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Cultural Studies and its local resources: discourse and practice in the Rural Reconstruction Movement

Pan Jia'en^a, Zhang Zhen^a and Du Jie^b

^aInstitute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Chongqing University, Chongqing, People's Republic of China; ^bInstitute of Rural Reconstruction of China, Southwest University, Chongqing, People's Republic of China

ABSTRACT

Emphasis on 'context' and 'practice' has been the tradition of Cultural Studies. Now Cultural Studies in Mainland China are facing the following difficulties: lack of attention to local issues and thoughts, lack of holistic horizon and sense of history. How can Cultural Studies in Mainland China search out more potential recourse and forces for critique and resistance from modern China and urban-rural China and confront Chinese problems and experiences which are of great complexity, by returning to its unique historical and social context and taking local resources into consideration? We try to return to the long-term engagement in 'action-writing' practice in the Rural Reconstruction Movement. Under the unique perspective of 'practitioner-researcher', they hope to explore plural spaces veiled by the mainstream and search out, in the historical context of China, local resources for Cultural Studies and possibilities for its advancement.

KEYWORDS Cultural Studies; consciousness of context; local resources; Rural Reconstruction Movement

1. The consciousness of context and holistic horizon of Cultural Studies

Stuart Hall, who is often called the founding father of Cultural Studies, pointed out that Cultural Studies is a kind of practice which combines theories with practice, an action which keeps self-adjusting according to its specific situation. Therefore, facing the disciplinary, professionalizing and ventriloquizing tendencies of Cultural Studies, he emphasized that Cultural Studies is supposed to be a kind of discursive formation in Foucault's sense, a formation of local knowledge which is full of controversy, with no simple source (Hall 2015a, pp. 223–231). Therefore, he expressed his discontent with the homogeneity of present Cultural Studies' methods: the omnipresent textualization perhaps renders power and politics something that only relates to language and textuality in a certain way. Then, he called for the localization and

CONTACT Pan Jia'en  panjiaen0807@163.com

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participation of Cultural Studies (Hall 2015b). In an interview 10 years ago, when asked his advice on the development of Cultural Studies in Mainland China, he said without hesitation that you should research your own issues and raise questions from the reality of China (Huimin 2006).

As Hall's student and the most important scholar in Cultural Studies, Lawrence Grossberg has offered similar ideas of what Cultural is and is not. In his view, Cultural Studies refuses to construct itself as a kind of completed and exclusive theory that travels freely across historical and political contexts; instead, it is supposed to be understood as an effort that tries to construct itself in changing historical projects and thought resources (Grossberg 2000, pp. 67–68). Therefore, being not a discipline, it can find its niche in every discipline and choose to study objects of any discipline. The more important task of Cultural Studies is to study 'complexity' and 'context', especially 'different contexts in a critical moment' (Grossberg and Kang 2007, Grossberg, Yanlin and Dongqin 2011, Yanlin and Dongqin 2011) and 'the complex and changing relationship between local context and large vectors (maybe the whole world)' (Grossberg 2000, p. 71).

That is why he suggests that we need to get beyond the Euro-centrism of Cultural Studies and should not take Cultural Studies blindly from the West. What needs to be done is to learn from their experience, integrate it into our own context and construct a new kind of Cultural Studies that belongs to Asia itself. That is to say, speak from our own context and speak to our own context (Grossberg, Yingqian and Taowen 2010, p. 8).

From the statements of the two representative scholars, we can understand their criticism of the present situation of the loss of vitality of Cultural Studies. Meanwhile, they advise us to return to the tradition of participation in practice and consciousness of locality of Cultural Studies by emphasizing context and complexity.

Up to now, there has been a consensus that Cultural Studies means the challenge to the discipline system. However, the consensus lacks real progress. If analysed in its concrete context, we can find that interdisciplinary practice is very difficult and, furthermore, is of limited liberation. In fact, exactly as Grossberg reminds us, interdisciplinary practice is simply the method of Cultural Studies and its ultimate purpose is to understand contemporary society profoundly and comprehensively and to reform society positively (Grossberg and Kang 2007). We maintain that in order to grasp the connotation of Cultural Studies better, we should advance interdisciplinary practice at the methodological level further and get beyond disciplinary systems. This paper tries to reflect on the present situation and deficiencies of Cultural Studies in Mainland China in terms of the consciousness of context and the holistic horizon, and to respond with local practice and local resources.

