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Brokered Dependency, Authoritarian Malepistemization, and Spectacularized Postcoloniality: Reflections on Chinese Academia

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Abstract

This paper calls for a paradigm shift in studying academic dependency, towards the paradigm of brokered dependency. Using Chinese academia as an example, I demonstrate how the neocolonial condition of academic dependency is always mediated through blockage-brokerage mechanisms. The two most salient blockage-brokerage mechanisms of dependency in the Chinese context are linguistic barrier and authoritarian malepistemization, and the effects of the latter consist of three layers: institutional, informational and incorporational. On top of their domestic impacts, those mechanisms jointly exacerbate spectacularized postcoloniality in anglophone-hegemonic global academic publishing. The paradigm of brokered dependency not only represents a more nuanced approach to the study of academic dependency, but also underscores the fact that the dismantling of the neocolonial condition cannot be conceived and pursued in isolation from comprehending and confronting the authoritarian condition, especially when the latter pertains under the disguise of anticolonialism.

Key words

Chinese academia; academic dependency; brokered dependency; linguistic barrier; authoritarian malepistemization; anglophone hegemony; spectacularized postcoloniality

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Introduction: China and Academic Dependency

Dependency theory in international political economy contends that global capitalism goes hand in hand with a center-periphery hierarchy, where "peripheral" countries are made to offer cheap labor and raw materials to "central" economies, purchase the latter's finished products at higher prices, deplete the former's capital that might have been used for their own economic

upgrading, and remain underdeveloped and dependent on the "center" as a result (Prebisch, 1950; Wallerstein, 1979). Inspired by it, *academic dependency* theory contends that global knowledge production, especially in social sciences and humanities, is similarly plagued by the neocolonial condition of dependency, perpetuating a hierarchical division-of-labor between the academic "center" and its "peripheries" (Altbach, 1975; Garreau, 1988; Alatas, 2000; 2003; 2022). In this system, "peripheral" academics depend on their counterparts at the "center" not only *materially* but also *ideologically*. Materially, academic peripheries depend on the center for infrastructural, technological and financial resources (Alatas, 2003:604). Ideologically, academic peripheries are perceived to be dependent on the center not only for its "ideas" (Alatas 2003:604) but also for "recognition," which nowadays typically takes the form of international rankings of universities and academic journals (Alatas, 2022:19; Tenzin & Lee, 2022:2).

Understandably, most academic dependency theorists ground their researches in former colonies (and economically underdeveloped ones in particular), where the legacies of colonialism are the most salient. For example, Syed Farid Alatas, the leading figure in the current generation of academic dependency studies, expounds the concept by scrutinizing Malaysia and India, two former British colonies in Southeast and South Asia (Alatas, 2000). Correlatedly, "while the issue of academic dependency has been frequently examined in the context of Africa, Latin America and the Middle-East in the last two decades," the dependency of East Asian academics has been largely left out of scrutiny until very recently (Tenzin & Lee, 2022:3), a neglect due both to the region's historical absence from Western colonization in general (apart from exceptions such as Hong Kong), and to its rapid economic development in recent decades.

That, of course, does not mean knowledge productions in East Asia are not haunted by the condition of academic dependency. Quite contrary, as a recent study exemplifies (Lee & Chen, 2022), East Asian academia remains as peripheral to, and dependent in, the global academic networks of prestige and recognition as before. Studies like this serve as a reminder that academic dependency is not simply a byproduct of economic dependency, but should be conceived in light of, say, "the rhetorical devices internal to the social sciences" that function as "selling strategies" (Alatas, 2000:90) both for theoretical frameworks, empirical presumptions and research agendas, and for perceptions of global academic prestige. Put differently, the relative overlook until recently of East Asian academic dependency highlights one way in which the prevailing approach in the study of academic dependency needs adjusting: that is, the need for it to take seriously the reality and tendency of *de-bundling* between material and non-material dimensions of academic dependency, notwithstanding their contemporaneous intertwinement and mutual reinforcement in many other parts of the world.

Academic dependency theorists might respond that the issue of de-bundling could be easily accommodated through minor revisions within the dominant approach that do not threaten its key premises or overall framework. For one thing, some might think that de-bundling is but a purely

transitory phenomenon. Take China for example. While Chinese academia had sought and relied on material forms of foreign aid for research and teaching in the early decades of Reform-and-Opening, their inpouring has become a bygone age in light of China's economic takeoff since it joined the WTO, and more recently in light of the acceleratingly ultra-nationalist turn of Chinese politics in the Xi Jinping era. In other words, insofar as China remains academically dependent in other aspects (such as "dependence on recognition"), they have effectively been de-bundled from material forms of dependency. Nonetheless, those who believe de-bundling is necessarily transitory might point to a series of ongoing developments—such as Chinese universities starting to withdraw from global rankings (Liang, 2022), and adopt new guidelines of faculty assessment that give more weight to publishing in Chinese journals *vis-à-vis* international journals (Sharma, 2020)—as evidence that Chinese academia is increasingly getting rid of non-material forms of dependency as well, and therefore that de-bundling between material and non-material forms of dependency would soon cease to be a relevant issue for it.

