



MIGRATION & MEMORY
ARTS AND CINEMAS OF THE CHINESE DIASPORA

edited by **Qiao Li** and **Richard Conte**



Migration & Memory
Migrance et Mémoire

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ÉRIC CONTE, PREFACE*	7
RICHARD CONTE, INTRODUCTION* <i>MOVIES, MEMORY OF OUR MIGRANCES</i>	13
QIAO LI <i>OUTSIDE AND BEYOND "THE NATIONAL": A CASE STUDY OF ANG LEE'S CINEMA IN HOLLYWOOD</i>	21
BRENDA S.A. YEOH & THEODORA LAM <i>DIASPORA'S CHILD: DEMOGRAPHY, IDENTITY AND MIGRATION-LED DIVERSIFICATION IN SINGAPORE</i>	41
TIM GRUENEWALD <i>WANG WAS MISSING: REDISCOVERING WAYNE'S INDEPENDENCE</i>	57
EMMANUEL LINCOT <i>CHINESE ARTISTIC DIASPORAS AND CHINESENESS*</i>	81
QIAO LI <i>"CHINESENESS" IN YIMOU ZHANG'S TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA</i>	99
<i>*English translation by June Allen</i>	
TEXTES FRANÇAIS ORIGINAUX	
ÉRIC CONTE, PRÉFACE	119
RICHARD CONTE, INTRODUCTION <i>LE CINÉMA, MÉMOIRE DE NOS MIGRANCES</i>	125
EMMANUEL LINCOT <i>DIASPORA ARTISTIQUE CHINOISE ET SINITUDE</i>	133
CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS / Biographies	148

PREFACE

Éric Conte

This work is the first of a series of books principally dedicated to the publication of papers from seminars organized, either solely by the MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE, or in partnership with other institutions. With a subtle Pacific touch, the back cover of each volume, in relation to the theme treated, will be done in a palette of colors drawn from Paul Gauguin's stunning painting, *Women of Tahiti* (1891), Musée d'Orsay).

The MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE, co-founded by the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the University of French Polynesia (UPF), is just two years old at the time of this publication. It is the newest member of the national network of twenty-three MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME, and the first to be established outside of mainland France with the aim of developing research in the humanities and the social sciences in the Pacific. The scientific field covered is broad, ranging from the study of past societies to contemporary issues. It particularly favors multidisciplinary approaches.

In addition to offering high-level research and training programs, the mission of the MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE is to promote international scientific exchange and the diffusion of knowledge.

As part of the "Journées des cinémas d'expression chinoise" (Seminar on Chinese-language Films) that took place from November 5th to November 8th, 2018 at the University of French Polynesia, we organized an international symposium on "Migration and Memory" in Chinese-language Films, on November 8th, in partnership with the UPF Confucius Institute and the Wen Fa Cultural Association. The present publication contains a selection of papers presented at this symposium.

The soft sound of the word *migrance*, comes from the somewhat poetic combination of *migration* and the French word *errance*, meaning wandering. It is a word for the women and men who have been through this personal experience, which has become a collective history, entailing the heartbreak of leaving behind family and beloved land, to travel in conditions that sometimes reach the limit of the humane, yet with a hope for new horizons and a better future. The word evokes hardships and aspirations that reflect current situations, even if today's conditions are certainly very different from those of the past.

Chinese migrants have lain down their roots in the diverse Pacific islands, just as they have in a multitude of places throughout the world. Their symbiosis with the local populations, while striving to preserve their language and their core values over the years, is part of what is referred to by memory in the title of this symposium. All this testifies to exemplary pragmatic intelligence.

This symposium deals with the complexities of local contexts of the Chinese diaspora, as seen through the lenses of filmmakers who, though they share common ethnic roots, are subjective witnesses to experiences which remain unique.

Three colleagues initiated these Seminars on Chinese-language Films and this symposium: Prof. Qiao Li and Prof. Richard Conte, who both also directed this publication, as well as Dr. Léopold Mu Si Yan, Director of the Confucius Institute, whose cheerful energy assured the success of the event.

I thank them warmly.

Professor Éric Conte
Director of the MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE

INTRODUCTION

**MOVIES, MEMORY
OF OUR MIGRANCES**

Richard Conte

Upon their arrival in the nineteenth century, almost all of the first emigrants from Guangdong in French Oceania settled and developed family lines. Their descendants do not have same sort of connections today that their ancestors did with a China that was then ruled by the Qing dynasty or Sun Yat-Seng. Is the present generation still to be considered as part of the traditional network of diasporic relations, in the same way as those living in other regions of the world? Two years after seminars and a publication devoted to this subject¹, the Confucius Institute of the University of French Polynesia have undertaken, in the present publication, to look into this question, from a previously unexplored angle, that of film works and contemporary art.

1 - *Diasporas chinoises et créolisations*, (*Chinese Diasporas and Creolizations*) directed by Emmanuel MaMing, Léopold Mu Si Yan, Bruno Saura, Editions You Feng, Paris, 2016.

For this event specialists in film and in visual arts, as well as film directors and producers of Chinese-language fiction and non-fiction movies were brought together. Parallel to the papers published here, a series of public film projections were offered, which highlight the relationship between cultural identity and its many variations and consecutive transpositions, as a result of multiple migratory phenomena.

Beyond a meeting between East and West, midway between what philosopher and sinologist François Jullien² calls “easy universalism” and “lazy relativism”, this book does not question conventional cultural differences. Instead, it explores the play of fertile tensions used for creative and esthetic representation, by communities that are both separated from and close to a various resources.

2 - François Jullien, *Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle*, éditions de l'Herne, 2016.

To what extent can the search for a clear “common ground” involve the analysis and practice of film language, and the cultural matrix become an art resource? Whether the movies were made in China, Malaysia, the United States, Taiwan, New Zealand, Hong Kong, or Canada, in dramatic, comical, epic, heroic or intimate styles, we can question what traces and vestiges in the direct or more pragmatic relationship to Chineseness historical and contemporary migrances leave in the minds of individuals, communities, and their collective myths. What popular imagination, what emotions, what experiences, and what projections towards the future in a globalized world do the filmmakers try to transmit? What thematic, aesthetic and stylistic contributions do they offer³? These are some of the questions dealt with in the texts published here within, to which we have associated the issue concepts migrance and memory, terms that I will aim to clarify in this short introduction. I will leave it up to the authors of the various papers to develop their pertinence within the framework of Chinese-culture film and arts, as I am neither an Asian film specialist nor a sinologist.

3 - The beginning of this text is very much inspired by the presentation of the symposium of Tahiti of November 2018, developed by Léopold Mu Si Yan, then director of the Institut Confucius de Polynésie française (Confucius Institute of French Polynesia), whom I thank for his initiatives, support and precious contributions.

Here then are a few observations, about the movie event, as both as a kinetic phenomenon, and a memorial heritage.

Already for the organizers of the 2007 international conference, *Migrancy at Work: Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics*, at University College Dublin⁴: «Migrance is no longer the only experience of the immigrant but is also an experience of the native. It now characterizes our common deterritorialized, dehistoricized humanity, in perpetual movement, in search of a new definitions of self and other, called upon, according to Édouard Glissant, to make a difficult transition from the Same to Diverse ⁵.»

4 - *Migrancy at Work: Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics*, International conference at University College Dublin on December 14 et 15 2007.

5 - Cf. Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Gallimard, 1996.

As for migration, at least in the French sense of the term, even if, at first glance, it characterizes the movement of a population from one place to another, it cannot be defined so simply. For example, it necessarily concerns civilians. A military convoy is not considered a migratory phenomenon. Nor can we confuse a migrant colony with a trading caravan. Migrating involves moving house and most often crossing borders, leaving one's family and relations, to live out the future in another society. Often – there are daily examples of this – there are vital reasons that force the migrant to leave everything behind, as migration always involves being uprooted and often involves a tragic event.

Furthermore, for the way that the Chinese-language diaspora film and visual arts deal with these issues, the term *migrance* – which suggests a more scattered movement, a wandering with the multiple crossings, that the experience of exile often entails, seemed more fitting than the word *migration*. The word *migrance* also adds a space for dreaming to the word migration: that dreaming of the world left behind, as well as that of the world longed for. It leaves the recollection of the native land open, while breathing life into the power of a better future on a still uncertain shore.

Isn't a movie a trajectory that transports us, in its movement, from a first situation to a final situation? Isn't it also a crossing that we have embarked upon? A flow, a scroll of combined images, words and sounds? However, other than if we leave the room or turn off the receiving device, we "introject" historical content, that often replaces our own personal memories, in such a way that film in the twentieth century, for the first time in human history, established itself as the common ground of a movement-memory.

Allow me here to give an example from personal experience. One of more notable migrations in recent decolonization history is the sudden and unexpected exodus of the French from Algeria in 1962 to mainland France. In a few months 800,000 "pieds-noirs" left the land they were

born in, after the Algerian War. As a child, I was among them and today I still have strong feelings, but vague memories from that journey. The images I add to my memory are those from movies and documents seen later. They have replaced the vague and fleeting impressions of the experience of leaving. The movies have somehow swallowed or absorbed my personal memory. What Deleuze, in his Vincennes courses⁶, called perception-images, “action-images” and “affection-images”⁷, take over and build a shared memory for each of us, a memory that is both communal and individuated, that partly fills in “gaps” in our pasts.

Certain films sequences, whether said to be from fiction films or documentaries, weave our memories from moving images that never actually happened in the past. Better still, they offer us the memory of a historical past that we had never experienced. Among hundreds possible examples, let us take that of the French Revolution: We certainly have some paintings and engravings of the event. Yet, many fiction films on the subject, such as Jean Renoir’s *La Marseillaise* (1938), Robert Enrico’s *La Révolution française* (1989) or Benoit Jacquot’s *Farewell My Queen* (2012), to name but three of the most well-known movies on the subject, are key to our imagination. They offer us an abundance of situations and actions, filled with invaluable depth and authenticity.

Film is thus linked with memory as much as with the movement that inspires its projection⁸. We can also note that the movies that most non-cinephiles see are those of their generation and that, as a result, the visual heritage that is woven into everyone’s memory is constantly changing, and therefore does not, strictly speaking, make for a common memory.

As stated above, a movie is a journey with a beginning and an end. Yet if we consider it more from the point of view of migrance than from that of migration; in our memories it will be the wanderings of our imaginations, a shift of meaning and a disorientation of our perceptions. What gives it this potentiality are the hypnotic effects induced by the flickering of the beam of the projection light, in the obscurity of the theatre, along with the audience with all of their heads facing the screen, ready for a collective hypnosis of variable lengths of time, yet long enough to form what Smithson called a “hole in one’s life”⁹. We may note that what is true for movies projected in a movie theatre or collective room – that Christian Metz analyzed as a device¹⁰ – is less so for television or for movies seen on a computer, whose luminous, emanating screens do not at all produce the same type of psychological excursion, and do not radically interrupt the usual spatial and temporal environment.

6 - Deleuze based his demonstrations on *Matter and Memory*, by Bergson (originally published in French in 1896). Two books were written based on these classes: Cinéma 1. *The Movement-Image* (originally published in French in 1983) and Cinéma2. *The Time-Image*, (originally published in French in 1985).

7 - With, for respective examples, Westerns, Police movies et *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer, 1928) in which close-ups are prominent.

8 - When there are no films (nor photos) there can, thus be memory failure. Certain grave or catastrophic events, due to direct or indirect censoring, were in some cases neither reported upon nor developed as fictional movies. That which, in a modern society, has not been committed to images, tends towards a sort of historical annihilation. Of course, movies can, also, conversely, be used as terror propaganda and show what is unrepresentable. (Cf. Jean-Louis Comolli, *Daesh, le cinéma et la mort*, Verdier, 2016).

9 - Jean-Pierre Criqui, *Un Trou dans la vie. (A Hole in One’s Life). Essais sur l’art depuis 1960*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2002.

10 - « I settle into a seat in the movie theatre. The lights dim. I stop all conversation and all relation with my neighbor. I stop moving. My situation can be compared to that of a sleeping person. Certainly, I remain conscious. I do not lose perception of space, like in a dream. But I forget my usual preoccupations. I renounce what could be called my daytime personality. I transform myself into recording surface. » Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire, psychanalyse et cinéma*, Union Générale d’Éditions, Coll. 10/18, 1977, p. 123.

11 - In 1895, the two brothers shot their first film (45'), *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, and organized the world's first public screening.

Yet if we look more closely, couldn't the conceptual duality of *Migrance and Memory* be the very definition of movies? Isn't film the art of recorded and projected movement? We can think of *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*¹¹, *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1896), the crazy chase scenes in Buster Keaton's movies, John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), and road movies like *Easy Rider* by Dennis Hopper (1969), or the first movie by Steven Spielberg, *Duel* (1971). We could endlessly list all these films in which the characters get around on foot or horseback, by bicycle, car, plane or rocket. Thus, most often the art of movement celebrates... movement, that is to say the pursuit, tracking or running; the journey, the odyssey and all ambulatory forms. Hence the displacement of populations, the exoduses, the conquests of territories were often recorded on film. What remains to us of the faithful depictions of these migratory events has the character of a moving recording; that neither still photography nor the written words of articles can provide.

It is there where the other visual arts abstain from moving, to better move our imaginations, that movies run before our eyes, with the appearance of reality, because a movie is both a migrance and a memory.

**OUTSIDE AND BEYOND
“THE NATIONAL”:
A CASE STUDY OF ANG LEE’S
CINEMA IN HOLLYWOOD**

Qiao Li

ABSTRACT

This article takes perhaps the most successful filmmaker of Chinese origin, Ang Lee, out of his Taiwanese context of discussion and investigates the ways that his transnational/global filmmaking intersects with Chinese cultural identities and influences. This further problematizes the concept of national cinema and notions of “the national” as being defined within the boundaries of a nation-state. In the era of globalization, the fixed notions of national are problematic in thinking through cross-cultural communication (which is not unidirectional if it is to be successful). Ang Lee’s films take place in cross-cultural, transnational settings and deal with the themes of Chinese/Taiwanese diaspora, homosexuality, and cultural identity. The analysis of “Chineseness” in Ang Lee’s transnational/Hollywood cinema help us interpret more productively the interface between global and local, national and transnational.

KEYWORDS

National cinema
Imagined communities
Cultural identity
Chineseness
Transnationalism
Ang Lee

This article draws on what Benedict Anderson (1991) put forward as the theory of “Imagined Communities” which assumes a large body of people regarding themselves as members of a “nation” (and here I interpret this term broadly and beyond understandings of geographical borders and political systems) through a variety of historical legacies, cultural memories and acts of consumption. I assume that there is a shared cultural affinity that extends across three Chinese language cinemas (cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) and I use the term “Chineseness” to refer to expressions of shared cultural, historical and philosophical continuities represented in the films of a number of directors in the three Chinese language cinemas. Prominent scholars of “Chineseness” maintain the view that “Chineseness” is promoted as a unique feature of national/regional culture which serves to connect localities to broader networks of power that include not only Mainland China but also Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore etc. Tu Wei-ming (2005) sets the stage in his *Cultural China: the Periphery as the Centre* in which he develops the concept of cultural space – a concept that encompasses the continuous interaction between all three symbolic universes and points to the creation of a transnational Chinese intellectual community. Similarly, in her book *Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production*, Shih Shu-mei (2010) has approached the notion of “Chineseness” by referring to Chinese diaspora as a universalizing category founded on a unified ethnicity, culture, language, and place of origin or homeland. “Chineseness” becomes a form of cultural capital that is shaped through transnational discourses that are negotiated in history. Ideas about degrees of authenticity as Chinese, which are seen as derived from links to territory and knowledge of “traditional” Chinese culture such as Confucianism and Taoism, have become a basis through which diasporic Chinese define themselves in relation to one another.