1.1. Locality and lack of 'glocal' sensibility¹

The consciousness of context of Cultural Studies also means attention to locality. Exploration of internal diversity and heterogeneity is distinguished from the simple transplantation of general theory. The point is not to simply reject Western academic discourse, but to be fully aware of the fact that Mainland China has become an important component of the world. Therefore, 'global' and 'local' are dual contexts that we need to be conscious of.

There has been a lot of discussion about the locality of Cultural Studies (Chen, Xinyu, Dan, Wei, Ji and Jin 2007, Xiaoming, Xiang, Chunlin, Qili, Jinqing, Gang, Yi, Hongsheng, Wenjian, Xinyu and Wei 2011). We hold that the lack of attention to locality in Cultural Studies in Mainland China is manifested in two aspects. First, there is a lack of original research on local issues. Second, the subjectivity of Cultural Studies in Mainland China is questionable because it is incapable of establishing contact with the unique resources for critique that exist in the local cultures, and incapable of breaking through the analytical framework established and developed in other contexts through positive interaction with the local context. How to increase the awareness of locality? On the one hand, the issues that we discuss are supposed to be closely related to daily life and experience. On the other hand, we should make our endeavour 'look down' and 'look inward' so as to return to our own context; and think about 'who are we?' and 'where do we come from?' while thinking about 'where are we going?'; and we should take into consideration the unique national conditions and traditions of our civilization, the revolutionary and socialist practices that are full of tension, various constructive practices that are intertwined with the revolutionary practice as local resources.

However, in the contemporary condition, dominated by globalization and dominant culture, it is questionable to think about 'locality' by the texts sifted by mainstream ideology. For this reason, we need to explore new resources from the society, history and marginal practice that are buried.

1.2. The loss of political economics perspective and sense of history

The writer Han Shaogong accurately criticized Cultural Studies in Mainland China, claiming that it is short of 'the final ball of political economics' (Jinhua 2015, p. 37). This is a really serious problem, especially in the time of 'post cold war'. Although it seems very sharp, Cultural Studies becomes more and more unable to understand the complex situation of the modern world, especially the profound influence caused by financial imperialism. The critical function it plays becomes weaker and weaker. There have been reflections on this problem from different angles (Bin 2001, Xiaozhong

2008, Xiaoxin 2011). We hold that, on the one hand, Cultural Studies is not supposed to be limited to studies on culture and signs, but is supposed to offer a kind of holistic analytical horizon in which political economics belongs as an important aspect of it. This aspect not only promotes the deep discussion of complex history and social reality, but also challenges various stereotypes that are based on mainstream cognitive frameworks. On the other hand, the background from which Cultural Studies emerged is exactly the global situation after the Second World War, which mainstream political economics and dogmatic Marxism had no ability to analyse. That is to say, a simple return to that kind of 'political economics' is of no help for the solution to the predicament of Cultural Studies. For this reason, we need to go further to imagine and promote a sort of new 'political economic perspective' under the new social and economic circumstances.

Moreover, what accompanied the loss of a political economics perspective is the loss of the sense of history (Jinhua 2012, p. 180). Although the main focus of Cultural Studies is on contemporary issues, 'historization' and 'contextualization' are also distinguishing characteristics (Kang 2008). Furthermore, to present the problems in a historical way is also an inherent method of Cultural Studies (Qili 2007). Of course, 'historization' here means the organic combination of contemporary practice and historical context at the level of research orientation and horizon, but without laying more stress on the past than on the present at the level of study materials.

The emphasis above on political economic perspectives and the sense of history tries to create a space for the critical practice of Cultural Studies horizontally and vertically and to return to the holistic horizon of Cultural Studies by rejecting and adjusting planar thoughts and practices.

