Critical Qualitative Inquiry in China Studies: Introduction to the Special Issue

Ping-Chun Hsiung

Abstract
This Special Issue aims to advance critical qualitative inquiry in China studies and contribute to a vibrant, inclusive global community. It builds upon debates and efforts in the behavioral and social sciences among area specialists in two eras: researchers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the diaspora in the 1980s who sought to sinologize behavioral and social sciences, and sociologists in China in the 2000s who are seeking to indigenize these fields. The Issue takes a two-pronged approach toward advancing critical reflection in knowledge production: (a) it aspires to diminish the current influence of Western and positivistic paradigms on behavioral and social sciences research; (b) it seeks to challenge discursive hegemonic influences to create and sustain space for critical qualitative inquiry. The Issue traverses disciplinary boundaries between history and behavioral and social sciences within China Studies. It opens dialogue with the non-area specialists who are the primary audience of the \textit{Qualitative Inquiry}.

Keywords
indigenizing sociology, sinologizing China studies, critical qualitative inquiry, methodology, epistemology

Behavioral and Social Sciences in China Studies
In the 1980s, sparked by an awareness of how behavioral and social science knowledges were produced in Taiwan and their marginal position in the global context, scholars in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the diaspora introduced the term “sinologizing” (\textit{zhongguohua, 中国化}) to describe their efforts to displace what they considered ‘transplanted sociology’ (Ye, 1982, p. 135) and behavioral research from the West (G. Yang, 1982, p. 157). Scholars in China did not participate in this effort. At the time, sociology, the primary social science field in China, had adopted a pragmatic approach to reestablishing and legitimizing itself after being denounced and abolished as a ‘bourgeois science’ for over 25 years (1952–79). As Chinese sociologists aimed to catch up with their American counterparts, they embraced the positivistic paradigm without questioning its hegemonic position in sociological inquiry. Although some scholars raised concerns about misalignment between survey questionnaires originating in the West and empirical realities in China, there was no serious deliberation during the early stage of Sociology’s reestablishment (Hsiung, 2017). This has changed over the last two decades, however, and the term “indigenization” (\textit{bentuhua 本土化}) has been used to categorize efforts to ground social science research locally.

In this introduction, I will provide an account of the debates and endeavors related to sinologizing behavioral and social sciences in the 1980s and indigenizing them in the 2000s. Reflecting upon this groundwork, I will discuss...
two observed developments central to the pursuit of critical qualitative inquiry in China studies.

**Sinologizing Behavioral and Social Sciences in the 1980s**

A core problem identified by sinologists in 1980s was that the behavioral and social sciences had focused on issues/questions that originated in the West and had uncritically adopted Western methodology and epistemology. As a result, social science researchers ended up inadvertently using empirical cases in Taiwan to verify Western theory (Xiao, 1982) but never revised Western theories based upon their findings (Lin, 1986). The objective of sinologizing the behavioral and social sciences was not to “regionalize” local knowledge from the outside world nor to be antagonistic to Western knowledge (Cai, 1986; Guo, 1986; Li & Zhao, 1986; G. Yang, 1982; Ye, 1982). Instead, sinologizing efforts aimed to incorporate the humanistic attribute of Chinese culture as a significant feature of sociological knowledge. By nourishing “critical” and “enlightening” dispositions, a sinologized sociology could offer an alternative vision for humanity that was different from the Western tradition (Ye, 1982, p. 144), even though it was unclear what this actually entailed. The ultimate goal was to globalize knowledge systems by revitalizing sociology that originated from the West (Lin, 1986; Ye, 1982).

The sinologizing effort was twofold: first, liberation from the “coarsely refurbished” Anglo-American behavioral and social science traditions, and second, turning a critical eye toward local mechanisms of knowledge production. The first suggested that rather than mirroring research topics from the West, sociologists in China studies should “systematically conduct locally based empirical research, discover its uniqueness and attributes, theorize these findings to establish sociological theories with Chinese characteristics” (Xiao, 1982, p. 306). Gao and Jin envisioned this as an epistemological project that invited social scientists to employ historical and cultural perspectives to interpret constantly changing local phenomena. Such an approach would prioritize an epistemological angle that is not derived from Western historical/cultural viewpoints (C. Gao, 1982; Jin, 1982). The second called for self-critique and examination. In the 1980s, sociologists in Taiwan maintained that the state should facilitate the development of sociology. However, they also insisted on remaining independent, impartial, and critical of the state (Xiao, 1982, p. 16/p. 295).