This article engages with Ang Lee, one key director from Taiwan, and looks at English language films he has directed either in, or for, a transnational context. This case study explores the representation and influence of “Chineseness” in Lee’s Hollywood projects. Thus, the case study not only seeks to “think beyond nation”, but also theorize beyond the concept of national cinema to form a systematic investigation into “Chineseness”, its transformed identity, in Lee’s Hollywood films. The article investigates whether his films still contain signifiers of Chinese traditional cultures and furthers the investigation of the signification of complex national meanings in contexts beyond that of the nation-state. Thus, this article also explores how elements of “Chineseness” employed by Lee operate in the transnational context and work to problematize fixed notions of national cinemas and the nation.

In the era of globalization, the studies of national cinema have been facing complexities brought about by transnational cultural and capital flow. The term “transnational Chinese cinema” in film studies has been popular since the late 1990s. For many (e.g. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu 1997), the “transnational” becomes a tool for approaching the complex connections among three Chinese language cinemas and Chinese diasporic filmmaking in the era of globalization. Chris Berry’s chapter *Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies* (2011) is the most recent key document for conceptualizing the term “transnational” in the Chinese case. By referring to Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim (2010), Berry (2011: 9) articulates the three patterns regarding the usage of the term “transnational” among which the second pattern « focuses on cultural formations that sustain cinemas that exceed the borders of individual nation-states or operate at a more local level within them; for example, Arab-language cinemas, Chinese language cinemas.» Although focusing on the multiple and conflicting meanings of the term “transnational” with reference to internationality and globalization, Berry (2011: 14) does not deny that cultural affinity is a larger force that shapes “the national” in three Chinese language cinemas in certain ways.

The idea of national cinema has long informed the promotion of non-Hollywood cinemas (Crofts 1998: 385). The dominance of Hollywood meant that as far back as the 1920s and 1930s, France and Germany formed their national cinemas almost in ideological opposition to Hollywood. Susan Hayward (1993: 5) explains, that by the 1920s, calls were being made in France for « a truly national cinema as a defense against the American hegemony, all of which (in the implicit concern for the well-being of cinema) points to a historicism and narcissism of sorts.» Classic theoretical concepts such as imperialism/nationalism, orientalism and the dualism of dominance/resistance became the basis of academic views on the relationship between Hollywood and other national cinemas. Among many issues, the “Otherness” of national cinemas has been historically emphasized in relation to Hollywood. « As a marketing strategy, these national labels have promised varieties of “otherness”— of what is culturally different from both Hollywood and the films of other importing countries » (Crofts 1998: 385). In this article, I explore models of dualism and dominance/resistance that have dominated studies of national cinemas. In an attempt to move beyond dualism, I will suggest a third perspective to reflect a more flexible notion of “the national” and its relationship to Hollywood. Studies of national cinemas have identified *auteur* directors as important elements in the building of national cinemas and more especially

the projection of national identities. This is partly due to the importance of international film festivals in the distribution and popularization of non-Hollywood cinema to the world, and partly, because these festivals by their nature privilege the *auteur* director. This article explores this important link between directors and national cinema developing a more complex context than has tended to preoccupy studies of national cinema – surely a narrow notion of the nation-state. What happens when certain *auteur*-directors of Chinese origin successfully cross cultural boundaries and make English language films, which are successful both in the East and the West or make films for a transnational context? Do they remain signifiers of Chinese traditional cultures? These are the key questions that I will explore in this article. To investigate these questions, I will examine perhaps the most successful *auteur* director of Chinese origin on the international film festival circuit, Lee, and discuss his work outside of his Taiwanese contexts and investigate his filmmaking in a Western transnational context. The choice of films to be discussed in the article has been made carefully to contribute to the central arguments. Therefore, a conscious decision has been made to not include all of Lee's English language productions, not to mention the number of Lee's English language films continues to grow.

LEE'S FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE FILM *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* (1995)

Taiwanese director Lee's authorial signatures in film arguably reflected and expressed the influences of Chinese culture and traditions which since the 1990s have additionally shown increasingly more affinity for transnational sensibilities and practices. Writing about Taiwan's relationship with China is problematic since both countries have their own opinions regarding which one is the legitimate site of China as nation-state and as guardian or inheritor of Chinese culture. According to June Yip (1997: 139), « One of the most crucial factors that binds a group of people into a "nation" is "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories", a shared heritage which, through repetition, creates and reinforces a sense of historical continuity and sense of community. » This is particularly the case in Taiwan when Kuomintang (KMT) relocated to Taiwan following its defeat in Mainland China in 1949; whereupon it then sought to consecrate Taiwan as the rightful heir to China's five-thousand-year imperial tradition against the Communist regime in Mainland China. For the purposes of both reinforcing political control over Taiwan and competing with Communist China, KMT focused on « building Taiwan as a legitimate site of the Chinese nation and culture » (Zhang 2004: 113).

Lee was born and educated in Taiwan. In 1977, he initially went to New York to study theatre at New York University but switched to film instead. Since his first feature film *Pushing Hands* (1992), his career developed quickly. His educational background and life experience in the West enable him to travel between the East and the West, between two different cultures. Lee has carefully explored the “intercommunity” of multi-cultures and bridged the aesthetic gaps between different film cultures. Gina Marchetti (2000: 292) has argued that Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) could be considered as a (cultural) hybrid film which « bridge[s] the gap between Chinese film and Asian American film culture. » In turn, this has led to a widely acknowledged reception of his films in a multi-cultural context. Whether in his Taiwanese films or Hollywood films, Lee is preoccupied with the cultural characteristics and the wisdom of the Confucian tradition. For example, the Confucian ideology of the “Golden Mean” influenced his way of dealing with film narrative, which will be explored later in this article. The Confucian “Golden Mean” is a text rich with symbolism. The idea of the “Golden Mean” is to maintain balance and harmony between one’s mind and her or his status in the society. Moderation is one key element for the practice of the “Golden Mean” and the guiding principle is that one should never act in excess. The abstinence and restraint both in terms of narrative and cinematic aesthetics in Lee’s cinema which will be explored later in the article is obviously influenced by this Confucian ideology. Bringing perspectives from Confucianism and Taoism to those of Hollywood cinema and a cinematic personal vision that bridges gaps in cross-cultural communication, these are the main characteristics of Lee’s cinema. Lee’s knowledge of Hollywood filmmaking modes is assimilated in his own filmmaking style; contributing to his success in understanding audiences’ aesthetic perspectives when making films outside Taiwan (Lee: 2007). While adopting Western perspectives and techniques, he also incorporates Chinese cultural principles and beautifully crafts his films from a Chinese aesthetic perspective. Whitney Crothers Dilley, in her *Opposition and Resolution in Sense and Sensibility*, examines Lee’s first English production in relation to Lee’s previous Taiwanese films and then states that:

« Although the story is two hundred years old and from a remote setting and period, it has a timelessness and universality which Lee brings to the screen, proving the director an apt observer of global cultural codes of behaviour. The central cultural principle of social duty also calls to mind Lee’s previous works, especially *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*. »

(Dilley 2015: 84)

Sense and Sensibility is Lee's first Hollywood project and English language film. Although Jane Austen's authorship has long been revered in English literary circles, Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* is more than a simple cinematic adaptation. Rather it is a complex cross-cultural phenomenon, that combines influences of British heritage films, women's films, traditional Chinese culture and Hollywood mode of filmmaking in unique ways. In this interesting cultural nexus, establishing the auteur of this film becomes problematic: we cannot erase the role of Austen as the author of the novel, just as we cannot deny the *auteurs*hip of British actress Emma Thompson who adapted the screenplay for Lee's film. *Sense and Sensibility* thus contains an interesting mix of Eastern and Western cultural sensibilities in more ways than one. Keeping in mind this East-West mixture, my article primarily focuses on Lee's *auteurs*hip input in *Sense and Sensibility* with particular reference to the ways traditional Chinese culture have influenced his authorial vision as a transnational filmmaker.

Lee's authorial signatures – especially those embodied in themes and scenarios about abstinence and restraint, first seen and developed in his early Taiwanese films such as *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) – are evident in his first English-language film both in terms of its aesthetic configurations and narrative premises. In Chinese aestheticism, nature, harmony, ambivalence and restraint are a highly praised aesthetic ideology. The characteristics of Chinese aesthetics consist of the ideas of profound implication, ambiguous connotation, and restraint (using techniques to create atmosphere and intrigue mediation), and *Liubai* (or *blank-leaving*). As Jorce Chi-Hui Liu (1997: 272) points out:

«This blank spot, the so-called *Liubai*, is a traditional Chinese technique painters use in order to leave some space untouched by the brush so that the objects on the canvas do not appear too crowded. But, in Lai's version, the blank spot turns out to be a meaningful visual icon of interstices, a missing sigh, or a sign which escape the reader's (the audience's) interpretation.»

Abstinence and restraint are often connected to tragedy and they are reflected in both film narratives and cinematic aesthetics in Lee's cinema. Lee tries not to project his protagonists as highly sentimental figures. The individual tragedy is epitomized as the conflict of self-expression against social convention. *Sense and Sensibility* and *Eat Drink Man Woman* are perfect examples of Lee's cinematic abstinence and restraint for the female character. That Lee was cast as the film's director might be attributed to Thompson's keen appreciation for his «meticulous talent for details and candor in family drama.»

As Doran and Thompson (1996 : 214) recount :

«After she (Thompson) saw *The Wedding Banquet*, directed by Lee, she discovered that Ang Lee's meticulous talent for details and candor in family dramas made him the most appropriate candidate to direct and bring forth the complexity of emotions and relationships central to the English family drama (by Austen) (...) He also helped to interject many Eastern cultural expressions in a world renowned English novel (...) in expanding and articulating interpersonal relationships, a topic inherently congenital and intrinsic to all cultures... »

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Lee's «Eastern cultural expressions» most manifest in the sequence where Marianne is sick (Figure1). Here, Lee employs the strong contrast of black and white tones. The scene is divided by a diagonal line that separates the well-lit and shaded portions in the *mise-en-scène*. Marianne, dressed in white, and the bed, also primarily white in colour, occur the former portion. Although she is lying in bed, the shot looks like she is standing at the gate of death ; her face is composed. In the shaded portion, her sister wears dark clothes and holds a dim candle. This scene obviously deals with the drama of life and death but calmness prevails in the shot composition.



Figure 1: Ang Lee, *Sense and Sensibility*, 1995. The *mise-en-scène* of the scene where Marianne is sick.

The line between life and death is a thin one. The contrastive use of black and white tones, light and shadow conjures up an image of polar oppositions, bringing to mind traditional Chinese cultural ideologies about life/death, sky/earth, sun/moon, day/night, feminine/masculine, and other polarised constructs, including man/nature and activity and passivity, as well as the corresponding pursuits to strike a balance between polarities as such in Chinese philosophies and practices, from Taoism and Confucianism. Expressed as “harmony”

in Taoist philosophy and the “Golden Mean” in Confucianism, the latter endeavours accentuate the interdependent relationship between man and nature. In doing so, the accents neutralize the conflict between subject and object, between man and nature as oppositional in character. Yin and Yang, the fundamental philosophical themes in Chinese culture, are symbols of balance and harmony. Thus, Yin and Yang create the possibility for realizing the Confucian ideal of the “Golden Mean” and the Taoist insight of “Harmony” and the equilibrium between one’s mind and his/her external world. These philosophic and aesthetic ideals manifest themselves, as just discussed in the life and death scene, within the dramatic narrative of *Sense and Sensibility* and, in the cinematography as well.

In terms of narrative, it may seem absurd to say the concerns manifested in Lee’s Taiwanese films are seen in British heritage films, especially when both authors (Jane Austen as the author of the original novel and Emma Thompson as the author of the script) are British. Indeed, *Sense and Sensibility* marks transition for Lee in terms of film genre choices. Taiwanese or otherwise, Lee’s films obviously deal with different subject matter that draw on diverse genres and film styles. However, all his Taiwanese films have an unchanged cultural core that marks him out as an *auteur*. This includes his *auteurist* reflections on the conflicts between traditional customs and individual aspirations, and the social constraints that frame them. Themes as such are recurrent in Lee’s early films such as the *Father Knows Best* trilogy which consists of *Pushing Hands*, *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*. These films emphasize on the father-son relationship or the generational and cultural gap between the father and his offspring(s). This theme, detailing the conflicts with the family drama setting, also appears in his first English language film. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the three daughters have to marry for social and financial reasons: their well-being and livelihood depend on doing just that, especially after the death of their father. Living with strained circumstances as such, they, also the film’s protagonists, thus struggle between sense (traditional conventions) and sensibility (individual emotion). One of Lee’s dominant authorial signatures relates to the particular obsession for highlighting or critiquing patriarchal power in the traditional Chinese family, as seen in the *Father Knows Best* trilogy, for example. In *Sense and Sensibility*, there is no strong or overbearing father figure. However, his death brings to fore the patriarchal unconscious when the daughters anxiously and actively seek male protection through marriage. If the image of the father has played a central role in Lee’s Taiwanese films, then, in *Sense and Sensibility*, the influence of patriarchy can still be considered as the force which drives the characters to their destiny. The death of the father creates an anxiety for the daughters and their struggle is placed within this social context.

From this perspective, the film is about attempts to restore the patriarchal order which is gone (as the father is gone) so as to recuperate the familial and societal harmony. Thus, Lee's efforts in reconstructing the family and a patriarchal order are still a potential (and powerful) theme in this British heritage film. Lee obviously draws on the intimacy and complexity of relationships between parents and children within a familial and social context in which the Chinese setting is switched to a British one.

“CHINESENESS” FROM *THE WEDDING BANQUET* TO *THE ICE STORM* (1997)

While exploring Lee's expression of “Chineseness” in the cross-cultural context of his Hollywood films, I will refer back briefly to his early Taiwanese films to see how his authorial signatures have been carried on in his later Hollywood films. Lee, as *auteur* of Taiwanese cinema, has certainly infused his signatures apparent in his Taiwanese « art house » movies into *The Ice Storm*. However, if the early works of Lee are in part about “Chineseness”, here a visual layer of “Chineseness” is for the most part erased. Still, this American literary adaptation inherits Lee's cultural capital. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald (2005: 148) considers Lee as a “cosmopolitan director” and movies as “international” texts: « internationalism is about the tangible deals between peoples, the integration of ideas and implementations across national boundaries, and the assimilation of styles and technologies into borderless realms of understanding, which nonetheless do not expect an ontological commitment to difference. » Lee's cinematic world is one that specifically explains the ambiguity of the notion of “national” in cultures.

As a family drama and an exploration of sexual complications, *The Wedding Banquet* becomes a good reference for Lee's *The Ice Storm*. The mode of narration is an important element in Lee's films. Lee graduated from *Taiwan National Drama School* and then he received Western theatre education in Illinois State University in the US. This educational background has given Lee's filmmaking a theatrical quality. The plots of his films are often simple but he is gifted at using dramatic conflicts to construct filmic narrative. In *The Wedding Banquet*, the narrative centres on the son's wedding banquet. The conflict between a traditional Chinese concept of family and the Western, modern, non-traditional conception of family is represented and explored in this crucial scene. This tradition has been carried over to his Hollywood films. The narrative of *The Ice Storm* focuses on two families (the Hood family and the Carvers) in a small town. The husband Ben has an affair with their neighbour and his wife Elena is tired of his deception. Their relationship with their adolescent children is also

in trouble. The conflicts of these families reach a climax at a swingers' party: at the end of the party, wives are supposed to randomly pick up a key and go home and spend the night with the key's owner. An unexpected ice storm, however, causes the wife swapping party to have an unpredictable ending. The whole film is imbued with a heavy atmosphere: the psychological dynamics echoes the unexpected but unavoidable ice storm. Donald (2005: 153) also identifies the "Chineseness" in *The Ice Storm* where «affect is created through the Chinese intonations of the score and through the repetitive description of undefined expectation through movement between one place and another.»