1.3. Lack of participation in practice and urban-rural perspective

Attention to and participation in practice have been the tradition of Cultural Studies that emerged after the Second World War. Several founders of Cultural Studies all participated actively in generalized social movements and this participation played a fundamental role in theoretical innovation. Therefore, there is a unique connotation of practice and a special way in which theory can interact with practice in Cultural Studies. The reason for emphasizing participation in practice is that Cultural Studies not only follows the changes of social reality, but also tries to intervene in the changes of society (Chen 1999, p. 18). What is more, the participation in practice here, including 'critical analysis' and 'participation with promoting effect', can help to discover and create new cultures (Xiaoming 2012).

Therefore, practice here refers not to concrete affairs, but to a sort of medium that connects action and thoughts. Based on a consciousness of

historical context, by methods such as redefining concepts and adding parameters, this sort of practice challenges the mainstream cognitive framework and various limitations derived from this framework, and provides constant power for the advancement of concrete practice in reality.

Compared with the tradition of the Birmingham School, Cultural Studies in Mainland China lacks attention to concrete and generalized social practice, and also lacks the consciousness and ability to study issues by combining theories, experience and field of reality (Zhuoyue 2014, p. 83). Obviously, we can see the attention that the founders of Cultural Studies, such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, gave to British workers' issues. In the same sense, the importance of peasants to China is equal with that of workers to the British. However, with regard to the huge, complex and severe Three Rural Issues (peasants, agriculture and the rural areas) and the national conditions, contemporary Cultural Studies in Mainland China mainly takes cities as object. Even studies that take the Three Rural Issues as their object are limited to textual analysis of literary works that relate to peasants and few of these studies offer a wide perspective and comprehensive analysis.

This sort of deficiency results not only in an imbalance of subjects and degree of concern, but also a lack of urban–rural perspectives. For example, what we call for here is not attention to 'the images of peasants' or 'the situation of rural areas'. In fact, there have been a lot of studies at this level, most of which are products of 'objectification', 'problematization' and 'stereotype', however. What we need urgently is the contextualization of the complex history and reality, which are influenced profoundly by the process of global capitalism and, meanwhile, are full of resistance. Based on this, on the one hand, we should expand the field of vision of Cultural Studies to the Three Rural Issues and its related issues (e.g. issues of migrant workers and left-behind children, Rural Reconstruction and so on). On the other hand, we should develop an urban–rural perspective of Cultural Studies, and re-understand Chinese history in the twentieth century and critically participate in contemporary social practice through this perspective.

2. Rural Reconstruction Movement as thoughts resources of Cultural Studies

Fredric Jameson pointed out in his 'On "cultural studies"' that the better way to discuss Cultural Studies as a wish is to approach it from the angles of politics and society, and to regard it as a sort of cause that prompts 'historic alliance', but not a sort of planning of a new discipline in a theoretical way (Jameson 2004, p. 1). It is the 'openness' and 'practicality' that encourages us to take the Rural Reconstruction Movement in its local context as an

example to discuss the consciousness of context, holistic horizon and local resources of Cultural Studies.

Here is a brief introduction to the Rural Reconstruction Movement: beginning with the severe crisis in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, thriving in 1920s and 1930s, and promoted by intellectuals, the movement was a sort of reformatory and constructive practice that aimed at the revival of rural areas as the solution to the plight of peasants; it took the rural areas and the bottom of society as its space of concern and thought. It was not only the result of the destitution in rural areas, but also the result of intellectuals' conscious understanding of the importance of the rural areas. The agents, methods and content involved were exceedingly diverse. Chinese intellectuals went to rural villages with the goal of saving them; rural communities initiated, and well-intentioned gentries led, local activities directed towards rural self-help and social construction. The representative figures of the movements include some influential educators and industrialists in China's modern history, such as Y.C. James Yen, Liang Shuming, Tao Xingzhi and Lu Zuofu. Additionally,

according to a survey by the Ministry of Industry of the Nanjing National Government (of the Republic of China), between the late 1920s and early 1930s, over 600 organizations and institutions were founded which, in turn, set up more than 1,000 experimental construction zones of various kinds. (Dahua 2000, p. 456)

As China emerged into global focus, contrasting with the image of a declining empire, talk of rural construction was duly reported. Tens of thousands of peasants, migrant workers, students, intellectuals and people from different industries participated. After 15 years of hard work, they developed 5 approaches to contemporary rural construction: 'students entering the countryside, supporting agriculture with education', 'encourage cooperation between peasants and improve administration', 'promoting mutual help among workers and promoting the dignity of labor', 'promoting social agriculture and rural-urban integration' and 'encouraging public involvement and cultural reinvigoration' (Jia'en, Lanying and Fang 2014).

