. The failure of the revolution had to be traced in the lack of a culture common to both the revolutionary intellectuals and the masses. As Qu Qiubai understood it, the cultural discrepancy between these two groups of people was the result of the strong European influence on the Chinese cultural elite which created what Qu called a ‘Europeanized culture’, *Ouhua wenyi*, in China. Of course, Qu Qiubai belonged to this elite. This Europeanized culture was the result of a Chinese cultural revolution which lasted from 1915 to 1925. That period is usually referred to as the ‘May Fourth movement’ or ‘new culture movement’, defined both as a cultural and political event. First of all, it was a political movement since May 4th 1919 was the day when massive demonstrations took place in urban China to protest against the post World War One peace treaty, the Treaty of Versailles, which was extremely humiliating for China although the country was in the winners’ camp. Imperial China had been under the colonial domination of foreign powers since the first Opium war in 1842 and, at the beginning of the xx<sup>th</sup> century, the extremely weak Empire of the Qing dynasty was fragmented into territories which were subjected to the economic domination of several countries: for instance, part of South-East China was dominated by France, Central China by England, the North-East by Germany, and Manchuria by Japan. In 1919, while the treaty was discussed, China was led by a very weak and illegitimate warlord government. The territories occupied by Germany in northern China were claimed by China but given to Japan. As soon as the news of the treaty’s terms spread over most urban cities in China, students and urban petty bourgeoisie demonstrated aggressively. This uprising was the first popular awakening of a modern nationalist feeling in China and was directed both against the imperialist forces and against the corrupt Chinese government.

Therefore what is nowadays called the May Fourth movement was not only political; it was cultural too and can be considered the birth date of the Chinese modern literature and culture. As the end of the Empire as a political institution was linked to the decline of the culture of the mandarin class, not only did it imply a change in regime but a cultural and social change too, and that, especially in the fields of knowledge and literary culture. The May Fourth movement was the time when this change took place with the utmost radicality.<sup>4</sup> Young Chinese intellectuals belonging to the first generation of modern intellectuals adopted Western culture and thinking and rejected with violence the Chinese traditional culture, Confucian culture, as feudal, reactionary, and incompatible with modern values and a modern society. Traditional culture was held responsible for China’s weakness in the face of the West. It is important to point out that modern culture was for these Chinese intellectuals

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<sup>4</sup> Kirk A. Denton (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 114.

mostly synonymous with European culture. And therein lies the contradiction of the Chinese early political nationalism: defending China against the West implied becoming Western. Qu Qiubai was one of these new intellectuals and belonged to the transitional generation of young people who were born to be mandarin scholars, who had received a traditional education and who, in the end, turned into modern, Europeanized intellectual.

One of the most important changes of this time took place in the field of literary language. The young and Western-oriented writers started to attack the old mandarin culture and especially the nearly sacred language which classical Chinese constituted. There were two literary traditions in China then: one was the literature of the elite and was written in classical Chinese, while the other, more popular and vernacular, was close to the oral language. This vernacular literature was officially considered as base and undignified, while, at the same time, mandarins often wrote novels in vernacular themselves, but anonymously. China's progressive writers in the 1920s rejected the classical language to adopt the vernacular with the aim of writing a literature which could be read not only by a small number of intellectuals belonging to the elite, but by most of the educated population. Young writers rejected the forms and the language of traditional literature; they read and translated a large numbers of European works, both in the fields of literature and the humanities, which had a very important influence on the literary language. In order to translate these works, they had to invent a large number of new words in Chinese, especially words referring to modern reality. Writers also had to adapt their style to the European syntax which did not correspond to the Chinese vernacular. As a consequence, this new generation of writers created a language which was very different from classical Chinese, but which was not the vernacular language either. Therefore this new writing style was not well received at all by the reading public; semi-educated urban Chinese could read, for example, popular novels series in the old vernacular but they could not read this new vernacular.<sup>5</sup> Qu Qiubai considered the new vernacular literature project a failure with unfortunate consequences since most of the more accessible popular literature in the old vernacular was imued with the old ideology of the traditional culture. In other words in place of a literature of progressive propaganda, there was just entertainment.

