

REREADING BRITAIN TODAY:
Essays in British Literary and Cultural Studies

重读今日英国

主编 仲伟合 刘岩

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We are particularly grateful to Mr. Fang Fanquan, Vice-President of GDUFS, and Ms. Christine Skinner, culture and education consul, British Council of the British Consulate in Guangzhou, whose welcome speeches at the Conference encouraged us a great deal. We also wish to thank Ma Jianjun, Wang Hong, Yu Weihua and Zhao Yinong for their brilliant ideas, Fu Jingjing and Guan Jianming for their effort in devising the Program of the Conference, Zhuang Ling, Xia Yukun and Xu Mianjun for taking care of other miscellaneous yet complicated matters of the Conference, and many other teachers from the office of FELC and graduate students of FELC who were involved in the organization of the Conference. Without the cooperation of all these kind people, the Conference would not have run as smoothly as it did.

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Preface

British (Cultural) Studies in the Chinese Context

When Professor Liu Yan of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) approached me a few months ago for the writing of a preface for the book she was editing out of the many papers presented at “The Second International Conference in China on British Literary and Cultural Studies: *Rereading Britain Today*” which was held from November 12th – 15th, 2004, I felt extremely honoured as it would certainly be my pleasure and privilege but was a bit worried that my limited ability and knowledge might not do justice to the general development of British Studies in China since the 1980s and the huge diversity of institutional and individual preferences and focuses for British literary and cultural studies in this region.

What persuaded me in the end to take up this writing task was that I had been quite heavily involved as co-ordinator in the British Studies Project (directed by Professor Xiao Huiyun) with the British Council from 1988 to 1996 at GDUFS. I was a member of the organising committee for the first “British Studies Material Development Symposium” at GDUFS in 1993, a member of the project team writing *Contemporary British Culture and Society* (with Xiao Huiyun as the Chief Editor) published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press (SFLEP) in 1996, facilitator and speaker at the first “British Studies Seminar” in Thailand in 1994, facilitator and speaker at the “Seminar on British Studies Methodology” in Indonesia in 1996 and also the two-week workshop on teaching of British Studies in 1999, the organiser and chair of “The First International Conference in China on British Literary and Cultural Studies: *Decoding Contemporary Britain*” in 2001 and subsequently the editor of the book *Decoding Contemporary Britain: Essays in British Literary and Cultural Studies* (Peking University Press, 2003), and keynote speaker at “The Second International Conference in China on British Literary and Cultural Studies: *Rereading Britain Today*” (at GDUFS, 2004). My monograph *Technologising the Male Body: British Cinema 1957 – 1987* (FLTRP, 1999) represents some of my thoughts and reflections on the cinematic representations of British masculinity in terms of gender and postcolonial studies.

What I am offering in the following piece of writing is but my very personal views of British (Cultural) Studies in China and part of this region. I am sure the Chinese saying “gua yi lou wan” (for one thing cited, ten thousand may have been left out) is

very applicable here. But whatever flaws that do exist certainly rest with me and I myself would very much welcome your critical comments and suggestions.

A Personal Overview

It is fascinating to see that when “our” world is simultaneously undergoing an unprecedented process of *Glocalisation* — *Globalisation* and *Localisation* of the economy, culture, images, discourses, as well as of risks and problems, there arises an urgent need to cross geopolitical, cultural and even psychological boundaries. The powerful emergence and development of regional studies in the last three decades in many parts of Asia, especially in China, has offered academics the opportunity to reread, rethink and even to deconstruct the greatest cultural construct in human history — the East-West divide. And here we are talking about British Studies which, I firmly believe, will help open up our minds, promote cross-cultural awareness and enhance Sino-British communication and understanding.

As a dynamic, enabling, and multi-disciplinary subject, British Studies has now become a rapidly growing area of interest in many parts of the world, not only in Europe and America, but also in some Asian countries/regions such as China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Turkey and Viet Nam. Academics in these countries/regions have set up research projects and degree programmes in a variety of tertiary institutions.

