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# Contents

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1

**Thematic section: Modern China and Shanghai**

**The Class Nature Under the Colonial System: A Critical Study of Old Shanghai as a Case**

殖民体系下的阶级本质：旧上海案例的批判性研究

Jiajie Wang

---

13

**Research article**

**The Thought of New Poetry from the Perspective of Classical Aesthetics: Centering on "Neutralization"**

古典美学观照下的新诗思想：以“中和”为中心

Ruodong Gao

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# The Class Nature Under the Colonial System: A Critical Study of Old Shanghai as a Case

## 殖民体系下的阶级本质：旧上海案例的批判性研究

Jiajie Wang<sup>1,\*</sup>

Received 16 February 2026

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**Abstract:** In globalization, imperialism persists through more concealed forms of domination. Colonial history has not ended; it has been reconfigured within global political economy and cultural consciousness. This paper argues that the racial and national contradictions visible in colonial and semi-colonial settings such as old Shanghai were, at root, expressions of the global expansion of monopoly capital and class rule. Combining postcolonial critique with Marxist political economy, and drawing on Lenin's theory of imperialism, the study analyzes old Shanghai through three dimensions: legal-spatial institutions, internal divisions within foreign and Chinese societies, and the cultural field. It shows that racial contradictions functioned less as fundamental causes than as surface forms and strategic instruments that concealed deeper class antagonisms. Reconsidering China's anti-imperialist struggle from a class perspective, the paper stresses the historical unity of national liberation and working-class emancipation. Old Shanghai thus provides a historical lens for understanding the enduring entanglement of capital, cultural hegemony, and class struggle in both past and present global orders.

**摘要：**全球化时代，帝国主义以更隐蔽的方式延续支配逻辑。殖民历史并未终结，而是被重新嵌入全球政治经济结构与文化意识。本文认为，旧上海等殖民与半殖民场域中的种族与民族矛盾，本质上是国际垄断资本扩张和阶级统治的表现。本文结合后殖民理论与马克思主义政治经济学，并以列宁帝国主义理论为基础，从法律—空间制度、侨民社会与华人社会内部裂隙、文化场域三个维度分析旧上海。研究表明，种族矛盾并非根本原因，而更多是遮蔽深层阶级对立的表层现象和策略工具。通过以阶级视角重审中国反帝斗争，本文强调民族解放与劳动阶级解放的历史统一。旧上海因此成为理解资本逻辑、文化霸权与阶级斗争在历史与当代全球秩序中持续交织的重要棱镜。



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**Keywords:** Colonial system; Class contradiction; Old Shanghai; Lenin's theory of imperialism; Postcolonialism; Marxism; Cultural hegemony; Sino-foreign relations; Semi-colonialism; Emancipatory politics

**关键词：**殖民体系；阶级矛盾；旧上海；列宁帝国主义理论；后殖民主义；马克思主义；文化霸权；中外关系；半殖民地；解放政治

## Introduction

In the era of globalization, imperialism has not vanished with the dissolution of the old colonial system; rather, it perpetuates its logic of domination in an increasingly concealed and pervasive form. Colonial history has not ended but has been re-embedded in new configurations within contemporary global political-economic structures and cultural consciousness. Analyzing this complex phenomenon urgently re-

quires us to pierce the veil of superficial oppositions such as “nation” and “race,” delving instead into the “class contradictions” and “logic of capital” that constitute their foundation. This theoretical task necessitates a critical synthesis: a dialogue and integration between postcolonial criticism—which focuses on cultural power, discursive construction, and identity politics—and Marxist political economy—centered on the economic base, mode of production, and class struggle. The

<sup>1</sup> Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Shanghai 200020, China.

\*Corresponding author. Email: [keiln0@163.com](mailto:keiln0@163.com)

former provides refined analytical tools for understanding the cultural dimensions of colonial domination, while the latter reveals the internal dynamics and structural roots of global capital expansion. Their conjunction constitutes a theoretical prerequisite for a comprehensive critique of the contemporary forms of imperialism.

At the same time, any theoretical synthesis cannot remain confined to abstract speculation; it must be tested within concrete historical and geographical sites. Modern Shanghai—a “critical node” of international colonialism characterized by the coexistence of Chinese and foreigners, institutional hybridity, and concentrated capital—offers an almost ideal analytical sample for this purpose. Here, colonial domination did not exist in the singular form of sovereign cession but manifested as a tripartite structure comprising the International Settlement, the French Concession, and Chinese-administered territories. This unique legal status and complexity of governance were quintessential products of the global expansion of capital and the exercise of power during the imperialist era. This site not only encapsulates the cultural hybridity, identity negotiation, and discursive power emphasized by postcolonial theory but also vividly embodies the class structure, capital accumulation, and transformations in the mode of production central to Marxist analysis. It thus provides a unique historical laboratory for examining the explanatory power of these two theoretical paradigms and the possibilities for their synthesis.

The central argument of this paper is that in colonial and semi-colonial sites such as old Shanghai, the apparent racial conflicts and national oppression were, in their deep structure, rooted in the global expansion of international monopoly capital and the imperatives of class domination. Lenin's theory of imperialism provides the essential framework for understanding this essence, namely, that colonial domination was not an accidental political phenomenon but a necessary stage and form in the development of monopoly capitalism—an institutional expression of finance capital's pursuit of surplus value on a global scale. The cultural hegemony, knowledge production, and identity politics acutely identified by postcolonial criticism, in turn, constituted a superstructure that served to obscure and legitimize this economic base. The relationship between the two is not one of simple substitution or opposition but should be understood as a dialectical articulation between base and superstructure: the logic of capital created the material conditions for colonial domination, while cultural hegemony provided its ideological underpinning. Throughout China's protracted anti-imperialist struggles, the fundamental experience and lesson lie in the necessity of closely integrating the national liberation demands of anti-imperialism with the class liberation demands of the subaltern classes (especially workers and peasants), forging a “popular revolution” with workers and peasants as its mainstay, in order to achieve genuine social transformation. Any separation of the two—whether the sectarianism that divorced itself from the national sentiments of the masses or the capitulationism that abandoned class positions—led to setbacks and detours in the struggle.

Proceeding from this foundation, this paper will commence with a theoretical dialogue between postcolonialism and Marxism, conduct an in-depth analysis of the colonial system and Sino-foreign relations in old Shanghai, and delineate a “class-colonial” composite map with Lenin's theory of imperialism as its central axis. By revealing the complex interweaving of law, space, culture, and class in old Shanghai society, this study will reexamine the historical experience of China's anti-imperialist struggles, elucidate the class essence underlying racial contradictions, and explore the implications of this historical analysis for understanding contemporary global inequalities and the politics of liberation.

## Theoretical Dialogue: Tensions and Complementarities between Postcolonialism and Marxism

The relationship between postcolonialism and Marxism is characterized by profound tension, constituting a vital strand in contemporary critical theory. Clarifying the similarities, differences, and potential complementarities between the two is a necessary theoretical prerequisite for the subsequent historical and class analysis.

### Insights and limitations of postcolonialism: Cultural hegemony, hybridity, and the deconstruction of “Grand narratives”

Postcolonial theory, represented by scholars such as Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri C. Spivak, has made a revolutionary contribution by extending the edge of critique from purely political-economic domination directly into the domains of culture and knowledge production. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said demonstrates that “the Orient” is not an objective geographical fact but a discursive system jointly constructed by Western knowledge, power, and imagination. The function of this discursive system is to establish Western subjectivity and superiority while providing ideological legitimacy for colonial rule (Said, 1978). Said's analysis is deeply influenced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's theory of “cultural hegemony” (Gramsci, 1971), which argues that domination relies not only on violent coercion but also on the manufacturing of “consent” and voluntary submission among the ruled, thereby internalizing colonial power into everyday structures of cognition.

From this premise, postcolonialism vigorously interrogates all “grand narratives,” including Marxism's narratives of the “mode of production” and “revolution.” According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, Marxism's treatment of “abstract labor” as a universal analytical category effectively universalizes the Enlightenment concept of the “abstract human,” thereby suppressing the rich and diverse historical experiences and cultural logics of the Global South (Chakrabarty, 2000). Postcolonial theorists instead emphasize contingency, hybridity, and “everyday resistance.” Bhabha's concept of hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (1994) reveals the processes of cultural fusion, power negotiation, and identity negotiation that emerge in daily encounters between colonizer and colonized, success-

fully deconstructing the rigid binary oppositions of colonizer/colonized and West/East (Bhabha, 1994). Spivak, through her interrogation of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), further directs critique toward the power relations embedded in knowledge production, highlighting the structural silencing of subaltern subjectivity.

However, the limitations of postcolonialism also stem from these very strengths. First, its critique is overly concentrated on the realms of discourse, text, and representation, running the risk of “substituting text for reality.” When analysis is confined to the deconstruction of colonial discourses, it tends to overlook the more fundamental global political-economic structures that shape those discourses (Dirlik, 1997). Second, its detachment from the category of class is a striking feature. Arif Dirlik incisively observes that postcolonial critique has facilitated “a shift from the questioning of politics and political economy to the current questioning of cultural identity” (Dirlik, 1997). In its eagerness to critique Eurocentrism, postcolonial theory may suspend “class” itself as a Western-imposed category, thereby obscuring the economic core of colonial exploitation and rendering critique unable to reach the structural logic of capital accumulation.

