

## Decolonizing Canons

### *A Conversation with Chinese Sociologists*<sup>1</sup>

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As I recall, the first time I met David Fasenfest was in 1976 when I took up a position at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in anticipation of being denied tenure at Berkeley. All I remember of our meeting was David turning me upside down. When I think of David, I always think of him turning things upside down, and that indeed is what he has done with *Critical Sociology*. Louis Althusser once said in regard to Marx's inversion of Hegelian philosophy – a person on his head is the same person when they are walking on their feet; it is a change in perspective but following the same problematic. Over the last 25 years, David has changed perspectives while holding on to the Marxist problematic of the old *Insurgent Sociologist*. He has molded *Critical Sociology* to the new post-1980s context of a more professionalized sociology by encouraging new critical stances, whether it be feminism, environmental justice, critical race theory or trans studies. With the help of trusted allies, David not only brought *Critical Sociology* back from the brink of collapse but turned it into a thriving journal with 8 issues a year. His genius was to give *Critical Sociology* professional recognition without sacrificing radical imagination, without losing sight of visions embedded in social movements, without sidelining the fundamental problems of our neoliberal age. He has created a safe and supportive space for challenging currents of the mainstream. There's been a no more important contribution to the marriage of Marxism and sociology. Throughout he has had a keen eye for the global, and insisted on the unusual recognition that US sociology is not the only sociology in the world. I know he has a special interest in China which is why I offer this trans-continental conversation with Chinese sociologists as a small appreciation of his tireless devotion to a progressive agenda.

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Decolonization is spreading across US academia like a wildfire. Every university has to examine its past for collaboration with white supremacy, whether the university was constructed on land expropriated from indigenous people or from the proceeds of slavery, whether it consecrated propagators of racism in statues, portraits, or in the names of buildings. There is a rising chorus demanding reparations for past oppression through the redistribution of material and intellectual endowments. Within academic departments there is a call for decolonizing syllabi and curricula, and specifically decolonizing canons.

History has been at the heart of the decolonization movement. A debate was fueled by the 1619 Project that originated in the pages of the *New York Times*, tracing the nation's history to the beginning of slavery rather than the declaration of independence. Historians were thrust into the public sphere, defending or disputing claims about the legacies of slavery. Outraged by this dark history, US President Trump created the 1776 Commission to give a rosier view as the basis of 'patriotic education.' The Commission was terminated by President Biden but the political struggle over 'decolonization' continues in the banning of 'critical race theory' from schools, including documents from the 1619 project.

Disciplines have been compelled to examine their own history. While anthropologists have been in the business of 'decolonizing' for half a century, recognizing their complicity with colonialism and its dehumanizing views of the colonized, those social sciences with a more scientific pedigree, such as economics, have been slower to examine their own history. Disciplines that are rooted in claims about the universality of Western thought, such as philosophy or political theory, have also been reluctant to disinter their past but they, too, have not been unaffected. The decolonization movement peters out as one moves from the social sciences and humanities to the natural sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics – though even here there is increased sensitivity to the limited diversity of its scholars and students.

Sociology has not escaped critical self-examination. From the beginning sociology has either endorsed or ignored the wider context of the 19th century, especially the context of Empire. As the discipline has come to focus on social inequalities, it has had to become ever more self-conscious about the inequalities it has sustained or overlooked. Inevitably, the debate swirls around the relevance of the canonical figures that have conventionally defined the foundations of our discipline. Marx, Weber and Durkheim were white European men whose writings straddled the nineteenth and early twentieth century, marginalizing questions of race and gender. Arising within an imperial order

they left too much unproblematized. A battle rages over what to do with these canonical figures.

## 1 Strategies of Dealing with the Canon

To decolonize, then, is to recognize, critique and expunge the presence of colonial presuppositions in canonical texts, exposing flawed universalistic claims that are rooted in metropolitan experiences, claims that overlook patterns of colonial domination, the relations between center and periphery. There are, I believe, four contending responses to the decolonization movement: restoration, rejection, revolution and reconstruction.