Not only is this line of response mistaken, but, as I will show below, it also exposes a more fundamental deficit in the current paradigm of studying academic dependency. For instead of showing de-bundling to be transitory, what these developments in Chinese academia exemplify is how academic dependency is intertwined with, and mediated through, various *blockage-brokerage mechanisms*, the effects of which are far too significant and complicated to account for within the current paradigm. In particular, this paper will focus on the two most salient mechanisms in the Chinese context, namely, *authoritarian malepistemization* and *linguistic barrier*, and explicate how they shape the Chinese instantiation of academic dependency, as well as how they exacerbate the dynamic of *spectacularized postcoloniality* in anglophone-hegemonic global academic publishing. While the specific blockage-brokerage mechanisms at play may vary across national contexts, the case study calls forth a new paradigm for comprehending and confronting academic dependency: the paradigm of *brokered* academic dependency. Meanwhile, it also illustrates why the dismantling of the neocolonial condition cannot be meaningfully construed and fruitfully pursued in disregard of the need to dismantle the authoritarian condition as well.

Linguistic Barrier as a Blockage-Brokerage Mechanism

According to the Chinese government's official historiography, China was a "semi-colony" (*ban zhimindi*) of Western imperialist powers during its "Hundred Years of National Humiliation" (*bainian guochi*) between the Anglo-Chinese War of 1839-1842 and the Communist takeover in 1949. During that period, modern research and education systems and institutions in China were established with the help of Western intellectuals and missionaries. Nonetheless, jurisdictionally

China was never under Western colonial rules—unlike, say, Malaysia and India, the two former British colonies upon which Alatas (2000) built his seminal account of academic dependency.

As one of the legacies of colonial rule, English to this day plays a much more salient role in Malaysia and India than in China. Even though it is not the native or primary language for the majority of either Malaysian or Indian people, English is nonetheless widely used in their official documents and communications at various levels of the state apparatus, as well as in their higher education institutions. By contrast, even though most primary and middle schools in China teach English, there is scant opportunity for its everyday exercise. Consequently, English proficiency among the educated classes in both former colonies is arguably much higher than among their counterparts in China. In other words, to the extent that the game of global academic publishing is now subjugated to anglophone hegemony in most disciplines, Chinese academia collectively faces a linguistic hurdle to said game's participation and conversance that is by and large absent in Alatas's paradigm cases.

To be sure, this contrast by no means makes colonialism excusable, let alone justifiable. Nor is comparative English proficiency among the academics of "peripheral" former British colonies necessarily an enviable thing. Rather, both the presence of linguistic barrier to anglophone global academic publishing, and the lack thereof, could compound the pernicious effects of academic dependency under different circumstances, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. For example, an effect of the relative fluency in English among the elites of former British colonies across the Third World is the scarcity of journals and researches published in local languages as opposed to in English, and relatedly "the underdevelopment of social scientific discourse in local languages" (Alatas, 2022:20). By contrast, though the dependence on recognition by anglophone journals, and by the "new global regime of university rankings," does not magically disappear in non-anglophone academic peripheries (Lee & Chen, 2022:33), scholarly outputs and discourses conducted in local languages nonetheless still thrive and predominate, instead of being squeezed out of academic circulation, in their respective societies. In the same vein, whereas the hegemonic anglophone academia has become increasingly insular, paying little attention to publications not written in English (Schwitzgebel et al., 2018; Haller, 2019:352), a certain linguistic distance from it might help mitigate anglophone-centric parochialism. For example, in recent year the writings of Japanese scholars have been translated into Chinese *en masse*, and some of them, such as feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko, has achieved academic and popular stardom in China, despite not being known or read in the anglophone world.

On the other hand, neither the linguistic barrier-induced development of academic discourse in local languages, nor its mitigation of anglophone-centric academic parochialism, neutralizes or negates the condition of academic dependency. Rather, it can, and often does, complicate and reinforce that condition, leaving peripheral scholars stuck between a rock and a hard place. For

the linguistic barrier, in the context of anglophone hegemony over global academia, constitutes a blockage-brokerage mechanism of academic dependency at the peripheries.

