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Two Decades of Gramscian Scholarship in China: A Critical Retrospection

Abstract

This is the Abstract of the English-language article by Yue Zhou Lin (Joe Lin) on recent Gramsci studies in China. We give his own English-language presentation of the article here below as an extended Abstract.

Presentation

Over the last two decades, Gramscian research in China has shifted away from seeing Gramsci as a Western Marxist, from studying the philosophy of praxis to grappling with the concept of hegemony, and from only interpreting Gramsci's thought to examining social problems in China through Gramscian lenses. However, Gramscian scholarship in China is found problematic too, namely, the misappropriation of the concept of hegemony, the lack of consideration of Gramsci's other concepts, especially the integral State, and still relatively a dearth of studies on Chinese intellectuals using Gramsci's concept of (organic) intellectuals. It is within this acknowledgment that the article suggests eight new frontiers that would advance Gramscian scholarship in China.

Keywords

Hegemony; Communist Party of China; Integral State; Organic Intellectuals; Theory of the Socialist State-Society

Two Decades of Gramscian Scholarship in China: A Critical Retrospection

Yue Zhou Lin

I. Introduction

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) has been widely acknowledged as a renowned Italian Marxist and socialist for his political leadership in the anti-fascist movement against Mussolini's totalitarian regime in the inter-war years. However, Gramsci's legacy has been widely recognized beyond Europe. Even though the politics of his life have faded from living memory, his thought has increased in influence among a multitude of disciplines in the academic firmament.

In recent years, the Marxist academic circle in China has felt a Gramsci vibe. This is hardly surprising because a wide range of schools of thought has been (mis)appropriated in China by intellectuals and the Communist Party of China (CPC) since the reform and opening-up in 1978. Although the CPC has enforced tough measures to censor outspoken and critical intellectuals, there is a narrow gateway left for Marxist academics and party officials to study the works of Trotsky and Gramsci. No doubt, such an endeavour involves using Trotsky and Gramsci to formulate and consolidate the official narrative that secures the CPC leadership.

Yet, it is still crucial to examine how Gramsci's thought has been perceived and adopted by Chinese scholars in and out of China beyond the European context. This is a project to which Gramsci himself would hold dearly given his linguistic background. Gramsci was a scholar with profound intercultural and multilingual awareness. He refused to glorify cultural-linguistic identities as exclusive, self-sufficient entities. Instead, he advocated what we now call bilingualism or multilingualism and saw foreign language acquisition and translation as ways to overcome linguistic barriers (Carlucci 2013).¹

¹ In a letter to his wife, Julia (also Julija or Jul'ka) Schucht of 5 September 1932, Gramsci specified that a translator should be able to acquaint one language with the other 'by using the historically determined language of the civilization to which he supplies the informative material [...] this kind of work deserves to be done, indeed deserves committing all one's efforts to it' (Gramsci 1994a, p. 207).

Therefore, one would expect that the issue of lost-in-translation creeps in when studying Gramsci across two continents, Europe and China. Nevertheless, there are three general challenges faced by all Gramsci scholars. First, Gramsci's most well-known thirty-three *Prison Notebooks* (hereafter *Notebooks*) cover topics beyond the confines of any single discipline, so misinterpretation arises when one knows little about specific topics (Morera, 1990, pp. 3-4). Scholars must be erudite and specialized in knowledge. Second, in Gramsci's own words, the notebooks were cryptic – 'quick prompts *pro memoria*...' to be 'revised and checked' and any '...imprecisions, false connexions, anachronisms' to be 'radically corrected' (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1365). Third, scholars across a broad spectrum (see Fontana, 1993, pp. 2-3) have selectively appropriated Gramsci's texts (Thomas, 2009, pp. 139-40) for all kinds of reasons.

Having all the above in mind, the article seeks to trace the two-decade-long reception of Gramsci in China by focusing on the progress and challenges associated with Gramscian scholarship. In so doing, the article calls for more scholarly attention to Gramsci's concept of intellectuals and the integral State in China. The article also hopes to generate – among western audiences – interest in Gramscian scholarship in China, refresh a cross-continental discussion among European and Chinese scholars studying Gramsci, and offer a cautionary note to the latter.

By structure, the article begins by identifying the three major shifts witnessed in scholarly engagement with Gramsci's thought in China: (1) a shift from labelling Gramsci a Western Marxist, (2) a shift of focus from the philosophy of praxis to the concept of hegemony, and (3) a shift toward applying Gramsci in the study of socio-political problems in China. The article will then review some Gramscian studies on China conducted by Chinese scholars in and beyond China and by some western scholars who also use Gramsci to study China. This hopefully will paint a general landscape of the progress made in China. Following this, the last section will lodge a critique of the current stage of Gramscian scholarship in China, pointing out the (mis)conceptual issues and the overlooked aspects. The article concludes with suggestions for possible new departures that would advance Gramscian scholarship in China.