### Foundations and challenges of Marxism: Modes of production, class, and global capital analysis

Marxism provides an irreplaceable foundation for the analysis of colonialism. Unlike postcolonialism’s focus on cultural representation, Marxism insists on viewing colonialism as an organic component of the global expansion of the capitalist mode of production. As Dirlik notes, “the most salient feature of modern colonialism is precisely its relationship to the expanding capitalist order, an order that nourished colonialism and made it a global phenomenon” (Dirlik, 1997). Although Marx himself held a complex attitude toward British colonial rule in India—severely condemning its brutality while regarding it as an unconscious historical instrument for breaking the “stagnant” societies of Asia—his analysis consistently rested on the perspective of transformation in modes of production (Marx, 1853). Marx emphasized that the colonial process was essentially an extension of primitive accumulation and the coercive global expansion of capitalist relations of production.

This perspective was systematized and historicized in Lenin’s theory of imperialism. In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), Lenin argued that, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, capitalism had transitioned from the stage of free competition to the monopoly stage—namely, the imperialist stage. In pursuit of superprofits, monopoly capital inevitably drove capital export and the territorial partition of the world. At this stage, the colonial system was essentially the political expression of finance capital’s domination of the world. Lenin’s analysis thoroughly linked national oppression with class rule: in the age of imperialism, the world was divided into oppressor nations and oppressed nations, and the struggle of the international proletariat had to be combined with the national liberation struggles of colonies and semi-colonies (Lenin, 1917).

Undeniable tension exists between Marxism’s “mode of production narrative” and postcolonialism’s insistence on “historical difference.” Chakrabarty criticizes Marxism’s concept of “abstract labor” for suppressing difference (Chakrabarty, 2000). However, the Indian Marxist scholar Aijaz Ahmad has powerfully refuted Said’s accusations against Marx, arguing that Marx’s writings on India derive not from “Orientalist discourse” but from his commitment to class analysis and the mode-of-production framework. According to Ahmad, “abstract labor,” as an analytical category, aims to reveal how capital abstracts concrete and diverse forms of labor into measurable units of value within commodity exchange. This abstraction is itself the brutal reality of capital’s logic flattening difference, rather than a theorist’s subjective invention. Marxism’s strength lies in providing a political-economic framework for analyzing how capital systematically produces, exploits, and manages differences of race, gender, and others in order to achieve class domination.

### A synthetic path: Cultural hegemony as superstructure and class politics as base

A critical synthetic path is therefore both necessary and feasible. Postcolonialism’s nuanced dissection of cultural hegemony, identity construction, and discursive violence can greatly enrich Marxism’s understanding of the superstructure. It teaches us that colonial rule and contemporary inequality rely not only on economic extraction but also on an entire apparatus of knowledge, affect, and identity that naturalizes and legitimizes such extraction. For example, Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s critique of “linguistic colonialism” reveals how colonial language functions as a central instrument of colonial rule and “indirect alienation” in the postcolonial era, with cultural hegemony continuously reproducing relations of colonial power through mechanisms of language, education, and literature (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986).

Nevertheless, such cultural analysis must be firmly anchored in Marxism’s political-economic base. Class contradiction—the antagonism between the owners of the means of production and the direct producers, together with the exploitative relations that arise therefrom—constitutes the structural background against which racial and national contradictions must be analyzed. Only by situating postcolonialism’s insights into cultural hegemony within Marxism’s framework of class analysis can cultural critique avoid the pitfalls of fragmentation and depoliticization. The history of old Shanghai provides an excellent case for testing this theoretical synthesis: in this semi-colonial city, racial segregation, cultural hybridity, and class differentiation were highly intertwined, perfectly illustrating how cultural hegemony served the class rule of international monopoly capital.

Through the above theoretical dialogue, it becomes evident that postcolonialism and Marxism are not in simple opposition but exist in a relationship of profound tension and complementarity. This synthesis not only supplies a methodological foundation for re-examining the colonial system in old Shanghai but also offers a critical weapon for understanding the class nature of contemporary global inequality.

## Old Shanghai: Class Spectrum and Racial Veil Under the International Colonial System

Old Shanghai was not a simple “colony” but a complex “three territories, four powers” configuration consisting of the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese-administered districts. The ambiguous legal status of this arrangement—essentially a “settlement” rather than a sovereign cession as a formal “colony”—was itself a typical product of global capital expansion in the age of imperialism. As Xiong Yuezhi has observed, this distinctive pattern of “one city, three administrations” was extremely rare in world urban history. It reflected both the differentiation and competition of foreign powers’ interests in China and the forced compromises made by the Qing government and subsequent regimes in the matter of sovereignty concessions (Xiong, 1999). Within this field, racial differences were meticulously woven into a refined order of class domination, forming a strict hierarchical structure beneath the surface appearance of Sino-foreign mixing.

To penetrate the superficial image of “Sino-foreign mixing” in old Shanghai and reveal the deep essence of its power structure, it is necessary to adopt an analytical perspective that integrates historical materialism with postcolonial theory. This perspective seeks to construct a detailed “class-colonial” composite spectrum. The core feature of this spectrum is that international finance capital and colonial political privilege occupy the apex of power and systematically employ race, nationality, and legal identity as primary instruments of social stratification and segregation. In this way, diverse populations from both global and local sources are reorganized into a rigidly hierarchical and contradiction-laden globalized class society. Within this structure, racial contradictions frequently appear as surface phenomena whose underlying substance is class rule; conversely, the practice of class oppression is always implemented and consolidated through racialized and colonial institutional arrangements. This chapter systematically analyzes the spectrum from four dimensions: the institutional complicity of law and space, the internal fissures within foreign society, the profound differentiation within Chinese society, and the complex dialectics of the cultural field.

### Institutional complicity of law and space

The maturity of colonial rule in old Shanghai lay in its construction of a governance system that combined “hard” coercion with “soft” discipline. Law and space served as the two main pillars of this system, jointly shaping and sustaining an institutionalized class-racial order. In recent years, scholarly research on the legal history and urban spatial history of the Shanghai concessions has deepened, providing richer historical materials and analytical frameworks for understanding this institutional complicity.

The class-based construction of law: Extraterritoriality and the “autonomous” powers of the concessions formed the juridical foundation of Shanghai’s colonial order. The primary function of this legal system was to ensure that international

capital and its agents enjoyed superordinate status and absolute security. As Ye Bin has shown in his study of the Shanghai Mixed Court, although the institution was nominally presided over by Chinese officials, the participation of foreign assessors made it almost impossible to render judgments unfavorable to foreigners (Ye, 2005). In both the Mixed Court of the International Settlement and the later Special Court, cases involving foreign subjects were systematically tilted in favor of the foreign side due to the significant influence of foreign assessors. Such legal privileges were, in essence, class privileges serving specific economic interests, designed to protect the core interests of capital owners and the colonial ruling bloc. Li Haoxian further argues that the operational mechanism of the Mixed Court embodied the dual character of colonial law: on the one hand, it maintained the “legitimacy” of rule by preserving nominal Chinese judicial sovereignty; on the other hand, it ensured the priority of colonial interests through substantive foreign intervention (Li, 2012).

Nevertheless, the legal field itself was also a site of power contestation. With the rise of Chinese national capital in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the sharp contradiction between the strong economic power of the Chinese bourgeoisie and their political disenfranchisement — “no representation without taxation”—in concession municipal affairs became acute. The trajectory from the early twentieth-century “Chinese participation movement” to the eventual addition of Chinese directors to the Shanghai Municipal Council in 1928 carries profound symbolic significance. Ma Changlin’s research demonstrates that this movement involved a protracted contestation from the late Qing to the Nanjing Nationalist Government period, encompassing both petitions and struggles by the gentry-merchant stratum and adjustments in the foreign powers’ strategies toward China (Ma, 2004). This change was not a benevolent concession by the colonizers but the outcome of political struggle waged by the upper Chinese bourgeoisie, who leveraged their economic strength—they were a major source of concession revenue—together with nationalist demands. It must be clearly recognized, however, that such “political participation” was extremely limited. It did not touch the fundamental juridical basis of colonial rule and brought no benefit to the broad Chinese proletariat. It precisely reveals the strategic elasticity of the colonial legal system: by selectively co-opting the upper echelons of native elites and partially aligning their interests with the colonial order, the system fragmented the colonized population and thereby consolidated the more fundamental structure of class rule.

The colonial inscription of space: If law constructed the abstract architecture of power, then urban space translated it into tangible everyday experience and bodily sensation. In recent years, urban historians such as Zhang Peng and Chen Yunqian have deepened our understanding of spatial politics through their studies of colonial space in Shanghai.

First, the most famous segregative space was the long-standing admission ban at the Bund Public Garden (Public Garden), a classic embodiment of spatial colonialism. Chen Yunqian points out in her analysis of modern Chinese parks

that the “Chinese and dogs not admitted” regulation at the Bund Public Garden became an important symbolic resource for nationalist mobilization, repeatedly appearing in various protest discourses and literary writings (Chen, 2009). This measure transcended mere racial discrimination and became a spatial-political strategy: it reserved the most privileged public landscapes for the colonizers’ exclusive “civilized” recreation, while the exclusion of Chinese constituted open racial humiliation and class segregation. Such spatial segregation was also profoundly reflected in residential patterns. The sharp contrast between the garden villas in the Western District and the factory districts and shantytowns of Zhabei, Yangshupu, and Nanshi directly mapped and solidified economic class divisions. Zhang Peng’s research shows that the concession authorities systematically promoted residential differentiation through land regulations, building codes, and sanitary management, thereby giving material spatial expression to class differences (Zhang, 2010).