As a background, note that English-language publications have generally been given more weight than Chinese ones in the processes of hiring, promotion, funding and annual assessment (which affects the distribution of year-end bonuses as well as other contingent benefits) across Chinese universities. To illustrate, take two representative cases from the assessment policies I have collected: in its 2019 faculty promotion guidelines, the sociology department at university Z (one of the only 39 officially designated "985 universities" in China) assigned 4-5 points to each paper published in a "top" English journal, 1-2 points to each in an "ordinary" English journal, 1-1.5 points to each in a "top" Chinese journal, and 0.3-0.7 points to each in an "ordinary" Chinese journal; meanwhile, university Y (one of the 115 officially designated "211 universities" in China, a superset of "985 universities") has had in place a university-wide policy since 2017 that an English-language paper published in an SCI (Science Citation Index) or SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index) journal is equivalent to *two* papers in a CSCI (Chinese Science Citation Index) or CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) journal in the context of promotion, and *ten* in the context of year-end bonus award. Other universities and departments follow similar patterns (at least until recently, see below). Granted, exceptions exist; for example, some have complained that their department of Chinese literature does not recognize any non-CSSCI journal in its hiring and promotion, even though there are several renowned English-language, Japanese-language and Taiwan-based Chinese-language journals in the discipline (Jiang, 2021). But the exception proves the rule: contemporary Chinese academia is rather dependent on the anglophone "center" for recognition (if not in other non-material aspects as well), and Chinese scholars are thereby incentivized to publish in English for pragmatic reasons.

In the meantime, insofar as most Chinese scholars find it difficult (i.e., too time-consuming or too cognitively draining) to read and write routinely in English, and insofar as intellectual exchanges among them occur mostly if not exclusively in Chinese, informational flows and intellectual exchanges between Chinese academia as a whole and the anglophone center are inevitably bottlenecked. To the extent that an academic discipline in China is dependent on the anglophone "center" either for ideas or for recognition, its dependency has to channel through a small number of "brokers": that is, either those who can, by way of their (typically overseas) experiences of English-based academic training, navigate both worlds with relative ease; or those who can exert disproportionate control on relevant accesses and resources, by way of their unique positions of power within the "system" (such as being the Ministry of Education officials in charge of compiling its "tiered" lists of foreign journals for the purpose of assessing research outputs and distributing research funding, or being the editor of a translated books series commissioned by a prestigious anglophone publisher). Unsurprisingly, with such a brokered mode of dependency come new chances for—and new forms of—system-gaming (e.g. Else &

Van Noorden, 2021), gatekeeping and other intellectual and moral hazards, including the peculiar problem of spectacularized postcoloniality that will be discussed later.

At first glance, that linguistic barriers function as a type of blockage-brokerage mechanism seems a banal truth. After all, informational flows do not occur in a vacuum; rather, mediums are always needed, giving rise to medium-based barriers, which in turn generate demands for brokers who help circumvent them, albeit in inevitably selective and often skewed ways. Meanwhile, the fact that the anglophone academic center is plagued with parochial insularity might also appear to show that linguistic barriers have no relevance to the issue of academic dependency; for they impede academic progress at both the center and the peripheries alike. However, given the power asymmetry between the academic center and its peripheries, the impacts of hindered and distorted interlinguistic exchanges are not only to be distributed unevenly but also to manifest differently across academic communities. For sure, anglophone scholars' unproficiency in other languages lowers the quality of their researches (e.g. Chang, 2022); but it is peripheral scholars who bear the brunt of being linguistically excluded, and consequently of being *further* burdened, sidelined and misrepresented.

Still, some might wonder if it is not the linguistic barrier that is the problem, but dependency itself. What if, they might ask, Chinese universities simply abandon their dependence on Western recognition in assessing researches, and instead assign more weight to Chinese-language journals and publications? Indeed, as mentioned earlier, in the past few years the Chinese government has been pushing universities and other research institutes to disavow "Western models," and to step up publication in Chinese journals instead (Sharma, 2020). Especially after China's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology released a joint memorandum lamenting the so-called "SCI supremacy" in Chinese academia in early 2020, most universities have taken the hint and acted upon it. For example, university X (another "211 university") promptly amended its assessment guidelines two months later, assigning Chinese journals more weight than English ones (and thereby reversing its previous priority between Chinese and English publications) on all fronts of faculty evaluation. Gone is the dependency of Chinese academia on the anglophone center, and hence gone is the bother of having to overcome its linguistic barrier, no?

The reality is much more complicated, however. For one thing, journal norms and practices in China today remain far more status-and-connection-based than merit-based, so to speak. For instance, it is typical of a CSSCI-journal to accept uninvited submission only from someone who ranks associate professor or above, and to reserve the lion's share of its pages for review-exempt papers solicited from (preferably chaired) full professors, using their influences to ensure enough citations that keep the journal in the biannually updated CSSCI list (Jiang, 2021). The perceived unfairness and irregularity of Chinese journals thus makes it inevitable for Chinese scholars to turn to (anglophone) international journals for both recognition and perceived quality-control. Meanwhile, academic journals in China are increasingly pressured into serving as propaganda

mouthpieces that blatantly aggrandize "Xi Jinping's thoughts" (e.g. Wang, 2016); correlatedly, it has become exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to publish on "sensitive topics" (e.g. ethnic policy, contentious politics, surveillance state, and so on) in CSSCI-journals, especially if the research conclusion is not to the authorities' liking. As a result, Chinese scholars working in those areas have to seek refuge in international journals, and sometimes even have to take the extraordinary measure of publishing *anonymously* in international journals, for fear of domestic repercussions (e.g. Anonymous, 2021).

