

Making Facts, Writing Fictions, and Authoring the Chinese Nation

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In 1918, amidst China's intense intellectual and literary upheaval known as the New Culture Movement, Chen Changheng, an economics student returned from the US, published a book called *A Treatise on Chinese Population*. Chen's treatise, which was the most comprehensive introduction of the population problem into China yet, contributed substantially to the popularization of the idea of population among the Chinese public, and was reprinted eight times in just a decade.¹ Despite the popularity of his work at the time and the continuous interest in the question of population as well as in the Malthusian controversy in contemporary China, Chen, like most of his peer social scientists, hardly enjoys the certain kind of recognition that is on a par with his contemporary writers and philosophers in the minds of intellectual and cultural historians of China. There are of course conspicuous explanations for the hitherto overlooking of

¹ Chen Changheng. (1928). *Zhongguo renkou lun* (An Treatise on Chinese Population), Shangwu yinshuguan, 18.

the literary significance of Chen's treatise. Most noticeably, Chen was a social scientist rather than, properly speaking, a writer or thinker. His significance, therefore, was not supposed to be literary. Furthermore, Chen's writing style was hardly innovative by modern literary standards. Published on the eve the May-Fourth literary revolution in 1919, the high point of the New Culture Movement, the treatise itself was composed in classical prose, not in modern vernacular format. Indeed, Chen had not even mastered the modern idioms of social science in Chinese; he, for instance, referred to society as *qun* [群] or grouping instead of *shehui*, [社會] even though the former had become increasingly obsolete by this time.

Regardless of Chen's ostensible anachronistic writing style, he also belonged to the same generation of intellectuals who were caught up in the midst of an iconoclastic movement in which anything regarded as "traditional" was under full assault and rendered as irrelevant. Partisans of the New Culture Movement in particular believed that culture was both the problem and solution to China's social chaos and political disintegration. In order to revitalize China, they maintained, Chinese culture—which appeared in the forms of literature, history, philosophy, ethics, science, as well as social and political institutions—must be remade and modernized for the sake of civilizational survival. In this sense, Chen was undeniably engaging the question of new culture as a social scientist.

What I would like to suggest here, however, is that the effect on the reconstruction of culture and knowledge generated by social science practitioners like Chen cannot be reduced as merely scientific. In the case of Chen's treatise, its literary repercussions were no less significant than its impact on Chinese social science for it helped to introduce a new genre of literary representation that was indispensable for the production and circulation of social scientific knowledge. The literary significance of Chen's work was demonstrated particularly in the

foreword to his book written by Peking University president Cai Yuanpei. According to Cai, Chen's contribution was twofold. First and foremost, Chen introduced charts and tabulations as a new way of presenting knowledge, and second, he advanced the public understandings of the Chinese population problem. The order of Cai's comments was obviously significant for it clearly indicated that Cai was more impressed by the form of Chen treatise than its content. Cai indeed went on to contend that the shortcomings of China was not due to the lack of knowledge on the population problem, rather, the problem was the inadequacy of its literary representation of the problem. He lamented that although China had long regarded itself as a "literate country," [*wenzhang guojia* 文章國家] all traditional scholars did was simply waste much of their time to polish their essays. Expressing an unmistakable sense of admiration, Cai praised Chen's use of charts and statistical tabulations in the treatise as extraordinary for it "allows the reader to comprehend the [population] problem of China by showing the similarities of various countries [in a comparative context]."²

It is important to note that despite being the head of the first modern Chinese university, Cai himself was raised and trained more or less as a traditional scholar at a time when China was still sufficiently secure and confident about its cultural universe. Cai's reaction to the arrival of social statistics and modern social scientific representation in general, therefore, can be seen as one of the defining moments in which the indigenous form of knowledge presentation was shaken in its confrontation with that of the modern social science. In this respect, Chen's treatise did a lot more than just recasting the question of population—itsself a growing concern among the late Qing statecraft thinkers—in the framework of modern social science. Whereas iconoclastic writers and philosophers launched brutal and vociferous attacks on the tradition mostly at the

² Ibid., ?.

rhetorical level, social scientific publications like Chen's silently introduced a new form of literary representation that was associated with what Ian Hacking has come to call a particular style of reasoning at the level of practice.³

This particular style of reasoning, manifested mostly in the forms of census and survey, broke down the existing community into individuals and then reassembled them using new social categories. As this novel style of conceptualizing society rendered the population as *directly* knowable, it simultaneously eliminated the exiting local elites who served as mediators between the ruler and the ruled.⁴ This entangled process, in this sense, entailed a new politics of representation that, on the one hand, gave rise to a new technology of government.⁵ On the other hand, it provided a powerful fiction of the community in which individuals and groups acquired and were interpellated into newly formulated roles and identities.⁶