Second, symbolic space: The Bund’s “exhibition of world architecture” was not only a physical concentration of finance capital but also a monumental display of colonial power and Western modernity. These buildings, with their overwhelming scale, technological superiority, and exotic styles, continually proclaimed the rulers’ wealth, technology, and cultural authority. As architectural historian Zheng Shiling has argued, the Bund architectural ensemble constituted a complete system of power discourse, in which every building served as both a demonstration of capital strength and a materialized symbol of colonial order (Zheng, 2008).

Finally, the most vital and “living” disciplinary and consumptive spaces: the emergence of cafés and other new consumption venues presented another layer of complexity. Lian Lingling’s research on Shanghai’s consumer culture indicates that, for many Chinese literati and middle-class individuals, cafés symbolized a depoliticized “metropolitan Western” modernity—fashionable, elegant, and intellectually vibrant (Lian, 2010). Yet these spaces were themselves products of the colonial economy, and their logic of consumption invisibly reinforced Western cultural authority. At the same time, access to and social practices within these spaces were always tightly linked to individuals’ economic and cultural capital, thereby reproducing capital-based stratification even within Chinese society. Leo Ou-fan Lee offers a penetrating discussion of this phenomenon in *Shanghai Modern*, pointing out that modern consumption spaces such as cafés and cinemas not only introduced new lifestyles and aesthetic experiences but also constituted a cultural trap of colonial modernity, leading the Chinese middle class to unconsciously identify with the colonial order while consuming the West (Lee, 1999).

### Internal fissures within “Foreign” society

“Foreigners” or “Westerners” in old Shanghai were by no means a homogeneous whole. The colonial system not only exploited the Chinese but also meticulously reproduced hierarchies based on nationality, race, wealth, and occupation within the foreign community itself—a microcosm of the imperialist world system described by Lenin. In recent years,

studies of the Shanghai foreign community by scholars such as Ma Changlin, Wang Jian, and Li Aili have provided more nuanced historical materials for revealing these internal fissures.

**Core layer: the Anglo-Saxon oligarchy.** At the apex of the pyramid stood the British and American taipans who controlled the major foreign firms, banks, and high-level positions in the Municipal Council. They served as agents of international finance capital in Shanghai, commanding economic lifelines and core municipal power. Li Aili’s research on British firms such as Jardine Matheson and Butterfield & Swire shows that these taipans not only dominated the economic sphere but also formed a highly exclusive elite circle through intermarriage, club sociability, and shared educational backgrounds. Their social networks and business networks overlapped extensively, jointly maintaining British commercial hegemony in Shanghai (Li, 2004).

**Dependent layer: Continental European expatriates and Japanese elites.** French administrative officials and merchants in the French Concession, together with the rapidly expanding Japanese financial conglomerates and senior staff after the 1920s, constituted another significant power bloc that competed with the Anglo-American group. Wang Jian’s research indicates that the French Concession adopted a governance model distinct from that of the International Settlement, placing greater emphasis on the superiority of French culture and assimilationist policies, resulting in a relatively centralized structure centered on the French consul (Wang, 2015). Meanwhile, the Japanese expatriate community grew dramatically in numbers after the 1920s, with its economic strength and political influence rising in tandem, gradually becoming an important force challenging Anglo-American hegemony.

**Instrumental layer: components of the “white governance machine.”** This included Scottish or Irish constables in the Settlement police force, officers of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, and foreign middle-level managers and technicians. By serving the colonial apparatus, they received generous salaries and racial privileges superior to those of the Chinese. Ma Changlin’s analysis of the Municipal Police shows that the promotion mechanisms and salary structures within the police clearly favored British constables, while Irish and Scottish constables, though white, occupied a noticeably lower status than English elites (Ma, 2004).

**Marginal layer and “undesirable whites”:** The existence of this group substantially challenged the myth of “white superiority.”

**White Russian refugees:** After the October Revolution, tens of thousands of White Russians fled to Shanghai. Many former aristocrats were reduced to shop clerks, bodyguards, or even prostitutes. Their impoverished living conditions stood in stark contrast to those of the Anglo-American elite. Wang Zhicheng’s study of the Shanghai White Russian community vividly depicts their survival landscape: although they were white, they faced obvious discrimination in employment, housing, and social status, and were forced to congregate in poor districts of the French Concession, forming a marginalized existence. The large-scale entry of White Russian women into dance halls, bars, and even the sex trade became a typical

representation of the “white slave” phenomenon in Shanghai. Their fate profoundly revealed the internal fragmentation of “white” identity within colonial society (Wang, 2008).

“Divide and rule” through Asian auxiliaries: The Indian constables (“Red-Headed Asans”) in the International Settlement and the Annamese (Vietnamese) constables in the French Concession occupied a particularly ambiguous position. As colonized subjects themselves, they were employed to police another colonized group (the Chinese), while struggling between loyalty to the colonizer and potential identification with the oppressed. Wu Yongmei’s research shows that these South and Southeast Asian constables occupied an awkward position in the colonial hierarchy: they enjoyed certain privileges over the Chinese yet remained far below white constables in social status and remuneration. Their identity formation exhibited clear hybridity and contradiction (Wu, 2012).

The presence of these “non-elite whites” and Asian auxiliaries provoked deep “racial anxiety” among colonial elites. Their poverty and “unseemly” behavior were seen as tarnishing the purity and superiority myth of the “white” ruling race. Consequently, colonial authorities and elite circles frequently adopted exclusionary or disciplinary attitudes toward them, attempting to draw clear boundaries. This phenomenon eloquently demonstrates that, in colonial cities, the ultimate determinant of social status was not skin color but an individual’s relationship to capital and power. Racist ideology is essentially a tool serving a specific class rule—that of the international bourgeoisie. When certain “whites” could no longer contribute to or even damaged that class’s myth, they too were marginalized.

### **Profound differentiation within Chinese society**

Confronted with colonial rule, Chinese society developed deep internal fissures according to differing economic positions and relationships to the colonial system, with nationalist demands and class interests intricately intertwined and contested. Scholarly research on social stratification among Shanghai’s Chinese population by Xiong Yuezhi, Zhou Wu, Zhang Jishun, and others has provided rich analytical frameworks for understanding this differentiation.

Compradors and dependent bourgeoisie: As key bridges between the colonial economy and the Chinese market, they accumulated enormous wealth by acting as agents for foreign capital. Hao Yen-Ping’s study of the Chinese comprador system points out that this stratum benefited from foreign expansion while serving as collaborators in the colonial economy. Their interests were deeply bound to the colonial system, and their political stance was often conservative. They were classic examples of Homi Bhabha’s “mimic men”—imitating Western lifestyles and craving colonial recognition. This group was highly Westernized in lifestyle, children’s education, and social networks, forming an agent class of the colonial order within Chinese society (Hao, 1970).

### **National industrial bourgeoisie**

They established indigenous enterprises but faced systematic pressure from foreign capital and its privileges in cap-

ital, technology, and markets. Consequently, they harbored strong nationalist sentiments and became important supporters of anti-imperialist patriotic movements (such as boycotts of foreign goods). At the same time, they maintained exploitative relations with the working class. Their struggle for “Chinese director” seats in the concessions served both to secure political rights for their own class and, to some extent, to represent broader Chinese communal demands. Zhang Jishun’s research shows that this stratum’s political attitude was distinctly dualistic: on the one hand, they had structural conflicts with the colonial order on anti-imperialist issues; on the other hand, they tended to defend the existing social order on labor-capital questions and opposed radical class revolution (Zhang, 2004).

### **New-style middle class**

This included lawyers, journalists, doctors, engineers, and company clerks educated in modern institutions and championing “science,” “democracy,” and metropolitan civilization. As Leo Ou-fan Lee has noted, many Shanghai intellectuals felt “humiliation and anger” toward colonial rule yet were reluctant to abandon the material comforts and cultural spaces of the concessions (Lee, 1999). Ye Wenxin further points out in her study of modern Chinese intellectuals that this group’s attitude toward the West was complex and “split”: they embraced “the West” abstractly as progressive modernity while resisting its concrete colonial politics. This split sense of identification made the new-style middle class an important participant in nationalist movements, yet it struggled to form an independent political program (Ye, 2000).

### **Urban proletariat and urban poor**

This was the largest group in Chinese society and bore the double burden of exploitation by Sino-foreign capital and racialized colonial oppression. They were concentrated in harsh factory districts and shantytowns, receiving meager wages with no security. Elizabeth Perry’s research on the Shanghai labor movement shows that, after the 1920s, precisely this class, mobilized by Marxism, transformed from a “class-in-itself” into a “class-for-itself” revolutionary force (Perry, 1993). Their struggles—such as the May Thirtieth Movement and the three-armed workers’ uprisings—simultaneously advanced economic and political demands, tightly linking class liberation with national liberation and posing the most fundamental challenge to the colonial and class order. The Shanghai workers’ strike movements were not only large in scale and well-organized but also gradually developed cross-industry and cross-regional united actions, demonstrating a more thorough revolutionary character than other social strata.

### **Dialectics of the cultural field**

The cultural field was a key battlefield where various forces contested “meaning” and “identity.” Cultural production and consumption in old Shanghai vividly embodied the intricate relations among modernity, coloniality, and nationality. In recent years, cultural historians such as Leo Ou-fan Lee, Xu Jilin, and Chen Jianhua have provided deeper insights into

this dialectical relationship through their studies of Shanghai's cultural history.