In a nutshell, neither the neocolonial condition of academic dependency in China, nor the linguistic barrier as a blockage-brokerage mechanism of it, can be understood in isolation from other background conditions of Chinese academia, especially the fact that it lives under an iron-fisted Party-State regime. Indeed, rather than being a coincidence, the push to step up publication in Chinese *vis-à-vis* in English—the *lingua franca* of global academia—and the tightening of ideological control over Chinese academic journals are two sides of the same coin, namely, the acceleratingly ultra-nationalistic turn of the Party-State over the past decade. By the same token, the status-and-connection-based culture of Chinese academia has much to do both with the formal institutions of authoritarianism and with the internalized norms of coping with it (Tenzin, 2017). Yet, these are just the tip of the iceberg. To fully appreciate the profound impacts of Party-State authoritarianism on Chinese academia, and to unpack how the authoritarian condition intersects and intertwines with Chinese academic dependency and its linguistic brokerage, as well as how they jointly exacerbate spectacularized postcoloniality in global academic publishing, the next section will introduce the concept of authoritarian malepistemization, anatomize its three layers of manifestation, and explicate its role as a blockage-brokerage mechanism in the context of academic dependency.

Authoritarian Malepistemization and Its Three Layers

I coin the term "authoritarian malepistemization" to denote the pernicious epistemic effects of authoritarianism; or, more specifically, the ways in which living under an authoritarian regime that exercises powerful control over the society induces pervasive and systematic malformations of knowledge and theory, both within and outside academia (though hereafter I will focus on the academia, and leave the malepistemization of the public at large—and of authoritarian policy-makers themselves—for another occasion). Note that it is authoritarian malepistemization as a pervasive and systematic societal phenomenon, rather than as individual, sporadic occurrences, that is of interest here. As such, what underlies it is not just the authoritarian *personality* of some politicians or their supporters, nor merely a few authoritarian *practices*, defined as "patterns of action that sabotage accountability to people over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation and disabling voice" (Glasius, 2018:517);

rather, at work must be some authoritarian *regime*, namely, a comprehensive set of legal, political and social arrangements under which civil and political freedoms are capriciously restricted, and under which meaningful political competition barely exists. Granted, whether a regime counts as authoritarian might be a matter of degree, rather than an all-or-nothing issue; relatedly, I leave open the question of whether pervasive and systematic authoritarian malepistemization might occur in "hybrid regimes," or in "authoritarian enclaves" within a democracy (Mickey, 2015), or in "backsliding" democracies such as Narendra Modi's India (Jaffrelot, 2021). Regardless, it shouldn't be controversial to say China's Party-State regime fails to meet *any* meaningful criteria for not counting as authoritarian (unlike Malaysia and India, Alatas's two focal cases, however flawed their democracies might be).

Meanwhile, unlike some other authoritarian countries where the state capacity is relatively underdeveloped, China's Party-State is all too powerful *vis-à-vis* the society. In particular, the Chinese Communist Party ensures its firm grip on both the state apparatus and non-governmental organizations alike, through mandatorily establishing and empowering either a Party Committee (*dangwei*) or a Party Branch (*dangzhibu*) at every relevant level of their operation. For example, in a typical Chinese university, the University Party Committee Secretary (*xiao dangwei shuji*) always ranks the highest administratively, overseeing the University President (who is only the "second chair," or *erbashou*), and its Party Committee has veto powers on the hiring, promotion or continued employment of faculty members. While the degree of actual restriction on academic freedom varies across universities and fluctuates over time, the threat never disappears, but rather hangs like the Sword of Damocles over every Chinese academic's head; indeed, from time to time there are academics being suspended or terminated by their institutions for crossing putative ideological lines. And the risks have become acceleratingly grave in the past decade as the regime continues to expand and strengthen its infrastructure of academic control, including mandatory "political and ideological conformity" training sessions for faculty and students, ubiquitous installation of classroom surveillance, regular inspection of syllabi and reading assignments for "subversive" and "Western-values-based" contents, massive recruitment of "student informers" who (are paid or academically rewarded by school administrations to) snitch on faculty and students for violating ideological taboos during private conversations, and so on.

Similarly, the scholarly production of knowledges and theories is subject to the authoritarian Party-State's direct incentivization and dis-incentivization through various institutional means. For example, as mentioned earlier, Chinese scholars have been incentivized to avoid the study of "sensitive topics" as those are difficult to publish in Chinese journals and may get you into trouble even if published in international journals; on the other hand, if one writes an oleaginous paper on how the unprecedentedly magnificent Xi Jinping Thought can help solve a certain conundrum in one's academic discipline or illuminate one's area of research, it'd not only be easier to publish but may also win a generous grant from the government, or reward from the school administration.