In China, many universities have been offering English Studies courses since the late 1980s which include British/English literature, history, economy, popular culture, and international relations. In 1989, three key Chinese universities in international/regional studies — Beijing International Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Shanghai International Studies University — established British Studies programmes within their existing BA, MA and ATT (Advanced Teacher Training) programmes.

Turkey started its British Studies programme in the early 1990s and Thailand held its first British Studies seminar in 1994. Indonesia organised a large seminar on the teaching of British Studies in 1995 and subsequently workshops and seminars in 1998 and 1999, with new projects and programmes on British Studies at key Indonesian universities. Japan has also been doing British Literary and Cultural Studies for quite a few decades.

Hong Kong and Macao have set up intercultural studies programmes such as the joint MA in European Studies at Macau University with an emphasis on East-West communication, identity and postcolonialism. Universities such as Hong Kong University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and Lingnan University have been

offering BA, MA and PhD programmes in British-related social, literary and cultural studies for decades. In 1996, Hong Kong celebrated the launch of *British Studies Project and Internet Route Map*. The electronic route map is a three-tiered homepage including categories for British history, culture, geography, literature and language. The project's aim is to assist British Studies in Hong Kong and Macao through the provision of custom-tailored teaching packs.

In 2001, the Faculty of English Language and Culture of GDUFs, in cooperation with the British Council (Guangzhou), organised "The First International Conference in China on British Literary and Cultural Studies: *Decoding Contemporary Britain*" with over 130 participants from China, Britain, the U. S., Canada, Indonesia, Australia and other countries and regions. In 2004, the two institutions (GDUFs and BC) repeated their successful cooperation by co-organising "The Second International Conference in China on British Literary and Cultural Studies: *Rereading Britain Today*" which was again a great event in China for British Studies. In short, British Studies is getting more and more attention from academics in Asia, particularly in institutions of higher education in China. This collection of essays from the Conference keynote speakers and participants further proves that many scholars in China and the rest of Asia are actively engaging themselves with British Studies, addressing a diversity of issues such as class, gender, ethnicity, Orientalism, identity, as well as aesthetic, social, political and psychological aspects of British literary and cultural production.

Re-defining British Studies

In the first issue of *British Studies Now* (The British Council 1992), British Studies is defined as

the multidisciplinary study of contemporary Britain calling on history, literature and the social sciences to explore the distinctive features of British culture and society. Overseas the teaching of British Studies implied the opportunity to draw on resources (specialists, courses and materials) that allow for the comparative study of British and other countries. Such study is likely to highlight

- the pluralism that results from differences of nationality, class, race, gender, language, place and generation;
- the evolving institutions of government, politics, finance, industry and the welfare state;
- the arts, media, and their interpretation.

Looking back at the developments and changes of British Studies in the last two

decades in the Chinese context, I personally feel very strongly that the vitality of British Studies, as of Cultural Studies in general, lies in its being multi-faceted and pluri-vocal. Scholars of British Studies prefer asking questions rather than providing answers, problematising various “truths” rather than reaffirming established perspectives, and deconstructing rather than building disciplinary boundaries. This critical paradigm shift in methodology has not only changed the empirical descriptive tradition of regional/area studies but also added questions of gender, identity and ethnicity to issues of class, race and aesthetics. These changes, when put in specific Chinese political, social and educational contexts, call for a redefinition of British Studies.

In 1989, GDUFS and the British Council (China) jointly started a six-modular course project within the existing British and American Literary Studies MA programme in the Department of English (now the Faculty of English Language and Culture). At the beginning, there was huge uncertainty about the definition of British Studies and where it should be situated in relation to our existing degree programmes. After rounds of debates, we arrived at the understanding that our definition of British Studies depends on the purpose(s) we want British Studies to serve, for whom it is designed, and where the collective and individual interests lie. We categorise British Studies into “Micro British Studies” and “Macro British Studies” mainly in terms of objectives, uses and audiences.