II. Three Major Shifts of Gramscian Scholarship in China

From the very beginning, Gramsci's reception in China was not freed from Chinese domestic politics. After the birth of the People's Republic in 1949, Gramsci did not attract political or academic interest (Lobina 2009, p. 323) even though he was known by the higher ranks of the CPC. Chinese then knew from Gramsci through the Russian edition of his Italian work (Liu 2011, p. 70). During the Hundred Flowers campaign initiated by Mao Zedong (Mao hereafter), intellectuals picked up Gramsci momentarily but their attitudes toward him became negative as the CPC and the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) diverged on the issue of plural national roads to socialism (Samarani 2018). The relationship became even sourer after the Sino-Soviet split (Peters 2012, pp. 106-7), which blocked the Chinese reception of Gramscian literature in Russian. Once Mao's cultural revolution (1966-76) broke out, Gramsci was ditched alongside all forms of 'foreign thought' (Harris 2015, pp. 69-83; Liu 2011, p. 70).

The freeze finally melted after the PCI leader Berlinguer visited China in 1980. The CPC and the PCI officially re-established their relationship, which inaugurated the second phase of Gramsci's Chinese reception (Lobina 2009, p. 325), though the encounter remained limited. Xu Chongwen was the first to introduce Gramsci to Chinese Marxists then. But Xu refers to Anderson (1976b) who focuses on Western Marxism and consequently many Chinese Marxists of Xu's time label Gramsci as a Western Marxist (Liu 2011, pp. 71-2). They argue that Gramsci's philosophy of praxis was a deviation from Marx and Engels' materialism.

Nevertheless, there have been three major shifts in Gramscian scholarship. The first one is a shift from labelling Gramsci as a 'Western Marxist' to celebrating him as a great revolutionary of the proletariat and a distinguished Marxist theorist. The second is a shift from introducing the philosophy of praxis to studying the theory of hegemony. The last one is a shift toward applying Gramsci to addressing social problems in China. Let us trawl through each shift.

A. Gramsci is a Marxist-Leninist, not a Western Marxist!

The first and probably the most important shift started in the latter half of the 1980s when the study of Western Marxism

deepened. Subsequently, Xu's interpretation of Gramsci went out of favour. Many Chinese scholars began to view Gramsci's philosophy of praxis as another basis for Marxist theories. During the reform of the curriculum on Marx, many scholars debated practical materialism and dialectical materialism, dedicating attention to identifying the works of Gramsci and György Lukács as theoretical resources for practical materialism.

During this time, although many identified Gramsci as Marxist, they differed in their reading of Gramsci. Tian for example advocated a complete cut-off between Gramsci and Western Marxism and raised Gramsci to a status on par with Lenin and Leninism (Tian 1984). The process of resuscitating Gramsci also involved finding connections between Gramsci's political theory and those of Chinese revolutionaries. Tian personally supported this process of philological maturity as the editor of the first Chinese edition of Gramsci's prison letters published in 2007. Yang Haifeng was among the staunchest follower of Tian. Both have contributed significantly to changing the overall attitude of Chinese mainstream scholars toward Gramsci (Liu 2011, pp. 76-7). In short, Gramsci drew upon but developed Lenin's theory on ideology to encompass the political-cultural dimension. Gramsci also paid special attention to the capacity of the masses for self-education.

In this sense, Gramsci and Mao could communicate with each other. According to Pan Xihua from the China Academy of Social Science (CASS) in 2009, both Gramsci and Mao accentuated vanguardism and supported mass-line politics, making self-consciousness and education an essential part of party building, although Mao provided a richer and more concrete analysis (Pan 2009). Before Pan of course, there were already comparative studies of Gramsci and Mao in the west (e.g., Todd 1974; Dirlik 1983; Liu 1997).

B. From the philosophy of praxis to the concept of hegemony

The second shift began in the 2000s when Gramscian scholarship changed its focus from introducing the philosophy of praxis to studying the theory of hegemony. In 2001, Tian published an article, *A brief discussion of Gramsci's theory of hegemony*, in which he took the problems of the State as a point of entry and argued that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is a key contribution to Marxist political theory (Tian 2001). The concept of hegemony guides

political work in both the West and the East (including China). Liang Shufa of the Renmin (People's) University of China argues that scholars must incorporate concepts of hegemony and war of position when studying the philosophy of praxis (Liang 2004). In line with Liang, Hu Ailing from Zhengzhou University provides a comprehensive study of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis in her work published in 2009, *Ideology, hegemony, and intellectuals: A study of the philosophy of praxis of Gramsci*. Hu's monumental work is a critique of vulgar Marxism, idealism, spontaneity, etc., through which it analyses the relationship between hegemony and ideology, the concept of civil society, and the salient features of Italian society and presents a theoretical exposition that identifies the theory-practice totality in Gramsci's philosophy of praxis (Hu 2009). Her work alongside other similar Gramsci studies has directed scholarly focus toward Gramsci's thought, politics, and theory of the party rather than just the relationship between Gramsci's philosophy of praxis and Marxist philosophy.