*Restoration* still holds a powerful place, not only in the United States, as many continue to make Marx, Weber and Durkheim the reference point and foundation of sociology. Having been schooled in the works of these figures, having taught them for years, many sociologists are invested in their continuity. But there's more to their persistence than inertia. They emerged with civil society in the second half of the 19th century, taking a stand against the overreach of the state and the market. As we return to the burgeoning economic inequalities of the late nineteenth century and recognize that the period from World War I to the 1970s was a progressive blip that has been fast disappearing (Piketty 2014); as we see the sprouting of authoritarian regimes across the globe; as we continue to face the renewal and deepening of marketization of labor, nature, money and knowledge; as we enthusiastically participate in the commodification of daily life through digitalization, social media, thereby aiding and abetting surveillance and control; in short, as markets and states encroach on an autonomous civil society so the canon, far from being irrelevant, assume ever greater significance as a dam as well as an inspiration for counter-movement. In this sense, sociology is inherently an anti-colonial movement, opposing the colonization of civil society by state and market (Polanyi 1944; Habermas 1985)

Marx, Weber and Durkheim don't have a monopoly on elevating the importance of civil society and the restorationists are ready to recognize others who have always hovered on the periphery of the canon – Simmel, Mead, Freud – and today courses on classical theory include feminists such as Harriet Martineau or scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois who, as we will see, can be appropriated in different ways. These concessions are how the restorationists accommodate to the pressing demands of those who want to abolish the canon.

So let me turn next to *rejecting* the canon – a move that comes along two opposed paths. On the one hand, there are postcolonial theorists who center

the importance of Empire as the context within which sociology emerged, but also its entanglement with race and gender. So, the canon is subject to critique for failing to adequately address that context, but they also consider the very idea of a canon, associated with some key writers, as problematic. Any foundational thinking is exclusionary, and decolonization must be inclusionary. Julian Go (2016), for example, advocates what he calls a perspectival realism which embraces a multiplicity of perspectives that are not identified by the race or gender of authors but by the standpoint they adopt. Epistemic justice replaces epistemic rigor. There are no criteria for the soundness of theories built on competing perspectives. It does not mean that the canonical thinkers are swept aside; they are just brought down from their pedestal. Let a hundred flowers bloom.

The postcolonial critique is one avenue to rejecting the canon, the other avenue is followed by scientists who would embrace Alfred North Whitehead's (1916) dictum: 'A science that hesitates to forget its founders is lost.' These positivists dismiss Marx, Weber and Durkheim not because of their white masculine Eurocentrism but due to their antiquated methodologies and outmoded theories. These figures may be of historical interest, but of no relevance to the contemporary practice of sociology that has eclipsed its origins. These scientists who model sociology after the natural sciences, now given a boost by the advent of big data, have a powerful influence within the discipline. Though otherwise bitter enemies, the postcolonialists and the positivists are enjoined in their rejection of the canon.

But let me turn to a third response to the canon, what I call the *revolutionary* response. Here the idea is to replace the old canon with a new canon. There have been many candidates but, at this moment, none match the credentials of W.E.B. Du Bois – the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard in 1895 – a historian, a philosopher and sociologist who wrote professional articles, lyrical essays, poetry, novels, and dramas. He was an academic, but also a public figure of global renown, who played a leading part in civil rights and Pan-Africanist movements and was a socialist and peace activist. Aldon Morris in his *The Scholar Denied* (2015) anointed Du Bois as the true but unrecognized founder of US sociology – true because the Atlanta School founded by Du Bois ante-dated the Chicago by 20 years, unrecognized because of the racism within our discipline. No less important, his last 50 years of writing not only centered race and class but also imperialism. Following the lead of Morris, Jose Itzigsohn and Karida Brown (2020) have advanced a Du Boisian sociology under the rubric of a 'racialized modernity'. Here the project is to clear the decks and start afresh by rooting sociology in the oeuvre of Du Bois.