Although the Rural Reconstruction Movement began before Cultural Studies, it has a lot of similarities with Cultural Studies and can be studied as one of local precursors to Cultural Studies and provide inspiration for the localization of Cultural Studies.

First, as a social movement that endured on a large scale throughout China's modern history, the Rural Reconstruction Movement can provide various cases that fulfil the sense of reality as a scene of tension as a model for the localization of Cultural Studies and prompt us to think about the complexity of modern China. In a holistic field of vision, it can be understood as a history of construction that people promote spontaneously and that can

adjust flexibly, and that is intertwined with the mainstream history of revolution and modernization. Facing the oppressive reality of a 'century of radicalism' and a 'century of rural destruction', peasants, responsible intellectuals and various other social forces combined to seek alternative possibilities that were propitious for peasants, agriculture and rural areas, under the constraints of an external environment and local resources. Meanwhile, as a discursive practice, in history and the present, facing the mainstream ideology that favoured 'urbanization, industrialization and de-agriculturalization', being conscious of the uniqueness of China's resources, condition and civilization, and the fact that the disadvantaged bore greater costs of development, the Rural Reconstruction Movement, therefore, reflects various mainstream discourses. In fact, its practice at these two levels exists, in reality, truly and diffusely, but hardly enters the scholars' view.

Second, Cultural Studies emphasizes complexity and usually advances thoughts by discovering hidden objects. As a sort of constructive practice that takes the lower classes and their livelihood, life and ecology as the driving force, the Rural Reconstruction Movement inherently rejects the elite perspective and the logic of the privileged. Under the pressure of an unfavourable external environment and the mechanism of precedence,² the Rural Reconstruction Movement is conscious of and emphasizes the far-reaching significance of culture; it takes people's development as the ultimate goal in a tumultuous environment in which the human being is regarded as a machine of utility; it thinks about particularity in universality and so on. These thoughts and practices are full of inspiration for Cultural Studies, including such insights as the position of rural areas, the significance of construction, the consciousness of national conditions and the limitation of ecology.

Third, besides Lu Xun, the importance of local resources that are recognized by Cultural Studies on both sides of the Taiwan Straits (Chen, Xinyu, Dan, Wei, Ji and Jin 2007), if we are conscious of our context, we can discover many thinkers and practitioners in China's modern history that would be enlightening for Cultural Studies. For example, Liang Shuming is one of the representative figures of the Rural Reconstruction Movement. His unique thoughts and consciousness of Chinese culture and his constant innovation in his own practice can be understood without doubt as resources for thinking for Cultural Studies in Mainland China. Besides those thinkers, what we also want to point out is that ordinary practitioners' actions and thoughts, feelings and changes, experience and tension can also be new materials for Cultural Studies. Besides these, we can also find that in modern China, there are not only traditions and contexts of 'consciousness of own culture', but also groups of 'organic intellectuals' that are not inferior to Western 'organic intellectuals': ten thousands of 'practitioners of Rural Reconstruction Movement' bid farewell to schoolrooms, teaching rostrums and comfortable cities, lived

in rural areas over a long period of time, thought critically and produced knowledge that was down to earth.

It is not only that the Rural Reconstruction Movement can provide rich resources for Cultural Studies, but also, in an alternative view, it can help us develop a deeper understanding of the Three Rural Issues and the Rural Reconstruction Movement from the perspective of Cultural Studies, and think about the significance, motivation and tensions within the Rural Reconstruction Movement in the dual context of modern China and global capitalism.