At the beginning of the 1920s, besides being a linguistic and cultural concern for the leftist activist Qu Qiubai, the lack of popularity of the progressive literature turned into a political problem resulting in the impossibility of constituting a linguistic community between revolutionary Europeanized intellectuals and writers, and the large majority of the urban population called the masses or *dazhong* by Qu Qiubai. In order to describe this gap, he claimed that there was a 'Great Wall' between intellectuals and the masses.<sup>6</sup> This metaphor is extremely evocative in the Chinese context because the Great Wall was, both materially and symbolically, the frontier between Chinese and the foreign outside world. If we take a look at today's Chinese nationalist discourse, this sentence

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<sup>5</sup> See Perry Link, 'Traditional-Style Popular Urban Fiction in the Teens an Twenties' in Merle Goldman (dir.), *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1977, 327-349.

<sup>6</sup> Qu Qiubai, 'Puluo dazhong wenyi de xianshi wenti' [The Real Question of Proletarian Popular Literature and Art], *Wenji* 1, 1985, p. 462.

by Qu is again devastating. The Great Wall is daily used in the official discourse as the representation of China and the symbol of Chinese national identity.<sup>7</sup> Qu Qiubai added that Chinese intellectuals in China were like foreign intellectuals, that's why he called this literature 'Europeanized art and literature' or *Ouhua wenyi*. They wrote a literature which was unreadable by those whom Qu and leftist intellectuals called the masses. A dilemma was therefore to be resolved: how could these intellectuals be the vanguards of the people if they could not communicate with them? How could they write a literature both popular and revolutionary in a language which was not understandable to ninety percent of the population? This question was crucial for Qu Qiubai at the beginning of the 1930s, hence his call for a massification, or popularisation, of the revolutionary literature. The point is that the May Fourth movement was already a cultural and literary popularisation movement: from classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese, and from traditional themes of literary scholars to a much more realist and contemporary content in literature. The new generation of writers aimed at writing for the whole people, not only for their small scholarly community. Therefore Qu Qiubai considered that the May Fourth cultural revolution had failed.

One of Qu's key concepts was the idea of 'cultural leadership', *wenyi lingdaoquan*.<sup>8</sup> It meant that revolutionary intellectuals had to take the power in the cultural realm, and that the creation of a common culture and language was the first condition for them to seize what he called the 'cultural leadership'. Qu's problematics is here very close to Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'cultural hegemony'.<sup>9</sup> Gramsci's voluntarist idea to create a common cultural bloc of intellectuals and workers is very similar to Qu's claim to create a mass revolutionary culture. Just as Qu said that writers are foreign in their own country, Gramsci wrote: 'in relation to the people-nation the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than the foreigners'.<sup>10</sup> According to their historical view, Gramsci and Qu both couldn't wait until the economic structure was ready for a take-over of power; they wanted to use culture to overthrow the dominant ideology. They had a lot more in common: both of them had been elected general secretary of the Communist Party of their countries, they were both Marxist theoreticians who were extremely concerned with cultural and linguistic issues, they both dealt with the same lack of national unity and, last but not least, the two of them were later put in gaol by nationalist-fascist forces. It is interesting to notice however that today in China, Gramsci is very popular in postcolonial studies while the home-grown Qu Qiubai is not.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For further analysis on this topic see Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Qu Qiubai, 'Ouhua wenyi' [Europeanized Literature and Art], *Wenji* 1, 1985, p. 492.

<sup>9</sup> Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and their Western Contemporaries*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2000, 60-71.

<sup>10</sup> David Forgacs (Ed.), *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, New York, New York University Press, 2000, p. 368.

<sup>11</sup> Liu Kang points out this contradiction in his work calling for the use of Chinese cultural theorists like Qu Qiubai in the field of postcolonial studies, *Aesthetics and Marxism*, p. 60.