By “**Micro British Studies**”, we mean British Studies for specific purposes, which is designed basically for university target groups of BA/MA degree or diploma students, overseas teachers, civil servants or people who demand up-to-date information about British culture and society generally. The identity of British Studies is therefore “locally” defined according to the specific needs of students and the availability of human and material resources in actual educational contexts. For instance, students majoring in English, apart from their usual course, may choose to take some British Studies courses such as: “British Popular Culture”, “British Folklore”, “Re-inventing Shakespeare” and “British History Through Cinema”; those in social sciences: “Institutions: Discourse and Power”, “Language and Gender” and “Tourism, Leisure and Design in Post-war Britain”; those studying English as a Second or Foreign Language: “Literary Representations of the Lake District”, “British Pop Culture Through TV” and “British Theatre and Society”. The purpose of offering these courses is to provide students or trainees with some valid and updated knowledge about contemporary Britain rather than a chance to engage in “serious” (highly specialised, and “elitist”) academic research.

The British Studies programme at GDUFS was offered at both postgraduate and

undergraduate levels, as an integral part of the existing MA in British and American Literary Studies and also as a compulsory part of the BA in English language and literature. There were a number of wider objectives for setting up British Studies, understood by both the British and Chinese parties: to meet China's Ministry of Education's need to develop comprehensive area studies of the major English-speaking countries in some key foreign studies universities in China; and to cater for the British Council's wish to provide resources for under- and postgraduates in these universities and improve their understanding of British culture and society. This was to remain a key element in the teaching of English through China in support of the national policies of modernisation and openness towards the outside world. The programme was made up of six modular courses: **First Year (1989 – 1990)**: Contemporary British Literature; Modern British History; **Second Year (1990 – 1991)**: Modern British Culture; Contemporary British Society; **Third Year (1991 – 1992)**: Britain's Foreign Relations; British Economy.

Two British Council lecturers were assigned each year to teach the courses while two Chinese teachers (already MA holders) were sent to take a related MA course in the UK. It was intended that the sum of these six courses would provide an organised resource of syllabuses, materials, bibliographies and guidelines which could be used by the department for research and teaching in general and for setting up an independent MA in British Studies later. The running of the project was adequately supported by books, videos, computing facilities and other resources from Britain and also from the host university. Adjustments and modifications of the courses in terms of structure, content, methods, and assessment were made on a flexible basis and project team members (Chinese and British staff sharing offices) held regular team meetings, exchanging teaching experiences and helping one another solve problems related to academic issues as well as administrative matters.

By 1992, thirteen British Studies MA optional courses related to British Studies had been designed and offered to our MA Literature students, such as: "Modern British History", "Contemporary British Literature", "Post-war British Poetry", "Modern British and American Drama", "20th-Century Literary Theories and Criticism", "Modern British Society", "Popular Fiction in Britain", "British Economy" and "Britain's International Relations". Some of these courses, mainly those on culture and society which were more accessible, had also been adapted and offered to undergraduates in upper divisions (third and fourth year students) and those in the training classes for secondary school teachers as optional courses.

No doubt, the courses were highly selective because they strongly depended on the educational contexts (e. g. physical location, availability of expertise and preference of the course designers), and were provided for a very general understanding of

modern British culture and society. Naturally this was a very elementary kind of British Studies, a subject supplementary to other subjects such as TEFL. In this sense it was regarded as "Applied" British Studies, although it could, when offered as a field of academic study at postgraduate level, lead to in-depth research into specialised areas which form part of the British experience. A degree, a few courses or just some training in British Studies would, in Britain, China or any other country, undoubtedly develop the student's or trainee's cultural awareness and even cross-cultural competence which would help lead to a career in museum or library work, historic preservation, cultural institutions, journalism, editing, private foundations, business, teaching, law, government/politics.