Perhaps Pan remains the most well-versed in the study of cultural hegemony and the political system of the proletariat. She analyses the Chinese explanation of the words 'egemonia' (hegemony) and 'organic intellectual' and compares Gramsci's concept of hegemony and that of other Marxists, especially Lenin's concept of political hegemony. Indeed, Pan's work has allowed Gramscian scholarship in China to finally catch up with Gramscian scholarship outside China since the 1970s.

This shift of focus has also driven a paradigm shift from Marxism to Post-Marxism in China since the 1990s. Yet the paradigm shift owes a great deal to the scholarly attention to Althusser's thought. For example, He Ping at the University of Wuhan attempts to address the 'ultimate question' in Gramsci's epistemology and methodology based on Althusser's critique of Gramsci, especially historicism. Her endeavour has allowed us to avoid seeing Gramsci as either an idealist or a materialist (He 2012). This further allows post-Marxists to respond to their critics and re-establish Gramsci's cultural philosophy and political philosophy and a New Gramscianism (not necessarily Robert Cox's Neo-Gramscianism, however). In this line, Sun Yixiao has published a work entitled *A Study of Gramsci's Historicism and Thought*, in which Sun adopts an Althusserian-Gramscian lens to study historicism in

Gramsci's writings and reflect upon the debate between historicism and scientism (Sun 2013). On ideology, Wang Fengcai has published an article entitled *Cultural hegemony and Ideological State Apparatuses: A theoretical analysis of the ideologies of Gramsci and Althusser*, accentuating the connection between Althusser and Gramsci, despite their differences. Wang argues that Althusser who was inspired by Gramsci introduced the concept of 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. To Wang, Althusser's distinction between ideological and repressive state apparatuses resembles Gramsci's distinction between civil society and state, or/and between cultural hegemony and political hegemony. Thus, Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatuses extends Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony (see Wang 2007).

The post-Marxist turn in China has brought Chinese scholars closer to their western counterparts when it comes to studying Gramsci. Among Chinese post-Marxists, there are two prominent figures. First, Sun Min at Hainan Normal (Teacher's) University has published a work, entitled, *"Ideological Leadership" in the Viewpoint of Political Philosophy-From Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe* in which he delineates an ever-developing strand of scholarship from Gramsci to Althusser, and then from Nicos Poulantzas to 'New Gramscian' scholars such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Sun identifies the distinctiveness of their understanding of ideology and hegemony as well as the commonality of their understanding (Sun 2012). Second, Zhou Fan at Beijing Normal University identifies in his article, entitled *Gramsci and the Formation of "Post-Marxism"*, that post-Marxism and New Gramscianism are two interrelated theoretical repertoires (Zhou 2008). In the theoretical realm, there has been a shift toward political philosophy due to Sun Mingan, who worked in Central Compilation and Translation Bureau. He has led us to Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler's debate with Laclau and Mouffe about the logic of hegemony and modern Kantianism. Sun argues that the debate has deepened our research into universality versus particularity and inevitability versus contingency in traditional philosophy and accentuated the unbridgeable rift between universality and particularity in modern politics (Sun 2013).

Interestingly, in literary theory which has long been influenced by currents of structuralism, post-structuralism, orientalism, feminism, etc., Gramsci's cultural hegemony has gained a special

status. Gramscian research in literary theory has overtaken those in philosophy and Marxism disciplines. One typical example is He Lei's *Gramsci and Cultural Studies* published in 2011.

C. *Gramscian analyses of socio-political problems in China*

There has been much greater attention to the application of Gramsci's thought. Gramscian scholars in China have used Gramsci to assess China's socio-political realities. After all, in the minds of Chinese officials and scholars alike, reading any western thought should serve the purpose of making the Chinese society better and its nation stronger. Again, several scholars are worthy of honourable mention. For instance, Sun Jing compares horizontally the theory of cultural hegemony and the Frankfurt school and cultural imperialism, incorporating globalization and anti-globalization theories. Sun is able to animate a discussion around western cultural hegemony and the practical issues associated with building 'cultural' security in China etc. In other words, Sun is conscious of the Eurocentric tendency in Gramscian research and the challenges of boosting confidence about native culture in China, a once semi-colonized state (Sun 2004).