Indeed, in addition to journals, *grants* have become yet another handy tool for the regime to shape research directions and boundaries. According to every faculty assessment policy I have collected, faculty promotion requires not only a certain amount of publications, but also a minimum number of research grants awarded by *the government* at relevant levels. For instance, at university Z, promotion to full professorship requires "hosting" (*zhuchi*) at least one "national-level (*guojiaji*)" funded research, and promotion to associate professorship requires either "hosting" a "ministry-level" (*buji*) or "provincial-level highlighted" (*shengji zhongdian*) one, or "being the second-highest-ranking participant" in a "national-level" one. By signaling which research topics (or conclusions) are likely, or unlikely, to receive government funding (and satisfy a necessary condition for faculty promotion), the regime effectively manipulates the academic process of knowledge-and-theory production.

Whereas social sciences and humanities are the main targets of the Party-State's institutional manipulation (Holbig, 2014), it does not mean researchers in natural science and technology can always get away from authoritarian malepistemization. For instance, as part of Xi Jinping's ultra-nationalist "Cultural Confidence" (*wenhua zixin*) policy, generous research funds are poured into proving (and propagating) the efficacy of traditional Chinese medicines (TCM) in treating COVID-19 and all kinds of other diseases, whereas medical scientists and practitioners who raise doubts about the rigorousness of those "TCM studies" are being silenced, demoted or otherwise punished (Collins, 2020).

Another recent example further illustrates how authoritarian malepistemization may impact disciplines of natural science and technology, as well as how it functions as a blockage-brokerage mechanism in the context of academic dependency. In May 2022, the officially compiled "Tiered List of High-Quality Scientific Journals in the Area of Highway and Transportation Studies" was publicized (China Highway and Transportation Society, 2022), which would guide future faculty assessments in the discipline. Two things about the list are of interest to us here. First, each of its three "tiers" includes more Chinese journals than (anglophone) foreign journals, an apparent nod to the aforementioned push to elevate the status of Chinese journals. Second, it includes (let alone in the "first tier") certain foreign journals that would raise quite a few eyebrows—such as *Journal of Cleaner Production*, which has been blacklisted for suspicious citation patterns by Clarivate Analytics (2020) and subsequently been exposed for tolerating plagiarism (Coenen et al., 2022). Some Chinese experts have mocked the list in private, but decided not to openly challenge it lest being persecuted later by "those who have a stake in the list." After all, in an authoritarian system, "one who holds a higher official rank than you do can crush you to death at will (*guan da yi ji ya si ren*)," one of the experts said to me. In a nutshell, despite the nationalistic rhetoric and policy, a certain degree of dependency on the academic center's supposed recognition continues to exist; but instead of genuine recognition, what is often needed—and had—is a mere (mis)representation of recognition brokered for its intended domestic audience, especially the non-expert government

officials in charge of higher education who are unlikely to ever learn (or care?) about the actual reputations of listed foreign journals.

So far, we have focused on the *institutional* layer of authoritarian malepistemization: that is, how the formal and quasi-formal institutions of Chinese academia under the Party-State rule (e.g. Party Committees, campus surveillances, journals, grants, faculty hiring and promotion policies, and so on) are set up to skew the selection of both research topics and research conclusions, and thereby facilitate the formation of a distorted body of knowledges and theories. But there are two other layers on which authoritarianism induces malepistemization: the *informational* layer and the *incorporational* layer. If institutional malepistemization works primarily at the output end of knowledge and theory formation, informational malepistemization plagues the input end whereas incorporational malepistemization contaminates the process of input-to-output transformation.

Informational malepistemization occurs when scholars are practically unable to obtain full, relevant and undistorted information crucial to the wholesome development of their theories and observations. To start with, as China blocks more and more foreign websites, including academic ones (Wong & Kwong, 2019), its own online databases have also been removing "ideologically sensitive" publications from their digital collections (Tiffert, 2019), leaving with scholars an increasingly patchy literature to lean on. Meanwhile, it is typical of an academic conducting field research in China to be harassed by local authorities, or denied access to archives, on arbitrary political or bureaucratic grounds (Greitens & Truex, 2020). Yet, informational malepistemization goes far beyond the inability to find the literature or collect the data narrowly needed for a specific research project. Rather, it also pertains more broadly to the deterioration of the day-to-day informational ecosystem, in which both academics and non-academics live. In the era of the mobile internet and social network platforms, not only has the Party-State established a "dynamic, layered, and multistage information control regime" through "delegated censorship" on contents that are remotely political (Sun & Zhao, 2022), but it has also perfected the art of propaganda by building an enormous online army that actively disseminates disinformation on the Chinese internet (King, Pan & Roberts, 2017). Arguably, this informational environment is particularly detrimental to scholars who work in such disciplines as area studies, international relations, and contemporary social and political thought, for which a contextualized understanding of the relevant society or an up-to-date knowledge of its ongoing events, and not just a narrow set of research data, is indispensable.