Guo noted that a predominant aspect of race/ethnic studies in China was a Han-centered framework that upheld the Han’s cultural superiority and agricultural-based economy. The party-state failed to acknowledge the diversity socioeconomic system of minority populations and through its assimilation strategies jeopardized the societal and familial lives of the minorities (Guo, 1986).

Much of the initial sinologizing effort during this era focused on critiques about how survey questionnaires were constructed and used. Some critics noted that concepts and wording used in imported surveys were inadequate because of translation issues and/or different contextual factors. Others noted that Chinese respondents were more likely to select the mid-point in a standardized five- or seven-scale measurement because the society as a whole values balance (zhongyong, 中庸) as an intrinsic principle of living and self-cultivation (Ye, 1982). Still others questioned the individualist orientation implied in questionnaires. Following from these early critiques, K. S. Yang has been spearheading efforts to sinologize psychology. Yang’s objective is to indigenize psychology to wean it from the highly Westernized tradition that is “incompatible with the native culture, peoples, and phenomena.” To ensure “indigenous compatibility,” Yang has advocated for an “indigenous or indigenized research paradigm” that devises concepts, theories, and methods which “accurately reveal Chinese psychological and behavioral processes, mechanisms, and patterns in the ecological, economic, social, cultural, and historical contexts” (K. Yang, 1999, p. 185). Since the 1980s, Yang and others have examined culturally unique phenomena, formulated indigenously meaningful variables, and developed measurements of indigenous compatible scales (K. Yang, 1999). At the core of their pursuit is to develop “concepts, methods, and theories that are compatible with the studied phenomenon as well as social, cultural, and historical context” (K. Yang, 1999, p. 181).

**Indigenizing Sociology in the 2000s**

Discussions about indigenizing sociology, the primary field of social sciences in China, have centered on the quantitative paradigm, the qualitative paradigm, and roles of the party-state.

**Indigenizing sociology through the quantitative paradigm.** When sociology was first reestablished in China in the 1980s, it had a distinctly positivistic orientation due to its Western roots. Discussions about indigenizing sociology do not reflect on the implications of this orientation to the content of sociological knowledge, nor do they question the validity of importing survey questionnaires originating from the West into the Chinese context. This can be seen in the official journal of the Chinese Association of Sociology, *Sociological Research*. Since its inaugural issue three decades ago, less than 5% of its publications have focused on issues pertinent to research methods, methodology, and/or epistemology (Feng, 2016). The publication primarily focuses on the development of, and debates within, the quantitative approach, for example, its positivistic merit, sampling techniques, principles of generalizability. Although Bian and Li coined the concept “bimodal psychological orientation” to
indicate that the Chinese respondents are most likely to present their public, rather than private selves in survey questionnaires because of political surveillance targeting individualism (Bian, 2001; Q. Li, 2000), insufficient consideration is directed toward this method as a means of knowledge production.

**Indigenizing sociology through the qualitative paradigm.** With respect to qualitative inquiry, a distinctive effort to indigenize the interpretative paradigm in sociology has emerged over the last two decades. Among scholars leading this effort, the general consensus has been to establish an intellectual tradition that is rooted in Chinese perspectives. This effort has been twofold.

First, researchers have challenged the use of interpretative frameworks originating from the West in China studies. Zhou called this “dissecting Chinese, indigenous concepts from Western perspective” (Zhou, 2018, p. 45). According to Zhou, for example, when a concept such as filial piety is understood from the vantage point of Western reciprocal pragmatism, the meanings and experiences of intergenerational emotional bonds are lost. Nor is the reflexive, relational underpinning of the concept captured.4 In another example, if the concept of guanxi (interpersonal relations) is understood from the Western perspective of exchange or game theory, ethical principles that simultaneously underscore emotion and personal integrity in human relations are ignored (Zhou, 2018). Echoing this line of epistemological critique, Yan has pointed out that the corporate model employed in the existing literature to study the Chinese family overemphasizes elements of Chinese life unfamiliar to the Western audience. Yan argued that when researchers apply such a model, they are unable to reveal how individual family members not only respond to but increasingly and actively redefine the everyday practices and emotional relationships Chinese household (Yan, 2003).