It is again Pan who has used Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony to study party-building in China at a practical level. She reveals that the ongoing process of consent formation as Gramsci advocated is crucial in ensuring that a proletarian party consolidates its own hegemonic power. This is with what the party's validity lies (Pan 2012). In a dynamic balance, an organic party can be established, which offers insight into the way in which a party maintains its relationship with the popular masses in an ever-digitalized epoch. To some extent, Pan's work paves the way to increasing Gramscian research written in Chinese discourse. On the one hand, this demonstrates originality in Gramscian scholarship beyond the European confinement, but on the other hand, it could also demonstrate a considerable degree of Sinicization or localization of Gramsci's thought. This can be seen in the following work entitled *Struggle for Cultural Hegemony: Gramscian Perspectives of Revitalizing Chinese Traditional Culture*, co-authored by Kang Xiaoguang, Liu Shilin, and Wang Jin. They have examined the social practices of the rejuvenation of localized cultures against the process of socialization and analysed the salient features of

mainstream culture and the social forces behind such culture. They have also covered topics such as legitimacy, ideology, cultural hegemony, and soft power (Kang, Liu, and Wang 2010).

When applying Gramsci to the study of social problems in China, it is crucial to pay attention to the interplay between agency and structure. Yang Haifeng, in his book *The Philosophy of Praxis and Hegemony: Gramsci's Philosophy in Contemporary Discourse*, accentuates a totality of Gramsci's philosophy, politics, and economics, and analysed Fordism and its influence on the way Gramsci formulated its theory of hegemony (Yang 2009).

III. China in a Gramscian Perspective

As the third major shift continues, we have seen a tremendous advancement in Gramscian studies in general, which is supported by widely available and more accurate translations of Gramsci's works. The translations of the English edition include Cao Leiyu, Jiang Li, and Zhang Yue's Chinese edition of the *Selections from Prison Notebooks* published in 2000, *Selected Works of Gramsci* edited by Li Pengcheng, *Theory of the Modern Prince* translated by Chen Yue, Xiang Ming's translation of Steve Jones' *Antonio Gramsci*, etc.

Furthermore, under Tian's supervision, we have seen translations of the *Prison Notebooks* in six volumes over the last three years. Tian mentioned in 2017 that the first three volumes would be published in 2019 respectively under the following titles (my translation of the original Chinese titles): *Historical Materialism and Croce's Philosophy* 《历史唯物主义和克罗齐哲学》, *Intellectuals and Cultural Organizations* 《知识分子和文化组织》, and *Notes on Machiavelli, Politics, and the Modern State* 《关于马基雅维利、政治与现代国家的笔记》. The next set of three volumes would be published respectively to celebrate Gramsci's 130th Anniversary in 2021 with the following titles (my translation again): *Literature and National Life* 《文学和民族生活》, *The National Rejuvenation Movement* 《民族复兴运动》, and *Past and Present* 《过去和现在》. If these volumes are within the reach of our comrades and Gramscian scholars in China, we would witness a new wave of more integrative, multi-dimensional, and sophisticated Gramscian research in China.² But

² Currently, these volumes are not found on Google. I suspect that the publication of them may have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

already in 2013, Ye Huizhen formulated a ‘WWWH hegemonic discourse’ theory and delineated a realistic path by examining how the CPC shares with the masses its political discourse and consolidates its cultural hegemony through Who (actors and audiences), What (subject content), Where (fields), and How (strategies and tactics) dimensions (Ye and Yang, 2013). She then incorporated the discourse theory of Jürgen Habermas and those of other post-Marxists and published another work in 2016, entitled, *A Study of Antonio Gramsci’s Theory of Cultural Hegemony and its Discourse Paths*. This work should offer many insights.

A. General Patterns

A good way to trace the reception of Gramsci and Gramscian studies in China is to type ‘Gramsci’ (*gelanxi*, 葛兰西) into the search engine called China Knowledge Net (*zhongguo zhiwang*, 中国知网). By 5 September 2021, there were 2475 published articles containing the word ‘Gramsci’ from 2000 to 2021 (see Figure 1). The number of publications was 175 in 2015, a peak in quantity terms.

But it is also effective to include more Gramsci-related keywords when tracing Gramscian studies in a broader interdisciplinary scope. Not all articles necessarily mention Gramsci even though they use Gramsci’s concepts in their studies.

The trend of published articles containing the word ‘Gramsci’ (2000-2021)



Fig. 1 China Knowledge Net

The data collected on 5 September 2021 show that published articles from 2000 to 2021 are under a set of themes all related to

Gramsci, and I rank them by the number of articles (see Table 1). Indeed, some may contain Gramsci or explore one or more themes, which may well result in double counting of articles. This unfortunately remains irresolvable given the availability of data. Nonetheless, it should not be a major issue because we are more concerned with the general pattern of Gramscian research in China.

The table result clearly demonstrates the major shifts discussed in the previous section. There are altogether 293 published articles that cover cultural hegemony, whereas only 63 published articles still discuss Western Marxism and only 58 discuss the philosophy of praxis. In addition, theoretically based articles are significantly fewer. For example, there are 224 articles for cultural leadership / hegemony but only 80 for the theory of cultural leadership / hegemony. Likewise, there are 83 for civil society but only 49 for the theory of civil society.