“The fiction of the census” (and, if I may add, survey), according Benedict Anderson, “is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions.”⁷ The analogy between the census and the fiction put forward by Anderson, while it has effectively unmasked the constructiveness, imaginariness, and above all, fictiveness of the nation-state as a natural enumerative totality, is also very suggestive in light of the recent scholarship in the social study of science—an intellectual horizon that, obviously, spans beyond Anderson's original conceptual framework. Briefly, despite its fictionality, the census, and for

³ Ian Hacking. (1990). *The Taming of Chance*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴ See Chapter One of my dissertation.

⁵ Michel Foucault. (1991). Governmentality. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 87-104.

⁶ See Asad, Talal. (1994). Ethnographic Representation, Statistics, and Modern Power. *Social Research* 61(1): 55-88 and Paul Rabinow. (1986). Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus. Berkeley, University of California Press: 234-261..

⁷ Benedict Anderson. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, Verso, 166

that matter, the survey in general, is also a specific mode of knowledge production and representation that prioritizes empirical facts. The nation-state, in other words, is hardly *fictive* in a straightforward or simplistic sense. Instead, the persuasiveness of nationalist claims is anchored in *facts*, even though the factual evidence admitted to substantiate those nationalist claims is always highly selective, if not manipulative.

This paradoxical relationship between fact and fiction opens up a range of new questions that could further our understanding of the actual mechanics of social scientific knowledge-production in respect to the construction of the nation-state. Specifically, the idea of the fiction propels us to ponder both literarily and allegorically about the nature of the survey. Who were the authors and narrators of the fiction of the survey? Who are the protagonists? Where are the plots and narratives? For whom was it written? How did the audience react? What were the media and techniques through which it was disseminated and circulated? In short, the question of the facticity of the fact becomes increasingly inseparable from its fictionality. My paper here is an attempt to address some of these questions.

My larger dissertation project is a study of the emergence, dissemination, and deployment of social survey research [*shehui diaocha* 社會調查] and its social and political effects in early twentieth China. Closely related to the rise of this particular mode of knowledge-production was the concurrent rise of an ensemble of scientific conceptions of society. These novel social scientific outlooks on the human world presupposed the existence of a social field with laws and mechanisms that was simultaneously waiting to be unveiled by scientific methods as well as susceptible to scientific interventions. The survey-based social science research, owing to its professed objective and transcending qualities, therefore became the pivotal technique to

comprehend and remake Chinese society as the foundation the modern nation-state by contending political factions. The idea of society and the practice of social survey subsequently emerged as a site of contestation rather than consensus.

While my larger project seeks to analyze the cultural and social processes in which the science of society forged social and political imaginings in early twentieth-century China, I am also interested in examining the actual mechanics of knowledge-production and -circulation. This paper focuses on one aspect of this question by interrogating the authority and authorship of social scientific knowledge-production. In particular, I introduce three examples from the larger social survey movement to illustrate that while social survey research at times made recourse to indigenous literary practice, it nonetheless departed from the past when it came to the question of authority and authorship. Ultimately, I argue that although the authority of the individual author appeared to be gradually relegated or made invisible by the authority of science, which in turn was endorsed by institutions and the state, the intervention of the knowing subject or the self, remained crucial to the production of social scientific knowledge.

The Fiction of Society

The first example I would like to introduce is Mao Zedong's famous *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, published in 1927. According Mao's own recollection, his interest in understanding the human world through direct observation and personal experience, rather than the text, began as early as the mid-1910s when he was inspired by prominent historical literary figures who traveled extensively in the Chinese empire. In 1917, carrying brushes, paper, and ink, he traveled to several neighboring counties in his home

province Hunan and embarked on his pursuit in social investigation. While none of these early travel writings were preserved, we know that these early experiences in some crucial ways defined Mao's lifelong interest in using the social survey to illuminate the reality of Chinese society, or "to seek truth from facts," as he put it in the borrowed Neo-Confucian expression.⁸ The short and focused investigations that Mao repeatedly carried out in the subsequent decade eventually precipitated in his *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan* published exactly a decade after his travel study. Often being regarded as an important document that shed light on the Maoist style of political struggle as well as social investigation, the report, which presented itself as a counter claim against other competing voices within the Communist party, contains perhaps one of the most commonly cited observations made by Mao:

In a short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a tornado or tempest, a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will break all trammels that now bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will send all imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies and bad gentry to their graves."⁹

Despite its prophetic nature, Mao's characterization of Chinese society, especially the rural society, as haunted by a specter of discontent was often seen as a rather realistic depiction of China. This agreement sometimes extended to include those who were less sympathetic to the Chinese Communist movement. Even the Nationalists, for instance, confessed that the inadequate account of rural China constituted a critical factor of their defeat. In the 1950s, after

⁸ The type of travel study [*youxue* 遊學] that Mao engaged in in the 1910s was quite common at the time. In my examination of the genealogical origin of the idea and practice of survey [*diaocha* 調查] elsewhere in this project, I have argued that the rise of survey both as a literary genre and as a mode of knowledge-production was partially derived from the indigenous literary and knowledge practices such as travel writing, local geography and history, as well as evidential scholarship. See Chapter 2 of my dissertation.

⁹ Mao Zedong 1954, 21-22.

retreat to China, the Nationalists themselves also admitted that their defeat was inseparable from the failure to carry out proper surveys to comprehend rural society.¹⁰

Here in this paper, my intention is not to join the debate about the accuracy of these investigations, but to interrogate the ways in which Mao's social investigations came to acquire the professed qualities of representing the reality of China for a broad audience. In contemplating this problem, I look beyond the conventional domains of sociology or political history, and suggest that the authority and persuasiveness of these investigations are indeed extensively hinged on a complex deployment of the multiple layers of literary devices and scientific claims. Specifically, I seek to demonstrate that social investigations, like those conducted in Hunan in the mid-1920s as a mode of knowledge-production, had departed significantly from traditional literary practice such as travel writing in terms of authority and authorship.

Mao's skillful and interweaving use of direct experience, empirical evidence, and generalization as a way to endorse the authority of his research is already evident in the first paragraph of the report on Hunan. He begins by invoking this personal experience: "During my recent visit to Hunan I conducted an investigation on the spot into the conditions in the five counties of Siangtan, Siangsiang, Hengshan, Liling and Changsha... I called together for fact-finding conferences experienced peasants and comrades working for the peasant movement, listened attentively to their reports and collected a lot of material." He then closes the paragraph with a rather sweeping generalization: "And many strange things there were that I had never seen or heard of before. I think these conditions exist in many other places."¹¹

¹⁰ See Zhongyang gaizao weiyuanhui diliuzu. (1953). *Dang de shehui diaocha: zhongyao wenti zhi baogao yu chuli* (*The Social Survey of the Party: The Reporting and Handling of Important Problems*). Zhongyang gaizao weiyuanhui diliuzu. To be sure, many of Mao's critics were skeptical of the Soviet-style class categories and therefore dismissed the validity of his overarching theoretical framework. Nonetheless, many of the same people found Mao's empirical findings useful to some extent.

¹¹ Mao, Zedong. (1954). Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. New York, International Publishers. 1: 21.

The use of first person narrative here is especially significant given that the report was published as an article rather than delivered as a speech. In fact, the narrator “I” remains quite prominent throughout the report, and at times it functions as an authoritative voice that does not simply report, but enunciates his political views and policy recommendations.¹² Aside from interjecting an assertive tone into an otherwise social scientific presentation, the presence of the narrator “I” was a constant reminder that whatever knowledge being reported here was grounded on the direct and personal observations of the narrator or the author himself. In many occasions, Mao in fact underscored the necessity of proper investigation in a crude and imperative tone, declaring that “without investigation, one has no right to speak, and without correct investigation, one again has no right to speak.”

While this attempt to grant authority only to those who have done *proper* surveys was a tactic that he would use repeatedly throughout his career as a way to silence his political opposition, it also served to invoke the idea that “I was there” as a way to authenticate a particular mode of information-gathering that is often associated with empirical social science, and especially ethnography. In this sense, even though Mao himself never received formal training in social survey, his invocation of the authorial presence was similar to many of his Western contemporary ethnographers who consciously sought to juxtapose the rhetorical device “I” with scientific findings in order to enhance and indeed endorse the authority of their field observations.¹³

Despite this careful juxtaposition of impersonal narrative and first person account in order to sanction the authority and accuracy of the report on Hunan, the report itself was hardly a stand-alone piece but was substantiated by another layer of empirical findings. Just a few months

¹² For examples, see assertive expressions like “I think not” in pp.46-49.