Imagination and consumption of "metropolitan Western": Mass media such as the *Liangyou* Pictorial constructed a glamorous, fashionable image of the international metropolis. Xu Jilin points out in his study of Shanghai popular culture that the abundant Western elements presented in these media were portrayed as symbols of "modern" life. This consumption of "metropolitan Western" in a sense diluted or even obscured the underlying "colonial West," unwittingly becoming complicit in colonial cultural hegemony (Xu, 2007). Advertisements, fashion, and interior design in *Liangyou* took the West as their model, packaging colonial modernity as a universal modern lifestyle and leading readers to unconsciously accept the cultural logic of the colonial order while consuming Western material culture.

Subjective persistence in language and literature: Unlike many fully colonized territories, Chinese retained its dominant position in Shanghai's cultural and literary fields. Chinese writers generally wrote in Chinese, presupposing cultural complicity with native readers. Chen Jianhua's research on modern Shanghai literature shows that this indicates that Shanghai's Chinese intellectuals, facing Western cultural impact, did not lose their cultural subjectivity; instead, it became the foundation for creative transformation of Western modernity (Chen, 2005). Whether in the urban writings of the New Sensationalist school or in Lu Xun's cultural critiques, cultural subjectivity carried by the Chinese language demonstrated resilience and creativity within the colonial context.

Left-wing literature and the cry of class consciousness: The rise of the left-wing cultural movement offered an alternative narrative. Lu Xun's essays, Xia Yan's reportage literature, and left-wing films (such as *Street Angel*, "马路天使") focused on the suffering of the lower strata, exposing social injustice and class oppression. Ni Wei's study of the left-wing cultural movement points out that these works sought to awaken mass class consciousness and the spirit of resistance, revealing the brutal reality beneath the glittering facade of metropolitan modernity and attempting to link individual suffering with the fate of class and nation (Ni, 2005). Through the portrayal of workers and peasants, the depiction of class struggle, and the critique of colonial order, left-wing literature constructed a cultural discourse diametrically opposed to colonial modernity and became an important vehicle for mobilizing the masses and disseminating revolutionary ideas.

The division and analysis of old Shanghai's "class-colonial" system demonstrate that this classic case vividly illustrates the "finance capital rule" and "partition of the world" logic identified in Lenin's theory of imperialism, realized in semi-colonial Shanghai in a highly concrete, spatialized, and culturalized form. The racial contradictions in this setting were, at their deepest level, political strategies whereby international monopoly capital, in collusion with colonial regimes, exploited and manufactured racial and national differences to divide the oppressed masses and deflect class contradictions. Through systematic analysis of law, space, foreign society, Chinese society, and the cultural field, it becomes clear that colonial rule in old Shanghai operated through both economic and

violent coercion as well as legal and cultural discipline, with class contradiction remaining the central thread running through all these dimensions.

## Viewing China's Anti-Imperialist Struggle through Lenin's Theory of Imperialism: The Penetration and Twists of the Class Perspective

Lenin's theory of imperialism provided Chinese revolutionaries with a crucial theoretical weapon. It enabled them to recognize that China's poverty and backwardness were not merely a question of "civilizational superiority or inferiority," but the inevitable outcome of the country's deep integration into the global capitalist system of exploitation. Consequently, China's anti-imperialist struggle had to transcend narrow nationalist frameworks and be closely linked with the international proletarian revolution and domestic class struggle. Only by situating the demand for national liberation within the overall contradictions of the global capitalist mode of production could a genuinely effective revolutionary path be identified. This theoretical guidance not only laid the scientific foundation for the Chinese Communist Party's early anti-imperialist discourse but was also continuously tested and deepened through the twists and turns of revolutionary practice.

### Early exploration and the CCP's class-based anti-imperialist discourse

From its very founding, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adopted Marxism and Lenin's theory of imperialism as the fundamental method for analyzing Chinese society, explicitly putting forward the revolutionary program of "anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism." The adoption of this program marked a qualitative leap in the Chinese nationalist movement: it transformed anti-imperialist struggle from an elite-led, diplomatic, or cultural form of protest into a new path that combined it with the social revolution of the broad masses of workers and peasants. The manifesto adopted at the Second National Congress of the CCP in 1922 clearly stated that imperialism was the principal supporter of Chinese feudal warlord forces, while warlords and the comprador bourgeoisie served as imperialism's agents in China. Therefore, genuine national liberation required a revolutionary alliance of workers, peasants, and the petty bourgeoisie to overthrow domestic reactionary class rule and ultimately achieve national independence and people's liberation (Central Committee of the CCP, 1922).

This discursive construction successfully wove national salvation together with class emancipation, providing powerful ideological momentum for revolutionary mobilization. Unlike the limitations of many May Fourth intellectuals who confined themselves to cultural critique or diplomatic protest, the CCP's anti-imperialist discourse regarded imperialism as the inevitable product of the monopoly stage of global capitalism and viewed domestic feudal forces as its political pillar in

semi-colonial China, thereby pointing out a clear direction of struggle for the worker-peasant masses. This class-based anti-imperialist discourse not only inherited Lenin's scientific thesis on the division between "oppressor nations and oppressed nations" but also translated it into a potent mobilizing force in practice, laying the ideological groundwork for the subsequent high tide of the Great Revolution.

### Challenges in practice and "Left" and "Right" deviations

Nevertheless, in the complex reality of revolutionary practice, correctly handling the dialectical relationship between national and class contradictions remained a constant challenge. After the Mukden Incident of 1931 dramatically intensified the national crisis, the CCP Central Committee, in its "Resolution on Errors and Shortcomings in Our Work in the Anti-Imperialist Struggle" (1931), sharply criticized two erroneous tendencies within the Party. The first was the "right" tendency of "fearing openness, fearing the masses, and shrinking back from the masses' nationalist sentiments," which hesitated to independently lead the surging anti-Japanese patriotic movement and even proposed unprincipled cooperation with other factions within the Kuomintang (such as the Reorganization Clique). The second was "left" sectarianism, which "set anti-imperialist struggle against everyday economic struggle," failing to combine the masses' rising national indignation with their immediate economic demands regarding wages, working hours, and conditions, and neglecting to utilize open anti-Japanese organizations to win over the broad patriotic middle strata, thereby seriously isolating the Party from the masses.

The core spirit of this resolution emphasized that anti-imperialist struggle must take proletarian strike movements as its "backbone," must closely integrate economic and political struggle, and must thoroughly expose the "traitorous" nature of the Kuomintang regime and its allied classes during the struggle, thereby guiding the masses from anti-imperialism toward an anti-Kuomintang "people's revolution." This was precisely the concrete application of Lenin's theory of "oppressor nations/oppressed nations"—transforming China's oppressed national status into a historical opportunity to awaken and mobilize the domestically oppressed classes for revolution. Through this dialectical approach, the CCP successfully avoided the errors of abstracting or isolating anti-imperialist struggle, achieving in practice the unity of national liberation and class emancipation.

### Chinese labor on the global chain: The fusion of class experience and national consciousness

The anti-imperialist struggles of Chinese workers constitute the most vivid and convincing footnote to this historical process. Selda Altan's research on Chinese laborers on the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway demonstrates that, in French colonial projects, Chinese workers suffered typical racialized exploitation: significantly lower wages than French workers, harsher medical conditions, and highly unequal legal treatment (Altan, 2020). However, the workers were not passive

victims. They engaged in everyday forms of resistance through collective flight, passive slowdowns, negotiations with foremen, and strikes. These acts of resistance were both class-based struggles against exploitation driven by survival instincts and, because they directly targeted foreign colonial capital, naturally carried the character of national resistance, vividly embodying the profound fusion of class experience and national consciousness.

It is noteworthy that Chinese nationalist elites at the time often regarded these workers merely as "objects of passive mobilization" rather than as historical subjects possessing their own revolutionary potential. This gap between elites and workers precisely illustrates that, without genuinely understanding workers' conditions and demands from a class standpoint, purely nationalist mobilization could only remain superficial and incomplete. Elizabeth Perry's study of the Shanghai labor movement also shows that, after the 1920s, it was precisely this class, mobilized by scientific Marxism, that transformed from a "class-in-itself" into a "class-for-itself" revolutionary force. Their struggles—such as the May Thirtieth Movement and the three armed workers' uprisings—unified economic and political demands to a high degree, striking at the economic foundation of imperialism in China while undermining the rule of the feudal-comprador class (Perry, 2001). This historical experience profoundly demonstrates that only by situating anti-imperialist struggle within the class perspective of the global capitalist production chain can the genuine unity of national liberation and class emancipation be achieved, thereby opening the correct path for revolution in semi-colonial China.

In summary, examining the course of China's anti-imperialist struggle through the lens of Lenin's theory of imperialism makes it clear that the class perspective remained the central thread running throughout. It not only provided the theoretical weapon for the formation of early anti-imperialist discourse but was also continuously tested and enriched amid the twists and turns of revolutionary practice. Only by consistently placing national contradictions within the framework of class contradictions could China's anti-imperialist struggle avoid the dual errors of rightist capitulationism and "leftist" sectarianism, ultimately realizing the unified goal of national independence and people's liberation. This historical experience continues to hold significant theoretical and practical relevance for understanding the dialectical relationship between national and class questions under global capitalism today.