Regardless, cultural hegemony is at the core of any Gramscian discussion in China. Keeping this discussion alive involves not just Chinese scholars inside China but also those outside China. The latter have established themselves through publications in English. Although the former dare not to be openly critical of the CPC, they are inspired by and learning closely from the latter who are equally acquiring insiders' knowledge from the former. This process of mutual learning is driving forward Gramscian scholarship in and beyond China.

Number of articles under each theme

Rank	Main themes in Chinese	Main themes in English	Number of published Articles
1	葛兰西	Gramsci	452
2	文化领导权	Cultural leadership/hegemony	224
3	市民社会	Civil society	83
4	文化领导权理论	Theory of Cultural Leadership/Hegemony	80
5	文化霸权	Cultural Hegemony [with the alternative Chinese character, <i>ba</i> 霸 (domination) rather than <i>lingdao</i> 领导 (leadership)]	69
6	西方马克思主义	Western Marxism	63
7	领导权	Leadership/Hegemony	62

8	实践哲学	The Philosophy of Praxis	58
9	市民社会理论	Theory of Civil Society	49
10	意识形态理论	Theory of Ideology	30
11	有机知识分子	Organic intellectuals	28
12	霸权理论	Theory of Hegemony [with the alternative Chinese character, <i>ba</i> 霸 (domination) rather than <i>lingdao</i> 领导 (leadership)]	18
13	狱中札记	Prison Notebooks	12
14	知识分子	Intellectuals	12

Table 1: China Knowledge Net

B. *A Gramscian-China encounter*

Whatever perception of the CPC one may hold, it has enjoyed an almost unwavering political legitimacy in China because it was the CPC that painstakingly united workers, peasants, and ethnic minorities to resist western imperialism through a down-to-earth myriad of nationalist and Bolshevik struggles that led to the successful establishment of the People’s Republic, a class nation, to use Lin Chun’s terminology (Lin 2015). The CPC has also been a powerful locomotive behind China’s development of its productive forces since the reform and opening-up began. Among the left, there is still ongoing debate around whether the CPC is or has always been socialist/capitalist or not. But more and more are convinced that the CPC has exercised and maintained its hegemonic power effectively. The question is around the *when* and the *how*. Arguably from Maoism to Dengism, the CPC has transformed itself from a totalitarian party-state to a hegemonic party-state (Zhang 2011a, 2011b). Of course, this reading depends on how we reflect upon what happened at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Mulvad (2019) who provides a bolder interpretation identifies Maoism, Dengism, and Xiism as three hegemonies. Indeed, despite millions of death from famine caused by the Great Leap Forward, and political purges in a series of intra-party power struggles and nationwide socio-political campaigns leading up to and during the Cultural Revolution, Mao used charisma and cult around himself to unite old party veterans (notably Zhou Enlai) and some ‘red experts’ (scientists), notably Deng Jiaxian, Qian Xuesen (or Hsue-Shen Tsien), and Yang Chen-Ning. The CPC under Mao industrialized and nuclearized China to keep it alive in the Cold

War. Under Deng, socioeconomic transformation in China took off and accelerated, alleviating poverty but widening the gap between the rich (urban) and the poor (rural). Under Jiang Zemin, the CPC has expanded its representation by co-opting businesspeople into its local level branches, arguably changing its composite. Under Hu Jintao's slogan of a harmonious society, social reform programmes were launched to bring the CPC and civil society ever closer. To rebuild or consolidate the consensus, Xi Jinping has used the China Dream and the realization of a moderately prosperous society. Mulvad's reading is however criticized by Fusaro (2020) who sees more complex hegemonic transitions, and by ten Brink who suggests viewing Maoism, Dengism, and Xiism as three different articulations of the same hegemonic project to avoid discontinuity between different generations of CPC leaders. Indeed, whether Xi himself likes this or not, he has stood on the shoulders of his predecessors who have also stood on Mao's shoulders. Gow (2017) for instance argues that 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' has undergone a shift from the emphasis on the economic base to a more substantial acknowledgment of cultural power under Xi's administration. Gow investigates consensus-building dynamics and identifies the 12 'Core Socialist Values' as a specific aspect of the broader China Dream discourse.