In 1992, the GDUFS British Studies team, led by Professor Xiao Huiyun, conducted a nationwide survey of over eighty universities in China and it was found that there was widespread demand for up-to-date materials for teaching about contemporary Britain. After a comprehensive needs-analysis through 180 questionnaires and interviews with more than 60 teachers of English and many more students in near 100 universities in China, a national symposium on British Studies Materials Development was held at GDUFS, co-sponsored by the British Council, in January 1993. The agenda was set for the writing of an 18-chapter topic-based student core coursebook and teacher's manual on *Contemporary British Culture and Society*. This model at GDUFS was *locally defined* in terms of our own objectives, uses and audiences. Particular attention was paid to the question: "What social, economic and academic constraints do we have to deal with in developing this British Studies textbook?" In fact, there were more constraints than anticipated, constraints such as conservative state educational policy, unpredictable change of political climate, overcrowded existing curricula, limited human and material resources, and the problem of labour distribution and cooperation among the writing team members and between institutions and organisations. Nevertheless, this writing project, the first of its kind in Asia, was successfully completed and, after being piloted at six universities in Guangdong, both the student's book and teacher's book were published in 1996 by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press (and soon reprinted and in 2002 updated and revised). *Contemporary British Culture and Society* has been used by many universities in China and members of the British Studies team at GDUFS visited leading universities in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Chongqing, Nanjing, Guilin, Guangzhou and other cities to run British Studies seminars and workshops on how to use this new book and other resources in the teaching of British Studies. One of the major objectives in running these British Studies and workshops was to create a sense of community among teachers of British Studies by forming a flexible network through which they could exchange "news and views" on

British Studies courses, programmes and research projects with universities both in and outside their region.

With multimedia services at our finger tips, and global developments of different kinds thrilling and scaring us every day, we need, somehow, to see British Studies from a new perspective which is more than just educational. As an unprecedented research enterprise, “**Macro British Studies**” refers to a truly interdisciplinary and systematic study of the whole British experience, from its beginnings to the present (not just contemporary), from Canada to India, from the Suez Canal to Hong Kong Island, from Ulster to Downing Street No.10, and from high culture such as Shakespeare and Milton to folk and pop culture such as tall tales, comic strips and British football hooliganism. Placed in an international (basically intercultural) context, “Macro British Studies” attempts to appreciate the incredible diversity of the British experience by approaching that experience from multiple perspectives, including business, economy, home and foreign policies, science, history, music, art and, what is more, their complex relations within the four nations. Its description of that experience should have as its audience both the British themselves and a wider world in which British culture (in the anthropological sense) began to work as an essential part of a global culture.

The field of British Studies itself for academic and practical purposes instead of classroom/educational British Studies is the answer to the questions we ask about the British culture in the broadest sense of the term. The essential questions may well include:

- Why do the British people live, dream, think, imagine and create as they do?
- How have their customs, traditions, beliefs, notions changed and developed?
- What in their history, landscape (or seascape, ethnoscape, ideoscape, technoscape, mediascape, bodyscape, etc) and heritage has shaped the expressions of their culture, whether literary, social, legal or economic?
- What is behind the intricate relationship between Britain and the rest of the world in the age of *glocalisation*?

To tackle such questions, we read, *selectively*, of course, British cultural signs, written, oral or visual, and examine the ways the British know and express themselves: in literature, cinema, theatre, laws, pop culture, product technology, educational, political and cultural institutions, architecture, monuments, religion, philosophy, folklore, myths, leisure and so on. All these display a set of values which can be said to be “typically British” as well as characteristics the British share with other cultures. This, I believe, is one of the most effective ways to deconstruct people’s various political and cultural stereotypes of Britain and its people as we know very well now that London is no longer “the Foggy Town” in Dickensian times and the