I consider such a revolutionary move to be premature. We are in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Even if we grant that Marx, Weber and Durkheim had limited perspectives on questions of race and gender, of colonialism and imperialism, they still have redeeming importance not only as a political stand against markets and states but, as Arthur Stinchcombe (1982) once wrote, as exemplars of scientific research, as developing an understanding of complexity to replace clichés, as a source of puzzles and hypotheses for empirical work. Foundational figures are bound to have blindnesses to issues that subsequently become salient – the test of their resilience lies in how they can adapt to new challenges, how they can be reconstructed to meet the exigencies of the present. A discipline, like a science, has foundational assumptions out of which develop research programs that are continually reconstructed to accommodate and absorb both internal contradictions and external anomalies. This is the *reconstructionist* position that I will defend and elaborate here.

## 2 A Theory of the Canon

Before reconstructing the canon we need a theory of the canon. I believe it is defined by four attributes: it is foundational, historical, geographical and relational. I'll tackle each in turn as it applies to sociology.

### 2.1 *The Canon Is Foundational*

What are the foundational principles that underlie the canon of yesterday, principles shared by Marx, Weber and Durkheim. I tentatively propose four. First, they possess a theory of history and, thus, provide a prognosis of the future. Second, they possess moral foundations that offer a distinctive perspective on the world and its possibilities. Third, they possess original methodologies that allow sociologists to grasp the world in unique ways, illustrated in exemplary studies. Fourth, they possess a conceptual framework that defines sociology's object – society – together with theories of its reproduction and transformation. I believe that these principles continue to inform the sociology of today. Even if the connection is not always visible or direct, the substantive themes we pursue in our inter-connected sub-disciplines can be traced to the way canonical theorists enact foundational principles.

But why might Marx, Weber and Durkheim be regarded as foundational? Why should we rely on figures that were writing over a century ago? First, they were living through and reflecting on a period when capitalism, the world in which we live today, became hegemonic, that is when finally, the old (feudal) order was extinguished and the seeds of a possible new (socialist) order could

not yet be successfully sown. As I have already stated, in many ways we are returning to that early period. Second, they each were originating a new field of inquiry and as such they had to justify their existence against hostility of competing disciplines, they had to spell out philosophical and scientific principles that have been easily lost in a century of professionalization and specialization. Third, Marx, Weber and Durkheim give sociology a moral compass as well as scientific foundations. The standpoint of these writers opposed the alienating, commodifying, exploitative, exclusivist tendencies of market and state, and, in different combinations, defended ideals of freedom, equality, solidarity.

### 2.2 *The Canon Is Historical*

These foundational principles are not fixed. They change over time. The canon has a history. It possesses not only a history but also a prehistory of scattered empirical projects without any obvious unifying core. The canon was first established by Talcott Parsons' (1937) theory of voluntaristic action that was based on a serendipitous convergence in the writings of Marshall, Pareto, Weber and Durkheim. These became canonical figures, but only for a short time as Parsons himself dropped Marshall and Pareto as he developed structural functionalism and its associated modernization theory. Durkheim and Weber were welded together to create new foundations built on the premise of an underlying value consensus and a set of four functions that all societies have to perform. The premises of structural functionalism came under heavy fire during the 1960s, with the emergent struggles not just in the United States but across the world. Marxism, feminism and critical race theory dislodged and then ended the reign of structural functionalism. A new canon was created – but one based on contention rather than harmony. Durkheim and Weber were not cast out but reread in competition with one another and with Marx, a figure Parsons had dismissed on the politically motivated and dubious claim that his ideas were limited to the 19th century.

### 2.3 *The Canon Is Geographical*

If the canon is historical, i.e., it changes over time, then we have also to consider whether it is geographical, whether it changes with positions in a global order. On the one hand, there are those who consider the canon as 'Western' or 'Northern' and thus largely irrelevant for the rest of the world. They may subscribe to the development of an 'indigenous' sociology, unsullied by the Western canon. In an important elaboration of this perspective, Raewyn Connell (2007) argues for 'Southern Theory' demarcated from Northern Theory, by reflecting the specific conditions in the global south. She compiles a list of scholars, some

self-proclaimed sociologists but most not, who have been ignored by Northern academics. An important corrective to the narrowness of Northern sociology to be sure, nonetheless the theorists she assembles spent much of their time in the North, often educated in the North, and certainly engaging Northern theory, thereby problematizing the bifurcation Connell advocates.