¹³ James Clifford. (1988). *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 29-31.

before the report on Hunan was written, another article entitled as *An Example of the Chinese Tenant-Peasant's Life*, was published.¹⁴ Despite its generic title, the article contains empirical findings collected from one of the five sites in which the report on Hunan was grounded. Unlike the Hunan report that contained a mixture of personal remarks, empirical facts, and theoretical generations, this article laid itself out as a mere presentation of facts bearing a simple and straightforward narrative structure:

Place

Year

Hypothetical scenario

Part I: Expenditure

Part II: Income

Part III: Conclusion

A reminder note that the article was based on an interview with a real person.

Even from the beginning, the paradoxical relationship between specific local knowledge and universal generalization was already evident. Although the narrative began with the citations of place and year as a way to convey a sense of realism, it is also was conditioned on a hypothetical scenario or what the author called the presumed facts [*jiading shishi* 假定事實], reinforcing that this was a prototypical example of the social world, rather than the reality itself. This example, in other words, served to exemplify an entire social class and hence reveal the truth about exploitation. Still, despite its hypothetical nature, the reader was then reminded once again at the end of the article that the entirety of the data cited was based on an interview with a certain real peasant Zhang.

¹⁴ The example being cited here can be found in Mao Zedong. (1994). *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*. New York, M. E. Sharpe, 478-483.

Constituting the bulk the presentation then is a painstaking and presumedly exhaustive list of tedious facts pertaining to the livelihood of the peasant household. Specifically, all facts are put under two categories, expenditure and income. There are eleven items under the former group and four under the latter. The level of detail here is quite striking. The numbers and prices of many inventory items sometimes have four digits after the decimal. This painstaking itemizing and counting of facts, in this sense, provides not only the grammar of scientific discourse, but also a sense of comprehensiveness and reality to which science alludes.

However, all these details and numbers notwithstanding, the survey narrative appears to unfold itself as a simple accounting sheet even though it was supposed to be a documentation of a tenant-peasant's life (*shenhuo* 生活). There is neither the color, nor the smell, nor the emotion that often comes to be associated with the richness and texture of human experience. Nor is there any documentation of culture, ritual, or social relations that would normally be the highlights in an ethnographic study. Nor again are there any chronological events that are inherent in a biography. The only contingencies mentioned are factors such as illness and natural calamity that, however unpredictable, could only accelerate and intensify the predetermined outcome instead of altering it. In short, the selection of facts is dictated by an overarching Marxist framework. The relationships between the so-called tenant-peasant's family and the larger world are completely reduced into that of the economic, and particularly that of the productive. The "life" story of the tenant-peasant becomes nothing but a story of exploitation.¹⁵ Or, if we put this story in the larger context of Mao's investigations, this story is nothing but a plot in the master narrative of the Chinese social revolution.

¹⁵ The conclusion or the "climax" of this story is that there would be an annual deficit of 19.6455 yuan for the family even in the best circumstances.

But significantly enough, despite its overarching conceptual underpinnings, facts here appear to be speaking for themselves. Unlike the report on Hunan, the narrator “I” is made completely invisible. Thus, if the occasional deployment of the first person narrator in the Hunan investigation mentioned previously was a way to authenticate the findings and analysis of the author, the facts here appear to be self-authorizing. The discrepancy in terms of presentation formats between these two investigations, however, is hardly arbitrary. The larger report on Hunan, despite its frequent citations of facts, is after all a set of opinions, social analyses, and policy recommendations. In other words, it is a generalized report that makes claims about the truth, and therefore requires substantiation from the facts. The second investigation, the example of the tenant-peasant’s life, on the contrary, functions like a record even though it is deprived of all local specificities. It is supposed to represent the raw materials or “just the facts” themselves and therefore serves to support the former report. The differences between the two therefore are not simply stylistic, but epistemological. And together they provide a powerful claim about the reality of Chinese society.

The fiction of nationhood

The second example that I would like to introduce is a state-sponsored survey conducted by the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica. While the investigative modality manifested in this survey is similar to the previous example, it served a very different purpose. In Mao’s social investigations, the relationship between the investigator and the investigated was not that of the self and the Other. A sense of cultural homogeneity, in other words, was already embedded in the fiction of society and was certainly further reinforced in the

subsequent generalizations. This survey, in contrast, began with the assumption of heterogeneity. The purpose of the survey itself was to domesticate and homogenize into the nation.