British are not really “conservative” because there has been the Conservative Party. At the same time, as we engage in independent studies of various subjects related to the British experience, we must pay close attention to exploring the cobweb interactions (influences, reactions, dominance and subversion) between politics and institutions, culture, and society. These interactions can be achieved through diachronic as well as synchronic comparative studies with other countries and cultures which may cover general or specialised topics. For example, when we study the British pop culture of the 1960s, we can examine British youth subculture by looking at the cult of the Beatles in comparison with the Chinese Red Guards’ cult of Chairman Mao. This would highlight the peculiarities of both cultures in terms of politics and leisure, religion and institutions, freedom and dominance. Considering the Beatles’ hit songs and Chinese “Loyal/Royal Music and Dance” (the 1990s did witness a strange but feverish revival of such “red” songs and music all over China) takes us beyond their aesthetic qualities into such cultural considerations as the historical, social, psychological as well as economic conditions under which each was produced and the means by which it was made available to a mostly frenzy mass audience. Thus it is a good point of entry into the study of the complex relationship making up the culture, British or Chinese, and intercultural relationships in general.

Creating New Space for British (Cultural) Studies in China

There has been a growing number of countries/regions in Asia where institutions of higher education and research centres and institutes have set up British Studies programmes and research projects but inadequate means of communication for exchanging research findings and experiences among academics in the East-Asia Pacific Region who share a great deal in their social, cultural and economic situations. Here are some of the tasks that scholars of British Studies could do to promote as well as deepen British Studies in Asia, especially in China.

A) Going Beyond Current University Curriculum and Mentality

Like American Studies, British Studies as a subject in China’s universities began to flourish in the 1990s alongside the BA programmes in English Language and Literature and the MA programmes in British and American Literature. However, this new element in current university curriculum, even for students majoring in English, remains subordinate or supplementary to the heavily language-and-literature-dominated programmes. With huge concentrations of expertise and resources in British literary studies at leading Chinese institutions such as Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University, Nanjing University, Fudan University, Sichuan University,

Zhongshan University and key international studies universities in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, British Studies, or British Cultural Studies at least, should have a bigger role to play in the construction of the students' "map of knowledge" for their BA and MA studies, especially in their understanding and critical interpretation of the different discourses that contemporary British social and cultural phenomena and practices generate. The introduction of such studies into the English language learning and teaching process would not only give students opportunity to learn to encounter the culture of the foreign language as a set of social and cultural practices but also have implications for teachers of English language and literature as cross-cultural mediators. Perhaps, before we question the authority of the British Literary Canon and also adopt Cultural Studies practice, what we need to do is to combat our deep-rooted conservatism in methodology, self-censorship in academic research and even prejudices against new ways of thinking and innovative practices in Cultural Studies.

B) Establishing British (Cultural) Studies Network in Asia

Since there is great need for professional and teacher training, for a means of updating information and for a support network of British (Cultural) Studies teachers in Asia, it is necessary to create, with certain assistance from the British Council, a *British Studies Newsletter* for Asian teachers and the general public. If this is not currently feasible because of resource constraints, *British Studies Now* should expand its thematic columns and also try to make its approach to British (Cultural) Studies truly international. Besides, the journal needs to improve its efficiency in distribution, particularly in the "Third World". In order to help enhance general awareness as well as academic research in and teaching of British Studies in the East-Asia Pacific Region, more regional/international events/conferences such as the two by GDUFS should be organised. Institutions of higher education in Asia may explore new ways of establishing links with their British counterparts to create exchange programmes for British Studies or British Studies-related teaching and research. With support from the British Council, they may also run local and regional seminars and workshops. In this respect, Hong Kong and Macao, as places where different cultures meet, have a unique role to play in cross-cultural studies such as British (Cultural) Studies. With assistance from local governments and institutions, they should act and eventually become leading centres for both teaching and research in British (Cultural) Studies.