Again, authoritarian malepistemization on the informational layer creates room for brokered dependency too. In recent years, for example, groups of dedicated conservative netizens in China have laboriously translated into Chinese and promulgated on the Chinese internet a large amount of Western alt-right commentaries, talk points and conspiracy theories (that do not pose threats to the Party-State's legitimacy, seem to fit its current leader's worldview, and can survive online censorship anyway), taking advantage of the fact that most Chinese citizens—including most

Chinese academics—have neither sufficient proficiency in English nor the ability to bypass the "Great Firewall" (i.e. censorship technologies blocking most foreign websites and slowing down cross-border internet traffic in China), and are therefore easy to make into taking those translated fringe claims as truths. Such is the case with the Great Replacement theory—the white-nationalist idea that Western European and North American countries are approaching the "tipping points" of "demographic suicide" due to non-white (especially Muslim) immigration. Discredited as it is in Western academia, it has been uncritically accepted by mainstream Chinese scholars since its spread on the Chinese internet (Lin, 2021:98-99).

Finally, authoritarianism also induces malepistemization on what I call the "incorporational" layer. That it, through various conscious or unconscious psychological processes, scholars living under authoritarianism would more or less incorporate part of its norms, ideologies or pathologies in their patterns or heuristics of thinking, which in turn influence how they process informational inputs, incorporate them in their existing bodies of knowledge and ideas, and transform them into theoretical outputs. Here I am not just talking about those who are eager to climb, or at least do not resist climbing, the ladder of institutional hierarchy, whose motivated reasonings would no doubt affect their own researches, and—through perpetuating the "deep water" academic culture that reinforces the authoritarian condition—their colleagues' as well (Tenzin, 2017). Rather, the effects of incorporational malepistemization are much more profound. For example, it has been noted that even among the Chinese scholars who explicitly disavow the Party-State's nationalism and purport to articular a non-ethnocentric theory of international relations, their work could still betray an unconscious "subservience to state cues and often uncritical attitude toward their own ethnocentric ideologies" (Chu, 2022:60). Furthermore, the authoritarian condition may even evince its effects of incorporational malepistemization on conscientiously anti-authoritarian scholars, by reversely fueling among them a "beaconist" mentality of projecting their anxieties and aspirations to a sanitized and fantasized "West," which in turn leads them to embrace wildly implausible theories and dubious normative stances (Lin, 2021).

Spectacularized Postcoloniality in Global Academic Publishing

Of course, none of the above means that Chinese academics do not produce valid knowledge or valuable theoretical insights, nor that they are passive and helpless subjects of the authoritarian condition who make no effort to overcome its effects of malepistemization. Quite contrary, many of them try their best to resist or circumvent those constraints and contortions: for instance, it has been rather common for Chinese scholars in social sciences and humanities to publish some of their most important works in venues other than narrowly defined academic journals (that "count" for the purpose of faculty assessment), a development that goes hand in hand with a proliferation of institutionally unaffiliated scholars, or "grassroots intellectuals" (Veg, 2019); and needless to

say, not all anti-authoritarian scholars in China fall for beaconist tropes. All in all, the continued intellectual pursuit by Chinese academics notwithstanding the overwhelmingly adverse condition is, if anything, a testament to their courage, resilience and ingenuity, and the fact that they have to endure and confront said condition on a daily basis makes the genuine scholarly achievements of theirs all the more impressive and commendable.

The nature of those achievements is easy to be misrepresented and misunderstood, however, through what I have elsewhere called the "dynamic of spectacularized postcoloniality" in global academic publishing (Lin, 2022:222-225). In fact, just as the blockage-brokerage mechanisms of linguistic barrier and authoritarian malepistemization intersect with each other and reinforce their respective effects on Chinese academics domestically (e.g. that most Chinese academics are not proficient enough in other languages to publish in non-Chinese journals diminishes their capacity to evade the Party-State's tightening grip on domestic venues of publication; an institutionalized authoritarian hierarchy makes brokered misrepresentations of global academic recognition harder to contest; censorship-induced informational contamination is compounded by linguistic barriers between China and most of the outside world; and so on), they jointly exacerbate the dynamic of spectacularized postcoloniality, to the detriments of both the relevant academic "periphery" (i.e. Chinese academia) and the global academic "center" (i.e. Western scholars who engage with, or are otherwise interested in, Chinese academia—or China more generally).