### Re-examination in the Postcolonial Context: Class Roots of Racial Contradictions and the Future of Emancipatory Politics

In the postcolonial era, although direct colonial rule has largely become a thing of the past, the "Orientalist" mode of thinking critiqued by Said, the structural inequalities within "global modernity" warned against by Dirlik, and the logic of monopoly capital analyzed by Lenin continue to persist and reproduce themselves in new, more insidious forms. This per-

sistence lends contemporary urgency and relevance to the analysis of the class contradictions that lie behind racial contradictions. Only by penetrating beneath surface categories such as race and identity to reach the core of capital logic and class domination can a solid intellectual foundation be established for constructing a united emancipatory path that transcends fragmented identity politics.

### **“Race” as strategy and ideology of class rule**

Both history and contemporary reality demonstrate that the category of “race” is not a pre-existing biological or cultural fact but a social construct that was deliberately invented and institutionalized during the processes of colonial conquest, the slave trade, and the commodification of labor under capitalism. Its core functions serve the needs of class domination: first, it divides the working class by creating a “racial hierarchy,” allowing lower-stratum white workers to develop a false identification with the existing order through the minimal “privilege” of skin color, thereby weakening cross-racial class solidarity; second, it provides an ideological justification for super-exploitation by defining certain groups as “inferior,” “lazy,” or “barbaric,” thereby dehumanizing them and legitimizing extremely low wages and wretched working conditions; and third, it effectively deflects class contradictions by attributing social problems caused by capitalist greed—such as unemployment, poverty, and resource scarcity—to the competition or cultural deficiencies of “other” racial groups, transforming systemic crises into inter-ethnic cultural conflicts (Dirlik, 1997; Said, 1978).

In old Shanghai, this mechanism was particularly evident. The long-term exclusion of Chinese from the Bund Public Garden was both an overt racial insult and a symbolic expression of class segregation. It constantly reminded the Chinese population of their subordinate “inferior” status while concealing the fundamental class reality of joint exploitation by Chinese and foreign capital inside and outside the concessions. In today’s globalized production chains, a similar logic continues to operate: capital flows freely across borders in search of the cheapest and most docile labor, a process that frequently coincides with specific countries, regions, and racial groups. The stigmatization of “Made in China” or the systemic discrimination against certain immigrant groups often intertwines economic competition, employment anxiety, and identity politics manipulated by capital. By reframing structural unemployment as a narrative of “foreign laborers stealing local jobs,” capital not only deflects domestic class contradictions but also consolidates the dominance of monopoly capital on a global scale. Such “racialization” strategies represent an important tool through which monopoly capital, as revealed by Lenin, maintains its global system of exploitation—an instrument that, under postcolonial conditions, reproduces itself in more flexible cultural and identitarian forms.

### **Beyond identity politics: Toward a united emancipatory politics**

Postcolonial critique has made undeniable contributions in exposing the hypocrisy, fluidity, and power relations inherent in identity construction, revealing how colonial dis-

courses sustain inequality through cultural representation and knowledge production. However, when postcolonial theory becomes excessively immersed in the politics of difference and the deconstruction of identity, it risks leading to political fragmentation and impotence. Once “class”—the universal analytical category and foundation for solidarity capable of linking oppressed groups across race, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes—is suspended or dissolved, resistance easily degenerates into fragmented, merely cultural and symbolic struggles that fail to challenge the fundamental logic of capital accumulation (Ahmad, 1992).

The fundamental insight of Marxism is that the economic base and political-economic analysis must be restored to the center of critical theory. This means that struggles against racism and gender discrimination must be organically combined with struggles against capitalist exploitation and for economic democracy. Genuine emancipatory politics does not merely seek “recognition” or a relatively superior position for a particular group within the existing order—as exemplified by the limited political participation of the old Shanghai Chinese bourgeoisie in their struggle for seats on the Shanghai Municipal Council—but aims to fundamentally transform the structural rules that produce and exploit these inequalities: namely, the logic of capital’s unlimited valorization and pursuit of profit. Only by re-anchoring cultural critique within the framework of class analysis can the fragmentation of identity politics be avoided and a transition achieved from the “politics of recognition” to the “politics of redistribution” and the “politics of transformation.”

The fundamental lesson of China’s anti-imperialist history lies precisely here. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Chinese Communist Party implemented rent and interest reduction policies in the revolutionary base areas and launched mass production campaigns, closely integrating national salvation with the improvement of people’s livelihood. This approach won the firmest support from the broad peasantry. The practice fully demonstrates that only by deeply fusing the demands of national liberation with the socio-economic revolutionary demands of the grassroots masses can a broad alliance transcending specific identities be formed, ultimately realizing genuine social transformation. This historical experience offers important enlightenment for the present: any contemporary justice movement—whether against racism or gender oppression—must, if it is to achieve substantive victory, directly and proactively confront core class issues such as resource distribution and the democratization of production relations, while devoting itself to building a broad alliance of the exploited and oppressed that transcends specific identities of race, gender, and others. Only in this way can the limitations of identity politics be truly overcome in the postcolonial conditions of global capitalism, advancing toward a united emancipatory politics aimed at economic democracy, social equality, and international justice.

Through the analysis of the colonial system in old Shanghai and the re-examination of China’s anti-imperialist struggle, this article clearly demonstrates that the deep essence of racial contradictions is the manifestation of class contradictions under the specific conditions of colonialism and semi-

colonialism. In the postcolonial era, only by adhering to Marxism's method of class analysis and situating postcolonialism's insights into cultural hegemony upon the solid foundation of political economy can critical theory provide scientific guidance for contemporary emancipatory politics and contribute intellectual resources to the construction of new united paths that transcend global capitalist inequality.

## Conclusion

Synthesizing the theoretical narratives of postcolonialism and Marxism, and using old Shanghai—a semi-colonial city—as a concrete historical lens, we can clearly discern the following: the profound national crisis that China experienced in modern times originated fundamentally from its forcible incorporation into the imperialist world-system as defined by Lenin, which rendered it an object of exploitation and dismemberment by international monopoly capital. Within this global capitalist system, the ostensible racial contradictions and national oppression were, in essence, a historical manifestation under colonial and semi-colonial conditions of the class contradictions between the international bourgeoisie and the broad masses of the Chinese people, particularly the working and peasant classes. The social landscape of old Shanghai, characterized by the coexistence of Chinese and foreigners, serves as a perfect illustration of this thesis: the Chinese, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population, were systematically deprived of political rights, while within “foreign” society itself, there existed a rigid hierarchical structure based on nationality, wealth, and power. Behind all these surface phenomena lay the core logic of capital accumulation and oligarchic rule, revealing that the class nature of colonial domination was far more profound and fundamental than racial antagonism.

The trajectory of China's anti-imperialist struggle is an epic narrative replete with detours and explorations. It records not only the heroic resistance of the Chinese nation against foreign aggression but also constitutes a history of theoretical and practical endeavor in continuously seeking the organic integration of national liberation with class liberation. Its core lesson lies in the following: only by deeply integrating the anti-imperialist demand for national salvation with the socio-economic revolutionary aspirations of the subaltern classes, and by launching a “popular revolution” with workers and peasants as its “mainstay,” could the ruling chain formed by the collusion between imperialism and feudal forces be broken, leading to genuine national independence and the thorough emancipation of the people. This lesson was vividly validated in practices during the War of Resistance against Japan, such as rent and interest reduction in the base areas and the Great Production Movement, fully demonstrating that the class perspective constituted a scientific method for guiding revolutions in semi-colonial and semi-feudal countries. Its profound lessons are equally thought-provoking: any separation of national contradictions from class contradictions, whether leading to a “Left” sectarianism that divorced itself from the masses or a Right opportunism that abandoned class positions, inevitably resulted in setbacks or

even failure for the revolutionary struggle. This historical dialectic retains significant cautionary relevance even today.

In our postcolonial present, although the direct forms of colonial domination have undergone profound changes, its economic foundation—the logic of monopoly capital's global expansion—and its ideological legacies remain deeply entrenched. Racism, xenophobia, and cultural discrimination are often deployed as ideological tools to deflect domestic class contradictions and sustain the unequal global political-economic order. Within the context of global production chains and capital flows, narratives of race and identity are increasingly used to obscure structural exploitation and the inequitable distribution of resources, making it difficult for the oppressed to forge alliances that transcend specific identities. Therefore, piercing the fog of racial contradictions to reveal the class roots behind them is not only a profound clarification of modern Chinese history but also an urgent call for a politics of liberation under contemporary global capitalism.

This implies that the true path to liberation lies in transcending a politics confined to identity recognition and cultural deconstruction, and in reconstructing a universal politics of liberation with economic democracy, social equality, and international justice as its fundamental goals. Such a politics of liberation must take Marxism's critique of the logic of capital as its theoretical cornerstone, while fully assimilating postcolonialism's profound insights into cultural hegemony and intellectual power, organically unifying the two. Only in this way can we build broad alliances that cut across specific identity boundaries such as race, ethnicity, and gender in the postcolonial era, and truly challenge and ultimately transcend the global system of capitalist inequality.