By viewing China's socio-economic development as a form of the CPC hegemonic transformation in Gramscian terms, we can at least appreciate that the relationship between the state and society in China is more intriguing. The concept of the integral State which Gramsci introduced in Autumn 1930 has become useful in the Chinese context, especially in overcoming a *State against society* dichotomy long echoed in liberal commentators and speculators. This is not to say that the CPC as a party-State is not oppressive, but one must not forget that what legitimises its coercive measures is its close-knitted relationship with civil society in China. Interestingly, the word 'civil society' can cause some discomfort among those who continue to pay lip service to the CPC establishment. They argue that Chinese society is not civil in a 'western' or 'liberal' sense. That said, in a Gramscian context, the concept of civil society lives on. Recent studies of labour-related non-governmental organizations (Hui 2020) and Chinese media (Zhang 2011a, 2011b) have treated the CPC as an integral State that

rebalances political society and civil society in their integral meaning or in totality. This rebalancing is best seen in Jiang's theory of the 'Three Represents' that has encompassed private entrepreneurs, stretching conceptually the Chinese working class and rejecting a *State against business* dichotomy (ten Brink 2019, p. 348). But this has also restructured the class equilibria within the CPC (Gray 2010, p. 457; van der Pijl 2012, p. 509) in contested public-private boundaries. Gow (2017) also adopts a Gramscian integral State conception to argue that civil society is non-neutral and investigates the reciprocal links between the 'Core Socialist Values' created in China's political society and spread in the country's civil society.

Thus, we can also examine hegemony as a 'chaotic process of class struggles' on the terrain of China's integral State, its historical conjunctures, and its rural-urban divide. There has been a growing conflict between internal migrant workers and global capital as the main struggle in China's integral State today (Chan and Hui 2017). What this also implies is the complication of Chinese intellectuals' identities. There is more here than meets the eye, which continues to require academic research. For example, some studies have analysed the interplay between intellectuals and common sense. The key idea is that Chinese subalterns need their own intellectuals to transform their implicit knowledge into an explicit philosophy and culture. Among migrant workers' unqualified organic, semi-organic, and organic intellectuals. Sum (2017) looks at the emergence of a 'loser' (*diaosi*, 屌丝) identity among the second generation of Chinese migrant workers and investigates the openness of their 'contradictory consciousness' and their efforts to re-hegemonize. Other studies take the wider context of China's great 5G race in which new organic intellectuals exert their influence through social media, either consolidating or disrupting common sense. They also focus on China Dream which has become a permanent component of both national and personal vocabulary and common sense.

All these applications of Gramsci's concepts continue to offer us insights into the way the CPC functions as a hegemonic or integral party-State as well as possible approaches to counter the CPC hegemony. Unfortunately, due to all kinds of institutional constraints, Gramscian studies in China focus more on consolidating the leadership and hegemony of the CPC. Other Gramscian

scholars in China continue to formulate a theoretical understanding of Gramsci's other concepts beyond hegemony, evident in Table 1.

IV. Challenges of Gramscian research in China

In the mid-1950s, Tamburrano once lamented that Gramscian scholars did not study Gramsci's concept of hegemony sufficiently (Tamburrano, 1958, p. 277). Gramscian scholars in the West took two decades (the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s) to place hegemony at the core of Gramsci's thought, In China, Gramscian scholars took about the same time. Interestingly, since the 1980s, there has been an overemphasis and inevitably overstretching of the concept of hegemony in the West. The same tendency has been witnessed in China.

A. Conceptual issues

Gramscian studies in China tend to conflate the concept of hegemony and 'legitimacy' or 'ideological dominance', or even 'power or control' (Hui, 2016, p. 434-36). Table 1 shows that 'wenhua lingdaoquan' 文化领导权 is supposed to be 'cultural leadership' in English but is also 'cultural hegemony'. Over 200 published articles have used leadership and hegemony interchangeably. Moreover, 'wenhua baquan' 文化霸权 should be 'cultural domination' but 69 articles refer it to 'cultural hegemony' as well, conflating domination and hegemony. This is problematic because hegemony contains the dialectical moments of leadership (consent) and domination (coercion). Perhaps a synthesis can be achieved with 'tongshi' 统识 as an alternative term for hegemony – 'tong' means to lead, manage, and incorporate, and 'shi' refers to 'knowledge, understanding, thought, and consciousness' (Huang 2015, p. 406).

Strange as it may seem, Huang's suggestion has not been accepted in Mainland China. Perhaps, it is hard to convince writers to change something that is already widely used. But Huang's 'tongshi' also makes domination (coercion) disappear in the concept of hegemony. The overwhelming translation of cultural hegemony into cultural leadership in Chinese, rather than cultural domination may be due to the CPC censor. The authors do not want to upset the CPC. When cultural domination is used, it may well refer to US hegemony. The negative representation of the

‘Other’ and the positive representation of the ‘Self’ are visible, allowing the double standard to creep in.