The second line of critique has been led by researchers who have taken a bottom-up approach to study overlooked and/or concealed phenomena in China studies. Through case study research, for example, W. Gao set out to examine the ruling of the party-state asking why more people did not die as the result of nationwide famine during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) that killed an estimated 15 to 45 million people. He eventually discovered that more people would have died if they had not engaged in covert survival strategies. Although these strategies had never been a secret among villagers, they were criminalized. The state’s discursive regime has since affected how the famine is recounted among villagers, they were criminalized. The state’s discursive regime has since affected how the famine is recounted among villagers, they were criminalized. The state’s discursive regime has since affected how the famine is recounted among villagers, they were criminalized. The state’s discursive regime has since affected how the famine is recounted among villagers, they were criminalized. The state’s discursive regime has since affected how the famine is recounted among villagers, they were criminalized. The state’s discursive regime has since affected how the famine is recounted among villagers, they were criminalized.

In May 2016, Xi Jingping, the President of the People’s Republic of China, gave a speech at the “Forum of Philosophy and Social Sciences.” Xi contended, “in order to observe and develop Socialism with the Chinese characteristics, it is essential to advance studies of philosophy and social sciences” by “[adhering] the guiding principles of...
Marxism,” “[accelerating] the construction of philosophy and social sciences with the Chinese characteristics,” and “[enhancing] the CCP’s directorship in philosophy and social science studies” (Xi, 2016).

Immediately after Xi’s speech, Sociological Research published three articles by the past and current presidents of the Chinese Sociological Association to explicate Xi’s position. They unanimously praised Xi’s speech because it stressed “the historical responsibility of social sciences in contemporary China” (P. Li, 2016, p. 1), pointed “out a clear direction to strengthen and enhance social sciences research,” (Song, 2016, p. 10), and “set higher standards for the development of China’s social sciences, and pointed out a clearer direction for [their] [sic] future development” (Y. Li, 2016, p. 27).

In one of the articles, Song specifically argued that “it is imperative to strengthen the Chinese characteristics in sociological discourse” (Song, 2016, p. 10). Such discourse, Song argued, was to be “grounded in China” and its primary topics were to center on state-orchestrated “reform, development, and stability.” Moreover, sociological researchers were expected to bolster their research on “new concepts, new ideology, and new strategy employed by the central party-state in its governance” (Song, 2016, p. 2). Song even identified empirical phenomenon worthy of study such as the challenges confronting townships in the midst of urbanization, social services in the midst of industrialization, information technology, consumerism, aging, and societal risk resulting from inequality. Song argued that to adhere to the spirit of Xi’s speech, new sociological concepts needed to be derived from four specific sources: Marxism, traditional Chinese ideology, China’s reform and development, and Western sociology. In another of the articles, Y. Li urged sociologists to “siege this great opportunity. Standing in the midst of China’s societal transition, consciously assume the historical responsibility of constructing the sociological discourse with Chinese characteristics and of making obligatory contribution to the development of the Socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Y. Li, 2016, p. 27).

A Reflective Analysis

Other than various efforts intended to mimic survey research, decentering Western imports has been the main objective of sinologizing and indigenizing behavioral and social science research. As discussed above, these critiques have laid valuable groundwork. However, the effort appears to have ventured on a path of chasing after a mirage of timeless, essentialized “Chineseness.” To sinologize psychology, G. S. Yang and his colleagues have tackled a well-recognized problem in adopting a transplanted survey questionnaire. They have developed culturally sensitive concepts and a measurable scale to replace Western imports; however, their efforts are inadvertently fostering a positivistic fixation on generalizability and pushing sinologizing psychology toward the quantitative paradigm at the expense of the interpretative tradition. To indigenize sociology, Y. Xing and others have made a cultural, historical turn in searching for Chinese perspectives. Developing culturally grounded theoretical models to supersede Western theories/lenses have become the primary effort. Here, their efforts run the risk of inadvertently compressing diverse cultural heritages, extracting extended historical lineages, and excluding those at the fringe of their intellectual radar (Hsiung, 1998; Wang & Cedian, 2019). All of this discourages an inclusive, non-normative orientation that can provide a foundation for their indigenizing endeavor. It should also be noted that there is a well-accepted wisdom that permanence and continuity are illusory. Changes and uncertainty are part and parcel of human experiences. From this perspective, critiques directed at imported models to establish an alternative set of Chinese theoretical models are likely to compromise, rather than realize, indigenization.