Old Shanghai, as a paradigmatic example of a semi-colonial city in the age of imperialism, provides a vivid and concrete mirror for understanding the class essence of colonial systems. The tortuous course of China's anti-imperialist struggle offers invaluable historical wisdom for contemporary Global South nations and oppressed peoples worldwide. Under new historical conditions, revisiting this theoretical synthesis and historical experience not only helps us more profoundly comprehend the power relations shaping the contemporary world order but also contributes Chinese perspectives and solutions to the construction of a just, equitable, and sustainable international order. Only by adhering to the standpoint of class analysis and integrating cultural critique with political-economic critique can we continue to advance the great cause of human liberation in the postcolonial era, ushering in a new world of genuine freedom and equality, free from exploitation and oppression.

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# The Thought of New Poetry from the Perspective of Classical Aesthetics: Centering on "Neutralization"

## 古典美学观照下的新诗思想：以“中和”为中心

Ruodong Gao<sup>1,\*</sup>

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**Abstract:** Classical aesthetics, rooted in Chinese culture, has been highly involved, nurtured and supplemented with poetry and literature creation and theoretical criticism for a long time. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese new poetry has been influenced by the modern poetic paradigm and cultural value system in Europe and the United States. It has been westernized for several times, and has repeatedly lowered the weight of the root of Oriental traditional art. Until the 1970s, with the "enlightenment opportunity" of Li Zehou's so-called aesthetics, and the "New Poetry Tide" and "the third generation" in the field of poetry, several groups of poets and theorists with the characteristics of geo cultural awareness, textual research and border extension of classical spirit, inheritance and decoding of historical information rose one after another. Under the care of the classical aesthetic thought of "Neutralization", they almost shouldered the responsibility of connecting traditional Chinese poetry and new poetry, and continued to innovate and explore. Elucidating this process and phenomenon may have a certain "filler" value for mutual learning and discussion in the field of classical aesthetics and contemporary poetics.

**摘要：**根植于中国文化的古典美学，长期与诗歌文学创作及理论批评存在高度互涉、熏陶和补充的关系。自20世纪初汉语新诗发轫，膺受欧美近现代诗学范式及文化价值体系影响，几度产生西化潮流，而一再放低东方传统艺术根脉的权重。直至20世纪70年代后，伴随李泽厚所谓美学的“启蒙契机到来”，诗歌领域“新诗潮”、“第三代”等运动陆续兴盛，几批具备地缘文化意识、古典精神考据与拓边、历史信息继承与解码特征的诗人与理论家相继崛起，在以“中和”为主的古典美学思想观照之下，几乎肩负起了通联传统汉诗与新诗的时代责任，并持续创新探索。阐释这一历程与现象，对于古典美学与当代诗学研究领域的互鉴和筹议，或将具备一定的“补白”价值。



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**Keywords:** Classical aesthetics; Modern Chinese poetry; Traditional culture; Neutralization thought

**关键词：**古典美学；汉语新诗；传统文化；中和思想

### 西学之外的根脉意识

汉语新诗的诞生之于中国传统文化而言，堪称千百年未有之大变局。它在较短的时间内将诸多贯通于古典时代的诗学观念、价值追求和文本特征打包抛弃，而长期影响乃至深嵌于古典汉诗的美学思想体系，则同样遭遇大面积剥离、闲置的命运。在“新文化运动”的浪潮之下，用白话创作的诗歌以欧美为师，以删繁就简和大刀阔斧为要旨，将唐宋以降的诗词格律、审美意识、语言习惯和情境关系等内容逐一处置、更新。在此过程中，古典美学与汉语新诗之间已至少横

巨有数条难以逾越的鸿沟，天堑两端，仿佛完全不接壤的事物。客观而言，新诗的发轫具备诸多积极效果，譬如对封建礼教所包裹或夹带的糟粕文化的清洗，有效襄助于近现代化发展的政治时局，消解掉少数精英知识分子在社会结构中对文学价值的垄断，让知识普及和写作门槛进一步降低，步入寻常百姓家。但伴随时间推移，令学界逐渐警醒的问题也逐步产生，譬如在除弊的同时大量派生于域外的文化思想对中国本位的价值体系造成了根本性的浸入，甚至存在某些喧宾夺主的情况。在诗学领域，部分激进偏颇的想法陆续诞生，导致了1920-1940年代间所谓全面西化、抛弃古典的诗歌未

<sup>1</sup> Hong Kong Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hong Kong, China.

\*Corresponding author. Email: [gaoruodong@prof.hks.ac.cn](mailto:gaoruodong@prof.hks.ac.cn)

来构想开始蔓延。以至于欧风美雨所包含的错谬判断、认知，将新诗发展几度引入了危脆的岔口。正如钱穆所言“中国自春秋战国到汉、唐、宋、明各代，可说是注重在求尽人之性”[1]的文化与美学发展脉络，便面临以费正清（John King Fairbank）为代表的西方学者质疑。所谓“在中国个人本身是不受赞扬的，他既不是唯一的、永存的，也不是世界的中心”[2]的论断与事实情况明显存在偏差，在诸如此良莠不齐的域外文化持续影响之下，本位精神和古典美学的珍贵价值终于被少许诗人率先觉察、唤醒。

分析汉语新诗的“身世家谱”，可以窥见一种天然的“混血体质”，19世纪以来愈发强烈的西学东渐趋势，让文明产生迭变的同时，所承载和孕育的文学也自然发生不同程度的质变，欧美近现代文化所构筑的强大底色，一方面托举起新诗发展的开放特征，使其足以跨语言、跨文化、跨国界地汲取或挪挪思想板块。譬如张岱年所说的“中国哲学只重生活上的实证，或内心之神秘的冥证”，而西方对“逻辑的论证”更为注重[3]一般，汉语新诗迄今为止，因受西方近现代心理学、哲学理论的催动，产生了大量研究事物义理的作品，如生活哲学诗或试验性创作，不断展开对逻辑的讨论与自省。另一方面，则是持续冲淡中国本土传承的这一半古老根系，以《诗经》《楚辞》《汉乐府》等为基底的底蕴深厚、传承有序的汉语诗学道统，面临从语言肢体到理论腹心的多位面撤换与抽离。千年前白居易曾阐释的“诗者，根情”[4]在20世纪的书写实践中，被不断转变为某种西化背景下的译腔诗。所谓“抒情传统”的根脉，在部分作品中沦为了域外生活伦理的揽镜自照，正如陈超所指出的“对西方某些当代文论的穿凿附会，使大量的诗呈现出惊人的语言空转，即兴‘能指链’的无穷游走”[5]现象，几乎从1930-1950年代的新诗发展“第一高潮期”延续到了1978年后的“第二高潮期”，其间不乏怀揣古典美学意识的文人提出争议，乃至产生抗衡，事实上也正是沿着这一脉络，可以望见汉语新诗的本位价值回归之路。不断实践书写、思考和回顾，取法古典关照当下和将来，趋近完善的地步。

于1924年草创的“新格律诗派”应该是最早产生继承古典美学思想的诗歌写作集群。无论是张君勱、丁文江、陈西滢还是徐志摩，都产生了类似的思考方针，尤其是对意境之美、色彩之美的追求，几乎为1940年代诞生的“九叶诗派”和1950年代台湾地区的“蓝星诗社”的部分试图改良新诗的成员，提供了理论先导。当穆旦、卞之琳、洛夫、余光中、周梦蝶、痖弦等人在“现代派”写作范畴之内“叩寂寞而求音”之时，当融合儒学、禅宗或道家的思想余蕴付诸于解构当下社会、推动私人抒情之时，一种“于空寂处见流行，于流行处见空寂，唯道集虚，体用不二”[6]的生命情调和艺术意境的实相，由此充入汉语新诗的思想源泉。实际上古典美学以强大的包容性、交融性和“柔软质地”，长期潜移默化地以消化、汲取并转换为己用的方式，处理着与西学之间曾一度紧张的关系，尤其是中国大陆地区进入1960年代后，在特殊时局环境内，大量写作者对文学的理解开始近似柳青所谓的“并非现代专业分工体制中的literature，毋宁说乃至是改造世界的武器”[7]的概念时，欧风美雨的浸润开始沦入被批判和唾弃的境地，相反偶尔被视为“封建残余”的古典美学，却在此时获得了一丝更宽松的发展契机，得以继续施展“融合”之术，将革命的、激烈的、暴力的甚

至颠覆性的思想内容、诗歌语言逐步分解、厚积而薄发。直到进入新的时期，足以为忠实于本土文化和传统精神的写作者提供丰沛的灵感资源，从而改变过去在诗学领域相对“式微”的处境，走向总体合作与对抗并存的主旋律。

李泽厚在1980年代曾感叹“再次启蒙的契机已经到来”[8]，中国古典哲学、美学乃至文学理论都进入了一个高速发展的阶段。历经岁月洗礼，沉淀丰厚经验的老学者们，与在此期间培育的新学人群体，愈发具备文化自信心理和全球化眼光，对于中西方之间、古典与域外之间的学术体系差异，展开更为具体和细致的思考。“东西文艺理论之差异，其原因不仅由于语言文字的不同，而根本是由于基本思维方式的不同。只有在这个最根本的基础上来探讨中西文论之差别，才能真正搔到痒处，不致作皮相之论”[9]，季羨林曾如是说。汉语新诗正是在此期间进入了百家争鸣、旗帜林立的繁荣期，其中以北岛、舒婷、芒克、宋琳、黄锐等为代表的“今天派”诗人在革命话语的昂扬、自由人格的呼唤和政治隐喻等诗技艺术之外，几乎都具备了对古典美学的呼应，即便分量和占比可能略少，只是在筒子楼中偶尔想象秦砖汉瓦的余晖、从门匾褪色的撇捺之间恍然意识到文明的古老，但这绝不是惊鸿照影、转瞬即逝，而是一种启发性的征兆。既在狭义概念上为其自身在后来（主要是1990年代后）的反溯古典色彩的写作提供了铺垫，在《青灯》《在天涯》《守夜》里对“故国残月”和“古中国”、“古老汉语”[10]中深刻眷恋历史的北岛，早已抵达了某种精神“回归”的境界；同时又在客观上为更年轻的诗坛后来者们，创造了思考的契机和索引，譬如张枣最为著名的《镜中》一诗：