On the other hand, we can speak of a global field of sociology within which Western sociology, particularly from the US but also from Western Europe, is hegemonic but not to the exclusion of alternative sociologies, wrestling for a place within the global field, defining their own national sociologies. In this view the struggle is not between 'indigenous' and 'dominant sociologies,' between 'Southern Theory' and 'Northern Theory' but takes place on the terrain of the dominant sociologies. In other words, the point is not to reject the canon, but to reinterpret it for specific contexts, even to the point of 'provincializing' the Northern canon by rooting it in its own political and economic context (Chakrabarty 2000). In this way different national sociologies will draw on different selections from Weber, Durkheim and Marx, leading to different interpretations of their works, leading to different reconstructions of the canon.

#### 2.4 *The Canon Is Relational*

The canon is not only foundational, historical, and geographical but the canon is also relational. Reconstructing the canon is not simply a matter of adding another theorist. The canon is not additive; it is composed of relations among its constituent theories. Thus, Talcott Parsons' vision of the canon was based on the derivation of principles based on the *convergence* of theorists, making up a common theoretical framework, rooted in a specific reading of Durkheim and Weber and a deliberate exclusion of Marx. However, when Marx was recalled, it was not to dissolve Durkheim and Weber but to put them into a conversation with Marx. This involved new readings of Durkheim and Weber. Instead of reading Durkheim through the collective consciousness, we began to read him through the abnormal forms of the division of labor. Out of the ashes of a conservative Durkheim arose a radical Durkheim that projected a socialist future, a guild socialism centered on occupational groups. Instead of reading Weber through his different types of action and the centrality of values, we began to see him as a theorist of domination and the state. Weber's history became the realization of rationalization – a distinctive combination of domination and efficiency. The discipline was no longer seen as unitary; it became an arena of competing research programs. The foundational principles of the canon were the basis of divergence rather than convergence.

Parsons' idea of a singular research program that would define sociology from here on out, and indeed in his wildest imagination define the social sciences, had a totalitarian feel to it. In a pluralist society, such a totalizing vision of sociology could not last for long. Its successor has been a rowdy discipline of contesting visions, with no single one dominant, which, ironically, has been more stable than the singular framework of its predecessor. Still, it is coming under severe bombardment from the decolonization movement, and W.E.B. Du Bois is the Trojan horse of a reconstructed canon.

### 3 Reconstructing the Canon with the Entry of W.E.B. Du Bois

The canon is not static, but moves with the times. Marx and Engels appeared in the 1970s in response to social movements that problematized the assumptions of value consensus, harmony, end of ideology, modernization theory. It did not involve casting aside Weber and Durkheim, but rereading them under the influence of Marx and Engels. Today we are living through social movements – not only in the US – that draw attention to racial inequalities and racial injustices as well as global challenges, such as climate change, pandemics, financial crises. W.E.B. Du Bois is a major contender for canonization as a social theorist largely because his life and theory was so heavily influenced by his race. But Du Bois was much more than a 'race man'; he was a Pan Africanist, a socialist, a peace activist; he was much more than a sociologist, trained as a historian and philosopher; he was more than an academic, being a poet, a dramatist and a novelist. Canonizing Du Bois by bringing him into a conversation with Durkheim, Weber and Marx will transform sociology in a dramatic fashion. Let me sketch what those conversations might look like and with what consequences for sociology.

#### 3.1 *Durkheim and Du Bois*

Aldon Morris (2015) focuses on the early Du Bois of *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996[1899]) and the Atlanta School – this is Du Bois aspiring to be a professional sociologist, conducting meticulous community studies, historically situated empirical research of the sort he learned from Gustav Schmoller, one of his teachers at the University of Berlin. This is the Durkheimian Du Bois not just in method but also in embryonic theory. Du Bois presents the seventh ward of Philadelphia, densely populated by African Americans, as a scene of urban pathologies reminiscent of Durkheim's forced and anomic divisions of labor, capturing the disorganization resulting from migration and discrimination. Du Bois makes a Durkheimian moral appeal, urging whites to recognize



the black upper crust. Du Bois claims that the black 'talented tenth,' as distinct from the submerged tenth, share a common civilizational consciousness with white elites. In forging his sociology of stratification Du Bois, like Durkheim, places a lot of weight on education as a progressive force in history, in particular the progress of African Americans.