Although intellectual autonomy vis-à-vis the state was emphasized in the 1980s, insufficient effort has since been directed to challenge the domestic hegemonic regime that dictates the process and results of knowledge production. Recent calls to advance social sciences with Chinese socialist characteristics speak volume to the danger of using a dogmatic approach to the pursuit of indigenizing the behavioral and social sciences. By enshrining “the CCP’s directorship” to construct “philosophy and social sciences with the Chinese characteristics,” the party-state is exploiting and co-opting an intellectual endeavor spanning several decades. Recent developments and numerous incidents indicate that the party-state’s iteration has propagated and institutionalized a top-down doctrine nationwide. A self-reflexive critique that can cultivate and sustain an intellectual sanctuary of critical qualitative inquiry is essential.

Moving Forward

This Issue intends to advance critical qualitative inquiry in China study by expanding the thematic parameter of critiques currently directed at Western methods and principles. Several contributors to the Issue illustrate how their research practices and insights are informed by their own biographic footprints. This reflexivity can broaden the scope of critiques beyond a focus outward on Western imports as reflexivity draws our attention away from the end product of the knowledge to the processes involved in its construction. Reflexivity demands that researcher examines their own vantage point in relation to knowledge production, that is, how a researcher’s perception shapes what they study, how investigative practice is conducted, and what conclusive claims are made on what ground. The exercise
renounces an essentialist assumption in China studies and asks sinologists of all backgrounds to be accountable.

More specifically, in my own contribution to this Issue, I interrogate the researcher’s sole, interpretative authority. I first present the contradictory conclusions made by a Chinese nongovernmental organization (NGO) activist who has carried out a project to increase women’s political participation and the Western scholar who comes to study the project. I propose an intervening mechanism to challenge the interpretative position of the latter to de-center the Western authority who often speaks on behalf of their research subject. S. Liu and D. Wang’s contribution discusses the intersubjective position in online ethnography. They discuss how they juggle the tension between their political commitment and research ethics in the context of party-state surveillance. In contrast, L. Zhang and T. Xing’s reflexive biographical accounts provide a glimpse of the intellectual journey among those from the cultural-revolution generation. Their accounts capture an embodied process of searching and re-searching.

The Issue also expands critiques beyond a narrow focus on the Western prerogative by presenting a critique of the growing fixation on individual careerism in the academic fields. Four articles in the Issue analyze the trials and triumphs of realizing intellectual pursuits through community capacity building. Three articles testify to an applied approach toward critical qualitative inquiry in China studies. My article details practices of feminist informed NGO activism intended to realize women’s liberation that has long been abandoned by the party-state. L. Zhang and Y. Yan, T. Li, and Y. Huang discuss a deliberate effort to expand data collection from being used solely for individual, short-term research projects to building an archival center to advance a collective, intellectual community over time. X. Teng recounts how he worked with teachers and local communities to develop ethnic minority textbooks for local schools. He also reflects upon challenges encountered when trying to override the institutionalized obstacles faced by the ethnic minority in the Chinese education system. Together, the articles invite further deliberation on critical qualitative inquiry in China studies and beyond.

Finally, articles included in the Issue all contribute to the need for reflexivity but from diverse angles. From a historical angle, X. Cao puts forward methodological strategies to analyze archival data in a way that can confront the state dominated discourse regime. L. Zhang and Y. Yan, T. Lin and Huang’s articles demonstrate that questions can be answered through archival data that have systematically been excluded from official archival institutes. Interrogating the legacy of women’s liberation, I examine an NGO project that enables women to assume leadership in rural governance, illustrating how feminist inspired NGO activism simultaneously confronts and strategically collaborates with the party-state. An interview with T. Xing included in the Issue demonstrates how a Han scholar challenges the Han-centric educational system through research, teaching, and grass-root initiatives. D. Wang and S. Liu discuss their online research on oppositional lawyers and lesbian communities in China wherein the virtual world constitutes a new battle ground for state surveillance and practices of dissent.