只要想起一生中后悔的事  
梅花便落了下来  
比如看她游泳到河的另一岸  
比如登上一株松木梯子  
危险的事固然美丽  
不如看她骑马归来  
面颊温暖  
羞惭。低下头，回答着皇帝  
一面镜子永远等候她  
让她坐到镜中常坐的地方  
望着窗外，只要想起一生中后悔的事  
梅花便落满了南山[11]

对“梅花”的书写不再是保罗·策兰（Paul Celan）式的强调叙事意味，而是在译腔转化之间对生死、大悲大喜和社会问题付诸笔墨的形态；也并非谢默斯·希尼（Seamus Heaney）式的德里郡乡间趣味的生活描摹，张枣留学德国特里尔和图宾根，师从欧陆的现代主义文学批评家，但对中国传统语言的敏锐度极高，他将个体命运与美学思考深度捆绑，将心思浸入一种如梦似幻的空间里，所谓“后悔的事”、“松木梯子”、“皇帝”都如同古画中唯美婉约的要素意象，南朝鲍照曾有诗云“中庭多杂树，偏为梅咨嗟，问君何独然？”[12]，历史变更斗转星移，诗人的语言习惯与方式产生了更改，但诗歌的心境和追逐却仍然吻合，张枣在古典世界的指引和支撑之下，完成了对现代情愫的升格、演

绎、铺陈，他不再依赖西学笼罩的诗学评价体系去衡量自身的长短，也放弃了对历史的“羞耻”和对“先锋”的执念，可以说自此开始，中国百年新诗的发展历程又掀开了新的篇章。诗歌理论界的进展几乎与诗歌创作形成对照关系，1980年后的学界振奋与反思并存，对传统文化的寻根，在部分时候甚至成为一项热议概念。譬如在抒情传统与中国现代性方面做出重要研究贡献的王德威，曾直言“挟洋以自重的姿态早已过时”[13]，诚如是，近40年来汉语新诗愈发走上了一条返乡、回顾的道路，这并非是岁月倒退的单纯复古行为，实际是对古典美学和传统文学精神价值的“再挖掘”，与结合近现代诗学的进程的关系修复、纠偏与重整。

## 精神还乡的桃源世界

中国传统文化中的诗歌美学，长期作为一种略高于社会实际发展规律、不同于政治发展逻辑，但与前两者存在紧密关联，乃至饱含象征和囊括意义的存在。历代文人以诗境为瓦砾砖石，铺设精神系统中的康庄大道或探幽曲径，通往自身的理想国度，各异的时代、地域和现实身份等因素导致了“乌托邦”存在差异，所抵达的境地各具高度的私密属性，但长久不变的是一种更内里、深层的文化驱动力，即“中和”思想。追溯这一概念，抛开现今史学领域尚存争议或有待勘探的上古时代，从先秦以来，便至少可得2000余年的源远流长，从《礼记·中庸》中所言的“中也者，天下之大本也；和也者，天下之达道也；致中和，天地位焉，万物育焉”[14]的阐述中可知，以“和”为“道”，并将“和”作为天地生化的基本规律，是“中和”价值的一层基本逻辑。而孔子在评论《诗经》之时更向前推进了一步，以“一言以蔽之，曰思无邪”[15]的陈述一槌定音，将“无邪”境界奠定为了儒家美学思想体系中的重要特征。继战国与秦代诸子百家的合流之后，两汉以来“中和思想”不断发展演化，总体以儒道二宗的互涉、对峙并走向融合为主，进入魏晋之后佛学由河西走廊再度输入（以鸠摩罗什为代表）就此成为未来千余年中国传统文化根系的组成部分之一，由此儒道释三家的合流的时代开始，“中和”的包容性价值与消化能力持续展开，以本位的、宽厚的、实用和理想兼济的姿态将后续域外输入的包括景教、拜火教、回教甚至犹太教等思想体系实现一定程度的归化、本土化和经验转化。中国诗人由此在“中和”为代表的古典美学影响之下，呈现出异彩纷呈、诸系横流、各成风景的局面，尤其进入13世纪，在北京大都的文学馆内，可以清晰看见河朔地区出身的北方汉文化士人杨果、郝经、杨奂、宋子贞，以及南方出身的儒学家赵复、许衡、姚枢、杨惟中，还包括来自中亚甚至阿拉伯地区的学者扎马鲁丁、阿合马，和吐蕃萨迦派的八思巴等人一同评议时事、推衍文学，治化朝纲。

措施柔和而润物无声的“介入”感，和强大的包容胸怀、消化能力，使得以儒道为主体的中国古典美学延展顺遂，价值斐然。当汉语新诗的发展终于意识到对本位历史的关注，并接受古典的照拂之时，1980年代不在少数的诗人终于得以饱尝雨露、迅速成长。陈先发作为“新诗潮”之后成就最大的诗人之一，在极早期的阶段便曝露了类似追求，《与清风书》中他直言“我想活在一个儒侠并举的中国”[16]的文学愿景。其背后是壮丽而细密的丹青画卷，历代以来中国传统文人群体的两大精神审美取向和梦想（遐

想）板块，都被他所吸纳于己身，或完好地继承。前者是仗剑天涯、浪迹红尘的隐逸思绪，范仲淹所感慨“处江湖之远”[17]的处世之道和思想云游，凝合了古典时代道家逍遥思想、墨家侠客思想的精髓，融入儒学为底色的士大夫功名观念，从而造就了在庙堂之外、都市之外、喧扰之外的别致心境。后者是封侯拜相、经纬天下的入世理念，自古以降文人墨客多以胸中丘壑谋国定天下为己任，在政治场上一展抱负方不辜负多年经纶，如此的济世思想形成了一种相对暗沉、迂曲和深邃的关乎名利纷繁的美学，在客观上与闲散隐逸的人生哲学形成既对立又共存和互动的状态。如若视两者各为一方端点，则两端之间的往返路径，则近乎足以概述一个传统文人奔波、纠结、踌躇与豁达并置的心路人生。

隔代承袭古典文人气韵和思想的重要书写方式，即是“纸上还乡”的旅途，1990年代后愈发蓬勃的地缘性写作，将汉语新诗的文本几乎第一次如此缜密化、细节化和饱含深情地植入了诸多不同方位的地区，或有精神层面追索和回忆为主体的书写，如程抱一、郑愁予、北岛等人，常年羁旅海外，距离故土地隔千里，仅仅依托丰赡的抒情和具备时间差的“写真”进行诗中的命运回归。或有国内相对年轻的一批写作者，以各自的家乡或常居之地作为现实嵌入和精神想象的双重锁定，展开追古抚今、思接千年的书写，一般体裁多以长诗为主，题材近乎于史诗概念，他们普遍出生在1955-1968年间，相较于更早期的诗人思想更为开明、言论环境更为自由，同时对古典时代的神往和构想也更为充盈、尊重和喜爱。代表包括以创作《水经新注：嘉陵江》《重庆书》的梁平、在“整体主义”流派中扛鼎的宋氏兄弟（宋炜、宋渠）、创作《江山北望》《敦煌诗经》的叶舟、创作《春风渡》《河西长歌》的古马、创作《新疆词典》《水上书》的沈苇、创作《水调歌头》《定风波》的胡弦，以及蒋立波、柏桦等，他们的笔触几乎包揽了从塞北烟云到江南水乡、从西域戈壁到巴蜀大地的广袤地域，直接造就了“21世纪以来，诗歌创作镜鉴和翻新古典已成为一种趋势”[18]的诞生，并为创作《钓鱼城》《十年灯》的赵晓梦、创作《止酒》《伐桐》的育邦、创作《不可有悲哀》《捕风与雕龙》的飞廉为代表的1970-1979年间诞生的更为年轻和沉潜的诗人群体提供了先行经验。

相对于一方地理的书写或乡梓情怀的呈现，另一部分几乎同期或略晚登台的诗人，则更为雄心万丈。他们渴望在山水天地之间，以更艺术化的视觉性语言推动精神遨游，对“绘画之美”、“透视之美”乃至“虚构之美”展开探索、拓增，以一种不乏冒险精神的先锋写作方式，搅入古典美学的池渊，将诸多元素、物象乃至世界观和观察位面，统筹融合继而重新建构，正如赵东所谈到的“在诗中常以历史虚构的视角进行创作”[19]的现象一般。兼事艺术批评、文化现象研究的诗人朱朱，曾在《后院》中如是写“一个处在记忆和遗忘之间的地带，一个使情感得以回旋的余地”[20]，这样的“地带”和“余地”在广泛的现实境况之中是无法搜寻和猎获的，惟有以超越固定逻辑的方式，将自身的记忆曲线、阅历感悟生成一种旋梯式的思考，才能自如贯穿眼前实景和千里外的凌空烟波。自南北朝以来“文人山水塑造的境界，本质上是‘实有’与‘真无’的结合”[21]，在虚构中勘探物质社会，在江湖里想象天上楼阁，将诸多写作对象之间的藩篱一并撤销，在“中和”的宽