The two couples, while being ready to go to the wife swapping party, are at the same time also worried about the disintegration of their families. All these elements in combination strengthen the dramatic tension of the film. In Confucian notion of family, the influence of father decides the inner structure of family. In Lee's Taiwanese film *The Wedding Banquet* and his Hollywood project *The Ice Storm*, both families are in states of tension dealing with conflicts. At the centre of these conflicts is still the image of the father. Lee explored the feeling and emotion of the two fathers (Gao's father in *The Wedding Banquet* and Ben Hood in *The Ice Storm*) in the two films. The father in *The Wedding Banquet* loses his power of control over his family. In *The Ice Storm*, on the one hand, there is a huge cultural gap between Ben and his daughter, but on the other hand, due to his immoral behaviour (an affair with his neighbour), he loses his dignity in front of his daughter when she discovers the affair by chance. *The Ice Storm* is endowed with a Chinese cultural spirit based on values of self-control and emotional restraint. In his representation of characters' psychological struggles, Lee's tendency is to keep them low key on the surface and to let the viewer work hard to interpret the emotional meaning. This is supported by careful construction of the *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. As a Hollywood melodrama, the above characteristics may coincide with Hollywood conventions, but in this film Lee also paid particular attention to the relationship between man and nature. *The Ice Storm* displays a family subjected to the forces of nature. For example, in the film the two teenagers head out for fun and finally start a panicked kiss.

The sequence (Figure 2) is shot in a drained swimming pool, which is filled with dead leaves. Lee and his cinematographer carefully (and artistically) structure the *mise-en-scène* and present a frozen moment of autumn, in which the relationship between the younger members (symbolically as well as the old members) of the two families form a portrait of misery. The autumn atmosphere is a cold, spooky and morbid mood that enhances the tragedy of the characters in the film.

For Lee, cinematically the ice storm may be allegorically read as a metaphor for tragedy, as in Chinese literature and poetry, when rain dies, it becomes snow.¹ The ice storm (the frozen rain) may well emphasize this mood of the tragedy.

1 - Lu Xun, one of China's greatest contemporary writers, wrote in his poem *Snow*: it is «lonely snow, dead rain, the ghost of rain» (Lee 1985: 16).



Figure 2: Ang Lee, *The Ice Storm*, 1997. The two teenagers' panicked kiss in a drained swimming pool.

Lee can be seen to draw on Chinese perspectives and traditions in dealing with family. He brings Chinese perspectives to the way that families work and what families are committed to do. In doing this, he also explores very common Western familial problems and offers solutions that may be slightly unusual. In *The Ice Storm*, Hood's wife is tired of Hood's deception and after discovering Hood's affair with Janey Carver, their neighbour, a coming "emotional storm" threatens to terminate the future of their family. What demands attention is Lee's way of representing family relationships and conflicts, which is heavily influenced by Chinese cultural characteristics. He does not simply destructure the notion of family in his films. On the contrary, he explores compromise and reconciliation (though often painful) to work through the family crisis they are embroiled in. In Chinese culture, compromise and reconciliation are regarded as highly intellectual ways and are represented as the "Golden Mean" in Confucianism. Facing their responsibilities and agreeing to compromise, Ben and Elena finally walk away from the absurd wife swapping party. The safe return of their son then reunites their family in contrast to their neighbour: the Carvers' tragedy (their son Mikey is killed in an accident in the ice storm).

“CHINESENESS” IN *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN* (2005)

Brokeback Mountain is Lee's second film to explore homosexuality. *Brokeback Mountain* is set in the American West of the 1960s and tells the story of a relationship between two cowboys that lasts twenty years. Gender studies and queer studies have taken an important role in Western scholarship mainly because they theorize how gender as a social and cultural construction shape people's lives, their relationships, their workplace, institutional structures, public policy and the production of knowledge. Lee is not working in that kind of political space in his production of *Brokeback Mountain*. Lee has repeatedly said that *Brokeback Mountain* is not a film about homosexuality but an exploration of a universal human emotion. As in *The Ice Storm*, Lee uses cinematic representation in *Brokeback Mountain* more importantly to depict not just the sexual but also the emotional life of two men. In *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis and Jack obviously indulge in homosexual behaviour but more importantly in terms of the narrative, their desire transfers from just a sexual impulse to an emotional love. Although they both come from different social backgrounds and have different personalities, their love endures for more than twenty years while facing personal difficulties, hardship and social prejudice along the way. According to Lee, *Brokeback Mountain* provides us with a mirror of “another strange world” (Lee 2007: 137) and is constructed to offer sympathy to the two protagonists whatever the viewers' attitudes are towards homosexuality. Matthew Bolton (2012) also argues that cinematic adaptation of queer texts often involves “straightening” differences by placing them within more conventional narratives of love and romance. He states:

«By contrast, Lee's film initially emphasizes the similarities between straight and queer desire but ultimately invites his implied straight audience to recognize the ambiguity of the protagonists' experiences and to register the gap between the audience's heteronormativity and the protagonists' queerness.»

(Bolton 2012:35)

Brokeback Mountain does not proselytize for gay identities and lifestyles. The film works specifically to highlight a human desire for true love. In *Brokeback Mountain*, homosexual sex becomes just another aspect of a universal and natural human need, desire and love. Although *Brokeback Mountain* is an American film with a sensitive and even, to some extent within an Eastern context, taboo theme, Lee suggests that *Brokeback Mountain* “is actually very Chinese” (Lee 2007: 142). This statement does not draw solely on the aesthetics of the film, but it also represents the influence of Chinese traditional culture in this film. The influence of Chinese traditional culture enabled

Lee to deal with the tragic and sensitive theme with a kind of Eastern “softness”. The influence of this Eastern “softness” can be seen in Lee’s authorial signatures: abstinence and endurance; harmony and reconciliation. However, the concept of this “softness” has more profound significance in Taoist philosophy:

« The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way. »

(Lao-tzu 1997: 8)

Water, as the symbol of “softness” is an important image in Taoism. Taoists conceptualize nature by using organic metaphors. Water benefits thousands of creatures yet symbolically (perhaps like human nature) it always flows to the lowest level (or in terms of Chinese expression – it is content with the places that all men disdain. Thus, through this spontaneous way of “flow” harmony emerges between man and nature). Lee’s filmic style is shaped by the Confucian/Taoist philosophy of harmony. As mentioned, harmony is the basis of Confucianism and Taoism and has long been regarded as an aesthetic concept in Chinese traditional art forms, which could be seen in many Chinese literary writings and paintings. Lee transferred these aesthetics of harmony to his filmmaking and created a unique visual style.

His visuals communicate important philosophical aspects. In successfully adapting *Brokeback Mountain* to the screen, the desolate bleak scenes depicted in Proulx’s short story which represents primitive passion and wilderness are rendered more picturesque mirroring characteristics of Chinese Taoist painting and implying harmony between man and nature. Thus, the visual representation suggests the preferred message that the film is about a love within human nature and not a love prohibited by society. In Chinese painting theory, composition is secondary to the formal properties of the brush and ink strokes. To the director of *Brokeback Mountain*, however, composition is primary and was much influenced in the film by the Taoist school of painting. The unique composition of this style of painting was developed to provide a sense of the relationship between man and nature, and between the earth and its people. Taoist painting puts emphasis on the spiritual qualities which reveal the inner harmony of man and nature as perceived according to Taoist concepts. The harmony of Taoist philosophy is evident in *Brokeback Mountain* and of the landscape and composition in particular. Lee expresses his Taoist philosophy by placing all emphasis on the ethereal landscape and showing man as merely a detail in the natural beauty. Thus, natural harmony makes the homosexual relationship natural and harmonious in the film.



Figure 3 :
Ang Lee,
Brokeback Mountain,
2005.
Ennis and Jack
by the lake.



Figure 4:
Ang Lee,
Brokeback Mountain,
2005.
Ennis and Jack
on the mountain.

As illustrated from Figure 3 to Figure 4, the aesthetics of the *mise-en-scène* privileges the acceptance of homosexuality; making something that is often read against the grain in mainstream cinema as a central and preferred meaning. Lee's composition contains specifically the Taoist symbols and signs. For example, in Figure 3, the scene depicts a vast range of elements and the depiction of nature depends on proportion and measure to create beauty by balancing land, river, mountain and sky in the frame, which is similar to the composition of traditional Taoist painting. The composition of the scene in Figure 4 is also similar to Taoist painting which ideologically positions man and nature in one unity to express harmony between man and nature. All these scenes are also beautifully crafted. The overall composition enables the audience to experience a kind of spiritual pleasure while watching the film and while digesting the film's preferred meaning in relation to sex and love.

CONCLUSION

As argued earlier, Lee brings a unique cross-cultural vision that is mostly very commercially successful because he introduces a different take on American/Western culture as he provides a Chinese perspective. The exploration of “Chineseness” in Lee’s cinema reveals that “the national” becomes no more a concrete and idealized construction with clear borders but transgresses spatial, temporal, cultural, ethnic, moral and sexual boundaries. It is also important for us to understand such transgression within a diasporic Chinese context.

Paisley Livingston (1997: 130) argues that contributing some form of agency to the production of an artefact is insufficient to be counted as an author of it; a communicative or expressive intention must stand behind the contribution. It is in this respect that I assume the concern for national themes of auteur directors of Chinese origin, such as Lee, are also expressed in their filmmaking outside of their national contexts. By conducting a detailed analysis of Lee’s major films made outside Taiwan, I explore how global filmmaking intersects with Chinese cultural identities and influences. My emphasis of “Chineseness” here does not efface American and British influences but, rather like my own film scholarship, it offers a space to bring new or multiple meanings by crossing cultures.

As Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (2006: 2) state: «... it is also important to recognize the impossibility of maintaining a strict dichotomy between Hollywood cinema and its “others”. Cinema has from its inception been transnational, circulating more or less freely across borders and utilizing international personnel. This practice has continued from the era of Chaplin, Hitchcock, and Fritz Lang up to contemporary directors like Ang Lee, Mira Nair and Alfonso Cuarón.» In such a transnational filmmaking context, “the national” is complicated by personal experience (especially auteur directors’ diasporic filmmaking) and bicultural identification has become relatively common. An investigation of the influences of “Chineseness” and its relationship with the national/cultural in the films that I am investigating reveals how these issues extend beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Ros Jennings (2002: 379) points out that «in the study of national cinemas, there has been an impulse to focus on historical, stylistic, linguistic and thematic concepts of “the national”. This approach has tended to maintain a notion of “the national” as separate and distinct from its international/global relationships.» When “the national” is constructed as an «artistic opposition to Hollywood style» (Jennings 2002: 379), what happens when directors, like Lee, cross cultures and their artistic style becomes incorporated into Hollywood? The cross-examination of “Chineseness” represented in Lee’s English language/

transnational films problematizes the notions of 'the national' as being defined within the boundaries of a nation-state. It is my contention that cross-cultural production, in many ways, is already post-national and multicultural in nature, therefore it offers us an insight into how the national/cultural identity can be challenged by cross-cultural interpretation. Lee, a successful director both in the East and the West, provides an interesting case study in this respect.

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GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

ROMAN TYPE	CHINESE CHARACTERS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT-TERMS
Ang Lee	李安	
Eat Drink	《飲食男女》	Man Woman
Liubai	留白	Blank-leaving
Pushing Hands	《推手》	
The Wedding Banquet	《喜宴》	
Yang	阳	Bright/positive
Yin	阴	Dark/negative

**DIASPORA'S CHILD:
DEMOGRAPHY, IDENTITY
AND MIGRATION-LED
DIVERSIFICATION IN SINGAPORE***

Brenda S.A. Yeoh & Theodora Lam

ABSTRACT

Since the founding of modern Singapore some 200 years ago, the island-nation-state has transformed rapidly from a port-city to a cosmopolitan city fueled by its globalizing ambitions. While a liberal yet strategic open-door migration policy was critical in supporting the government's economic goals, it is also responsible for transforming the country's social and demographic landscape. This article explores the way in which transnational migration into Singapore has reconfigured the social fabric of Singapore's racial categories and interrogates the politics of race and identity in an increasingly diverse cityscape.

KEYWORDS

Singapore

Population diversity

Migration

Identity politics

Hyphenated identities

Multiracialism

INTRODUCTION

Since its founding as an entrepôt in the early nineteenth century, Singapore has experienced considerable development and change from its beginnings as a port-city under conditions of “colonial pluralism” to its present status as a postcolonial nation-state with strong global-city ambitions (Goh 2008: 236). Through an initial period of a century and a half characterized by a liberal open-door policy on immigration during the colonial regime, followed by a subsequent half century of careful post-independence planning in pursuit of economic growth and nation-building, Singapore has developed into a global city par excellence in Asia with a distinctive multiracial complexion and cosmopolitan landscape.

As Sandercock (2006: 43) notes, the contemporary phenomena of «immigration and ethnicity» are «constitutive of globalisation and are reconfiguring the spaces of and social relations in cities in new ways». In this article, following a brief history of nation-building in postcolonial Singapore, we examine the way in which rapid and highly diverse transnational immigration is reconfiguring the social fabric of global-city Singapore in terms of its demography in relation to the creation of a “multiracial” nation-state, and its management of race identity in the wake of increased immigration.

POSTCOLONIAL NATION-BUILDING IN THE NEW CITY STATE

In a nation constituted by streams of immigrants from China, India, the Malay Archipelago and Europe along with creolised cultures such as the Peranakans (a fusion of predominantly Chinese and Malay influences) and Eurasians (mixed European and Asian ancestry) that sprung from colonial encounters, one of the primary tasks of postcolonial nation-building in Singapore was to transform diasporic groups into one settled people. This task proved particularly challenging, as not only was the island made up of myriad races and ethnic groups from elsewhere, but the concept of nationhood did not exist until the end of World War II. Singapore only became an independent nation-state in 1965, after it severed colonial ties with Britain in 1963 and joined the Federation of Malaya in what became a short-lived merger that soon spiralled out of control, leading to Singapore’s separation from Malaysia in 1965. Given these factors, the island-nation-state has little sense of a shared history with which the complexly heterogeneous population of almost two million can identify. As Harper (1997: 261) observes, Singapore, as «a child of diaspora ... testifies to the difficulties of creating a modern nation-state on a model inherited from Europe in a region where history mocks the nation-state’s claims to cultural and linguistic exclusiveness.»