Below, I provide an analytical summary of each article pointing out how issues discussed by individual authors contribute to critical qualitative inquiry in China studies and in global contexts.

*Ping-Chun Hsiung: Feminist Inspired NGO Activism in Contemporary China: Expanding the Inductive Approach in Qualitative Inquiry*

My article examines feminist praxis and NGO activism within the Heyang Project that transformed the landscape of women’s political participation in rural governance through village elections in Shaanxi Province, China (2004–2013). Empirically, the article presents an NGO-centered framework to challenge the Western and state-centered lenses that have been used to frame and assess the development of NGOs, civil society, and the women’s movement in China. Taking an inductive approach, I detail the ways in which the NGO, Shaanxi Research Association of Marriage and Family (Research Association), simultaneously challenged and collaborated with the party-state to turn equality between men and women from an abstract policy declaration into tangible electoral outcomes. The Research Association also activated and maximized the bureaucratic functioning of the Women’s Federation, a state-sponsored mass organization that has tended to become the mouthpiece of the state rather than to advocate women’s interests. Furthermore, the Research Association seamlessly transcended the local/global divide: It turned a feminist concept and gender training from the West into mobilizing devices and tapped into the rural traditions of a folklore troupe to mount a mass campaign. Its mobilizing strategy revived the collective legacy of women’s liberation initially pledged, but long aborted by the CCP state.

Methodologically, I disrupt the exclusive power long upheld by the researcher in qualitative inquiry by devoting a section to analyze the politics of feminist inspired NGO activism. Two groups associated with the Project feature prominently in the section: Key members of the Research Association unveil their behind-the-scenes planning and interpret their strategic moves. Their accounts disclose how the Research Association managed to have the number of women elected into local governance increase fivefold in just two election cycles. In addition, the elected women also reflect on their personal journey, from being systematically marginalized in the landscape of rural governance to a leader entrusted with the economic, political, and social...
affairs of their respective village. As an intervention strategy, the section includes members from Heyang Project from their subjective positions and provides space for their interpretative authority. This strategy rectifies a perennial problem in qualitative inquiry where those being researched continue to be re/presented by the researcher as the interpreted object.

Di Wang & Sida Liu: Doing Ethnography on Social Media: A Methodological Reflection to the Study of Online Groups in China

Wang and Liu are among the first group of social scientists conducting online ethnography in China: Wang on feminist activism and Liu on the practices of civil right lawyers. They argue that given state censorship, the increasingly popular “Big Data” approach to research will inadvertently capture purposely disseminated information filtered by the state apparatus. Small cases, which have evaded state’s surveillance, offer researchers a unique opportunity. By joining various chatrooms, Wang and Liu gained instant membership to these online worlds. Through immersion, they developed an overview of issues that mattered to chatroom members and identified key players in underground circles. The blurred public/private, front/back, on/off boundaries of online ethnography give Wang and Liu access to “backstage” lives. The online ethnographic sites also transcend geographic and/or temporal divides that are challenging for conventional ethnographers to overcome. Their approach meant that Liu was able to “see” that the public face of a combative civil rights lawyer was countered by his private face as a tender father online, and that Wang unexpectedly received a message from a lesbian couple about their fifth forced eviction by local police in Guangzhou, China, while at her own birthday party in New York.

The opportunities presented in online ethnography described by Wang and Liu are not uniquely Chinese. Nor is the CCP state the only entity that abuses Big Data. It is well known that in North America, large corporations use Big Data to increase their profits, and that special interest groups have infiltrated social media to swing general elections. Wang and Liu’s discussion about immersion and reflexivity are refreshing because they make a convincing argument about the merit of ethnographic research even when social life is conducted as much as online as it is off-line.

Conducting online ethnography under an authoritarian regime poses unique challenges pertinent to research ethics. While keeping informant’s identity anonymous is a common practice in the West, how researchers can remain anonymous and evade state surveillance is uncharted territory. In their article, Wang mentions that she was asked to use her professional network in the United States to raise the profile of local initiatives belonging to chat group members, while Liu was approached by a closely scrutinized lawyer to discuss a possible collaboration in person. The dilemma Wang and Liu faced were not simply about whether or not a researcher should sit on the sideline as an impartial researcher. Instead, such requests have potential to expose the researcher’s identity and/or to jeopardize the welfare of their own family members who live in the offline world under the CCP regime. The article raises many critical issues that require further deliberation.