## CRITICIZING DIACHRONIC HYBRIDITY: FROM QU QIUBAI TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Qu Qiubai, from a leftist point of view, developed a strong criticism of the new modern literature and its failure to write for the masses. At the same time, this movement was criticised by the right wing government of Nanjing and by some traditionalist Chinese intellectuals who wanted to return to classical Chinese.<sup>12</sup> Although he criticized violently the May Fourth language, Qu, as a modernist and as one opposed to culturalist traditionalists, rejected the classical language. The way he developed this critique of modern literature, and the nature of the epistemological basis of his criticism, is significant since he regarded the new literary language as a hybrid language, a mix of classical Chinese, mandarin vernacular and Western languages. As he put it: ‘The Chinese literary revolution created an abnormal foetus, like the union of a horse and a donkey which gave birth to a mule language; a mule which did not have any future’. He added: ‘The language of the new literature is not the language of a human, but neither is that of a ghost, it is not contemporary but neither is it ancient.’<sup>13</sup> Our point here is not to ask in ontological terms whether there could be a hybrid and a non-hybrid language; it is obvious that all languages are influenced by the past as well as by other languages.<sup>14</sup> Although he used a derogatory biological metaphor, his criticism was not at all a nationalist criticism of hybridity. Qu Qiubai never wrote that the purity of the Chinese language had to be preserved from foreign influences.

The contrast is very clear with today’s Chinese linguists’ perception of hybridity due to the influence of foreign languages. Since the mid-nineteen eighties, China’s intellectual and political world has been prey to a strong cultural nationalism which has tended to contest or to deny modern history and culture. The ‘cultural nationalists’, whom the Chinese Australian scholar Yingjie Guo has identified, are from diverse intellectual backgrounds and have different ideological orientations. However, as Guo tells us, they all share a common goal: ‘to substantiate and crystallize the idea of the ethnic nation in the minds of the members of the community by creating a wide-spread awareness of the myths, history, and linguistic tradition of the community’.<sup>15</sup> According to Guo, cultural nationalists state that Chinese identity is anterior to modernity and has to overcome it. They tend to contest the Chinese Communist Party’s own nationalist discourse which originates from the May Fourth movement: ‘It should also be apparent that this movement is pitted against state nationalism and the

<sup>12</sup> From the beginning of the 1930s, Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nanjing government tried to contest the reform of the written language reform, calling for a renaissance of classical Chinese studies at school in opposition to the May fourth intellectuals’ ambition to impose a vernacular literature. This movement was named *wenyan fuxing yundong* or ‘classical Chinese renaissance movement’.

<sup>13</sup> Qu Qiubai, “Xuefa wansui” [Long Live the Literary Warlords] (1931), *Wenji* 3, 1985, p. 176.

<sup>14</sup> Stating that languages are always located in a hybrid situation favours the deconstruction of the idea that there could be pure and hermetic languages. A writer is always situated inbetween, writing in what Dominique Maingueneau calls an ‘interlangue’: ‘relationships, in a given situation, between the various types of one and the same language, as well as between this language and others, past or present’, Dominique Maingueneau, *Le contexte de l’œuvre littéraire : Enonciation, écrivain, société*, Paris, Dunod, 1993, p. 104 ; the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze claims that a writer always writes in a ‘foreign language’, see *Critique et clinique*, Paris, Minuit, 1993, p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China, The Search for National Identity under reform*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2004, p. 5.

whole May Fourth tradition of political nationalism (...) cultural nationalism and political (state) nationalism remain divided over the legacy of the May Fourth Movement and the Communist Revolution.<sup>16</sup> The culturalist discourse has extended to the linguistic field and tends to question the language reforms which have taken place since the May Fourth revolution.<sup>17</sup> The linguistic polemic concerning the SARS epidemic which spread over China and part of the world during the winter of 2002-2003 is relevant in this regard. The disease was first discovered in November 2002 in China and Chinese local doctors invented a word for it: 'feidian'. It was the abridged version of 'feidianxing feiyan' translated as 'atypical pneumonia'. After a few months the epidemic spread to foreign countries and the World Health Organization became involved, analysed the disease and gave it a new name: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS. From that time on, in Chinese media there were at least three different names for the disease: 'feidian' in Chinese characters, 'SARS' in letters of the Roman alphabet, and the phonetic transliteration of the word SARS into Chinese characters: 'sasi'. Many Chinese linguists or scholars wrote articles in both the media and academic support criticizing the use of the word SARS, because it was a foreign word.<sup>18</sup> Their aim was to preserve the so-called 'Chinese language purity' from foreign influence. It was to protect, as one said, 'the great cultural tradition of China'. Some referred to the Communist Party's 2003 xvi<sup>th</sup> congress recommendations not to use foreign words so as to justify their opinion. For these scholars, the hybrid was constituted by the presence of what were seen as foreign words in Chinese. Nevertheless, as it often happens with nationalist discourses, history was left aside: as in Qu Qiubai's thinking, what today's nationalists call 'the great cultural tradition of China' is rather a great cultural tradition of translation since most of the words referring to modernity in modern China came from abroad, from Europe via Japan. It seems however that Chinese cultural institutions have always been trying to hide the hybrid condition of modern Chinese culture and its foreign influences. For instance, it is difficult to find in China historical dictionaries which mention the etymology of new words (at least from the beginning of the xx<sup>th</sup> century) without occulting their external, and non-Chinese origins.