Thus, the construction of a sense of belonging and shared history was paramount amongst the many aims and challenges of the ruling government in postcolonial times. Part of the ideological work embedded in constructing a nation – what Gopal Baratham (1999) referred to as congealing “the jelly of nationhood” in polyglot populations – involves defining fixed categories to incorporate citizens of the nation on the one hand and excluding others as non-citizens or “aliens” on the other. With independence in 1965, immigration laws were modified (Modification of Laws [Immigration] Order, 1966) to reinforce Singapore’s borders as the fledgling nation-state worked to establish its identity as a sovereign and independent state. Legislation in relation to citizenship was accordingly adjusted. The 1957 Singapore Citizenship Ordinance had conferred automatic citizenship on everyone born in Singapore. Those born in the Federation of Malaya or who were citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies could become citizens if they had a minimum of two years’ residence (later increased to a minimum of eight years), while all other “aliens” – mainly those born in China – could apply for citizenship by naturalisation with at least eight years’ residence (later increased to ten years). Dual citizenship has been prohibited since 1960, as the government was generally of the view that, given Singapore’s geopolitical situation, allowing its citizens multiple allegiances might compromise its security in times of national crisis (Suryadinata 2015). Nation-state formation demanded an enactment of closure and increased control of national borders in order to strengthen a sense of imagined community across diverse groups, even as countervailing pressures of globalization propel cities like Singapore to develop extraterritorial connections among places, populations and times (Oswin and Yeoh 2010).

In the first few years of independence, strict controls were imposed on the importation of foreign workers, but these controls were relaxed as industrialisation went into full swing. Rapid industrialisation based on low-cost labour and low-to-mid level technology was accompanied by a large influx of foreign workers in the manufacturing, construction and domestic services sectors from “non-traditional” (that is, non-Malaysian) sources, such as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Thailand. By the 1980s, plans were put in place to upgrade the country’s industrial structure in order to push towards skill and technology-intensive economic activities with higher value-add. In order to fuel economic growth, labour augmentation programmes depending on aggressive (but also selective) labour immigration

policies designed to attract “foreign manpower” at both the high and low ends of the industrial spectrum were implemented to overcome the limitations of local resources. As a result, the number of non-residents/non-citizens in the population rose sharply, from 60,944 in 1970 to 1,644,400 in 2018 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018a). The post-independence decades of rapid economic growth also saw a sharp decline in natural increase as fertility rates plummeted to well-below replacement rates among the citizen population, despite the turn-around from an anti-natalist to a pro-natalist population policy from the late 1980s.

While the first national census in post-independent Singapore in 1970 registered a total population of just over two million, comprising an overwhelming majority of citizens (90.4 per cent) and much smaller proportions of permanent residents or PRs (6.7 per cent) and non-residents (2.9 per cent), a very different social and demographic mix has emerged as Singapore celebrates its bicentennial in 2019 – 200 years since the arrival of Stamford Raffles who set up a British trading post on the island in 1819. In a total population of 5.6387 million in 2018, less than two-thirds of the population (61.6 per cent) were citizens, 9.3 per cent were PRs and 29.2 per cent were non-residents (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018a). Foreigners constituted around 30.8 per cent of the country’s labour force (excluding foreign domestic workers) or over 1.1 million of the nation’s 3.6756 million-strong workforce in 2018, possibly making Singapore the country with the highest proportion of foreign workers in Asia (Ministry of Manpower, 2018). Such openness to foreign others is seen to be an essential strategy if Singapore is to compete successfully in the current round of globalization. The late Mr Lee Kuan Yew (2000), then Senior Minister, for example, emphasized the need to become “cosmopolitan” to secure a key role in the globalized economy:

«To succeed, Singapore must be a cosmopolitan centre, able to attract, retain and absorb talent from all over the world. We cannot keep the big companies out of the local league. Whether we like it or not, they are entering the region. ... Now in a globalised economy, we are in competition against other cities in the First World. Hence we have to become a cosmopolitan city that attracts and welcomes talent in business, academia, or in the performing arts. They will add to Singapore’s vibrancy and secure our place in a global network of cities of excellence.»



Figure 1: Modern Skyline of Marina Bay, Singapore.

In the immediate postcolonial phase of nation-building in the 1960s and 1970s, the new national leaders advocated the welding of heterogeneous groups into “one people” on the premise of an ideology of “separate but equal” multiracialism. National identity is built through the careful management of race, where four “official races” were designated under the so-called CMIO (Chinese, Malays, Indians and “Others”) framework. The notion of being “separate but equal” encourages people to accept the co-existence of various communities and their different religious practices, customs and traditions « without discrimination for any particular community » (Chan and Evers 1978: 123). In short, Singapore-style multiracialism is thus based on the arithmetic formula of four “separate” but “equal” races in a nation of “one people” The philosophy propounds the need to subordinate ethnic identity to the more important purpose of constructing national identity, while at the same time providing space for each of the four “founding races” to promote, valorise and reclaim ethnic links and identity. This form of racialized multiculturalism continues the colonial classificatory schemas drawn under British rule and underlies ethnic policies governing inter- and intra-ethnic relations in different spheres of life.

Right into the twenty-first century, government formulations about the nation of Singapore continue to invoke a multiethnicity based on the CMIO model. In his vision of ‘building a multiracial nation through integration’, for example, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (2000) made clear that the way forward for Singapore «is not mosaic pieces, but four overlapping circles. Each circle represents one community. The area where the circles overlap is the common area where we live, play and work together and where we feel truly Singaporean with minimal consciousness of our ethnicity. This pragmatic arrangement of seeking integration through overlapping circles has underwritten the racial and religious harmony that Singapore enjoys today.»

Such formulations privilege fixed categories (tied to ancestral cultures) and are silent about the more mobile “others” – over one and a half million so-called “non-residents” – who live and work in the city-state yet do not officially belong to the “CMIO races” constituting the Singaporean citizenry. Ranging from “foreign workers” in construction, domestic service and other “dirty, dangerous and difficult” (the 3Ds) sectors, to “foreign talents” belonging to the professional and managerial classes, these mobile individuals are outside state constructions of the national population and do not appear in any form of census-taking. Census categories also fail to capture fully the increasingly complex social formations which result from the rapid rise of cross-nationality marriages, stirring into the city’s diversity marriage migrants, “foreign spouses” and “children of mixed marriages”.

MIGRATION-LED POPULATION GROWTH IN THE “MULTIRACIAL NATION”

As part of riding the «globalisation wave to move Singapore forward» (in the words of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reported by Neo 2015), the Singapore government has geared up its development and planning strategies to cater for a population scenario of 6.9 million (revised up in 2007 from 2001’s 5.5 million) by 2030. The government published this figure in a population white paper entitled «A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore», which was passed in parliament in 2013. However, achieving its global-city goal by increasing its indigenous citizenry would be admittedly difficult given the country’s low fertility rates and ageing population.

Singapore’s fertility rates, similar to those in rapidly developing or developed Asian countries, have declined rapidly in the post-independence decades, plummeting to below-replacement levels in a much shorter time than in most Western countries. In a population numbering around 5.6387 million in 2018, the resident growth rate

was only 0.7 per cent with some 35,444 resident births in 2017 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018a). The resident total fertility rate has further declined from 1.2 in 2016 to 1.16 in 2017 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018a), reflecting the limited success of measures such as cash incentives implemented by the Singaporean government to boost fertility and reverse the low birth rates among the citizenry (Straughan, Chan, and Jones 2009).



Figure 2: Street Diversity in Singapore.

Instead of depending on the reproductive capacity of its indigenous population, Singapore's demographic woes are partially addressed by admitting around 15,000 to 25,000 new citizens and 30,000 PRs per year, to eventually reach the targeted population profile of '6.5 to 6.9 million' in 2030. In this proposal, the population profile would comprise a foreigner population of 45 per cent (2.9 to 3.1 million) and a "Singaporean core" of around 55 per cent (3.6 to 3.8 million). The increases in Singapore's population and its labour workforce in recent decades are hence largely accounted for by the burgeoning pool of PRs and non-residents, a group which grew much more quickly than the local "naturally" occurring population.

Foreign manpower enters Singapore through different immigrant channels and in different categories (Yeoh 2006), including "foreign talents" (skilled labour or employees holding positions at the professional and managerial levels), "foreign workers" (unskilled/low-skilled labour in the construction, manual labour and domestic industries), workers with mid-level skills (such as technicians, chefs and health-care workers), international students (from primary to tertiary levels), entrepreneurs, trainees, confinement nannies, athletes and sporting talent,

and family (spouses, parents or unmarried children of Singapore citizens/PRs, as well as mothers accompanying their children to Singaporean schools and who stay in Singapore as dependents or on long-term visit passes). The Population in Brief report, published in 2018 by the Strategy Group, Prime Minister's Office (2018), breaks down these 1.644 million foreigners as 41 per cent work permit holders (foreign workers only), 15 per cent foreign domestic workers, 11 per cent employment pass (foreign talents), 12 per cent S-pass holders, 4 per cent foreign students and 17 per cent dependents of citizens/PRs/work pass holders.

Of the growing number of foreigners in Singapore, a significant percentage take on Permanent Residency (figures were at an all-time high of 79,167 in 2008 but have averaged around 30,000 new PRs a year since 2010 because of tighter immigration policies), and a smaller percentage become new citizens (22,076 in 2017) (Strategy Group, Prime Minister's Office 2018). Along with differential birth rates among local racial categories, immigration has been an important dynamic shaping the resident population mix and CMIO proportions over the years. In comparing the racial arithmetic of increased immigration in the period after independence, from 1970 to 2018 the proportions of 'Others' (from 1.2 to 3.2 per cent) and "Indians" (from 7.0 to 9.0 per cent) have increased, while those of 'Malays' (from 14.8 to 13.4 per cent) and "Chinese" (from 77.0 to 74.3 per cent) have declined. Another facet of increased immigration which has a bearing on the multiracial complexion of the nation-state is associated with the generally growing trend of cross-nationality and inter-ethnic marriages in the last few decades. Cross-nationality marriages involving a citizen spouse and a foreign spouse (i.e. a PR and/or non-resident) stood at 29.9 per cent of all marriages registered in Singapore in 2017, while marriages across ethnic categories continued to grow to 22.1 per cent of all marriages in 2017 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018b). The increasing diversity and "hybridity" within the nation has thus become an issue requiring urgent attention (Rocha 2015).

IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE "HYPHENATION"

According to a study on ethnicity, national identity and a sense of rootedness among Singaporeans conducted by the Institute of Public Policy (IPS) at the turn of the new millennium, the majority of Singaporeans prefer to identify themselves by national identity (Singaporeans) rather than by ethnic identity following CMIO prescriptions (Ooi 2002). More recently, another IPS study confirmed that the majority of citizens saw themselves as Singaporeans first and Chinese, Malay or Indian next (Lim and Mathews 2017). In the words of Prime Minister

Lee Hsien Loong, while nation-building continues to be a work-in-progress, « We are confident of our own Singaporean cultures and identities, even as we are conscious that we are ethnic Chinese, Malays, Indians or Eurasians » (Lim and Mathews 2017). At the same time, while the state promotes the development of a national identity, it does not advocate the erasure of ethnic markers; in fact, not only does state policy support and accommodate CMIO ethnic identities (Ooi 2002), but it ties many of its programmes on housing, heritage, education, language and community-building to a foundational understanding of “race » in the context of an even-handed multiracialism. As a journalist puts it in the article « All in the Race » in the Straits Times on 22 July 2001, « no one is required to abjure his race in order to be a Singaporean. »

While CMIO ethnic categories continue to have significant traction in Singaporean society, they are likely to become less binding under the weight of transnational immigration pressures. The influx of foreign spouses with the rise of international marriage, for example, affects CMIO arithmetic in at least two ways. First, foreign spouses represent a wide range of ethnicities (for example, “foreign brides” tend to be Chinese, Vietnamese or from South and Southeast Asia). Though they at first enter Singapore under the non-resident category, they may eventually make the transition to PR status before becoming new citizens. In fact, in the past decade, an average of around 8,500 PRs in Singapore have become Singaporean citizens each year (Wong 2007). Second, cross-nationality marriages which are also cross-ethnicity may produce children of mixed ethnicity. Up to 2010, Singaporean law required that these children automatically adopt their father’s ethnicity at birth (changes to this rule are discussed below) (Chua 2003). These children may not fit easily into any of the CMIO categories, including the catch-all “Others”. A disgruntled new citizen – a Caucasian man with a Malaysian wife of Indian heritage and three children (two from a previous marriage to a Chinese woman and one from this marriage) – who was unable to purchase public housing because of racial quotas lamented, « We don’t fit a cookie-cutter definition of race and to simply categorize us as “Other” overlooks our unique blend of race and culture » (McHenderson 2008). Identities formed out of cross-cultural heterogeneity tend to challenge nation-state ‘race’ categories and create new kinds of identity politics.

In the new millennium, increased transnational immigration soon spawned a need for more complex forms of identification, and this need was overtly recognized (possibly for the first time in a national speech) in Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s 2006 National Day Rally Speech. In his appeal to Singaporeans to welcome “new immigrants”, he, not only argued for a recognition of difference (« A Chinese-Chinese

is different from a Singaporean-Chinese. An Indian-Indian is different from a Singaporean-Indian »), but proposed that this could be done by allowing for “hyphenated” national-racial identities at least for the first few generations:

« We will hyphenate, Australian-Singaporean[s], Chinese-Singaporeans, Chinese-Chinese Singaporeans. But make them one of us and if we meet one of them, let’s be friendly, let’s go out of our way to show them around, help them, make them feel at home. ... So even if the first generation is not completely Singaporean, the second generation growing up here will be and will contribute to Singapore. »

As a first step, the law was amended from January 2010, allowing mixed-race Singaporean children to adopt the race of either the father or the mother, or to use double-barrelled race classifications in official documents such as identity cards (Kor 2010). To date, there were no official figures showing how many people had changed their race, but unofficial polls conducted in 2012 indicated that many mixed-race Singaporeans did not feel the need to do so (Lim 2012). Only four out of the fifteen people polled would consider changing their race to reflect their dual identity. In terms of newborns, Singapore’s Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) revealed that 16 per cent of mixed-heritage babies were registered with double-barrelled races on their official documents between January 2011 and June 2012, while the remaining 84 per cent were registered as Eurasian or as adopting either their father’s or their mother’s race (Lim 2012; Tan 2012). Statistically, however, people with double-barrelled identities are still not captured, as population figures only incorporate the first component of a person’s hyphenated ethnicity (Rocha 2015). Cross-cultural identities are hence not fully visible in national statistics.

In announcing the change to allow for hyphenated racial identities, PM Lee (quoted in Hussain 2010) clearly based the rationale on the « significant number of Singaporeans marrying across racial lines »:

« ... the couple has to consider carefully how their kids will be brought up and what the kids’ identity will be: Will they be a Chinese kid, an Indian kid, maybe European, maybe Japanese, maybe Vietnamese – there are many Singaporeans here who have married Vietnamese spouses... We think it’s best to leave it to the parents to say how they want to describe their kids’ ethnicity. »

The seeming flexibility of choice and the integrative possibilities of the hyphen are, however, limited to the realm of identity politics and have no major consequences for ethnic-based policies structured

around the CMIO model. The policy change continues to require identification with a dominant “race” (which must be placed first before the hyphen), which is used for all “administrative” purposes, hence stultifying any impact on policies, such as ethnic quotas in housing estates or the requirement for minority representation in Group Representation Constituencies. As the Prime Minister (quoted in Hussain 2010) explains, the move towards hyphenation is a form of “liberalisation”, not a “revolution”; it was put in place simply to «give people greater choice in identifying or describing themselves», not to impact on entrenched policy, as «the majority of the population will still comprise the major racial groups – Chinese, Malays and Indians ... [and] the number affected by the shift “will remain small for some time to come, and maybe for a very long time”.»