Shuji Cao: Detail-Based Analysis in the Study of Land Reform: A Methodology for Studying Modern Chinese History

Over the last several decades, S. Cao, a historian by training, has combed through thousands of local historical documents. He has come to realize that mundane terms and conspicuous concepts often paved the way to the discovery of events or practices that had previously escaped scholars’ attention. Some discoveries even led to the revision or ultimate repudiation of accepted theories about, or versions of, the PRC history. In his article, he lays out three methodological interventions he has used to decode the Land Reform Law, one of the most important legislations in the PRC history.

The Law, promulgated (1950) immediately after the CCP took power, was premised on the rampant exploitation of peasants in rural China. The CCP intended to consolidate its power by dismantling pre-existing landownership structures and redistributing the land. But identifying who the landlord was and how his land should be redistributed was not a straightforward matter.

“Speaking bitterness” against the landlord class was as much a politically orchestrated campaign as an organic expression over long-standing exploitation. Although researchers have studied political struggles centered on the Land Reform, limited access to archival data and ubiquitous discursive regime lead many questions unanswered.

Cao demonstrates that the Land Reform Law, written in highly abstract language, was divorced from complicated and diverse landownership and associated socioeconomic relations. To decode the Law, Cao read it against two types of local archives when they recently become available. One is the so-called “process documents” archive. Different from the discursive, proclaiming type of language used in national level, central documents, the process documents detail the ways in which local cadres interpreted and implemented the Land Reform Law, for example, how they actually adjudicated landownership, mapped out redistribution strategies, and enforced rewards and penalty. Cao also examined the “mediation and judicial documents” that concern landownership disputes in rural areas or involve ambiguous cases of absentee landlords in rural-township junctures.

By analyzing and interpreting these documents, Cao carried out “detailed coding,” an analytical strategy comparable
Zhang’s work weaves his biographic journey with his intellectual investigations of social life in Chinese communities. It contributes to our discussion of critical qualitative inquiry in China studies and beyond. In his writing, Zhang never uses terms such as “immersion,” “reflexivity,” or “inductive logic” that are fundamental to practitioners of critical qualitative inquiry in the West. Instead, he discusses how, as a researcher, he assumes a “humbled open mind,” “suspend[s] various theoretical perspectives,” and “empt[ies] the self.” He describes how, after months of living in a village, the rhetorical obscurity of ideology and theory dissolves and vivid landscapes of social life in the rural community come to light. His article describes a research process unique to Zhang’s generation. As a returnee-turned-ethnographer, Zhang is constantly reminded of his experiences as a sent-down youth once obliged to be educated by the proletarian. Being a researcher, Zhang has been required to simultaneously embrace and review his past. By stepping outside his study and leaving behind theoretical indulgences, his work points to challenges confronted by all critical qualitative practitioners. Carving out a space of criticality requires practitioners to step out of their own bubble and to put their pervasive ideologies in check. An unwavering commitment to carve out a space of criticality is a prerequisite for practitioners working under overt political surveillance. Constant vigilance and relentless effort to prevent muzzling is also imperative to safeguard criticality in seemingly accountable democratic system.

In 2011, Zhang founded the Contemporary Chinese Social Life Data Center at Fudan University in Shanghai (CDRCSL). The Center has since collected two types of documents/materials that the state archival institutes deem of negligible importance and thus beyond their own acquisition activities. One type includes more than half a million copies of handwritten personal letters, with the largest set being 789 long-distance letters exchanged between a couple from 1971 to 1987. The other type includes grassroots archives of primary materials from four sources (local government and public services institutions, collective enterprises, rural brigades, and family). The second half of Zhang’s article and Yan, Li, and Huang’s piece provide a summative description of the collection and its invaluable contribution to social science research.

They point out that the collection is particularly invaluable as state archives have become increasingly inaccessible in recent years. Equally important, they argue, is the collection’s diverse, rich contents for social science research on the rise and fall of Maoist socialism. Through examples, they demonstrate that the personal letters, bookkeeping records, capital flows of collective enterprises, and work journals of cadres, soldiers, businesspeople not only capture local realities concealed or absent in state archives, but they also detail the interplay between citizen, the work units, and the party-state. The authors further discuss the challenges and research ethics of using the collections as primary sources for social science research.