In January 1939, the Social Division of the Central Executive Committee of the ruling Nationalist Party received a complaint from a publisher charging that ethnic groups along the Chinese borders often bore pejorative names that induced discrimination.¹⁶ The timing and nature of this complaint must have touched a nerve of the Nationalist regime. China and Japan had recently entered into a full-scale war; most railways and coastal cities by this time had fallen into the hands of the Japanese and the Nationalist government was forced to retreat to the southwest provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan—a region where most of China’s minorities lived and where previous dynastic regimes often had difficulties projecting their authority. In other words, facing prolonged international conflicts and an exhausting civil war with the Communists, the Nationalist regime desperately sought to consolidate its new base for recuperation. The question of minorities in the surrounding areas thus emerged as pressing political and administrative concern.

Immediately after the complaint was filed, the Nationalist Party commissioned the Institute of History and Philology to investigate and rectify those names at issues in order to avoid “misunderstandings.” The pejorative names in question were those Chinese characters that bore the so-called “insect-beast-signifying radicals.” For centuries, Chinese culture had posited a cosmological order within which Han Chinese cultural elites occupied the highest position in the civilizational hierarchy. Non-Han minorities, on the contrary, were relegated to the status of barbaric or uncivilized. This sinocentric worldview was especially noticeable in the names ascribed to non-Han ethnic groups. Frequently, these ethnic groups were given names with insect

¹⁶ See Ruy Yinfu. (1941). "Xinan shaoshymizu chongshou pianpang mingming gai lue (On the Origin of the Tribal Names in Southwestern China with Insect-and-Beast-Radical Characters)." *Renleixue jikan* 2: 125-169.

(), dog (), dog-and-cattle (), dog-and-horse (), and sheep radicals () as ways of signifying their alleged barbaric nature or inhuman origins. Such insect-and-beast signifying radicals were most commonly, albeit not exclusively, used to name the ethnic groups along the southwestern borders because of their high concentration in that region.

At first glance, this survey revealed a profound testimony of the symbiotic relationship between the nation and secular science. As mentioned earlier, the Institute had defined itself as modern research institution that favored scientific survey rather than traditional scholarship. Thus, accordingly, the Institute was supposed to use its scientific expertise to enlist facts to *falsify* and *rectify* the existing pejorative naming practice. A closer examination of the investigative practice, however, disclosed that traditional methods of textual investigation remained crucial in the production of the knowledge of nationhood. Even from the outset, the study already claimed that it had combined both the methods of fieldwork and textual studies, and hence underscored both the significance of modern survey and the complementary role of traditional textual studies. But in actuality, much of the so-called field research, like that I discussed above, was primarily text-centered. For the researchers, very little non-textual materials collected previously seemed to be relevant for this study. Instead, the study marshaled an impressive amount of ancient and recent literature such as travel writings, local gazetteers, and even ancient canonical texts to trace the genealogies of various ethnic tribal names. It also cited Western anthropological works to introduce a comparative edge on several occasions.¹⁷ After an exhaustive survey of all the relevant historical literature, the Institute compiled a collection of several dozen historical tribal names that bore derogatory radicals.

¹⁷ The main reason to use Western anthropological works was to equate the customs and totemic beliefs of the minority groups under consideration to those that had been examined by Western anthropologists elsewhere. The study suggested that customs and totemic beliefs were some of the reasons why certain derogatory names were given to the minorities. See *Ibid.*, 130.

Having collected the pejorative names, the next step was to identify, categorize, and falsify them. Through detailed philological and etymological comparisons, researchers identified the majority of these names as variations or metamorphoses of a relatively smaller group of signifiers. Also, based on their knowledge acquired in the field previously, researchers discovered that many of the ethnic groups signified by these pejorative names had already ceased to exist, or in some cases, their existence was nothing but mythical. All in all, only a few dozen tribal names were singled out as corresponding to existing minority groups that could not be further combined or reduced into one another.¹⁸ These names were subsequently categorized according to the types of animals as signified by the radicals. This classification, however, was merely a philological interest rather than an endorsement of any biological significance as implied by these animal signifiers, and hence again indicated the philological nature of the study.