In short, while the rapid increase in international marriages has been an important catalyst in unbinding “identity” and allowing a few more degrees of freedom (for the children of these marriages) when it comes to self-description, it hitherto has not posed any significant challenge to the CMIO gridlock nor led to more inclusive policies for marriage migrants in the social, political or economic spheres. The CMIO-multiracialism model remains an important systematic framework for managing race relations in Singapore. The move toward legitimising hyphenated identities moves in tandem with the hope that the “hyphens” are transient phenomena that will fade away as immigrants from diverse backgrounds become more integrated in subsequent generations. Ironically, in contrast to originally homogeneous Asian countries like South Korea where marriage migrants have been a significant diversifying force producing at least a rhetoric of “multiculturalism” (even as the reality forged by state policies and civil society groups have tended to expect female marriage migrants to be assimilated into the norms and forms of Korean society so as to secure the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation), the existence of a multiracial/multicultural framework in Singapore has not made it any easier for immigrant wives to advantageously position themselves to make claims on cultural rights, such as language support for themselves and their children.

Overall, hyphenation may not provide an appropriate framework for the restoration of former creolized cultures that flourished during the colonial era, such as Peranakan and Eurasian cultures (Yeoh, Acedera and Rootham 2019). As a share of the population, for example, Eurasians – which accounted for about 0.8 percent of the population (approximately 1.5 million) in the last census of the colonial period – has fallen further to 0.4 percent in the 2010 census capturing a resident population of over 3.7 million (Chua 1964; Singapore Department

of Statistics 2011). Neither does hyphenation as a means of accommodating « foreign others transiting to becoming part of national self » apply in the case of foreign workers (a large proportion of the non-resident category) who are not permitted to settle in Singapore. Nevertheless, for a nation-state forged out of racial categories derived from a colonial history of racial prejudice, as well as from postcolonial developments based on the preservation and management of categorical racial difference, active recognition of hyphenated identities is a major step towards more flexible thinking about race, the cultivation of cosmopolitan sensibilities and the accommodation of difference. As argued elsewhere, « much of the host-migrant identity politics in Singapore at this time is confrontational and ridden with derogatory undertones » (Yeoh and Yap 2008: 201). Yet fostering an identity politics based on flexible as opposed to rigid, pre-defined categories would allow globalizing cities to capitalize more creatively and positively on sameness and difference.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary migration is a compelling force increasing diversity in globalizing cities. A postcolonial nation-city-state like Singapore that is inextricably plugged into globalization processes can no longer be constructed solely on the basis of a nationality-bound demography; it must now selectively incorporate a wide range of non-citizens of different skill levels, occupation, ethnicity, nationality and gender. A particularly provocative change is the rapid increase in cross-national and cross-ethnic marriages, a phenomenon that plants seeds of further variability in the profile of future generations of Singaporeans. In terms of identity, the “multiracial template” that has formed the basis of the imagined community of Singaporeans since independence is being transformed in the face of diverse immigration flows. The ensuing identity politics of difference and sameness organized around ethnicity and nationality requires more flexible management of race while still capitalising on the intrinsic strengths of an already plural society.

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**WANG WAS MISSING:
REDISCOVERING
WAYNE WANG'S INDEPENDENCE**

Tim Gruenewald

ABSTRACT

Wayne Wang (1949-present) occupies a unique position among Chinese American directors working in the United States as he has enjoyed a long and productive career spanning more than 30 years. Unlike most filmmakers, Wang has moved back and forth between independent filmmaking with experimental characteristics and mainstream commercial Hollywood productions. After early success with his pioneering Chinese American film *Chan is Missing* (Wang, 1982), audiences and film critics were wondering what happened to the “independent” after a string of several commercial Hollywood films during the early 2000s. In 2007 and 2008, Wang returned to independent film production with *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2007) and even formal experimentation in *The Princess of Nebraska* (2008). Both films benefit from violations of mainstream Hollywood film form in the areas of editing, subtitling, camera, *mise-en-scène* and narrative. Wang could realize these projects through innovative financing using the strategy of shadow film and pioneering new approaches to distribution by premiering *The Princess of Nebraska* on YouTube.

KEYWORDS

Wayne Wang

Independent film

Experimental film

Hollywood

Asian American film

Chinese American immigration

YouTube

In 1991, summarizing the previous twenty years of Asian American filmmaking, Renee Tajima saw Wayne Wang at the forefront of a small group of Asian American directors that «have begun to chip away at the glass ceiling» which had restricted Asian American filmmakers to small budget niche films: «His work bears a distinct, personal signature – visually stylized, a wry intellect, stronger on concept than in narrative – but he is rarely predictable» (Tajima 1991: 30). Indeed, Wang's seminal feature *Chan is Missing* (1982) was not just a landmark in Asian American film history but, as Peter Feng argued in 1996, made a significant contribution to the formation of Asian American subjectivity itself. By demonstrating the conceptual impossibility of a fixed Chinese American identity, the film opened the possibility of becoming Asian American as a political act (Feng 1996). Wang followed up his early success with two more independent films set in the Chinese American community, *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart* (1985) and *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1989), which further examined issues of cultural migration and the fragmentation of Chinese American identities. Both films garnered mostly favourable reviews but failed at the box office (Tzioumakis 2012: 71) in contrast to the ultra-low budget *Chan is Missing*, which became a word-of-mouth success and grossed an astounding \$1,000,000 (Levy 1999: 516).

Since then, many critics have lamented Wang's failure to deliver upon the promise of his early films. For example, critic Hua Hsu has stated in his aptly titled 2006 essay «Wayne Wang is missing: The vanished promise of his early films», «to many, Wang's journey from *Chan* [...] to his current projects seems puzzling» (Hsu 2006: n.pag.). Hsu came to this assessment by looking at Wang's foray into Hollywood studio filmmaking such as *Maid in Manhattan* (Wang, 2002), *Because of Winn-Dixie* (Wang, 2005), *Last Holiday* (Wang, 2006) and comparing them to the benchmark of his early independent films. Hsu came to this conclusion just before the two low budget and independent films *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (Wang, 2007) and *Princess of Nebraska* (Wang, 2008) were released. In my view, they lived up to the promise that Tajima saw in Wang in 1991. The value of both films – and this holds more true for *Princess of Nebraska* and somewhat less for *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* – lies precisely in their deliberate suspension of mainstream Hollywood film form. One could argue that Wang did not get lost during his detour of commercial Hollywood filmmaking, but that this diversion might have contributed in inspiring the formal experimentation present in those two films.

Wang's very first feature, the ultra-low budget *A Man, a Woman, and a Killer* (Wang and Schmidt, 1975) had no connection to Chinese or Asian American themes at all. It was not released in the United States despite some recognition at film festivals in Europe (Ferncase 1996: 30-31). After *Chan and Dim Sum*, Wang made *Slam Dance* in 1987, an attempt at film noir, specifically to avoid being typecast as an Asian American director limited to films about his community. The effort failed completely as the film was a commercial and critical disaster (Allon et al. 2002: 556). Tajima's prediction that Wang would be the first Chinese American director to cross over into the mainstream finally became true when *Joy Luck Club* (Wang, 1993) became a box-office hit, which grossed in excess of \$30 million, just two years before Ang Lee's first international hit *Sense and Sensibility* (1995).¹ In 1995, Wang followed up with the even bigger independent hit *Smoke*, which won him a Silver Bear at the 45th Berlin International Film Festival among several accolades. The episodic film about the patrons of a tobacco shop in Brooklyn was a collaboration with bestselling author Paul Auster, produced by the Weinstein brothers and released by Miramax, which dominated the US independent film market at the time. Starting with the moderately successful coming-of-age comedy *Anywhere But Here* (1999), Wang made a series of studio films with no Asian American connections, some of which were commercially very successful such as *Maid in Manhattan* with an international box office of more than \$150 million while others barely broke even as for example the Queen Latifah vehicle *Last Holiday*. Of course, Wang never reached the consistent box office prowess of Ang Lee, which – be it by design or by accident – resulted in the most distinguishing aspect of Wang's career. Unlike any Chinese American and like very few American directors of any ethnicity, he moved between mainstream large budget studio productions, smaller budget commercial and art house films and low budget independent films for a period of more than 30 years, which gives him the distinction of being the director of Chinese descent with the longest active career in the United States so far.

1 - All box-office figures are taken from boxofficemojo.com.

Wang explained his return to independent filmmaking in 2007 as a strategic decision:

«The industry can really box you in, so you try to break the patterns [...] I felt I should go back to something smaller, more personal, something about the Chinese-American community [...] Walking around Chinatown now, you feel how the community has changed, which has to do with the new immigrants and how China has changed.»

(Lim 2008: n.pag.)

This statement implied two important components about his motivation. First, the Chinese American community had changed substantially in contrast to the time of Wang's earlier films of the 1980s, which compelled him to return to the subject. Second, Wang refers to the limitation of studio film production, implying that a film that would be personal to him about the Chinese American community could only be realized as a small budget and independently produced film, which sheds some light on constraints under which contemporary Chinese American directors or minority directors in general have to work.

A Thousand Years of Good Prayers and *Princess of Nebraska* are based on short stories by Chinese American author Yiyun Li. Like Wang, she came to the United States to study at medical school. While Wang abandoned the plan and studied film and television at the California College of Arts and Crafts, Li completed a graduate degree in immunology before turning to an MA in creative writing (Li 2014). They are, however, of two different generations. While Hong Kong-born Wang arrived in the United States during the Cold War and just before the height of the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, Li grew up in Beijing and immigrated three decades later during a transformational time for China and its relation to the West. Thus, Li's short stories provided Wang with a narrative about recent Chinese migrant experiences to the United States. Nevertheless, she was offering with *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* a short story to which he could personally relate (« In an odd way, I'm like Yilan in the film! » [Eguchi 2009]) as he saw some parallels to the relationship to his own father and had similar experiences as Yilan during his father's visit in the United States.

According to Wang, it was difficult to line up financing for *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*:

« The first one was very difficult to put the money together. It was such a minimalist movie. It doesn't have the typical drama and no stars. There was a Japanese investor behind me. That's the only reason why it got done. »

(Corey n.d.)

Interestingly, originally the film should have received funding from China, which fell through because of required changes to the script (Corey n.d.). *The financing of Princess of Nebraska*, on the other hand, was a by-product of the first film:

« I came in slightly under budget on the first one. I was able to convince the distributor, by the time I was editing the film, that for the little money that's left, I can do *Princess of Nebraska*. Which is the same thing I did with *Smoke and Blue in the Face*.

(Corey n.d.)

In addition, the Center for Asian American Media Collaboration in San Francisco got involved as a co-producer. The difficulty in procuring financing for both films demonstrates that funding film productions with Chinese American narratives remains challenging even for an established director with a proven track record of commercially successful mainstream and independent films.

LANGUAGE, MISE-EN-SCÈNE AND ISOLATION IN *A THOUSAND YEARS OF GOOD PRAYERS*

A Thousand Years of Good Prayers is the story of Yilan and her father Mr. Shi, who is visiting his daughter in Spokane, Washington. They have not seen each other in twelve years. Mr. Shi is concerned that his daughter is single after having divorced her Chinese husband who moved back to Beijing. During the days when Yilan is at work, Mr. Shi meets an Iranian lady who is living with her son.

The use of languages other than English is crucial to the meaning in both *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Princess of Nebraska*. The choice of language in film is not neutral, but it is loaded with ideological and political meanings, particularly in Hollywood. It is telling that in big budget production the extensive use of subtitled languages other than English is more likely to be granted to fictional languages than to minority languages spoken in the United States or foreign languages.² Villains are another common exception where foreign languages are sometimes used in big budget Hollywood productions to further amplify their otherness. Even in independent US productions the use of subtitled foreign languages is the exception including most independent films of Wayne Wang. This is different for *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Princess of Nebraska* as Putonghua is the dominant language in both films. This shift alone indicates a different era of Chinese-language filmmaking in the United States in which Chinese asserts itself naturally alongside or instead of English. While Wang used Chinese in his previous films such as *Chan is Missing*, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* or *Joy Luck Club*, the Chinese language was reserved to specific characters to indicate their recent arrival (e.g. *Chan is Missing*) or it was used in segments that took place in China (e.g. *Eat a Bowl of Tea*). By contrast, in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Princess of Nebraska* all main characters use both Chinese and English. Moreover, both films' use of language is self-conscious and even explicitly discussed, especially in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, where characters speak in three languages: Putonghua, English and Farsi. Language and communication are central to the film's depiction of the relationships between Mr Shi and his daughter and Mr. Shi and his Iranian acquaintance (Madam).

² Two examples of fictional languages would be Na'vi in *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) or Valyrian in *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019).

Language and second language acquisition are constantly emphasized by Mr. Shi's use of his notebook. Wang uses humour to communicate the struggle for the first generation of immigrants as well as the language competency of the second. For example, when Mr Shi sees a sign of the convenience shop "Kum & Go", and inquires about the meaning of "Kum". Yilan tells him not to use this spelling in his notebook and recommends, « c-o-m-e is [...] it just looks better », indicating to the viewer her familiarity with English slang.

The significance of language is particularly salient during the climactic dispute in which Mr Shi accuses Yilan of adultery and she in turn reveals that she knew that her father was living a lifelong lie about being a rocket scientist. In response to her father's accusation, « you talked, you laughed [...] with such immodesty », Yilan says:

« It's different [...] we talk in English, it's easier. I don't talk well in Chinese [...] If you grew up in a language, in which you never learned, to express your feelings. It would be easier to learn to talk in a new language. It makes you a new person. »

In the ensuing dialogue, Yilan blames her parents for never talking about their problems, which lead to her inability to speak about feelings in her mother tongue and address problems in her own marriage. After Yilan divorced, her husband returned to Beijing while she stayed in the United States, indicating that the contrasting embrace of the United States including the American language and interpersonal communicative practice may have contributed to their separation. Another dispute between father and daughter further underscores that Yilan has adopted American English and embraced her life in rural Washington State. At one point the father says: « Yilan, I am here to help you! » Her response is the only time she addresses him in English as she screams: « I am perfectly fine! » This is the only moment in which she loses her temper and reveals her emotions to her father. It is indicative of her inability to communicate with her father and to express her feelings in Chinese.

A second relationship between two characters serves to further amplify the tragic irony of the father's and daughter's inability to communicate in Chinese. During the long hours spent alone while Yilan is at work, Mr. Shi meets an unnamed Iranian woman who migrated to the United States to live with her son. Using gestures and rudimentary English, they are able to reveal to each other their innermost feelings and vulnerabilities. Mr. Shi admits that his daughter is not happy and that he was not a good father, while the lady reveals that she lost her daughter during the Iran-Iraq War. This exchange includes a strategic use, or rather omission, of subtitles as a means to convey Mr. Shi's experience

in the United States. While all of his communication with his daughter is subtitled, the film does not translate when Mr. Shi speaks in Chinese to someone who cannot understand him. The lady's Farsi is also not translated. This selective use of subtitles is violating the conventional use of subtitles as Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour explain at the example of *Vendredi Soir* (2002), in which the subtitles misrepresent a breakdown of communication in the film:

«The subtitles, on the other hand, present the dialog with absolute clarity. When Claire Denis asked the subtitler if the text could be presented with missing letters or words – to reflect the viewer's experience of partial comprehension – she was told it would be impossible. The orthodoxy stated that "Either we have subtitles or we don't".»
(Egoyan and Balfour 2004: 26)

Through violation of this film convention and calculated omission of subtitles, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* expresses the incompleteness of communication that Mr. Shi experiences during his visit. Ironically, the cross-generational dialogues, which are completely translated, yield less communicative exchange and mutual understanding than the dialogue between Mr Shi and the Iranian lady, even though their exchange remains to a large part incomprehensible to both characters and the viewer.