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I came across Teng’s work when I began organizing the Forum of Critical Chinese Qualitative Research in 2014. In fact, I invited Professor Teng to give a speech at the Forum’s inaugural pre-conference in 2016. It did not materialize because the Forum had no budget to cover Teng’s trip. I was therefore delighted to have a chance to interview Professor Teng in Beijing in 2018. The article included in this Issue is an edited/shortened version of the interview.

The interview begins with my query about his journey through ethnic minority education as a Han (majority) national identity. Teng’s personal story offers a glimpse of the ethnic/racial divide in the Chinese context. As a Han (majority) intellect and ally of the ethnic minority community, Teng eventually became a trailblazer for ethnic minority education and anthropological education in China. He challenged the Han-centered curriculum and lobbied for bilingual education in ethnic minority regions. He trained generations of ethnic minority scholars and bureaucrats who graduated from the Minzu National University. He even established a boarding school for 46 ethnic minority girls in the Lahu fills in the Yunnan province.

In the interview, he discusses the politics of bilingual education and the rural/urban divide within ethnic minority communities. He also reflects upon the overwhelming weight of the Han (majority) domination that he has witnessed firsthand as he endeavored to carve out a space for
Exploring critical qualitative research in China studies has long been an intellectual passion of mine. It transformed into a communal endeavor after the Forum of Critical Chinese Qualitative Research was founded in 2015. The Forum has become an intellectual space for scholars and graduate students to exchange ideas, gain mutual support, and collaborate intellectually. From our discussion, it becomes clear that the field has focused primarily on empirical phenomena in topical issues, for example, urbanization, inequality, rural to urban migration. Insufficient attention has been directed to issues pertinent to the process and politics of knowledge production. From my collections and experiences with colleagues in the Forum, I began actively planning this Special Issue for *Qualitative Inquiry* in 2018.

In the early planning stages of the Issue, I was quite ambitious, hoping to present definite answers about doing critical qualitative research in China studies. I provided extensive comments to papers submitted to the Forum. I also combed through recent publications in major Chinese sociological journals, reached out to professional networks to solicit interest, and met with potential contributors in China. As the endeavor unfolded, I worked with scholars to develop their pieces, providing written comments and engaging in rounds of brainstorming discussions. As the process of developing a coherent collection of articles proved to be more challenging than I had initially anticipated, I came to view the Issue as laying the foundation for a new line of inquiry rather than offering tangible answers to a field within which the conversation had barely begun.

In the final stages of manuscript preparations, I have worked closely with individual authors to re-structure and, in some cases, to co-write sections of the papers. Four out of six articles are originally written in Chinese and authored by scholars currently residing in China. Chinese to English translation is always a balancing act between honoring the original text and making it legible to the general, English audience. Added to this was the extra thought and effort required to circumvent the well-established governing regime of knowledge production in China. Policies and editorial guidelines are in place at various levels in China to determine what and how knowledge is ultimately presented. Writing and reading under an umbrella of censorship creates normative practices that these authors take for granted. As these authors and I worked closely to finalize the papers, we were both frustrated. Oftentimes, I was baffled by a particular style of writing that relied on ambiguous words, inconclusive propositions, and/or unspoken arguments. The authors, on the other hand, were leery about explicitly stating their viewpoints. They assured me that “there is no need to write it so blatantly” and that “the reader for sure will understand the unspoken.” After several rounds of revision and co-writing, I was delighted to receive a note from one of the authors who, upon accepting my editorial suggestions, stated, “this is exactly what we aren’t allowed to put it down.” In this sense, guest-editing this Issue has been an act of activism that extends across the borders of intellectual governance. The tale bears witness of humbling and daunting aspects of nourishing critical qualitative inquiry in China studies.