Alongside with the process of identification and classification was the anxious attempt to falsify these pejorative names. While it was relatively easy to falsify those names that were redundant or those that had no real corresponding groups, the falsity of the remaining sixty-six pejorative names could hardly be justified on any philological or scientific grounds since the Chinese disdain for non-Han groups was not only prevalent in historical literature but was also unmistakably central to the discursive construction of Chinese civilization. The historicity of these pejorative names hence posed a fundamental challenge to the modern state. That is, while the state attempted to distance itself from the derogatory cultural practice of the imperial past, it also had to lay claim to historical and cultural continuity to forge a sense of nationhood. Thus, it was in the state's interests to adopt an apologetic position toward the cultural heritage that it had acquired while at the same time it attempted to vindicate the very same tradition that it claimed to inherit. The final report submitted by the Institute on the minority naming problem was clearly

¹⁸ The final report also acknowledged that these findings were inconclusive and required further investigation.

an attempt to walk this thin line. It explained that the derogation and the misconception of the manners, customs, and totemic beliefs of the non-Han were the main causes of this derogatory naming practice. In short, by explaining the problem, the problem was indeed being explained away. That is, even acknowledging the Han cultural prejudice against the minorities, researchers simultaneously downplayed it only as merely misunderstanding.

After falsifying all the pejorative names, researchers began to rectify them. However, the actual conversion of the existing insect-and-beast signifying names was anything but simple and the so-called rectification, like the process of falsification, was far from straightforward. To begin with, unlike one popular neo-Confucian school of thought that advocated the rectification of names—i.e., to restore the truthful correspondence between the signifier and the signified—as a way to restore the rightful social and political order, the animal signifiers as a longstanding linguistic convention were neither right nor wrong from the perspective of modern science. Rather, they only appeared to be “politically incorrect” under the moral imperative of the nation and hence demanded to be “corrected” or “rectified” (*gaiding* 改訂) by eliminating all the radicals in question. The immediate solution, the Institute proposed, was to replace all these animal signifying radicals with a human radical “人”, which was often used to signify humanity and civility. Obviously, this was not really a novel approach. Intellectuals and some local government officials had been using this method to address non-Han minorities for some years. The problem was that there had not been any universal consistency. As early as 1933, for instance, the Guangxi Province had been using “人”, a radical that signified human-in-motion or just movement in general, to replace all animal signifying radicals in its provincial yearbooks. In fact, even after receiving the recommendation from the Academia Sinica, the Ministry of Education insisted on the adoption of the human-in-motion radical as the national standard. Fu

Sinian, the director of the Institute, however, reasoned that the human radical was more appropriate than the human-in-motion radical on this occasion because of its strong symbolic connotation of a standing human being. Eventually, the academic expertise of the Institute was honored.¹⁹

The choice of the radical, however, was not the only problem. To make the matter even more complicated, simply replacing the insect-and-beast radicals with the human radical would mostly result in characters that did not previously exist. New characters, in other words, had to be invented. Even in the few occasions where the proposed characters could be found in classical texts, pronunciations of these archaic words were often unknown. Either way, new pronunciations had to be invented to accompany the conversion. In most instances, the Institute recommended that pronunciation of the new character should just follow that of the remaining part of the character, a practice that is commonly used in Chinese when encountering archaic or unknown characters.

In September 1940, just a month after the Institute's final report and recommendation on the matter of minority names was submitted, the government issued a decree banning any further use of pejorative names to depict ethnic minorities, emphasizing that these "compatriots" (*tongbao* 同胞) from the border regions must be addressed according to their locales.²⁰

Interestingly, the decree permitted the maintenance of the original categorical distinctions for "the convenience of historical and scientific research" and maintained that the "rectified" names

¹⁹ Not all "insect-and-beast" radicals were replaced by the human radical. In some cases, no human radicals were added back after the derogatory radicals were dropped.

²⁰ The naming issue was indeed so touchy and urgent that even before the commissioned study was completed, the Nationalists had already issued a decree stating that the minority population should be named according to their places of origin rather than their conventional insect-and-beast signifying names. But it was only after the Institute completed its survey, that the regime acquired a scientific basis to institute its political intervention.

should be used for this purpose in order to “eliminate group boundaries and solidify the entire Chinese race (*zhonghua minzu* 中華民族).”²¹

Authorship and authority

The third example that I am using here is very different from the previous two. Instead of analyzing the survey reports, here I examine the very processes in which surveys were conducted. This example, nonetheless, also came from the Institute of History and Philology. The Institute, from the outset, was set up to conduct survey-based research, an empirically driven mode of knowledge-production and representation that was believed to transcend cultural and national boundaries. This conscious attempt to distance their own practice from traditional scholarship was exemplified in a remark made by its founder Fu Sinian. “I am not a literati,” Fu once wrote, “but only someone who attempts to find things.”²² The Institute’s rejection of traditional “Neo-Confucian” scholarship, moreover, can also be seen in its hiring practice as well as its ongoing debate with other contending knowledge projects such as the National Studies Movement.²³

Despite these efforts, the Institute however found that many of its researchers continued to conduct research in the old-fashioned way. The tension between the two competing approaches was, for instance, revealed in the correspondence between Fu Sinian and his colleague Li Guangming who led a team of investigators to conduct a minority survey in the southwest province of Sichuan between 1928-1929. Although Li’s mission was approved by Fu, his working style turned out to be more like that of a traditional scholar. For example, Fu was

²¹ See Ruey Yinfu (1941), 147.