3. The context of the discourse of the Rural Reconstruction Movement and its 'writing practice'

E.P. Thompson points out with discontent in *The making of the English working class* that only those who succeed are remembered; the passless path, the lost cause and those who failed are all forgotten (Thompson 2001, p. 5). This idea is based on his critique of mainstream studies which usually assume a perspective of the dominator, and also the embodiment of his unique perspective: various ordinary people need to be rescued from the contempt of later times because it was them, not us, that lived in those turbulent times (Thompson 2001, pp. 11–13). We maintain that the call for such rescue is not a simple moral stance, not a superstitious belief in 'the people', but the result of rethinking popular culture and the rejection of the attention to the historical view of the winner, which means that the winner always takes all and the losers are always in the wrong.

Furthermore, Cultural Studies is supposed to be put in a local context. Taking the Rural Reconstruction Movement as an example, the enlightenment it offers to Cultural Studies is discussed in the following paragraphs from three angles: the 'problematic', 'the processing of experience' and 'contextualized analysis'. Additionally, interpretation of the connotations of the Rural Reconstruction Movement from the perspective of Cultural Studies is also discussed.

3.1. The problematic of 'practitioner-researcher'

The Rural Reconstruction Movement can be seen as a sort of 'alternative' practice that stays conscious of rural areas, the lower classes and the constraints of national conditions; the movement's understanding of reality and society, its imagination of an ideal world, its interaction with various thoughts (including critique from various positions and angles), and its inherent tension and plight, are symptoms of the way in which it represents the complexity of the process of the modernization of the traditional peasant-populated country, which has inherited a legacy of thousands of years of civilization.

However, there are many deficiencies when we think about this complex and multi-dimensional movement.

The key promoter of the Rural Reconstruction Movement, Liang Shuming (2005, pp. 161–162), pointed out that the ultimate goal of the movement is not only to build rural areas, but also the state-building of China and the reconstruction of our nation and society. But the movements is not only the social practice that tries to safeguard peasants' livelihood and reform the urban–rural relationship. However, mainstream descriptions of the movements still tend to consider it as what it appears to be. Most of these descriptions usually analyse the movement at the level of technology and lack any holistic horizon or contextualized analysis. Moreover, most of these descriptions take the 'ideal' of the Rural Reconstruction Movement or a stereotype of it as object, and are developed in the framework of 'the history of revolution' or 'the history of modernization'. Therefore, the complexity of the practice and its interaction with internal and external environments are ignored in significant measure. The practitioners' arguments and thoughts tend to be simplified. As the result, what is erased by this kind of 'smooth narration' is often the most enlightening thought resources as discussed above.

In fact, the practice that is often described, reflected and taken down by intellectuals ignores the fact that practitioners of the movement themselves are often researchers. They can be understood as 'practitioner-researchers' who are discontent with the superstition of Western theories and various imaginary solutions to issues, and are more likely to have a different problematic from their hands-on practice.

One of the authors of this paper began to participate in the contemporary Rural Reconstruction Movement in 2000 as the person in charge of the University Students Association that cared about peasants, agriculture and rural areas. After graduation, as the deputy director of the office of the Y.C. James Yen Institute of Rural Reconstruction (which was the main institution that promoted the development of the contemporary Rural Reconstruction Movement), he participated in the entire process from 2003 to 2007. The institution was closed by force majeure in May 2007 and then transformed into the Green Urban-Rural (Beijing) Science and Technology Development Center. The centre was formed by a merger with the Green Urban-Rural Cooperative, which was the result of the affair of a 'professor selling rice' and then it became the Little Donkey Farm in the suburbs of Beijing in March 2008. Subsequently, its business space was expanded to cities and consumers. Then, as the Executive Director and legal representative (from 2008 to 2014) of the Green Urban-Rural (Beijing) Science and Technology Development Center, the author participated in part of the work of the Center and the Little Donkey Farm. Meanwhile, the author wrote a doctoral dissertation and some relevant papers based on his long-term participation in the movement.

After his participation for 15 years, there were several questions that puzzled the author. Why is the Rural Reconstruction Movement the same choice of many intellectuals who are of different backgrounds, in different disciplines, in different political positions and with different experiences? Why is the movement always filled with a driving force in spite of various difficulties? Why are the practitioners always unable to achieve the goal they pursued in spite of their endeavours with might and focus?