容度内造梦。譬如在《海上得丘》中欧阳江河曾感慨“词的顿首，付予一个梦的修理工/人类思维的某些零件坏了”[22]，自2010年后《凤凰》《圣僧八思巴》《蔡伦井》等作品几乎也在折射这一思考倾向，关于梦的“修理”实质上便是对生活的扩展和瞭望。

传统的“中和”美学赋予当代诗人一种“个人思辨”价值的轴心地位，以“我”的视角去解读、研判、梳理世界万象，而非绝对客体地置身于时间、空间之外，法国哲学家保罗·萨特（Jean-Paul Sartre）在20世纪中叶提出的“世界万物只是因为有人的存在，有人的见证，有人的唤醒，才显示为一个统一的风景”[23]的理论，实则在中国古典时代早已被文人付诸实践，譬如在1100余年前的唐帝国中期，柳宗元曾直言“夫美不自美，因人而彰”[24]的意见。由如此美学文化所衍生、鼓动发展的汉语新诗，无疑更贴近诗画或艺术综合呈现的意味，在近乎“无穷”或“永恒”的历史关怀之下，谢灵运的心灵窗口、庾信的思想寰宇、晏殊的置酒楼台和林逋的世外桃源，以各异的细节建设的姿态，合流成为一种生命体验和超越理性的“美”的共和画面，从而源源不断影响着后世文人的写作。直到进入21世纪，愈来愈多的诗人开始清晰意识到古典经验的深刻价值，不再以高度西化的冠冕扶持自身摇摇欲坠的自信力，曾在1980年代的华语文学一度形成热潮的西方意识流写作，也逐渐被后来者考据、发掘和反思，作为中国人处理“时间”写作的三种模式，“时间的物象化、情象化和镜象化”[25]概念虽无“stream of consciousness”之名，却完全具其实。

诗人以语言替代色彩，辞藻转换充作笔法技巧，如同画家一般在语感的停顿之间、意象的穿插、丰盈或捣毁之中，构筑颇具厚度的篇章。并以此处理驳杂多源的现实信息，通过精神的输出影响物质的波动，好的诗歌总是“有机结合的产物”[26]，这无关于开宗立派、教化他人、普度众生、统摄政治等出于本心的跨界意图，仅仅是“美”的呈现，在时间轴上以“慢”制“快”、以道德制约偏见，以细水长流和百溪入海式的美学，包容和超出盛行于一时的热度与潮流。当代汉诗已然逐渐适应并热衷于这种节奏，在字行之间将当下的山川河渠、城郭坊市输入人文长碑，以现世的语言呼应从古典时代便照彻寰宇的日月星辰。

## 延伸思想的历史之镜

饱含山水写照、现象讽刺和公共现实描摹的汉语诗歌，长期作为人文精神和社会现象的一种反映形式而存在，与之类似的是“藏身”在诗歌文本躯壳内的美学思想，几乎是针对历史的经验总结，和高于历史发展事实的价值延伸。当百年汉语新诗的历程开始承认、有序衔接乃至接受古典美学给养输入的时刻，学界很难忽视其中对历史的解构价值，一种与史学共生或孪生的新诗之学，由此发展壮大。通过古典观照之下的当代诗歌，足可窥见一种人与自然间以和谐为主基的价值观，自先秦时代至今，在“天人之际”和“互相感应”的精神探索、追逐之下，正如许倬云所言“中国人对自然有一种特殊的亲密感”[27]，传承悠久且有序的农耕文明造就了朴实、真诚的“天命观”美学，无论是社火祭祀或粮稻播种、收获等时刻都能清晰地看到这一特点，在汉语新诗中不乏围绕其对描写，从最基础的朴素情绪出发，继而阶梯式攀登岁月更宽幅的卷面，从白面书生写到公卿官僚，从收

稻之举写到治国安邦，从苍茫一片的田地农家出走半生，最后在喧嚣繁华的名利场中选择转身，回归一种朝暮恬淡的隐逸之志。

伊曼努尔·康德（Immanuel Kant）曾在其《纯粹理性批判》开篇写道，“我们的一切知识都从经验开始”[28]的论述一般，古典美学观照下的诗歌，本身就是经验累积叠加、诗人不断交汇的智慧结果，历代文人针对当下时空的解构、情感的宣泄、人情的应答和命运的自慨，既类似“山重水复”般的不断耦合，但又事实上不断拓宽了后人灵感的源泉，正如葛兆光所言的“中国是一个相当稳定的文化共同体”[29]概念，在如此的文化节奏和特性之下，诗歌很自然地成为了百家之学集中体现的一个窗棂，或杂糅隐含多种信息的一块玉牒，正如以赵野为代表的诗人喜欢纠集道法思想、儒学价值、山水情怀、先锋哲思、生活意趣和公共现实于一诗之内的现象，本质上是从经验走向“超验”的突破，天人感应的古典美学价值被较为完好地继承，所谓“审美和艺术中情感与认识和理性相统一”[30]的传统美学思考，被尽数映现。诗人从家乡古宋县的稗官野史或乡音话本中，神往宋帝国曾经的人文辉煌景况；在大理苍山洱海之畔的民居里，畅忆并享受一种道人玄而又玄的精神漩涡，在纸上复盘历代发生或虚构未曾出现过的命运起伏、悲欢离合。

近年来由于以赵汀阳为代表的学者从政治哲学领域多次提及，使得“天下”概念的研究愈发深邃和拓宽，实质上在诗歌中不断隐现的诸多宏大思考的母题身后，都怀揣着“天下”观念的影子，考据这一“身影”的历史，几乎可以追溯至古典时代美学的早期发展阶段，一种“代表着绝对的价值要求，不仅是儒家最高的政治原则，也是每一个体的道德理想”[31]的思想，是支撑着历代众多文人心理世界建构的主要柱石。从一域之室看向万代千秋，是对“天下”时间性与发展规律的思考；从苍生黎庶写入庙堂之高，是对“天下”社会性和历史经验的总结。中国诗学中对“天下”体系的阐释，其核心即是一种外化与内化并存的发生机制，诗的语言一边指向本位的、传统的腹心哲学，另一边则包揽域外的、陌生的输入信息，从最基础的层面就消解紧张、对抗的意涵，正如马克斯·韦伯（Maximilian Karl Emil Weber）所言，具备儒学“仁礼”和“忠恕”思想特质的中国古典美学体系正是“那种把对现世的紧张关系，无论在宗教对现世的贬低还是从现世所受到的实际拒绝方面，都减少到最低限度（在意图上）理性的伦理”[32]，饱满的“中和”思想为汉语新诗长期提供着“美”的底色，是一种近乎于族谱或血统概念的文化基因，以情怀打量世界，形成理与趣高度统一的和谐生态。

当代汉语新诗作为建设“中国文化话语”的重要途径而存在，已然成为事实。诚如在比较诗学领域做出重要贡献的学者曹顺庆，曾指出“中国文论话语建设一直以‘科学’的西方话语为‘元话语’，直接导致‘古代文论现代转换’这个公认为正确的口号，从话语上就误导了学术界”[33]的意见一般，中国文化及文学领域的独立性、客观性和丰赡性的话语版图建设，已经迫在眉睫十分必要，从文论学的角度出发开展纠偏、筛错是学术主流的方式，而从文学创作角度出发推动意识觉醒、反思和转调则是作家、诗人层面的方式。正逐渐从欧风美雨的高度依赖者或忠实受惠者角色中走出的汉语新诗，寻求自身的国际生态位，开凿更系统性和历史论

述性的研究版图，已然成为一项襄助于“文明对话”机制的重要支柱。以“中和”为源流的汉诗精神，正在字行之间对应着现实中愈发开放共和、自信包容的中国姿态。

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# Call for Papers

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## Scope

CSM welcomes original contributions that explore diverse topics, including but not limited to:

**History and Culture:** In-depth studies of Chinese history from ancient times to the modern era, examining significant events, dynasties, and cultural developments; Analysis of traditional Chinese culture, including philosophy, literature, art, and religion, and their influence on contemporary society

**Society and Politics:** Examination of China's political system, governance structure, and policy-making processes; Studies on social issues such as population dynamics, urban-rural disparities, and social welfare policies

**Economy and Business:** Research on China's economic development, growth patterns, and industrial restructuring; Studies on business practices, corporate governance, and innovation in Chinese enterprises

**Language and Linguistics:** Research on the Chinese language, including its structure, grammar, and phonetics; Studies on language education, language policy, and the spread of the Chinese language globally

**Education and Pedagogy:** Examination of China's education system, curriculum development, and teaching methodologies; Research on educational reforms, educational equity, and the role of education in social mobility

**Philosophy and Ethics:** In-depth exploration of Chinese philosophical thought, such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and their contemporary relevance; Research on ethical issues in Chinese society, including business ethics, medical ethics, and environmental ethics

**Transportation and Infrastructure Systems:** Smart mobility and traffic management; Intelligent infrastructure and engineering systems

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## Thematic section: Modern China and Shanghai

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## Types of Submissions

**Research Articles:** Should be between 6,000–9,000 words. They should present original research, methodologies, or theoretical advancements. Articles exceeding 9,000 words will only be accepted if necessary for the subject matter.

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