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²³ See Chapter 2 of my dissertation.

annoyed by the fact that Li's reports were very infrequent and often read like travel diaries. In his field reports, Li frequently discussed local politics and he moved from one topic to another without particular focus. To make the matter worse, Li was very disorganized and his team apparently went considerably over budget. On February 1929, half a year after Li had left for the field, Fu finally wrote a lengthy complaint letter to Li saying that he had only written twice since he left. "Of all the operations that we are having, none would just demand money without submitting reports and ignore the budget like yours," Fu wrote. He also gave Li a list of painstaking advice:

(1) avoid relying on others and endure the suffering yourself; (2) buy more artifacts and textual materials and eliminate unnecessary expenses; (3) avoid becoming intrigued by local politics; (4) learn a minority language and record its rough grammatical pattern; (5) submit reports frequently; (6) pay close attention to the communal life rather than the floating political events; (7) do not just wander around; the acquired knowledge has to be systematic; (8) take more photos; (9) do not establish any liaison in the Chengdu [the provincial capital] area.²⁴

This checklist, in many ways, is as revealing as one could get in terms of illustrating the drastic differences between the old and the new methods of research. Fu expected that the production of knowledge involved the systematic gathering of information. This required the fieldworker to collect both textual and non-textual materials. The fieldworker, for his part, had to keep himself aloof from local political affairs in order to maintain neutrality and hence the integrity of the collected information. At the same time, he still had to engage the local community and acquire local knowledge such as learning the language. He also had to be cool-minded and pay attention to details, and more importantly, endure constant suffering. Furthermore, the new research method required teamwork and collaboration among fieldworkers and researchers both in the field and at home. Field reports therefore had to be submitted to the

²⁴ I have retained the original order of the list for it seems that Fu was jotting down his points with some premeditation regarding their priority. See Fu Sinian. (1929). Fu Sinian to Li Guangming. Taipei, Taiwan, Institute of History and Philology Archives, Academia Sinica. IA 20-10.

Institute for evaluation frequently. Inevitably, this also presupposed pre-field planning and execution of the plan in the field accordingly. In fact, a typical research proposal prepared for such purpose always involved extensive discussion on the objectives and definition of the project, personnel, methodologies, itineraries, instruments, and budget.

In this sense, Li had nearly violated most of the ideal protocols that Fu was envisioning. Nevertheless, upon receiving Fu's criticism, he tried hard to make them up. Among other things, he began to submit frequent field reports and tried to address some of the specific concerns that Fu had voiced.²⁵ He even detailed how different sections of their exploration could be turned into different articles and books. Fu, however, was not particularly impressed by the superficiality of his travelogue-style narrative report. Meanwhile, in another report written a few months after Fu's initial complaint, Li mentioned that he had not only purchased a lot of relevant materials, but even laid out his survey methodology. Listed according to the order of reliability, he told Fu that their methods of information gathering had been threefold, namely based upon eye-witness account by fieldworkers, information obtained from either "barbarian" (*fanren* 番人) or other knowledgeable informants, and unverifiable hearsay. "If you still think we are 'appreciating flowers from a running horse,'" Li wrote quite desperately, "we would have nothing else to say."²⁶ Perhaps, as a last-ditch effort to show that he had at least tried and indeed suffered greatly in the field, Li confessed in the report:

My body has been very weak and I already got sick three times. I am really unsuitable to be a member of a team that travels into the wilderness and the barbaric territory. Moreover, my will is weak; I am sentimental and emotional.

²⁵ Li's attempt to adopt some of Fu's suggestions, such as the use of photos, could be found in the final survey report. See Li, Guangming and Wang Guanghui (1929). *Chuankang minsu diaocha baogao* (Report on the Folklore Survey of Sichuan and Xikang Provinces). Taipei, Taiwan, Institute of History and Philology Archives, Academia Sinica. IA1a.

²⁶ See Li Guangming. (1929). Li Guangming to Fu Sinian. Taipei, Taiwan, Institute of History and Philology Archives, Academia Sinica. IA 20-20.