In addition to *The Philadelphia Negro* sociology has embraced Du Bois's moving essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), especially the notion of 'double consciousness' – how African Americans living within the veil nonetheless are forced to see themselves through the eyes of their white oppressors. Karen Fields (2002) has drawn parallels between Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Experience* and the *Souls of Black Folk*, arguing that both Du Bois and Durkheim experienced the world as the discriminated other – the one an African American and the other a Jew. Too often, this is where sociology's engagement with Du Bois has ceased, overlooking the next 60 years of his prolific career.

Concerned with the violent racism deployed against African Americans, despairing of Booker T. Washington's compromise with white elites, finding it difficult to accumulate research resources but also losing confidence in the liberatory effects of science, and more generally his failure to convince whites that African Americans are humans, Du Bois leaves Atlanta University in 1910. He turns to politics, cofounding the famous civil rights organization (the NAACP) and becomes the editor of its magazine, *The Crisis* – a position he will hold for the next 24 years. In 1909 Du Bois (1996 [1909]) pens a biography of the militant abolitionist John Brown – an endorsement of the failed insurrection against slavery at Harpers Ferry, a dress rehearsal for the American Civil War. Du Bois' message in the celebration of John Brown is that the cost of liberation will be high but not as high as the price of repression. This is a new Du Bois, one that recognizes that African Americans cannot rely on others for their emancipation, but they will have to emancipate themselves.

### 3.2 *Weber and Du Bois*

We now come to Du Bois's implicit critique of Weber in *Darkwater* (1999[1920]). This collection of literary sociology opens with the famous essay, 'The Souls of White Folk' – a deliberate counterpoint to the *Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois has given up persuading white folk that African Americans are *human* and instead demonstrates to African Americans that white folk are *inhuman*, displayed in the brutality of World War I – a struggle between European nations for the control and exploitation of Africa. If Western civilization is superior, he argues, then it is because of violent appropriations from the rest of the world – appropriation of human beings, artistic treasures, raw materials and ideas. Du Bois'

history of the West is so different from Weber's account of rationalization and its religious origins. For Weber, violence may be important in the rise of merchant capitalism but this is firmly demarcated from the reproduction and expansion of modern capitalism that is based on formally free labor, accounting, separation of home and work, a legal system and the application of science. For Du Bois the violence of capitalism, and particularly racial violence, never ceases.

The essays in *Darkwater* insist that the solution to humanity's problems lies with socialism, conceived of as the public ownership of the means of production, participatory democracy and the equalization of wealth. His essays on 'The Ruling of Men,' 'The Damnation of Women,' and 'Of Work and Wealth' all point to the socialist transcendence of capitalism, but only if the race problem is solved first. He criticizes the professed socialists of his time for not taking the race problem seriously. They will never achieve an alternative egalitarian world on the backs of the majority of the world's population – 'the darker races'. Max Weber was even more skeptical of the promises of socialism – freedom, equality and democracy. For Weber socialism is neither feasible nor viable. Any attempt to bring about socialism will only bring about the opposite, the intensification of rationalization and bureaucracy, the diminution of freedom and democracy. In his view socialism would become the dictatorship of officials not the democratic rule of workers. Du Bois and Weber both question the possibility of socialism, but where the one embraces socialism the other dismisses it.

### 3.3 *Marx and Du Bois*

*Darkwater* represents Du Bois as a utopian socialist. He projects a vision of socialism but has no way of realizing it other than through a voluntaristic act by a unified working class. How that could come to pass is unclear. Not only is there no theory of class formation, Du Bois has no theory of the dynamics of capitalism that will lead in the direction of socialism. This will have to wait for his Marxist moment. Although Du Bois had spent time in meetings of the Social Democratic Party while a student in Germany, 1892–94, and although he imbibed a commitment to the state-led socialism of his professors at the University of Berlin, he never seemed to have taken the writings of Marx, let alone Marxists, seriously. It was only after his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1926 that Du Bois plunged into *Capital*, *The Communist Manifesto* and Marx's writings on the American Civil War. This led to Du Bois' intellectual transformation in the 1930s that would inspire his masterpiece *Black Reconstruction in America* (1998[1935]). So opposed to the mainstream historiography, it would take historians another 30 years to catch up with Du Bois' account.