These questions are the basis of the author's problematic and motivation to promote the movement and, meanwhile, also form the the consciousness of the context which is distinguished from the value coordinates dominated by mainstream ideology and the prejudiced dualism of 'reformation–revolution' that ignores the complex context and inner tension that exists in the movement by understanding the movement as equivalent to a defective 'reformism'. These tendencies of the consciousness of elite perspectives and power relationships are adverse to the discovery of possibilities involved in the practice and to the representation and understanding of the complexity of the movement.

3.2. 'The experiences that are present'

How to embody the problematic above in concrete discourse? There is an interesting story of the author. When he participated in the movement at the Y.C. James Yen Institute of Rural Reconstruction located in Zhaicheng village, Hebei province in 2003, the participants were educated by Y.C. James Yen that if you want to enlighten peasants you need to transform yourself into a peasant first (James Yen 1989, p. 221); we tried to become close to peasants, by the assimilation in dress. According to this intention, we wore fabric shoes brought from the village all the time. Afterwards, wearing fabric shoes, I participated in a training course for peasants. However, surprisingly, I found all the peasants there wearing suit shoes. I failed to transform myself into a peasant, again. The anecdote reflected my stereotyped imagination of peasants. In the rapidly changing modern society and under the shadow of the culture of consumerism, which is omnipresent in cities and rural areas, the fact is that the peasants are also changing rapidly, whereas our thoughts are rigid. How can we be alert to the stereotyped imagination? Which sort of power is dominating the construction of the image of 'the other'?

Furthermore, realizing that the reality and experiences always contain more content than the imagination and theories, both the reflection on the practice of the Rural Reconstruction Movement and the exploration of the localization of Cultural Studies are destined to be long and complex processes. It also reminds us that experiences and feelings themselves are important components of the movement. Functioning in the same way with historical

texts and specific cases, they can be a sort of effective medium from which we can understand the movement better.

The attention to feelings and experience is precisely an important and unique tradition of Cultural Studies. In the case of Raymond Williams, it has been pointed out that experience is a central category in his theory of culture (Gang and Xiangyu 2000, p. 8). In his book *The country and the city in the modern novel*, he represented his experience as the second generation in rural areas: born in a working-class family located in a village of Wales and living there for a long time. We can find in the book not only Williams's memory and understanding of the elder generation and his hometown, but also his feelings, such as confusion and anger, towards the mainstream discourse about the country and the city at that time.

This can be understood as the aspect of feelings and experience of Cultural Studies which abandons the neutral position and renders personal experience as precious materials of Cultural Studies without hiding the limitation of being a single social subject (Gang and Dengying 2002). In fact, only in this way can the 'contextualization' and 'complexity' of Cultural Studies be realized and the researcher's motivation for participating in this practice be promoted. Even historians who emphasize precision and historical documents also regard feelings and experiences as the driving force behind the innovation of studies, not a factor interfering with a neutral position. For example, when reviewing the academic career, Philip Huang found, surprisingly, that it is feelings, not rationality, which are the source and motivation of the problematic in academic research, which play a fundamental function (Huang 2015). What relates to 'feelings' here is exactly 'experience' (Huang 2016).

There are two aspects of experience that need to be discussed about the Rural Reconstruction Movement. In the macro aspect, the existence of the movement in China's modern history itself is a part of China's experience, which helps us to understand the making of modern China and its complex connotations. In the micro aspect, the practitioners' experience and feelings are linked with not only personal emotion, but also universal structures of feelings and reality. The two aspects closely connect with each other and should not be considered as separate. The weakness of the latter is not only the symptom of the fact that the former is excluded from the mainstream academic perspective, but also enhances that exclusion.

There are multiple aspects of the 'experiences that are present'. For example, the 'practitioner-researcher's' experience as the present party; the feelings, positions and life-course that are present; the constraints, value coordinates, historical traditions and mainstream logics that are present. To some extent, the consciousness of 'the present' is the consciousness of context of Cultural Studies.