The suffering that I have endured during the past year has been the worst in my life!²⁷

A few days later, he wrote to Fu again: “Although I have learned a lot, the biggest benefit has been that I have discovered a lot of my shortcomings. That is, as you have pointed out, ‘practicality, details, preparation, and independence’ have been missing from my research.”²⁸

This type of confessional writing was hardly unique to the investigators of the Institute of History of Philology but appeared to be quite common among fieldworkers of various types of survey. In numerous cadastral surveys conducted by the Institute of Land Administration, for example, researchers frequently juxtaposed their empirical findings about land values, local customs, population statistics, and the like with their very personal and subjective feelings. Expressions such as “It is too hot to fall into sleep tonight” and “I was waken up by the rain,” among many others, can be found practically everywhere in their fieldnotes as if hardship and sufferings, willingness to disclose one’s emotion, and the truthfulness of the empirical findings were inseparable.²⁹ It was through their suffering in the field that, the investigators were purified and redeemed, and hence became capable observers of the truth.

Concluding remarks

It is often assumed that science is an objective endeavor in which the intervention of the self must be removed. And it was in part under this claim about science that scientific knowledge appears to be absent in indigenous Chinese scholarship. Early twentieth century Chinese

²⁷ See Ibid.

²⁸ See Li Guangming. (1929). Li Guangming to Fu Sinian. Taipei, Taiwan, Institute of History and Philology Archives, Academia Sinica. IA 20-21.

²⁹ See Lin Dinggu. (1977). *Minguo ershiniandai Zhongguo dalu tudi wenti ziliao--dian sheng diaocha shixi* (Documents on Land Problems in Mainland China during the 1930s: Fieldwork Diary of Surveys in Yunnan Province). Taipei, Chengwen chuban youxian gongsi. See further discussion in Chapter 3.

practitioners of social science too seemed to subscribe to this dichotomized opposition between the scientific/modern West and non-scientific/traditional China. For many Chinese social scientists, social survey research did not simply represent the arrival of the modern, but it was the very technique that could understand and transform, in an objective and systematic manner, the “traditional” China that was believed to be ridden with political corruption, superstition, and irrationality. Social survey, in short, was one of the central mechanisms that produced the modern-tradition demarcation.

Inherited from the Enlightenment belief and confidence in truth, objective science, and human capacity, the progressive impulse in social scientific thinking postulated both the knowability of the independent reality of social phenomena as well as the cognitive capability of human beings to access that reality. This understanding of science and human cognition is particularly exemplified in the idea of the knower, as oppose to the artificer. The knower is often seen as an objective or ‘selfless’ man without substance and content, or a man that is nothing more than an instrument or a mirror.³⁰ Such as an understanding the knower and the artificer seems to entail a transformation in the terms of authorship and authority in scientific knowledge-production that, even according to Foucault, was characteristic of the West:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a totally new conception was developed when scientific texts were accepted on the own merits and positioned with in an anonymous and coherent conceptual system of established truths and methods of verification. Authentication no longer required reference to the individual who had produced them; the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness...

On the rhetoric level, there is little question that Chinese social scientists believed that the collective agency of Chinese social investigators was like that of the knower. For them, the

³⁰ David Hollinger. (1994). *The Knower and the Artificer, with Postscript 1993. Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, 1870-1930*. D. Ross. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press: 31-32.

trained social investigator was like a selfless individual who could have unmediated access to the truth. This tendency is quite evident in the published survey reports that I have mentioned above. However, a closer look at the actual processes of producing these surveys, as I did in the last example, suggests that in one form or another, the self was far from just being a mirror. In short, despite attempts to distance the production and presentation of scientific knowledge from the inspired efforts of the particular individual, the mediation of the knowing subject was immanent in the production of social scientific knowledge. My suggestion, of course, is not that Chinese social investigators too had failed grasp the “essence” of science, or that “true” science had never develop even in early twentieth century China. On the contrary, I suggest that, as Johannes Fabian put it, “facticity itself, the cornerstone of scientific thought, is autobiographic” and hence constitutes the root of the problem of objectivity and subjectivity.³¹ The Chinese case, in this sense, offers us yet another piece of evidence that we should, as the recent scholarships in social study of science have proposed, albeit somewhat belated, interrogate the very processes in which objectivity and subjectivity as well as other binary oppositions were constructed.³²

³¹ Johannes Fabian. (1983). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York, Columbia University Press, 89.

³² For examples, see Bruno Latour. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press. Steven Shapin. (1994). *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (1985). *Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.