If today's nationalist discourse hides, rejects or even denies this influence, on the contrary, in the 1930s, Qu Qiubai both welcomed and faced this foreign cultural influence because it was seen as a necessary manifestation of modernity: the 1920s and the 1930s were one of the main historical stages when new words relating to modernity spread over China. From an epistemological point of view, the sense of hybridity is clearly different in Qu Qiubai's critique of the 1920s Europeanized literature when compared to the position of Chinese contemporary nationalists. The linguistic hybridity which Qu Qiubai denounced could be called a diachronic hybridity because for the author the problem was the coexistence in a same language of the past and of the present, of the modern and of the ancient, of the new and of the old. On the contrary, for contemporary nationalists, linguistic hybridity, revealed

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<sup>16</sup> Guo, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> See chapter five of Guo's work : 'Reconstructing the mother tongue : Chinese characters, traditional forms and cultural linguistics', 91-109.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the Popular Republic of China official website on China's language and writing (*Zhongguo yuyan wenzi wang*): <http://www.china-language.gov.cn/> (page read on October, 21<sup>st</sup> 2005).



by the use of foreign words in the Chinese language, is seen as cultural and ethnic. The epistemic difference between Qu Qiubai's idea and the cultural nationalists' approach is a shift from time to space. Such a divergence between Qu's critique and today's dominant perception of hybridity demonstrates a nationalist turn in the recent Chinese intellectual environment. It also reveals that intellectuals in the 1930s, such as Qu Qiubai, were entirely immersed in a universalist discourse of modernity which implied what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls a 'denial of coevalness'.<sup>19</sup> Present modernity came from abroad and China, located in the past, had to absorb its new words, news forms of narration, new syntax, and to translate it to make it its own modernity and create its own modern Chinese language. From a popular point of view, there was no common Chinese language in China, but there were many local dialects, local common languages and there was a mandarin vernacular, a kind of 'lingua franca'. Eighty percent of the population were illiterate in the 1930s and did not have a written language.

Therefore, for a Marxist revolutionary like Qu Qiubai, inventing a modern written Chinese meant creating a language from the oral usage of the masses, adapting modern words and styles to Chinese popular local oral languages, and writing in a language which could be understood when read out. It also implied that abolishing Chinese characters and adopting the Roman alphabet was as a necessity so as to adapt to modernity. According to Qu, as he had learnt from the Western scientific linguistic discourse, modernity needed phonetic languages: only oral languages were regarded as real languages, only phonetic languages could enable the masses to write and tame the pronunciation of their local vernacular.<sup>20</sup> Qu refused the creation of a standard and unified national language and fought the supporters of a single national language.<sup>21</sup> For him, it was imposing from the top a language which did not represent the multiple oral languages of the Chinese masses. While Qu believed that these local languages of the masses were too impoverished and lacked the vocabulary of modernity, as a Marxist and as a Leninist, Qu believed in History and in the capacity of capitalism to unify into a single market diverse populations and societies. He thought that a common Chinese language would naturally follow the spread of capitalism and believed that in cities the workers of various origins would eventually begin to speak a common language. Besides, he believed that the Chinese written language would be the phonetic written transcription of this common Chinese language. As a consequence, for Qu, the duty of the revolutionary writers was to sustain the popularisation of the modern: new words pertaining to modernity, new syntax and new literary forms. Finally, their duty was to translate the European or modern into the popular culture, to translate the European so as to create the Chinese modern language.