In order to accomplish the goals above and get rid of the excessive reliance on 'text studies', we try to discuss the 'experiences that are present', which are

ignored by mainstream discourses, and endeavour to make the practitioners who are hidden between the lines 'present'.³ In this way, we hope to emphasize people's agency and the sense of solidarity in and out of the texts and to discover the complexity that 'overflows' the texts. Experience here refers to perhaps stories, confusion, reflection and complex feelings such as unwillingness, helplessness, excitement, worries, awkwardness and tangled feelings. In this way, we hope to reflect on the 'objectification' of mainstream studies, which separates subject from object, and then, taking the 'experiences that are present', the emotional influence and discursive power as one of the contexts, to 'historize' and 'contextualize' the 'experience'. By this, we try to reject the division of 'practice-research' and promote the interaction between experience and the times, the self and the other. Besides, we hope these 'sub-texts' will supplement the context of the Rural Reconstruction Movement, and meanwhile, provide a new driving force for the narration of the movement and to explore more perspectives to understand the practice of the movement.

3.3. Contextualized analysis and complexity

Based on the problematic above and consciousness of the integration of experience and feelings, we try to 'think about the Rural Reconstruction Movement outside the movement', to integrate the scattered cases into their macro context, to explore the complexity inside the practice, to challenge the stereotypes of peasants, agriculture, rural areas and the Rural Reconstruction Movement that are dominated by mainstream ideology, to rethink the significance and tension of the movement, and to explore the richness of the movement through the consciousness of context and in a holistic horizon.

First, we take the 'Century of Rural Reconstruction' as the analytic framework. Distinguishing our approach from the comparison or joining of the various movements that share the same name, we hope to integrate various branches of the Rural Reconstruction Movement at different times and locations. We emphasize the correlation between different branches while emphasizing the differentiation and complexity, because continuity is exactly an important character of the movement. On the one hand, we enhance the contemporary significance of the historical practice; on the other hand, we make the discussion more contextualized, from which we can understand that the movement is not an abstract existence in historical documents, but a part of the daily life of ordinary people in China today.

Second, we analyse the context and background of the Rural Reconstruction Movement. Considering reformism and radicalism as they pertain to rural construction in modern China, we hope to represent the characters of the Rural Reconstruction Movement in the process of the modernization of rural China. For more than a century after the Opium War of 1840, China

suffered invasion and oppression by Western powers. Resources were siphoned out, and the ensuing survival anxiety in turn generated complex and unpredictable responses, haphazardly bundled into movements like Self-Strengthening and Self-Help.

Regarding the Three Rural Issues, we note that under the influence of global capitalism as driven by superpowers, the radical efforts of various (Chinese) nationals towards modernization often systematically transfer the economic, social and environmental costs of these efforts to the rural community, thus generating poverty, instability and ecological crises, among other harmful effects. It is precisely this Century of Radicalism, this deviation from the traditional practices that emerged out of a historical context (i.e. the local, rural and national context), and towards a singular consensus in society, that so damaged villages, giving rise to a Century of Rural Destruction. How can rural communities and minorities survive? They cannot simply rely on confrontation or opposition. Radicalism in the modern history of China, a country where agriculture is a bastion of civilization and where peasants form the majority of the population, generated the Three Rural Issues and different forms of rural destruction. And yet, radicalism also nurtured the Century of Rural Construction as an alternative practice and a means of self-protection. Furthermore, it also nurtured various paradoxes and plights that emerge in practice (Jia'en and Tiejun 2016).

Third, we analyse contextually the origin and driving force of the Rural Reconstruction Movement. Back to the experiences, thoughts and actions of its practitioners, accompanied by the observation and comments of people at that time, we conclude, preliminarily, four factors as the origin and driving force of the movement: 'self-help and the will to save rural villages threatened with destruction', 'doubt on the modernity and innovation', 'discovery and representation' and 'reconstruction and revival', which are related to both personal experience and social structure and to themes of the times. If 'self-help and the will to save rural villages threatened with destruction' are understood as a sort of self-protection and the 'passive' aspect of the movement in a relative way, then 'doubt on the modernity and innovation', 'discovery and representation' and 'reconstruction and revival' can be understood as the active aspect of the movements. The activity of the latter can be attributed to its constructiveness, its understanding of the 'mineral of the brain', 'the multiple functions of agriculture', 'the dimension of society and ecology', the consciousness of mainstream illusion which cannot make its discourse consistent, and the innovative practices which are not limited to the aspect of technology. That is to say, by going back to the historical texts, we can find that the Rural Reconstruction Movement, which is not a special phenomenon, is motivated and promoted by multiple factors and is closely connected with the historical processes of modern China. Based on these factors, on the one hand, it is full of complexity and

possibilities; and on the other hand, being in dilemma situations, it interacts with the mainstream with various difficulties (Jia'en 2016).