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As mentioned earlier, I worked closely with several authors to revise, and in several cases, to co-write the papers. Through this rather unconventional process and with the authors’ patience and trust, the manuscript comes into its fruition. Specifically, I thank Jinsheng Zhao for applying his expertise in Chinese-Russian translation to translate the Chinese articles. The following reviewers have helped authors to clarify and sharpen their papers: Giampietro Gobo (University of Milan, Italy), Ya-Wen Lei (Harvard University, USA), César A. Cisneros Puebla (University of Tarapacá, Arica, Chile), Aminda Smith (Michigan State University, USA), Y. Yvon Wang (University of Toronto, Canada), and Renita Wong (York University, Canada). At different stages, Linn Clark edited various versions of the articles included in the Special Issue. The Issue benefits from her meticulous reading and insightful comments. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Special Issue would not have come about without the support of Drs. Norman K. Denzin, James Salvo, and the ICQI. Dr. Norman Denzin encouraged me to found the Forum of Critical Chinese Qualitative Inquiry. Ever since its inception, Dr. James
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ORCID iD
Ping-Chun Hsiung https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4838-8572

Notes
1. For example, the term “depression” is translated as yiyu (渝郁), which is not a colloquial term used by the Chinese to describe the woefulness of their mental state. This has led to the false finding that the rate of depression among the Chinese Americans is much lower than their White American counterparts (Liu, 1986, p. 77).

2. As pointed out by Ye, Chinese are collectively not individually oriented. Their opinions and behaviors are not entirely self-driven but are anchored inter-subjectively. The Chinese are particularly conscious about how their views are received/perceived by others, and learn the virtue of tailoring their opinions and behaviors to the collective. Disregarding the relational context is considered inappropriate and uncivil. Filling out a survey questionnaire implies that the subject is required to express individual feelings, opinions, and positions divorced from the collective. Thus, survey questionnaires as a means of data collection violate commonly practiced societal etiquette. This method prevents non-Western cultural meanings and practices from entering into the knowledge system. Thus, data collected through survey questionnaires are unlikely to reflect an account of Chinese society and its members (Ye, 1982).

3. For example, Yang has developed the Theory of Chinese Social Orientation to explain how a typical Chinese person tends to “establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with, and merge into, the surroundings so that collective and social relational goals can be effectively achieved” (K. Yang, 1999, p. 194). G. K. Huang examined the Chinese concept of “face” and its roles in social interactions. According to Huang, face consists of two attributes: lian (脸) and mianzi (面子). The former refers to the respect given to a person by the group due to moral reputation and the latter denotes the prestige or social esteem that a person earns from achievement. L. L. Huang developed a psychological model that is aligned with Chinese cultural and political ideology that emphasizes the value of harmony and devalues conflict. By referencing the Yin-Yang perspective that reflects the basic views of Confucianism and Taoism, Huang departs from Western scholarship that studies “conflict” from the social exchange theory, conflict dialectics, and prisoner’s dilemma game (Huang, 2016).

4. Emphasis on parents’ unilateral demands from their adult children ignores the ethics and relational principle of filial piety. Filial piety is an ethical code that sanctions respect of children toward one’s parents. It is the backbone of ancestor worship and familial loyalty. However, it is neither all-encompassing nor unconditional. A dialectic, fluid principle is available to demand flexibility in practice. Practicing filial piety, it is said that one is forbearing and conciliatory only when the expectation and demand from parents (the superior) is reasonable and that one is expected to place the principle of justice above and beyond one’s loyalty to the family. Codes of ethics even within the Chinese context are not without contentious ambiguity. Resisting dogmatic application of the hierarchy implied in filial piety is a resounding wisdom within the Confucian doctrine.

5. One case focuses on a group of farmers witnessing an incidental infraaction between a migrant farmer and the wife of a local official on a street corner in a township in Southwest China. After several bystanders (farmers) expressed support for the migrant farmer, the crowd grew. The husband who was with his wife at the time called the police force to intervene. The scene quickly escalated out of hand. Overnight, police cars were torched and office buildings littered. The public generally considers such clashes to be the result of the local administration’s mishandling of farmer’s collective sentiment that demands dignity and respect (Ying, 2009).

6. P. Li was the seventh president. L. Song was the eighth president. Y. Li is the current president.

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**Author Biography**

**Ping-Chun Hsiung** studies the politics, mechanism, and engendered process of knowledge production and ignorance perpetuation in local and global contexts. She has facilitated and contributed to critical dialogue across the core/periphery, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal, and science/social sciences divides to advance the interpretative paradigm of social science inquiry. She is the founder of the Forum of Critical Chinese Qualitative Research. Her current research examines how investigative research was conducted, findings constructed, and policies derived during China’s Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), which result in the great famine and 15 to 45 million deaths.