Spectacularized postcoloniality—the phenomenon that, in place of genuinely decolonized representations of academic "peripheries," mere spectacles of postcoloniality are often presented to and celebrated by the "center"—is a peculiar problem haunting the worthy project of academic decolonization, at least when the latter is pursued within the confines of the neocolonial condition of contemporary global academic publishing. To unpack it, we must again start from the fact that English is the *lingua franca* of the global academia, which puts extra burdens on "peripheral" academics who are non-anglophone. Most of them are simply prevented from being heard and recognized at the anglophone "center," while the remaining few who can overcome the linguistic barrier are, when they do, alienated and privileged at the same time. On the one hand, they are *alienated* both because their English texts are not (meant to be) accessible to most of their domestic peers, and hence are unlikely to become an integral part of their ongoing intellectual exchanges; and because, being the singled-out few, what they say in English are seen and appraised inevitably in isolation from the literature in local language they might engage with (but which is inaccessible to anglophone readers), and hence risk becoming decontextualized and objectified under the "Western gaze," so to speak.

On the other hand, the singled-out few are, in a more important sense, *privileged*. Insofar as the *status quo* of anglophone-hegemonic global academic publishing disincentivizes anglophone academics from overcoming linguistic barriers and engaging in depth with scholarly discourses in other languages, most of them have to rely on second-hand accounts provided by a handful of

scholars, a.k.a. academic brokers, who are presumably versed in relevant "peripheral" talks and contexts. Consequently, when one of the few non-anglophone "peripheral" scholars who are able to overcome the linguistic barrier presents (in English) their version of the intellectual landscape of their own society to the Western eye, its accuracy is unlikely to be contested; for the linguistic barrier both prevents their domestic peers from waging (effective) contestations, and impairs the capacity of the anglophone-hegemonic academic "center" to discern callous misrepresentations of non-anglophone intellectual landscapes. In particular, those who are not only able to publish in English, but also well-connected in the Western academia or the anglophone publishing world (such as by holding tenured positions, or by sitting on journal editorial boards), are the privileged among the privileged, as they hold the power not only of telling "peripheral" stories themselves, but also of deciding who else also get to tell such stories: that is, which other "peripheral" scholars or works get to be introduced to, and "authenticated" in, the global academic "center."

With this state of affairs in mind, let us turn to spectacularized postcoloniality. Academics dissatisfied with the Western-centric, neocolonial global academic publishing have been seeking to increase its inclusion of previously marginalized academic communities, and its representation of their diverse cultural and intellectual traditions and landscapes. While this certainly is a worthy pursuit and has yielded fruitful results, it can at times backfire too, propagating at least two types of spectacularized postcoloniality at the cost of genuine academic decolonization, both of which, moreover, are exacerbated by the brokered condition of academic dependency through linguistic barrier and authoritarian malepistemization.

First, the endeavor to transcend Western-centrism and increase representational diversity in global academic publishing may, by way of an eagerness to promote some argument or approach that seems novel and culturally distinct *vis-à-vis* the dominant "Western" mindset, inadvertently opens the door to brokered misrepresentations of "peripheral" intellectual landscapes that appear more "spectacular" for the Western audience than the actual landscapes do. For example, a recent article in a highly regarded English journal argues that the "moderate Confucian" stance on same-sex marriage (i.e. legalization plus sociocultural discrimination) is superior to the typical "liberal" stance (i.e. legalization plus sociocultural nondiscrimination); and in order to make the argument work, it paints a misleading picture of contemporary Chinese intellectual discourses on same-sex marriage, presents moderate Confucianism as the only extant theoretical alternative to the more homophobic stances in China, and erases from the picture those groups of Chinese scholars (such as Chinese liberals and progressive Confucians) who have long rebutted "moderate Confucianism" and reached nondiscriminatory conclusions in the domestic debate. In other words, the promotion of a particular "non-Western" approach (i.e. moderate Confucianism) as theoretically novel and practically relevant is done through the erasure of the much richer (but less "culturally distinct") discourses in the background, and, ironically, reinforces "the academic-colonial ideology of non-

Western theoretical irrelevancy" as well as the "essentialization, otherization and museumization of the 'non-Western'" (Lin, 2022:223-224).

Apparently, the inability of the "center" to screen out such a callous misrepresentation in the first place has much to do with its unproficiency in Chinese, and its resultant allocation of *de facto* powers and privileges mentioned above. In the meantime, authoritarian malepistemization aggravates the problem, as the frequent disappearing of online articles and archives in China makes it harder to keep record of past discussions, on the basis of which it would have been relatively easier for a more comprehensive and more accurate representation of the Chinese intellectual landscape to emerge.

Second, there is another type of spectacularized postcoloniality that grows not so much from an eagerness to increase perceived cultural and intellectual diversity *per se* (as a cure for Western-centric global academic publishing) as from an eagerness to locate and promote, on the basis of a diversified global academic publishing, periphery-based intellectual allies and inspirations (for a postcolonial vision of politics, and against the West's domestic and international wrongdoings). Again, the endeavor is in itself innocuous and laudable; but just as some of the anti-authoritarian intellectuals in China would fall prey to "beaconist" fantasizing of the Western world (Lin, 2021), from time to time Western academic leftists are tempted to glorify the authoritarian condition at a "peripheral" region—such as China's Party-State regime—and its local apologists, and project onto it a transcendence of "Western" vices such as capitalism and colonialism, despite China's nepotistic (party-)state-capitalism, Chinese colonialism and imperialism over its own peripheries, or their conjunction in the form of "racial capitalism with Chinese characteristics" (Wong, 2022).