While language is a key element in the dialogue to signify the disconnection between father and daughter, Wang also employs visual means such as *mise-en-scène* to express the same. In her perceptive analysis of space in the film, Jing Nie has argued that the use of Chinese cultural objects in Yilan's apartment serve as an allegory for her inner attachment to her Chinese heritage that she hides from the public, which is a function of her hybrid identity. Unlike her father, she does not want to project her Chineseness in the public space (Nie 2009: 99-100).

Using a series of visual compositions, the film conveys emotional distance as empty space between father and daughter as well as visual barriers that separate the two characters in the frame. This can be observed starting from their first encounter at the airport. Here Yilan is placed on the left side of the frame separated from the entry by another person (Figure 1). In a static long take, Mr. Shi slowly appears from the background and the door serves as a framing device to emphasize the empty space around him. As he walks through the door, Yilan approaches him only reluctantly. During the dinner scene (Figure 2), the shot emphasizes the empty space in the center of the frame and the disconnection between the two is further amplified through Yilan's avoidance of her father's gaze. Finally, the separation is strongest during Mr. Shi's

soliloquy in which he reveals his emotions and regrets (Figure 3). While together in the same shot, they are in different rooms, visually separated by the wall. Mr. Shi is not aware that his daughter is listening. Tragically, she leaves midway through Mr. Shi's revelations and thus misses the section in which he explains that he was demoted from his work as a rocket scientist for political reasons by the party leaders and thus was himself a victim as much as a perpetrator of deceit.



Figure 1: Wayne Wang, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, 2007. Yilan sees her father for the first time after twelve years.



Figure 2: Wayne Wang, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, 2007. Mr Shi and Yilan argue at the dinner table.



Figure 3: Wayne Wang, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, 2007. Mr Shi confesses without knowing that Yilan is listening.

The effect of the *mise-en-scène* depicted above owes much to the film's slow editing and narrative pace as it provides the viewer the time necessary to feel the pain of the characters' isolation. The same applies to the emphasis of the two main characters' loneliness as well as the general sense of social separation in suburban America. Several static long takes of empty indoor and suburban spaces are shown throughout the film (Figure 4 and Figure 5.) It would have been difficult to create this sensation of the Chinese immigrant experience in a mainstream Hollywood production and certainly impossible to do so using the slow-paced style employed in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*. Wang explained the restrictions of studio filmmaking regarding editing: « For example, in the big budget films, you are never allowed to breathe. The film doesn't breathe. Everything is cut very, very fast. When nothing happens, it's gone » (Eguchi 2009). Just as the editing would be too slow for a studio film so would the narrative, as Wang points out in the same interview: « It doesn't have a big dramatic story. It doesn't have your Hollywood Act 1, Act 2, and Act 3. It's shot very simply » (Eguchi 2009: n.pag.). The sparse narrative matches the restrained visual style of the film. While the plot could be summarized in a few sentences, Wang succeeds in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* to capture profound and universal inner struggles of migrants in general and those of Chinese Americans in particular.

Figure 4 : Wayne Wang,
*A Thousand Years of
Good Prayers*, 2007.
Train station waiting hall.



Figure 5: Wayne Wang,
*A Thousand Years of
Good Prayers*, 2007.
Train station platform.



SHADOW FILMS, FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION AND *PRINCESS OF NEBRASKA*

Sandra Liu has discussed an important and exceptional phenomenon of Wang's film career in what she called «shadow films» (Liu 2000). These are experimental films that were inspired by and connected to more conventional films such as *Dim Sum Take-Out* (1988), inspired by *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart* (1985), *Blue in the Face* (1995), inspired by *Smoke*, or *Life is Cheap ... But Toilet Paper is Expensive* (1989), inspired by *Eat a Bowl of Tea*. According to Liu, « these films stand out among Wang's works because they represent distinct instances throughout his career (to date) in which his refusal simply to accommodate market demands have crystallized ». She has called

them shadow films « because they exist in the shadows of, or portray a darker vision of parallel themes in their companion pieces » (Liu 2000: 98). With those films, Liu continues, « Wang was actively responding to the structural limitations that the mainstream film industry placed on him, wresting spaces for himself in which he could explore aesthetics and themes that would otherwise be suppressed » (Liu 2000: 99). Difficulty to find financing for experimental films in the United States is certainly not limited to Chinese or other migrant directors. Still, it is worth remembering that Wang's career began with the film *Chan is Missing*, which won production grants from the National Endowment of the Arts and the American Film Institute and was honoured as Best Experimental/Independent Film from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association in 1982 (Chiu 1982). Given this early success, one might wonder if his background might not have further added to the necessity to rely on the imaginative shadow film strategy to provide funding for cinematic experimentation. His most recent shadow film is *Princess of Nebraska*. Like *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* it is based on a short story by Yiyun Li. It was shot immediately after *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* on a micro-budget with left over funds from that film (Lim 2008). While *Princess of Nebraska* exhibits some thematic and formal parallels, it also includes several formal innovations and narrative features that make it a more experimental film in comparison to *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, as I will explore in the following.

Princess of Nebraska tells 24 hours in the life of Sasha, who is a Chinese college student in Omaha, Nebraska. At the beginning of the film she arrives in San Francisco, where she has friends, to get an abortion. The child is from a one-night stand back home in Beijing with Yang, a bisexual Chinese opera singer. In San Francisco, she is staying with Boshen, who used to live in Beijing and also had an affair with Yang. Over the next day, she roams the city aimlessly, attends a dinner party with Boshen, and visits a karaoke club with her friend May. After Boshen fails to change her mind, Sasha seems to go through with the abortion although her choice is not revealed explicitly.

Princess of Nebraska first surprises the viewer with an unusual widescreen aspect ratio of 2.35:1. This is an ironic choice since this format was common in Hollywood films up until the 1970s for studio productions using the CinemaScope process.³ It was also the original theatrical aspect ratio of *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977), which ignited the Hollywood era of the tent-pole blockbuster that is ongoing until today. This aspect ratio is particularly uncommon for ultra-low budget films shot with prosumer digital cameras such as *Princess of Nebraska*. Wang is using the widescreen format to destabilize the dichotomy between low budget independent and Hollywood studio productions.

3 - CinemaScope offered an aspect ratio of 2.55:1 starting in 1953, which was reduced to 2.35:1 in subsequent years and by 1957, 84.5 percent of all movie theatres in the United States and Canada had adopted the process (Cook 2016: 310-11).

He is achieving this goal by ironically playing with and creatively frustrating audience expectations and by alternately rejecting and embracing conventional wide screen framing, *mise-en-scène*, and camera work. Given the historical use of widescreen formats, audiences are conditioned to expect long shots, landscapes, and carefully arranged *mise-en-scène* (Cook 2016: 315-21). *Princess of Nebraska* frustrates this expectation starting with the very first shot, which is a close-up of red high-heel shoes worn by someone who is impatiently pacing back and forth (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Wayne Wang, *The Princess of Nebraska*, 2008. Opening shot showing a close-up of red high-heel shoes.

The viewer does not know who is wearing the shoes or where she is waiting. The restless movements of the person suggest that she could be nervous and the ambient noise on the soundtrack and the glossy floor only vaguely implies a public waiting hall in an airport. The shiny red shoes, furthermore, indicate fashion and thus the film opens with an image of global consumerism. The idea of design and fashion is even present in the display of the film's title, which is matching the pink colour of the pants on a black background. The absence of an establishing shot, the use of extreme close-ups from the outset, and the fragmentation of the body frustrate the orientation of the viewers and force them to participate actively in the film's meaning making by considering some of the connotations I have presented here.

The shots following the film's title confirm the viewer's suspicion that the young lady is waiting at the baggage claim of an airport. This is an important connection to *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*. The point of departure for both films is the airport that is the ubiquitous space of global mobility. China and people living in China are now much closer to the United States and the Chinese American experience. Migration is no longer a one-way street as was the case for Chinese Americans portrayed in Wang's earlier films but they are moving back and forth between China and the United States as is the case for Sasha, the main character of *Princess of Nebraska*, who is introduced in the opening shots described above.

In addition to the close framing used for most of the film, Wang also frustrates viewer expectations of a widescreen film by employing almost exclusively a handheld camera. *Princess of Nebraska* in large part recalls the *cinéma-vérité* style. The camera follows Sasha as she wanders through San Francisco as if documenting her experience, much of the film is shot on location in public areas, and most of the sound is recorded on location and often includes ambient noises. In addition to the documentary appearance of the film, the handheld camera also mirrors Sasha's inner restlessness, for example, as she is waiting for her appointment at the abortion clinic.

In part, the film's experimental camera work is a direct consequence of the ultra-low budget and independent nature of the production. *Princess of Nebraska* was co-produced by the Center for Asian American Media in San Francisco, which introduced Wang to the cinematographer Richard Wong, who had only completed one independent film prior to *Princess of Nebraska: Colma: The Musical* (2006). Wong described the shooting process of *Princess of Nebraska* as « guerrilla » and liberating. Wang directly acknowledged the contribution of his director of photography in pushing him to be more adventurous: « There's a rebellious creativity there and he brought that out of me » (Lim 2008: n.pag.). In addition to the budget constraints, the daring choice of a young and inexperienced director of photography undoubtedly was a key factor in shaping the look of the film. A. O. Scott of the *New York Times* praised the film's cinematography (2008) and Wang recognized Wong's impact by sharing directing credits with him (Lim 2008: n.pag.).

The film's experimental camera work paradoxically becomes most meaningful when it is suspended. In three key sequences, Wang and Wong do not use the handheld camera thereby creating a sense of time and space different from the flow of the rest of the film. In the first instance, Sasha is spending the night with her girlfriend May. They have sex and they talk. Sasha, reading from a diary, recalls how their romantic relationship started sometime in the past. She then says in English: « Come with me to Nebraska and then we can go to LA, London, New York ». May responds in Chinese: « Little Princess of Nebraska, give me a fucking break », and then continues in English: « Every night I play these roles for these fucking men in these fucking bars [...] I am sick and tired of acting out other people's tragedies! » May then continues to tell the story how her mother was forced to stay in Mongolia because of her, yet had told her that her mother « never regretted having me, that I gave her life purpose, a place to be, even if it was not the best place ». The film then suspends the handheld camera and proceeds with a carefully calculated crane shot that moves slowly up with a turning motion from a medium shot of Sasha's face and comes to a halt

on a highly stylized tableau showing both women lying on separate beds. The stunning shot takes advantage of the full width of the wide screen frame (Figure 7). The soundtrack of ethereal synthesizer sounds, which gradually increase in volume, further adds to the surrealism of this shot. The composition captures the connection between the two young women as they are shown in the intimate setting like a mirror image of each other. At the same time, the unbridgeable gap between both is visualized to indicate that Sasha is ultimately alone with the existential choice that she has to make.



Figure 7: Wayne Wang, *The Princess of Nebraska*, 2008. Tableau of Sasha and May in the hotel.

Second, the film uses static tripod shots during Sasha's visit to the abortion clinic. On the way to the clinic and after the appointment, a handheld camera is used. Only during the conversation, when Sasha is alone with the doctor, the camera is still. The scene is edited in a classic shot-reverse-shot sequence showing a close-up of both women's faces as they are talking through the abortion procedure. Again, the camera work interrupts the flow of the film as if to suspend the normal progression of time and provide space for appreciating the gravity of the conversation. The climax of the scene occurs when Sasha looks at the ultrasound to see the fetus. The doctor recommends Sasha to see the screen as it would help her "to make some decisions". This is followed by an extreme long take of 47 seconds. Very slowly the camera zooms in until it comes to a stop at a close-up of Sasha's face as she is staring at the screen. Her eyes then move slowly towards the camera to look at the audience. At this moment, the doctor asks: « Are you ok, Sasha? » The rest of the shot is completely silent except for the ticking of a clock. The shot and the sound emphasize the duration of this existential moment. The viewer becomes implicated in Sasha's agony through the long

seconds that she looks towards the viewer and then turns back to the ultrasound screen (Figure 8). The only words uttered serve to point out the obvious as the viewer senses the rhetorical nature of the question.



Figure 8: Wayne Wang, *The Princess of Nebraska*, 2008. Sasha looking at the ultrasound.

Third, *Princess of Nebraska* ends with a highly experimental scene that shows Sasha standing in front of a large concrete wall while the US band Anthony and the Johnsons' *Hope There's Someone* is playing for the entire duration of the song, which amounts to just over four minutes. The scene consists of two shots. The first shot is handheld and moves from a close-up of the face that covers more than half the frame, to a medium shot of her upper body, covering only one-fifth of the frame, to an extreme long shot in which she appears tiny in front of the huge grey wall (Figure 9). During the close shot, we see her lips moving first out of sync with the song then increasingly synchronized with the lyrics.



Figure 9: Wayne Wang, *The Princess of Nebraska*, 2008. The film's final shot of Sasha.

The song plays a central role in the concluding scene due to its minimalist instrumentation as well as the mesmerizing quality and unusual high pitch of singer Anohni's voice. The song amplifies the surrealism and melodrama of the moment and the setting. Both sound and image are highly unreal, yet profound and existential at the same time. A brief look at the lyrics demonstrates the song's concrete relevance to the film's central theme of abortion:

« Hope there's someone who'll take care of me
When I die, will I go?
And hope there's someone who'll set my heart free
Rest alone when I'm tired

There's a ghost on the horizon
When I go to bed
How will I fall asleep tonight?
How will I rest my head?

And that sin, I don't want to go
To the seals of war through shame
And there's a ghost on the horizon
When I go to bed

Oohh! Oohh!
Oh I'm scared of that middle place
Between light and nowhere
I don't want to be the one
Left in there, left in there.»

(Anthony and the Johnsons 2005)

The first stanza could be interpreted to refer to one of the most existential desires for parenthood and the hope that old age and death can be made bearable through children. The second stanza could refer to the aborted child that presumably haunts Sasha. The abortion returns as "that sin" in stanza three. Finally, stanza four could be seen to refer to Sasha's state between life and death at the final scene of the film. At the same time, much remains unsaid and left to the imagination of the viewer. We do not even know with certainty that Sasha made the decision to abort the pregnancy since the scene in the clinic ends with her looking at the ultrasound image of the fetus in awe. There is only a faint hint as she barely nods to Boshen when leaving the clinic.

These three scenes stand out through their visual style but they are also connected by their narrative significance. Each of them visualizes an existential experience that contrasts with the disconnected, mediated, and superficial experiences of the airport, the shopping mall, the dinner party and the Karaoke bar.

The first scene is the only time that Sasha is intimately connected to another person although her relationship with May cannot solve her struggle with the decision regarding her pregnancy and the fact that she ultimately must make the decision and bear its consequences alone. In the second scene at the abortion clinic, Sasha can no longer escape from the weight of her circumstance through distraction. Looking at the unborn fetus, she is hit by the full force of the existential dimension of the decision that she has to make. Finally, the third scene is the most enigmatic and extreme if only for its exceptional duration and complete separation from the diegetic world of the film. The combination of image and song capture Sasha's existential pain as well as her complete isolation and alienation.