C) Capitalising on the New Achievements in British (Cultural) Studies

Indeed, British Studies in China has developed along with British and American literary studies within modern English language and literature departments. In

Guangzhou, it was conceived in its educational context (within the Department of English which was later renamed "Faculty of English Language and Culture" of GDUFS) and re-conceptualised with (British) Cultural Studies which was developed in 1950s out of Leavisism through the works of Richard Hoggart (*The Uses of Literacy*, 1957), Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society: 1780 -1950*, 1958), and later through contributions from E. P. Thompson (*The Making of the English Working Class*, 1968), Stuart Hall and Tim Jefferson (eds, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, 1976), and David Morley (*The "Nationwide" Audience*, 1977). Because of the limited resources and lack of expertise in other aspects of British Studies, both the teaching and research at GDUFS have been heavily biased towards British literary and cultural studies, as could be seen from the two international conferences on British Literary and Cultural Studies in 2001 (*Decoding Contemporary Britain*) and 2004 (*Rereading Britain Today*). The research projects at GDUFS have, likewise, been influenced by research work on British Gender and Postcolonial Studies such as Paul Gilroy (*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 1987), Stuart Hall (*The Hard Road to Revival*, 1988), Robert Young (*White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, 1990; *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 1995), Houston Baker, et al (eds, *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, 1996), Christopher Gittings (ed, *Imperialism and Gender: Constructions of Masculinity*, 1996), Susan Bassnett (ed, *Studying British Cultures*, 1997), Ania Looma and Martin Orkin (eds, *Post-colonial Shakespeares*, 1998), and Robert Young (*Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 2001).

As such, new critical theories from sociology, philosophy and political science as well as new modes of analysis such as gender studies, media (esp. film) studies and postcolonial studies have challenged our traditional approaches to the study of the British Literary Canon and the conventional divide between "Culture/Literature" and "culture/literature". This visible genealogy in gender and postcolonial cultural studies can be confirmed in the publications by scholars at GDUFS such as Mao Sihui's *Technologising the Male Body: British Cinema 1957 - 1987* (1999), *Decoding Contemporary Britain: Essays in British Literary and Cultural Studies* (ed, 2003), Wang Yougui's *Essays on James Joyce* (2002), and the series of PhD projects on British and American Cultural Studies such as Li Yufeng's *Representations of Chineseness in Hollywood*, Wu Na's *Reading of Chinese-American Cultural Identity in M.H. Kingston's Works*, Peng Baoliang's *Representations of the Other in Disney's Animated Films*, Ding Shaoyan's *Construction of Meaning in American Popular Ads in 2002*, Chen Kaiju's *Subaltern Studies of Zhao Benshan's Major Comic Sketches* and Peng Qigui's *Representations of Ethnicity in American Sitcoms in the 1990s*. New

publications such as *Rereading Britain Today* edited by Zhong Weihe and Liu Yan witness the continuation of British Studies with a focus on literary and cultural studies of the British Isles at GDUFS.

Coda

In a time when dollar-chasing has become the most seductive new religion of almost every nation, it may be idealistic to reiterate truisms such as promoting understanding and friendship between different peoples from different cultures, to reaffirm humanistic values such as love, respect and dignity, when we engage in projects like British Studies, American Studies, Chinese Studies or any other regional studies. But I do hold the view that in our academic world there are many people who still believe that “Even if the world must end tomorrow, I shall still plant my apple tree.” And I think our British (Cultural) Studies will prove to be one of the meaningful tree-planting missions which will evolve towards cultivating a beautiful orchard of mutual understanding and genuine respect. Enhancing cross-cultural awareness is not only the objective of British (Cultural) Studies but also the first step towards self-discovery.

Again, let me congratulate GDUFS on the publication of selected essays from the *Rereading Britain Today* International Conference and applaud Professor Liu Yan for her great work in the academic vineyard as well as all the editors from SFLEP for their meticulous efforts and professionalism.

Mao Sihui

Macao Polytechnic Institute

November 2005

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