Another obvious issue is the overemphasis on the term ‘cultural hegemony’. Whether theoretically or empirically based, 373 articles in Table 1 have ‘cultural’ before ‘hegemony’, whereas there are only 80 articles that do not have ‘cultural’. The ratio is 4.66:1. Sadly, this is a consequence of the post-Marxist turn, which can also be related to censorship because without ‘culture’, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony may appear too ‘political’ for the CPC. Yet, ‘cultural hegemony’ never belongs to Gramsci’s constellation of concepts. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is as materialistic as ideational. For example, Hu’s ‘Harmonious Society’ proposal does not emerge from mid-air. It is a response to phases of intensive capital-labour struggles. The proposal incorporated two goals of the CPC – capital accumulation and socio-economic and legal material concessions (labour law) to the Chinese working class (Hui and Chan 2011). Under Xi, the ongoing consensus building around the China Dream worldview has been accompanied by coercive measures such as crackdowns on corrupt officials and organizations, locally organized crimes, big internet tycoons, and the entertainment industry. The materiality of hegemony is something overlooked by Gramscian scholars in China but also by some post-Marxist scholars in the West.

Lastly, the overwhelming focus on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has also led to misappropriation of it, cutting it off from its vital relationships with Gramsci’s other concepts. Gramscian scholarship in the West has witnessed to some extent a shift toward Gramsci’s concept of the integral State. Somehow this is not found in Mainland China. This is a big lacuna! Strangely, Chinese scholars have studied Gramsci’s concept of (organic) intellectuals but without emphasizing the integral State concept. I argue that we must find the interconnection between various State-society formulations in the *Prison Notebooks* to avoid misunderstanding Gramsci. Anderson (1976a) once identified these formulations as antinomies. However, Francioni (1984), Thomas (2009), and Lin (2022) have all rejected this reading. Two of the three State-society formulations, the integral State(-society) and the totalitarian State, are interrelated dynamically (see Lin 2022, pp. 7-10).

Again Table 1 shows that Gramsci's concepts of organic intellectuals and intellectuals are still underexplored. That said, there are some theoretical articles out there. For example, Xu and Zhao distinguish Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals by telling differences between broad and narrow definitions. Broadly, organic intellectuals are organic as they constantly develop an intra-class cohesion with their own social class. Narrowly, they demonstrate cohesion and integration between intellectuals/theory and masses/practice (Yu and Zhao 2016, pp. 27-8).

Moreover, according to Wang Weixian and Wang Yaqi (2020), it is only through a dynamic balancing of the interactions that organic intellectuals and workers are cultivated. There is neither is there an exclusive workers' movement nor an independent intellectuals' movement. The two Wangs have thus identified two linkages. First, there is the horizontal linkage between organic intellectuals and masses. So, workers become educators while intellectuals are 'massified'. Second, there is the vertical linkage between traditional and organic intellectuals. Their respective identity can switch. Traditional intellectuals can become organic if they undertake ethical-political changes. Organic intellectuals may become ossified and conservative and lose their 'organic' character. They become increasingly connected and make progress theoretically through constant debates and history. Interestingly, the Wangs treat organic intellectuals as civil servants or administrators of the superstructures and mediators of social life (Wang and Wang 2020, pp. 84-5).

If given the opportunity, I think they would have discussed whether Gramsci meant 'individual' or the 'collective' when referring to organic intellectuals. For Kate Crehan, Gramsci focused on the latter (Crehan 2016, p. 35). In other words, the proletariat builds its integral momentum by fostering its 'collective' intellectuals. They together become the leading class; the bourgeoisie becomes the 'new led' and exists as traditional intellectuals (Lin 2022, p. 14). Mu Meiliang lays out five tasks for proletarian (organic) intellectuals. First, they should disseminate and politicize knowledge to raise their ideological consciousness and comrades. Second, proletarian intellectuals rule and assimilate traditional intellectuals. Third, they make full use of the 'argumentative strength' of traditional intellectuals. Fourth, proletarian intellectuals articulate and propagate the new worldview and leaders' ideology in

the simplest language. Fifth, they engage constantly in a war of position (Mu 2020, p. 43-4).

Generally speaking, Gramscian scholars in China need to develop systematic research on Chinese intellectuals from a Gramscian perspective. We anticipate more studies to be conducted on the entire *Prison Notebooks* of Gramsci, which will be of great importance. Table 1 shows that there are 12 articles written on this. But this is far from being sufficient in any sense.

B. *The voiceless young*

It is a blessing that Sum (2017) has studied the identity and re-harmonization of the ‘loser’ (*diaosi*). It is high time for Gramsci to be used for studying subalterns and the marginalized in China. Although *diaosi* can refer to any age, it does trigger the nerves of young people who are seeking a job and life in desperation. The idea of ‘a counterattack from the loser’ (*diaosi nixi*, 屌丝逆袭) was once all too familiar in China. It is similar to what English people would relate – a ‘working-class hero’, a vulnerable, materialistically deprived person who managed to liberate him/herself from his/her humble beginnings, escape poverty, and achieve success (usually wealth and power). Is this revolutionary or wishful thinking?