The question then remains how *Princess of Nebraska* is connected to the issue of Chinese migration to the United States and the shifting meaning of Chinese American identity? One way to answer this inquiry is to look at the character Boshen. Wang changed his race from Chinese in Li's short story to Caucasian. This racial transformation is significant as Boshen is the first white American character in Wang's films that had migrated in the reverse direction and the first non-Chinese character that is fluent in Chinese and speaks the language in the film. This is a fundamental departure from the migration patterns depicted in Wang's earlier films, which indicates that the power relation between the dominant white and Chinese American community has shifted. The character Boshen suggests that the status of China in relation to the United States has changed as Jing Nie has argued:

«They are both global shoppers of alien cultures: Boshen is drawn to Beijing Opera, while Sasha is obsessed with Western culture [...] The once dominant Western culture gradually lost its (post-) colonizing power in the globalized cultural market and is objectified by re-asserting Oriental gazes [...].»

(Nie 2009: 109)

The Chinese language and culture and the country as a destination of migration are now attractive to white Americans. At the same time, Chinese migrants to the United States are no longer automatically committed to staying there like Yilan in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*. Both Sasha and Boshen exemplify that flows of migration between China and the United States have become circular. Such a fundamental change necessarily impacts Chinese American identity, which itself has played a role in Wang's return to independent film production (Nie 2009: 98).

CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING INDEPENDENCE WITH INTERNATIONAL HELP AND INNOVATE DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

Both films could not have been realized without international financing and innovative digital distribution. As detailed above, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* was only made due to a Japanese investor (Corey n.pag.) and *The Princess of Nebraska* was a shadow film of the former and essentially realized on leftover budget. After a successful film festival run,⁴ *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* was purchased by Magnolia Pictures along with *The Princess of Nebraska*. While *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* received a limited theatrical release in the United States, this was not the case for the lower budget and more experimental *The Princess of Nebraska*. Wayne Wang liked the idea of a double bill and the two films were shown together in some film festivals. However, Magnolia Pictures rejected the idea since the concept had failed in 2007 with the Robert Rodriguez/Quentin Tarantino double feature *Grindhouse* (2007). Instead, Magnolia decided to release *The Princess of Nebraska* online through YouTube for free in preparation of a double feature DVD (Figure 10) release of both films (Snyder 2008). Ultimately, the strategy succeeded as the goal was to increase the viewership through the limited time online release and the film accumulated close to a quarter of a million page views, which is about ten times the theatrical audience of *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (Sickels 2011: 174). Just as Wayne Wang was a trailblazer of independent film during the early 1980s, particularly *The Princess of Nebraska* suggests that he has been at the forefront of innovation again in the recent era of low-budget digital filmmaking and online distribution.

4 - The film won the Best Film and Best Actor awards at the 55th San Sebastián International Film Festival.

The strategy to distribute both films together is sensible as they are thematically and formally related. Although they are quite different stylistically, both convey inner struggles of Chinese migrants to the United States through violations of Hollywood film convention: primarily through mise-en-scène and editing in the case of *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and through camera movement, framing, long takes and sound in the case of *The Princess of Nebraska*. Together, both films provide a picture of Chinese immigration in the early twenty-first century. By looking at three different generations of Chinese migrants, they also suggest how the background and identity of Chinese migrants have changed, particularly for the latest generation. The existential choice and the cultural conflict between China and the United States is no longer an important conflict in *The Princess of Nebraska*. The cover for the DVD double release captures the shift between the two films. The upper half shows Yilan with her father sitting on a bench.

While firmly seated in the American landscape, she is figuratively looking back to the previous generation as if she is looking back on her own past. By contrast, the lower half of the cover shows Sasha looking at her mobile phone, as she seems to be taking a selfie. She is not shown as present in a real place but instead turns to the global virtual space through which she is connected back to China even when in the United States, as is depicted in the film when she, for example, is texting with Yang. The central issue for the new generation is no longer the conflict across cultures, but the narrative and visual attention turns to herself and her existential problem of an unwanted pregnancy.



Figure 10 : Double release DVD cover.

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**CHINESE ARTISTIC DIASPORAS
AND CHINESENESS***

Emmanuel Lincot

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the complexity of diasporic phenomena in the Chinese artistic community.

By no means a homogeneous community, artists, especially of the generation of the Chinese reforms and of Tiananmen – the first generation of exile – are nonetheless differentiated by an impression and positions that belong to a language of what we describe here as Chinese-ness. The party-state then seeks to exploit the related resources, in the name of a unique Chinese identity that it contrasts with Western values. This neoconservative plan, associated with nationalistic and cultural dimensions, by no means denies the heritage borrowed from Western modernity, yet manages, with or without the consent of the Chinese artists themselves, *Sinicizing* the artistic proposition.

KEYWORDS

Chineseness

International Cultural Relations

Representation

Modernity

Heterotopia

Diaspora

*It's about going from one place to another,
and bringing what you have to offer to each new place¹.*

Zhang Huan

Due to these first artists of the diaspora, tireless cultural passers between China and the West, the recognition of an artistic scene in China has been able to assert itself². Not only through the assimilation of these artists into the international art market system, but also in China, where many years after the reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping, it remained very difficult to have access contemporary art in public spaces. Yet the artists worked and helped one another. Immense networks linking Beijing, Chengdu, Wuhan, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen developed. The paradox is that these artists became well-known through the censorship of their work, or by their participation in foreign biennals³. Most of the Chinese public remained unaware of their experiences. However, the success of the first Chinese avant-garde artists abroad would encourage younger Chinese artists to follow in the footsteps of their elders. The time after Tiananmen (1989) was a real driving force, in terms of the need to give shape to new professions – art critics, curators and publishers – and often led to courageous activism in these professions. One of their initiatives that had great psychological impact was the provocatively-named exhibit “FUCK OFF!”, organized in 2000 in Shanghai by artist Ai Weiwei (1957) and art critic Feng Boyi (1960). It was all the more so, since its inauguration intentionally coincided with the opening of the very official and conservative Shanghai Biennial. Ai Weiwei, haloed with his recent, prestigious past (son of the dissident poet Ai Qing, 1910-1996), and having spent time during his years of New York exile with the last big names of the *Beat Generation*⁴) was certainly the most radical of the main players, already at that time. The period spent abroad, by Ai Weiwei and his contemporaries, was a guarantee of opening-up, as well as of seriousness and respect. Like for the generation from the inter-war period, these artists reproduced a modernism borrowed from Europe and the United States, which China had been partially distanced from, due to the Maoist boarder closure.



Ai Weiwei

1 - Gérard A. Goodrow, *Crossing China. Land of the rising art scene*, Cologne, Daab Media GMBH, 2014.

2 - We have partially borrowed from Shu Mei-shih this “geopolitical” sentence, to which she adds “desires”. This sentence seems to exclude other motivations that eludes artists; those dealing with authorities. Shu Mei-shih, *Visuality and identity. Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*, Berkley, Berkeley University of California Press, 2007.

3 - Emmanuel Lincot, *Peinture et pouvoir en Chine (1979-2009) : une histoire culturelle*, Paris, You Feng, 2010.

4 - Jean-François Chougnat and Judith Benhamou-Huet, *Ai Weiwei. Fan-Tan* (with contributions by Uli Sigg, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Émilie Girard and Emmanuel Lincot), Paris, Manuella éditions, MUCEM, 2018.

HETEROGENOUS TRAJECTORIES

Though Ai Weiwei is the most renowned, due to media coverage of his direct struggle against the authorities, around Sichuan earthquake victims (2008); other artists have also largely contributed to the prominence of the Chinese art scene. Sheng Qi (1965) and Xu Bing (1955) are particularly interesting cases. The first fled China in 1989. Ten years after a long European stay, he went back to live and work in Beijing. References to Mao Zedong and mass gatherings are seen in his large-format paintings. Whereas Xu Bing stayed in New York throughout the nineties before returning to settle in the Chinese capital in 2008, where he became vice president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. A major artist, he made headlines in 1994 with a work featuring a pair of pigs whose bodies were strewn with pseudo-aphorisms composed of letters of the alphabet on one pig and Chinese characters on the other. In 1988, his installation *Celestial Book (Tian Shu)*, shown at the *Zhongguo Meishu Guan*, the main museum of the capital, revealed the artist's ambition. Most of this work kept questioning, sometimes in a very raw way, the relationship between China as a textual civilization, and its use of writing, and cultures borrowed from the West.



Xu Bing (1955),
Celestial Book, 1987
Installation
@ Courtesy of the artist.



Xu Bing (1955),
Celestial Book, 1987
 Installation (detail)
 @ courtesy of the artist

Gu Dexin (1962) is another particularly interesting case, in terms of trajectory. His participation in the exhibit *Les Magiciens de la terre* (1989) at the Pompidou Centre could have persuaded him to stay in France. It did not. Yet three of his fellow countrymen, also involved in the international show, chose to settle in the host country. These three were conceptual artist, Huang Yongping (1954) whose lineage includes both Marcel Duchamp and Taoist thinkers; painter Yang Jiechang (1956), adept at a tradition of reinvented inks, and Fei Dawei (1954), art critic and advisor for the exhibition. For Gu Dexin, the system can only change from the inside. Thus, he chose to go back to live and work in China. In contrast, diametrically opposed in these choices, is the approach of yet another renowned international artist: Yan pei-Ming (1960). He said:

« I don't fit into a category. Neither French nor Chinese: I am first of all an artist. The vocation to paint came to me at the age of thirteen, because I wanted to be alone. It was the middle of the Cultural Revolution. I did not experience it as a tragedy at all. Others – intellectuals, and the affluent – did experience it as such⁵. »

5 -Interview with Yan pei-ming, in French, Dijon, January 27, 2015.

He wished to live abroad, not for political reasons, but to study painting, which he devoted himself to, by producing very large-scale monochromes. They depict famous figures (Barack Obama, Pope Francis, Mao Zedong, Bruce Lee, the Mona Lisa and so on), or refer us to a painting of a tragic story, particularly that of Goya. Of course, one may think of Warhol, Liu Xiaodong or Richter when looking at his painting, but he renews a genre which, with the stroke of his brush, evokes the calligrapher's gesture. Although he did not participate in *Les Magiciens de la terre*, artist Wang Du (1956) went to France, after studying in Guangzhou, to join this small group of Chinese artists, who had already settled in Paris. One of his most well-known works is the sculpture

World Markets (2004), acquired by the Lyon Fine Arts Museum. It shows the influence of Claes Oldenburg, in his choice of a monumentalized reuse of today's consumer objects. Wang Du also did other sculptures, including *Family*, (1997) which criticized Westerners' obsession and use of cosmetic surgery. Not all of them chose to reside solely in France. There are three adopted Berliners: the aforementioned Ai Weiwei, and also Feng Lu (1979) and Ling Jian (1963).

Unwelcome in his native land for political reasons, Ai Weiwei made use of his German stay to produce a high-impact documentary film, *Human Flow* (2017) about migrants in Europe. The younger artists, Feng Lu and Ling Jian, highly influenced by both German and Chinese cultures, were constantly traveling back and forth between the two countries. Feng Lu gives great importance to animality, hybrid beings, and the absurd. Some of his works may remind us of carnival scenes painted by Bruegel. Ling Jian is inspired by pop art and the ambiguity of lustful women in dramatized postures, sometimes in uniforms. His paintings are done in kitsch style. This pop style is symptomatic of a deeply globalized generation. Yet this generation remains linked to global cities, as can be seen, notably, in the work of Cai Guo-qiung (1957).

DESIGNERS INSPIRED BY GLOBAL CITIES

One of the most renowned world artists, based in New York since 1955, he is known for his spectacular fireworks and sculpture installations. Born in Fujian, the city where Huang Yongping wrote a manifesto honoring Dada in the eighties, Cai Guo-qiung did an installation, *Head On*, in which ninety-nine stuffed wolves are seen running, before crashing into a plexiglass wall. Shown at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, this work, being in Germany, necessarily refers to Joseph Beuys' performance, *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974). However, the two works have different meanings. The coyote is associated with the Roman myth of the son of the she-wolf, and also with America. These predators can have a very different meaning, in the framework of Chinese history. They can evoke barbarism – specifically the Turco-Mongolian people, that the Chinese popular imagination described as wolf-men⁶, breaking into pieces at the wall (the Great Wall?) of civilization, understood to be Chinese civilization. This re-appropriation of codes for Cai Guo-qiung was conveyed in quite another way at an event of much greater importance: the Beijing Olympic Games (2008). General designer of visual effects for the opening ceremony, Cai Guo-qiung was, along with the filmmaker Zhang Yimou (1950), one of the top two artists of his generation to have participated in the organization of this vast gathering. Pyrotechnical artist, he lit up the opening night. The magnificent performance had a symbolic value, that of a people

6 - In the same vein, we can find the novel by Jiang Rong, *Wolf Totem* (*Lang Tuteng*) published in 2004 in China (2008 in English at Penguin Press). A best-seller, this work was sold in 20 million copies, 5 million legally and 15 million in pirated form. It has been translated into 39 language in 110 countries.

proud to see their country get its strength back and impose its “Soft Power”. It was also a return of a project of universal brotherhood, through sports, as was conceived by Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, and long before him, his illustrious mentors, the Greek citizens.



Gunpowder was invented in China by the doctor and Taoist alchemist, Sun Simiao, when in search of an immortality elixir. Its explosive powers were only discovered much later. Cai Guo-qiang is a worthy successor. He defines himself as a shaman, an energy transmitter, reviving the myth of a chaotic world origin, the *Kai tian pi di*. His vision of art goes beyond image to share the strength of a demiurgic gesture. The firework footprints that took form in the sky of the Tiananmen Square could not, however, be done on the evening of August 8th, for security reasons. They were recreated by the artist, who replaced them with projected synthetic images. Therefore, the shots of this extraordinary performance are only a work of image editing. Their power of illusion is all the more striking. A sign of the times, the photograph that preserves the memory of the work was exhibited the following year at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in Taiwan. The worsening of cross-strait relations since then, and more generally between China and the countries that surround it, would probably no longer permit this kind of operation today. It shows us a performance associating “fire” (*huo*) with “life” (*huo*), in a homynimic relation⁷. We can sense that the emotions of a whole nation were united in a common feeling of having taken a decisive step in its history during these sixty-three seconds. The path of synthetic steps made by the artist in the sky is certainly not trivial.

Cai Guo-qiang,
Head On, 2006.
Installation view at
Deutsche Guggenheim,
Berlin, 2006.
Deutsche Bank Collection,
commissioned by Deutsche
Bank AG
Photo by Hiro Ihara,
courtesy of Cai Studio.png.

7 - Emmanuel Lincot,
*Strategic challenges
in the Centre/ Periphery
relations in China*,
Paris, IRIS, ASIA FOCUS #84,
septembre 2018: <http://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Asia-Focus-84.pdf>

They follow a trajectory parallel to that which Beijingers, according to very ancient beliefs inspired by geomancy, describe as the backbone of the dragon. They seem to accompany the paths of demonstrators who, throughout the twentieth century, continued to gather in the mythical Tiananmen Square. The steps of this giant are also similar to those of Yu Kong, legendary hero who moves mountains.

Airborn, would his return herald another project: for China to expand beyond its borders, to conquer space, and thus new frontier? Dreamlike, they allow the artist to apparently take up the cause of the projects of the regime. However, Chi Guo-qiang maintains his independence in the very ambiguity of the interpretations of his works. They are always presented in places or cities that are highly visible, and, if possible, highly prestigious. The Chinese authorities have taken him in to the point of now supporting art projects that they condemned a few years ago. What might seem like a turnaround, is in fact a deep shift in Chinese cultural industries and diplomacy⁸. Though Ai Weiwei remains the exception that confirms the rule, supporting an internationally known artist has become part of a general rational, that of an utterly Chinese Soft Power. In his own way, the artist Gu Wenda, like Cai Guo-qiang, has internalized this new, complex configuration.

