

Oct. 5, 2009

8 Study Questions on Schein, Robins, and Maybury-Lewis “The State”

1. Referring to the image of the “g-stringed other woman,” Schein says the “heterosexual gaze common to Western consumption of such images is not necessarily dominant in other contexts” (p. 474). What is the “heterosexual gaze”? What is she talking about?
2. Schein argues that a self/other binarism between China and the west began to dissolve in the 1980s, that in fact procedures like cosmetic surgery produce not imitations of western bodies but hybrids. She draws an analogy with the “creolizing artifice” that results from “the relaxing and dyeing of black hair” (p. 477). Describe her argument.
3. What does Schein mean by “the alterity of the feminized folk, an internalized site of difference” (p. 474)? What does “alterity” mean? Do we have anything similar?
4. What does the westernized “white” woman mean in China today, according to Schein?
5. Schein says that in the body of the white woman is both the object of consumption and its agent. What does she mean?
6. What major change in symbols of femininity occurred in China between the 1980s and 1990s, according to Schein?
7. Schein speaks of situations in which women become sites for debates over tradition and modernity. Give three examples of this process from our reading.
8. Schein describes a process of “internal orientalism” in which non-Han minorities were represented in a type of film made in the 1980s as “an idealized folk that was both feminized and peasantized” (p. 478). This image, she says, served as a counterweight to Westernization. Describe the similarities between the West’s image of China and this cinematographic image of non-Han “folk.”
9. Schein describes a reversal in some of the 1990s images of the non-Han rural inhabitants of the margins of China, from that of “less-than-modern” to images said to be “charming,” and “amazing.” A Hong Kong clothes designer found them to be a source of “authentic” cultural production which he said he would use in his trendy designs (p. 479). She calls this “nationalist nostalgia.” Provide an analogous U.S. example.
10. Schein (p. 481) speaks of “a reorganization of the global order through *postnational* linkages that supplant or rival territorial nation-states.” Provide 3 examples of such “postnational linkages.”
11. Robins writes out of a certain position, from a certain perspective. Compare this stance to Schein’s and Maybury-Lewis’s.

12. "...however good the simulation, it does not amount to the real thing." (Robins p. 68). Discuss this argument. If true, would it apply to all non-European cultures' efforts at modernization? If false, how do countries adopt the values and institutions of "Western civilization" and avoid being mere simulations?

13. Robins (p. 69) quotes Richard Tapper on Kemalist (Mustafa Kemal) doctrine:

[It] was an alternative to Islam in providing identity and organising principles of life. At the public level, it was no substitute for the divine laws of Islam; at the individual level, it could not meet intellectual needs for an ethics and an eschatology, and its ideology and values were inadequate, shallow and thin.

Argue in favor of this view of secular Western culture. Argue against it.

14. Robins describes two kinds of nationalisms in Turkey—one representing the "real" Turkey, the other deriving from "official and state culture" (p. 72). Describe the way each is nationalistic, and discuss why they are so opposed.

15. Discuss the problems that arise from an overly simple opposition of "traditional" and "modern" using two examples from our reading so far.

16. What is Robins referring to with the phrase "civil society"?

17. On p. 74, what does "liberal" mean in the phrase "new liberalized economic order"?

18. On pp. 77-78, sociologist Nilufer Gole talks about a new social group of Muslim engineers interested in "changing the paradigm of modernity," separating it from westernization. She says they realize that "modernity can only be produced through local cultural identities and social structures." Argue in favor of their position. Against it.

19. Robins' discussion on pp. 79-82 is not anthropology. What is it?

20. Having read Maybury-Lewis, what definition of "state" is most useful to you?

21. Contrast "nation building" and "strengthening the state."

22. Why was the study of ethnicity and the state comparatively neglected until the 1990s?

23. Maybury-Lewis quotes Walser saying "for the moment...pluralism in the strong sense—one state, many peoples—is possible only under tyrannical regimes" (1982: 6). Defend this position. Critique it.

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