The period of Reconstruction (1865–1877) that followed the Civil War (1861–65) had always been pictured by historians as well as in the (white) popular imagination as an unmitigated disaster. The emancipation of African Americans from slavery could only lead to corruption and chaos. Du Bois took a courageous stance against this conventional wisdom. In an article in the *American Historical Review* Du Bois (1910) had already pointed to the benefits of the Reconstruction after the Civil War – the extension of the franchise led African Americans to become major figures in public and political life and to progressive legislation including the expansion of education for all. In *The Gift of Black Folk* (1925) Du Bois wrote of the contribution of African American fugitives from the plantations to the Northern Armies. These claims would reappear in *Black Reconstruction in America* but within an entirely novel theoretical framework.

*Black Reconstruction* opens with a Marxian theory of the origins of the civil war. The rising demand for cotton from the largely English textile manufacturers put pressure on slavery to move into new lands and to organize the regeneration of a slave population – an expansion that threatened the ongoing capitalism of the North. That was the provocation of the Civil War, but its prosecution, in the final analysis depended upon a significant proportion of the enslaved population undertaking what Du Bois calls a General Strike, leading them to enlist with the Northern Armies and turning the war in their favor. In recognition of the significance of the African American contribution Lincoln announces the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 which anticipates the period of Reconstruction after the War. Under Reconstruction Du Bois examines, state by state, the development of an inter-racial democracy – that he also calls an abolition democracy – and how capitalism itself can create the possibility for transcending the racial order. Progress was halted and then reversed when Northern capital, having conquered slavery, lost interest in advancing the interests of African Americans in the South, instigating a withdrawal of Northern troops. Thereafter, the South was handed back to the erstwhile planter class who set about establishing the racial order of Jim Crow, drawing white workers to the side of white capital through the creation of the ‘public and psychological’ wages of whiteness. Throughout the treatise Du Bois undertakes a class analysis of the forces at work in undermining and then reimposing a racial order. Du Bois effectively shows how the ideas of Marx can be fruitfully reconstructed and applied to this critical moment in US history. Rather than an unmitigated disaster, Du Bois considers Reconstruction a splendid failure – from the imaginary utopia of *Darkwater* Du Bois moves to the real utopia prefigured by the African American struggles under Reconstruction.

Du Bois' engagement with Marxism continues during the New Deal when he proposed that the African American community exploit the reality of segregation to build their own cooperative commonwealth within the United States. After World War Two Du Bois takes his Marxism in a global direction, joining his ideas of Pan-Africanism to the burgeoning anti-colonial movements in Africa. At the same time, he becomes a leader of the international peace movement which puts him on the Soviet side of the Cold War. He becomes an enemy of the US state and indicted as an undeclared agent of a foreign principle. At the trial in 1951 the case is thrown out for want of evidence. The state department exacted its revenge by denying Du Bois his passport for the next 8 years, at the end of which he becomes the celebrated guest of the Soviet and Chinese States. Du Bois openly sides with the growing strength and influence of the Soviet Union and China in promoting an international socialist project, and supporting the anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia. His position in the US becomes untenable and in 1961 he thumbs his nose at the US state by finally joining the Communist Party and departing for Ghana where he died in 1963 at the age of 96.

#### 4 Sociology for Today: Reconstructing the Canon and Decolonizing Society?

This has been a rapid tour through the extraordinary life and works of W.E.B. Du Bois. We have seen how Du Bois can be read successively through a Durkheimian, Weberian and Marxian lens, compelling a more systematic theorizing of his enormous oeuvre as well as leading to rereading the erstwhile canon – something that I cannot do here. Instead let me suggest five challenges Du Bois presents to the conventional sociology canon:

1. An explanatory science that takes a global and historical perspective on capitalism, centering race as well as class, beginning with the slave trade, and continuing through colonialism and imperialism;
2. A moral science offering a utopian dimension and calling forth an anti-utopian analysis of the changing limits of the possible;
3. A reflexive science that places social scientists within the world they study as well as within contested fields of inquiry;
4. An interdisciplinary science that recognizes disciplinary boundaries in order to cross them, in particular a cross fertilization between social science, history and the humanities;
5. A public science that forces sociology out of its academic cocoon, entering the public arena by framing public debates and public issues.