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<sup>19</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other : How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983.

<sup>20</sup> Concerning the epistemology of the Saussurian linguistics and the deconstruction of its phonocentric assumption, see Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris, Minuit, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> On this topic, see John De Francis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1950.

## THE CONTRADICTION OF A WORD: “EUROPEANIZED”

The word ‘Europeanize’ or *Ouhua* is relevant to Qu Qiubai’s geographical position and his theoretical contradictions. He dealt with ‘Europeanized culture’, which was for him the new Chinese literature produced during the May Fourth period. Europeanize, corresponds to *ouhua* in Chinese, a word made of two characters: ‘ou’ from *Ouzhou*, which means the ‘European continent’, and ‘hua’, a suffix meaning ‘transform’ or ‘-ize’. *Ouhua* is thus transformation into a European, ‘Europeanize’. The adjective ‘Europeanized’ sounds like the very popular word ‘Americanized’ which was widespread in France just after World War Two. It meant something new which resulted from the transformation of a local culture and way of life under the economic influence of American consumerist capitalism. The word ‘Americanization’ in 1950s France, just as ‘Europeanization’ in 1930s China, was synonymous with the term ‘modernization’. Words such as ‘Europeanized’ or ‘Americanized’ are very local words, they cannot be universalized. The use of an adjective about a geographic place tells about the location of the speaking subject. When Qu discussed a ‘Europeanized culture’, he underlined out his cultural location. Talking about ‘Europeanization’ was claiming to be outside Europe as a place, it was claiming to be different. And yet this discourse of difference did not fit with Marxist universalism. As the anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo asserts, Marxism denies any form of cultural otherness since the only Other is the other social class: ‘Marx’s unquestionable contribution to the analysis of the functioning of capitalist economy should not be confused with Marx’s sightlessness when it came to the location of ‘the other’ and the exteriority of the system.’<sup>22</sup> Qu Qiubai wrote that the expression ‘Europeanized culture’ sounded very peculiar to him because introducing a cultural difference where there should have been nothing but class and historical differences was not theoretically correct. Talking about a ‘Europeanized culture’ implied a geopolitics of space which contested Qu’s vision of a Marxist universal historical process. This is the reason why Qu specifies that a ‘Europeanized culture’ meant the ‘historical stage of a capitalist social relation’. He insisted on the fact that he was dealing with a new culture and an old culture. The new, the modern was the culture which spread from Europe. Such a contradiction resulted from the gap between his geographical and cultural location, which was China, and his theoretical Marxist thinking which located him in a universalist, and thus Western, discourse of modernity.

Our contemporary historical position enables us to be aware of elements which Qu Qiubai ignored. Although he was dealing with intercultural questions and especially with the European cultural and

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<sup>22</sup> He adds: ‘that is, Marx, according to Dussel, only thinks in terms of totality (the ‘same’ and the ‘other’, which is the working class) but is less aware of alterity, the exteriority of the system. Hence, Marx’s thinking on these issues is located within modern epistemology and ontology’, Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 177.

linguistic hegemony, Qu 's denial of coevalness resulting from his Marxist historical view prevented him from having an intercultural approach. This blind spot in Qu's view is due to the fact that he deals with his time on the grounds of a theory which he claims to be universal, denying its historico-cultural dimension, its mid-xix<sup>th</sup> century European perspective.

Nowadays in China, 'postist' theories (postmodern and postcolonial) go with the deconstruction of a universalist and evolutionnist epistemology which was Eurocentric and which reached the intellectual elites outside of Europe, as Qu Qiubai's writings revealed. Furthermore, the postcolonial critique of Western cultural hegemony and of its abstract universalism led in contemporary China to culturalist nationalist discourses which stressed identity and difference.

Perhaps a more appropriate critical and programmatic approach to the question of culture in a hypermodern world lies between and beyond the vision of Qu Qiubai and the critique of his modern detractors, beyond also what can be seen as trap of ahistoricity and essentialisation implied in the notion of the 'intercultural'. That approach would integrate the reality that cultures are always changing, being crossed, hybridized, that identities shift over in time and thus belong to history.

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