While some of those Western academic leftists simply attack "from the high ground of moral (Marxist) and linguistic (English) superiority, hurling a barrage of hollow rhetorical salvos on scholars toiling in the fields below" who painstakingly unearth the Party-State's atrocities and oppressions (Johansson, 2013:167), others have keenly promoted some self-styled "New Leftist" academics in China whose politics "they would likely find repulsive, if not for a lack of sufficient knowledge about Asia and wishful desire to find analogues to themselves in non-western countries" (Hioe, 2017). And this is compounded by the fact that, adapting to the authoritarian condition at home and taking advantage of Chinese unproficiency among Western academics, those Chinese "New Leftists" have come to master the art of doublespeak, capable of blatantly defending Party-State authoritarianism (along with Chinese ultra-nationalism) to domestic audiences while skillfully disguising such apologia with profound and leftist-sounding academic jargons that mesmerize their Western peers (Hioe, 2017; Chen, 2022). Hence, by spectacularizing the disguised authoritarian apologia as genuine, distinctive theoretical contributions by Chinese academia, the truly invaluable works—and struggles—of the Chinese academics who push back against (rather than adapt to and benefit from) the authoritarian condition are further obscured and depreciated, insofar as the condition keeps being normalized and whitewashed.

Conclusion: Towards the Paradigm of Brokered Dependency

Before concluding, I would like to address a potential concern about my positionality, and the related objection to, or at least hesitation with, what I say in this paper. For am I not myself an academic broker, now that I write in English, publish in anglophone journals, and present (my version of) the landscape of Chinese academia to Western eyes? Is this paper not spectacularizing the condition of Chinese academia? On what basis can my readers be assured that they are offered an accurate representation, and with what standing do I critique the power relations of academic brokerage? To these questions I reply, first, that I am indeed somewhat a broker, just as the other Chinese academics who are able to publish in English and present their versions of the Chinese intellectual landscape to anglophone audiences. My critique of brokered dependency is, therefore, *reflexive*. But second, it is reflexive not because I am critiquing individual brokers as "bad actors," or the ostensibly inevitable activities of academic brokerage as *per se* objectionable. Rather, it is because I am critiquing the underlying conditions that multiply the hazards (*vis-a-vis* practical values) of those ostensibly inevitable activities, conditions the pernicious influences of which *I am certainly not immune to* (the extent of which on me, moreover, *I may not be fully aware of*): namely, the authoritarian condition that induces peculiar forms of malepistemization in Chinese academia, and the neocolonial conditions of academic dependency and anglophone hegemony in global knowledge-and-theory production that doubly marginalize "peripheral" scholars who are non-anglophone. Instead of spectacularizing their postcoloniality, critiques of this kind first and foremost extend sympathy and solidarity to those whose lived experiences under—and struggles against—said conditions tend not to be voiced and heard in the "center" of global academia, and seek to explicate the need for dismantling those conditions *altogether*.

Whereas this paper focuses on Chinese academia and its most salient blockage-brokerage mechanisms, i.e. linguistic barrier and authoritarian malepistemization, there is good reason to assume that academic dependency is *always* brokered, even if the mechanisms through which it is brokered, and the ways in which those mechanisms interact, vary across cases. For every academic community is rife with hierarchies, stratifications and power relations, which are in turn shaped by the broader political, economic and sociocultural conditions of the respective society. If academic dependency theory calls attention to the center-periphery power structure in global academia, the presumption of *brokered* academic dependency calls attention to the fact that there must be other power structures when we zoom in on national or local academia.

In other words, academic dependency theory needs a paradigm shift towards that of brokered dependency. Acknowledging both the agency of "peripheral" actors (including academic brokers among them) despite the hierarchy of global academia, and the inconvenient fact that "peripheral" agency can be exercised in skewed ways that reinforce its underlying structural injustices and

impediments, the new paradigm opens up room for more accurate and more nuanced accounts of how the neocolonial condition impacts different academic "peripheries" differently. Furthermore, that the mechanisms of brokered dependency may, besides their domestic impacts, exacerbate the dynamic of spectacularized postcoloniality in global academic publishing reminds us not only that the neocolonial condition jeopardizes knowledge production at the "center" as much as it does at the "peripheries," but also that anticolonial politics does not necessarily translate to decolonization. In particular, it highlights the fact that the cause of dismantling the neocolonial condition cannot be conceived and pursued in isolation from comprehending and confronting the authoritarian condition, especially when the latter pertains under the disguise of anticolonialism.

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