Bringing Du Bois into conversation with the canon could revolutionize sociology, but only if we take in the entire gamut of Du Bois' life and work. There is always the danger that entry into the canon will come at the cost of his more radical and critical works, blunt his effect by confining him to his early empiricism.

To take such a radicalized sociology seriously is to recognize that the perspective developed here, although presented in a universal register, is in fact a perspective from the North, specifically the standpoint of US sociology. What does the entry of Du Bois mean from the standpoint of Chinese sociology? It's an open question as to the relevance of this reconstruction *for* the study of China and more specifically *from* China. Is the reconstruction I've outlined a manifestation of academic imperialism? Chinese sociologists may have no interest in the consecration of Du Bois, preferring to develop their own canon, suited to their own conditions. Notwithstanding his global perspectives, his identification with the Soviet Union, with Maoist China, with independent Africa, his hostility to the US state, Du Bois' sociology is still an American project, albeit undertaken from a subaltern position. Chinese sociologists may, indeed, question the relevance of Du Bois to China, past and present. They may be more committed to development of an indigenous sociology that would dispense with Western canon. Decolonized or not, the canon is still Western. Alternatively, Chinese sociologists may want to get on with the empirical examination of pressing social problems, unhampered by any concern or interest in foundational works whether from the West or the East. To them, all this talk of the canon is beside the point, lighting matches while Paris burns.

Western hegemony, however, is not so simply turned aside. It is backed up by institutional resources distributed by states with interests in that hegemony. Let us not forget that the Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking system was designed to measure the quality of Chinese universities against the so-called best universities in the world, deemed to be the most prestigious universities in the US, populated by scholars that win Nobel prizes, academic medals, scholars with high citation counts in 'high impact' 'international' (largely American) journals. States across the world evaluate their universities by their position in global rankings, the famous top 500, and allocate rewards accordingly. Faculty positions in top Chinese universities are largely reserved for scholars with US credentials, US PhDs, books published in the US, articles published in US refereed journals. These are just a few ways in which US hegemony is consolidated.

But the global hegemony of US academia reproduces itself within the field of national sociology. Thus, Chinese sociology is itself a contested field giving rise to divergent interests in Western sociology. Those who have profited from their training in the US or Europe have access to the best jobs in Chinese

universities. It might be said they have an interest in US hegemony, and the perpetuation of its canon. Such well-rewarded ‘cosmopolitans’ may seek alliances with sociologists in other countries, especially BRIC countries, leaving behind locals embedded in sub-national communities, writing in Chinese languages, sociologists who have a limited interest in the trappings of Western credentialing. As Sari Hanafi once wrote, the hegemony of the West, leaves the rest caught between two alternatives: publish globally and perish locally or publish locally and perish globally. Only a few manage to straddle these two worlds.

In the welter of rankings, evaluations, and audits, we mustn’t lose sight of the meaning of sociology. *Decolonizing the canon* – becoming self-conscious about the colonial origins of sociology and how they are carried forward into contemporary sociology – is a progressive, indeed exciting and overdue development, but it should not distract us from *sociology’s role in decolonizing society*. As I write this, the US is fighting a proxy war in the Ukraine, pouring arms into the Ukraine to fight the Russian invasion. This is a struggle of imperialisms undertaken at the expense of a smaller but resolute nation. How different is this from Du Bois’ account of World War One which was also fought over imperial control of weaker nations. How different is the Russian assertion of control over Ukraine different from the Chinese state’s domination of Hong Kong? Is race so irrelevant to the Chinese state – whether it be ethnic groups or the hukou system that divided rural from urban? Ultimately what binds sociologists together within a single global field, despite its hegemonic organization, is the creation and defense of civil society – local, national and global – against the global aggression of markets and states. Marx, Weber, and Durkheim reread through the lens of Du Bois is still a potent foundation for a sociology for today.

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