There have been papers that focus on the analysis above, so it is not necessary to discuss them in detail here. We here simply point out that the Rural Reconstruction Movement should not be understood as a single and special phenomenon. By contextualized analysis, putting it back into the background of modern China and the historical process of the expansion of global capitalism, based on the holistic horizon that includes economics, politics, culture and ecology, we can understand profoundly the unique significance of the movement: not the simple critique of 'the rural', which includes economics, tradition of culture, lifestyle and the corresponding ways of thinking; but also not romantic praise and nostalgia; but instead, the return to the historical context; the consciousness of the tensions that exist in the movement; the discovery of various forces that overlap, intersect, conflict and interact with each other; the thinking about the uniqueness from the perspective of differences; the rediscovery of measures that people at the bottom take in the face of various external and internal constraints such as rural destruction;⁴ and the enlightenment of the sustainability of rural civilization from the perspective of ecological civilization.

4. Conclusion

Emphasis on 'context' and 'practice' has been the tradition of Cultural Studies. Now Cultural Studies in Mainland China are facing the following difficulties: a lack of attention to local issues and thought resources, a lack of a holistic horizon and a sense of history. Besides symbolic analysis and ideological critique, by returning to its unique historical and social context and taking local resources into consideration, how can Cultural Studies in Mainland China search out more potential recourses and forces for critique and resistance from modern China and urban-rural China, and confront directly China's issues and Chinese experiences, which are both of great complexity?

With regard to the huge, complex and severe Three Rural Issues and the national conditions, contemporary Cultural Studies in Mainland China cannot deny the fact that it mainly takes cities as its object, and takes textual and cultural analysis as the main method, which means a lack of participation in practice and a lack of complex understanding of the urban-rural perspectives. We should try to return to their long-term engagement in 'action-writing' practice of the Rural Reconstruction Movement. Under the unique perspective of 'practitioner-researcher', they hope to explore plural spaces veiled by the mainstream and search out, in the historical contexts of China, local resources for Cultural Studies and possibilities for its advancement.

As an issue and resource, the Rural Reconstruction Movement is just an example. We can also take issues and ongoing practices such as the culture of 'new working class' and alternative lifestyles into consideration. The significance of both the Rural Reconstruction Movement and Cultural Studies is to make our thoughts richer and more complex, and not to restrict our activities to a sphere designated by a disciplinary system. This paper is just an immature invitation, which hopes to promote local Cultural Studies that are powerful and down to earth.

Notes

1. 'Glocal' here means developing an intellectual horizon of comprehension capable of combining the 'global' with 'China'. This would be a capacity of simultaneously identifying both the Chinese influence on the world and the global elements active in China, for only if it is equipped with this glocal awareness can Cultural Studies in the Chinese mainland develop both a real and effective global horizon and a sense of care towards the world. See Xiaoming (2012, p. 101).
2. For example, industry and national defence take precedence over agriculture; cities take precedence over rural areas; the nation-state takes precedence over peasants; economics takes precedence over culture; human being takes precedence over ecology and so on.
3. See Pan Jia'en, *Radicalism and reformism: rural reconstruction movement in the process of modernization*, unpublished draft, supported by the Late Project of the National Social Science Found; and Jia'en (2008, p. 72).
4. Not only indignation and grief, but also tenacity; not only direct resistance, but also constructive reformatory practice.

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Notes on contributors

Dr. Pan Jia'en 潘家恩 (Corresponding author) is an associate professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Chongqing University.

Zhang Zhen 张振 is a postgraduate student at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Chongqing University.

Du Jie 杜洁 is a lecturer at the Institute of Rural Reconstruction of China, Southwest University.

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