Another similar term is ‘phoenix boy’ (*fenghuang nan*, 凤凰男) which describes a thrifty boy from the countryside or urban slums daring to dream big and go on a date with a ‘peacock girl’ (*kongque nv*, 孔雀女) who is stereotypically spoiled and wasteful. All the melodrama is to say that the marriage between a phoenix boy and a peacock girl is the ridiculous *déjà vu* of Titanic!

None of this, unfortunately, has generated a strong sense of collective solidarity let alone class consciousness. Nevertheless, the 996 work culture (9 a.m. to 9 p.m. 6 days a week) has led to new waves of young people who are beginning to resist it in their own way. For example, be passive or not, the outcry of ‘laying down’ (*tanping*, 躺平) is somewhat a collective response to ever-inhuman ‘internal competition’ (*neijuan*, 内卷). This has gained traction and may resonate among young people as often the voiceless. Gramscian scholars in and beyond China can capitalize on this, and cultivate young comrades in their pursuit of a sort of ‘laying-downism’ (*tanping zhuyi*, 躺平主义) from below. One should not

dismiss it or see it as simply a form of soft resistance to structural exploitation. On the contrary, it can turn into a Gramscian war of position that may lead to something more profound when given sufficient attention. For example, the laydownist mentality comes from young people's long-standing anxiety about their 'sense of existence' (*chunzai gan*, 存在感) and 'sense of security' (*anquan gan*, 安全感). Unlike the previous generation, young workers today no longer accept self-struggle (*zìwǒ fèndòu*, 自我奋斗) as the golden rule of life because it is often used to manipulate and brainwash them into submission. Even traditional values of 'sense of gain' (*huodegan*, 获得感) and 'sense of achievement' (*chengjiu*, 成就感) have become so superficial or nothing more than whitebait to make them work until they empty their tanks of labour power. Karoshi or 'overwork death' (*guolaosi*, 过劳死) and 'overwork obesity' (*guolaofei*, 过劳肥) are widespread phenomena in certain sectors such as computer programming now. The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor cannot simply be resolved by blindly following the 'work hard and gain more' principle that the neoliberals sell as universal work ethics. Young people have awakened and begun to resist however desperately structural inequalities. Gramsci would help young people and the working-class foster collectively their organic intellectuals as a collective too.

V. Conclusion

The article provides an exploratory analysis of two decades of Gramscian scholarship in China, identifying both progress and challenges. It also demonstrates that much work is needed to make conversations between Gramscian scholars in and beyond China. We may be easily frustrated by ever-tightening censorship in China that has placed undeniable constraints on Chinese comrades. Nevertheless, welcoming signs are seen in the ever-more positive reception of Gramsci, so are some innovative ideas contextualized in the current CPC hegemony. We should therefore remain engaged with Gramscian scholars in China.

The radical left may be concerned about the post-Marxist turn in China that has misconstrued Gramsci in a new way. But bear in mind that Chinese post-Marxist scholars have only acquired this from their colleagues in the west. There is not yet a distinctive and

independent post-Marxist wave emerging in China. Like all theoretical thoughts, Gramsci cannot mitigate the fate of being picked on a supermarket shelf by Chinese scholars who regularly shop (or appropriate) for convenience. This may sound disturbing to Gramsci's loyalists, but it was the wish of Gramsci himself to have his concepts used and refigured freely according to the local and national contexts and even to be replaced when reality denies his thought. As Gramscian scholars, we must keep ourselves at least as open-minded as Gramsci did. Perhaps, we can demand some honesty from our Chinese comrades. All we need to do is kindly ask them to maintain Gramsci as a Marxist-Leninist and avoid putting words in his mouth when using his concept for a post-Marxist inquiry.

On this note, the article suggests eight new frontiers to further advance Gramscian scholarship in and beyond China: (1) see China as a work-in-progress integral State and the CPC as a hegemony neither capitalist nor socialist, (2) place the Chinese working class at the centre in phases of hegemonic processes, (3) bring class struggle back and think innovatively forms of war of position and movement in Chinese society, (4) pay attention to processes of proletarianization in a wide range of sectors that contribute to the expansion of the working-class population against the burgeoning middle class, (5) strengthen links between intellectuals and common sense by pivoting on dominant/subaltern identities and the integral State(-society), (6) focus on young people's 'lying-downism' as a protest and link it to the wider opposition to the hegemonic current within China, (7) re-establish a historical and dialectical materialist reading of Gramsci without dismissing the role of culture, and (8) use Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the integral state and study China to construct a theory of the socialist state-society.

These eight suggestions will also help revitalize Marxism as an unfinished 'kaleidoscope' that involves a 'long arch of democratic struggles' (Thomas 2015, p. 112) rather than a monolith of any orthodoxy. It requires us to refuse both 'a speculative attitude and determinism' (Filippini 2012, p. 647) and stimulate the collective efforts of not just a few but all of us.

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