8 - Emmanuel Lincot,
« Les industries culturelles
en Chine. Enjeux et perspectives », *Monde Chinois
Nouvelle Asie*, n° 41,
April-May 2015, pp. 56-63;
« D'une révolution culturelle
à l'autre » Eric Mottet,
Barthélémy Courmont and
Frédéric Lasserre (ed.),
*La Chine et le Monde.
Quelles nouvelles relations,
quels nouveaux paradigmes ?*
Preface by
Jean-Pierre Cabestan,
Québec,
Presses de l'Université du
Québec, 2015, pp. 73-86.

IMAGE OF ONE, IMAGES OF ALL

Born in 1955 in Shanghai, graduate of the calligraphy department of the Zhejiang Academy in Hangzhou, Gu Wenda was censored for one of his first exhibitions held in Xi'an in 1986. Accused of « linguistic confusion », due to his choice to present Chinese pseudo-characters, he left China with a scholarship to study at the University of Minnesota in 1989. *Oedipus Refound* is the name of the installation that he dedicated himself to during his stay. A reference to Jacques Lacan is clear in the work. In the nineties the Oedipus complex was one of the most controversial subjects debated on American campuses regarding the understanding of an artistic approach. This installation featured sanitary napkins and menstrual blood from sixty donors in 16 countries accompanied by letters telling about the donors' experiences. The installation caused a ruckus and triggered the fury of feminist associations. Gu Wenda remained convinced that these materials and human testimonies should to be exploited. What had previously been more of a testing ground, gave rise to a total renewal of his thought and his artistic choices, a prelude to the use of hair, in a gigantic installation that was to occupy him from 1993 to 2004. This major work, entitled *United Nations - China Monument: Temple of Heaven*, is part of the permanent collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Hair is the main media of these banners by the artist, with writing

in very diverse languages. About Babel as a tribute to diversity, this installation triggered the protest of both Polish and Israeli circles, who, on the contrary, saw it as an insult to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. Thus, in Poland, Gu Wenda's installation was banned twenty-four hours after opening to the public.



Gu Wenda,
*United Nations - Babel
of the millennium*, 1999
© Courtesy of the artist.

In the same spirit, the artist did an installation in the United States with the reuse of poems dating to the Tang dynasty period, and engraved on steles, as they appear in Beilin – literally: *Stele Forest* – a place of the scriptural memory of China and a sanctuary of the literary culture in Xi'an. For the sake of transculturality, Gu Wenda had them translated first into English and then, from the transcript made, into Chinese. The result was an incomprehensible and deliberate pidgin; Gu Wenda was pointing out the limits of a language of universal ambition. The very inanity of language is a principle denounced by the Taoist tradition of a Zhuangzi (4th century BC) which has inspired many Chinese artists since the eighties⁹. Gu Wenda and more recently Xu Tan (1957) with his series *Key Word*, begun in 2005, or Huang Xiaopeng (1960) trying, with humor, to translate the clearly communist songs via Google are part of this same lineage. Gu Wenda innovates, in his environmental concerns, at a crossroads between ecology and a Land Art, revisited by the 3D conceptualization of a future city taking on the arrangements of ancient Chinese cities (circles and squares), to which the artist has been devoting himself since New York, saying that urbanization must not be synonymous with Westernization.

9 - Emmanuel Lincot,
*La Figure de l'artiste
et le statut de son œuvre
en Chine contemporaine:*
Mélanges 2, Paris, You Feng,
2009

China Park, the name of this project, which is still virtual, also responds to other concerns expressed by GuWenda:

10 - Gérard A. Goodrow,
Crossing China.
Land of the rising art scene,
Cologne, Daab Media GMBH,
2014, p. 346.

« I do not want my art to be only in the hands of collectors or displayed in museums. Artists must be responsible for the world they live in and offer solutions with little regard to the time that will be required to implement them¹⁰. »

11 - Seminar of Yolaine Escande and Denis Vidal (in the focus « création et processus créatifs » of the LabexCAP):
Les nouvelles figures de l'artiste universel -
Musée du quai Branly, EHESS.

Who would not identify with the postures and choices embodied by Gu Wenda? He corresponds to what Yolaine Escande and Denis Vidal have called a “figure of the universal”¹¹. The majority of these artists are men. Yet, a sign of the times, women are also asserting themselves as artists.

EXILE AS HETEROTOPIA

One of the most well-known female artists in China is Zhang O. Born in 1976 in Guangzhou, she emigrated to London to study at St Martins School of Art before settling in New York. Her series of portraits entitled *Horizon* (2004) report on upheavals in rural China. Young girls pose in front her lens. The viewer cannot help wondering about the future of these children who, until recently, were subjected to the one-child policy, and whose lives are very different from those of their elders. The girls seem to be the obsession of this engaged artist who, two years later, photographed a disturbing series entitled *Daddy and I*. We see Chinese preteen girls posing alongside their adoptive white fathers. The work denounces the perverse effects of the one-child policy that forced low-income families to favor their male children and to abandon their daughters to these middle-aged, middle-class Americans. The approach is part of a documentary process. It causes uneasiness, as the gap between these girls and the much older men may seem indecent. The artist leaves the interpretation open to the viewer. The pictures remain ambiguous. However, Chinese diaspora artists are found not only in the United States and Europe.

Australia is an important continent for artists like Shen Shaomin. Born in 1956, he became well-known later in life. Today, he is one of the most well-known Chinese-Australian artists. He benefits from this situation in a booming environment which favors his relations with China. Shen Shaomin is mainly known for his *Unknown Creatures*, skeletons of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic hybrids, some with characteristics even borrowed from plants, that he has been making since 2002. On one of these skeletons, assembled using the bones of fifteen of cows, he engraved teachings borrowed from Buddhist, Christian and Muslim religions, as if this hybrid creature could incubate the thought

of a monster... unless the artist is referring here to the dragon, which, in Chinese mythology, on the contrary, is a source of life. In 2010, Shen Shaomin turned to the creating modified sculptures. These works, not very politically correct, show Communist leaders arranged in glass coffins. Among them are Liu Shaoqi, Lenin, Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung and, in anticipation, the already supposed dead Fidel Castro; whose bodies were arranged in star, as part of the Sydney Biennial. Hence the title of the installation: *Summit*.

Made only two years after the 2008 financial crash, *Summit* responded to the ideological crisis of capitalism, by convening the charismatic leaders of international communism: Action, Reaction. With the acuity of the one who is from this “other place”, this *heterotopy* – as Michel Foucault¹² pointed out in *The Order of Things* – Shen Shaomin was able to get away from the dominant language by criticizing it, and by summoning a story that the West had buried at the end of the Cold War. Another emigrant artist, Ni Haifeng (1964) has made this criticism of dominant languages a focus of his work. Graduate of the Hangzhou Academy, after residing in Amsterdam, he returned to China and – like filmmaker Jia Zhangke (1970) – developed a passion for vernacular languages. As can be seen in his video *Xeno-writings* (2003), he works on an edge that seems to connect these languages or reject them into the fringes of the system. What does this mean? China and its artists, in the choice of punctual or permanent migration, redefine complex practices affecting the very cartography of their existence and their art. These practices are at the origin of new links between localization and globalization as Éric Bonnet and François Soulages¹³ have also, in other contexts, observed.

A CONCEPTUAL TURNING POINT

New perspectives are opening with these artists. They are participating in the deconstruction of postcolonial hegemonies. To varying degrees, all have been marked by the thought of Edward Said or Frederic Jameson, whose texts were translated during reforms¹⁴, and whose radicality continues to nourish, in a permanent interaction, the exhibitions of each of them. Their contributions continue to shape the new geopolitics of art. Rarely propelled by political decisions, otherwise approached only allusively, except for in 1989, these artists have ensured the emergence of a *geocriticism*, to borrow an expression used by Kantura Quiros and Aliocha Imhoff¹⁵, in another context. One of the most interesting examples is probably that explored by Anny Lazarus. She shows a diversity of approaches to criticism in China¹⁶. Through English translations borrowed from of North American universities – there was a keen interest in French Theory, when the position

12 - Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things, an Archeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, Randomhouse, 1970. Original publication: *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

13 - Éric Bonnet et François Soulages (ed.), *Lieux et mondes. Arts, cultures et politiques*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2015.

14 - Chen Yan, *L'Éveil de la Chine. Forward by Léon Vandermeersch*, Paris, L'Aube, 2002.

15 - Kantura Quiros and Aliocha Imhoff, *Glissements de terrain in: Géoehétique* (Edited by Kantura Quiros and Aliocha Imhoff), ENSA, Dijon, 2012, pp. 5-16.

16 - Anny Lazarus, *La Critique d'art contemporaine chinoise. Textes et contexte*, Presses Universitaires de Provence, Aix-Marseille Université, 2017.

of criticism in China was being reinstated, with the relative abandonment of the Maoist doctrine in many fields of knowledge. Criticism thus became synonymous with the return of free speech, that had long been impaired – as Victor Klemperer¹⁷ had noted in his time in the context of Nazi Germany – due to three decades of full totalitarianism that China had endured.

17 - Victor Klemperer, *LTI, la Langue du Troisième Reich. Carnets d'un philologue*, Paris, Albin-Michel, 1996.

History considered in teleological and Marxist terms, was marginalized in of favor patterns inspired by Benedetto Croce, or by the renewed focus of the Kantian theses of Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) by the philosopher Li Zehou (1930). Thus, the next generation of Gao Minglu (1949), Lü Peng (1956), Lu Hong (1954) and Pi Daojian (1941) kept aiming to get away from causal linear interpretations of history, by focusing most of their criticism on a structural understanding of social phenomena. Symptomatic of this evolution is the radicality of the remarks made in 1985 by a Li Xiaoshan (1959) – author of « Traditional painting is at an impasse », except from the article « My Opinion about Contemporary Chinese Painting », first translated into a European language by Dutch cultural education specialist Hans Van Dick (1946-2002). In the wake of this shift, Wang Nanming (1962) summoned the Frankfurt School, by questioning the concept of *alienation* originating from modernity and from observation of cultural industries; while Gao Minglu proposed to subvert the Foucauldian concept of “representation” (*zaixian*) through one of the most important art criticism works published to date in China: *Yi School: Dislocation of Modernity*. “Reinvented traditions”¹⁸, and reappropriation of the discourse of art criticism, imposed new norms that aimed to be universal. They formed the main body of a very diverse theoretical thought, based on a reinterpretation of the Classics.

18 - We have borrowed this expression from Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.), *L'Invention de la tradition*, Paris, éditions Amsterdam, 2006.

The work of Gao Minglu is one of the most representative, from this point of view. The abandonment or repudiation of the legacy of the first Chinese Enlightenment, that said to be of May “4, 1919”, and of a Westernization of China and its elites, is probably at the end of this path. The deep questioning of temporal structures (*avant-garde*, “contemporary” and so on) and the creation of neologisms, such as “maximalism” (as opposed to “minimalism”...), are part of an approach that keeps with cultural nationalism. One of its givens is to consider the partial Westernization of China as a mistake. Whatever their interpretation, these critics point out that any writing of history is both pendular and exclusive. They explain in part, that the choices of certain conceptual paradigms that have fallen out of favor in European universities or which are violently combated, are integrated into the discourse of the most contemporary Chinese art critics and thinkers. The determinism of *Nordic thought* that Gao Minglu seems to attribute to the painting

of Wang Guangyi (1957) is one example. The same goes for Dai Dan (1983), but in a completely different way. He uses the ideologically connoted concept of “cultural genes” (*wenhua jiyin*). Rather than an isolated phenomenon, this is a current trend in China.

It paradoxically aims to refute – in the very enunciation of the discourse – Reason on behalf of a rationalism, which the regime also uses, in the development of its own phraseology. Thus, they speak of a “socialist spiritual civilization” (*She hui zhu yi jingshenwen ming*), of “building modern socialism” (*She hui zhu yi xiandai hua jianshe*) in all government bulletins and slogans, omnipresent in cities as well as in rural areas. The official declarations as well as the administrative school rules, including fine arts school rules, are riddled with references aimed at a collective conditioning. In a directive issued by the Ministry of Education dating to 2002, still applicable today, we find the following guidelines:

«The work of art education at school must be guided by Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong thought, and Deng Xiaoping theory. Through cultural and artistic skills, we can strengthen training in patriotism and have the right aesthetic point of view, enabling to resist any bad culture¹⁹ ... »

This style of total estheticizing discourse is reminiscent of the ideological excesses once known in Germany, studied by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe²⁰, Jean-Luc Nancy and Eric Michaud²¹. Stakes are high – because the difficulty Chinese intellectuals have in defining the necessary space, that would allow them to escape the risks of acculturation or even instrumentation, is a recurring issue²². This, unless artists opt for an opposite choice that would be the very antithesis of any sort of identification, and that would designate them to an overly exclusive territory or history.

CULTURAL HISTORY AND RELATIONS BETWEEN ARTISTS AND POWERS IN CHINA IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

A choice of being in the middle, of edgy thought, independent of State powers, and open to what the historian François Hartog called a “regime of historicity²³” is the choice that artist Chen Zhen (1955-2000)²⁴ subscribed to. His fertile contribution reminded us of the necessary opening-up of artists in the development of a rewriting of art history, conceived henceforth as a palimpsest of discontinuous narratives, or to borrow the words of Stuart Hall, « stories that overlap, that fit together, but do not match²⁵. » Deceased, more than ten years ago, the future will tell us whether the artist was a precursor, or one of the great marginalized thinkers of his time. However, one thing is certain:

19 - Lei Peng, *L'Éducation artistique dans les politiques éducatives de la Chine contemporaine – Quelles raisons, quels rôles et quelles fonctions?* PhD Thesis, (under the direction of Alain Kerlan), Lyon 2, 2018, p 200, (unpublished).

20- Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Mythe nazi*, Paris, L'Aube, 1991.

21 - Éric Michaud, *Un art de l'éternité. L'image et le temps du national-socialisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996.

22 - Anne Cheng (ed.), *La Pensée en Chine aujourd'hui*, Paris, Gallimard, 2007.

23 - François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expérience du temps*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2013.

24 - Chen Zhen, *Les Entretiens*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2001.

25 - Stuart Hall, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 1, n°61, 2006, pp 1-24.

a cultural history of these individual trajectories refers us to other issues: those of the ongoing interactions between artists and authorities. The link between these two realities has been little studied in other Western contexts. The explanation is simple: «“contemporary” arts» or «“contemporary” Art » are often perceived around the world, to varying degrees and in different ways in different cultures, as a phenomenon of Western origin.

There are several reasons for that. Firstly, there are economic and cultural reasons: Thanks to successive waves of globalization, modernization, and Westernization (including the wave that has been unfolding since the end of the twentieth century) - this phenomenon has penetrated non-Western societies. There are deeper and structural reasons as well. Globalization is linked to the Western world through modernity. Yet it is in the cultural sphere five hundred years ago, that a process of immanent rationalization (Max Weber) was triggered. This led, depending on the differentiated spheres of authenticity and of customs, to a complete restructuration of practices and systems of representation. During this major shift, some of these systems, which had in common the use of forms of symbolic coherence (linked to sensitivity, feelings and imagination) eluded the most strict forms of rationalization (cognitive moral, legal, etc.), and gradually became more autonomous, imposing themselves as powerful means for critical and meaningful, reflexive expression; freeing themselves from traditional religious and/or temporal powers.

It is these complementary systems of rationalization, destined to remain at the fringe, that modern Western culture grouped under the general category of art. Greatly rationalized, the new powers (from the government, to the market, to restructured religious institutions) are in tension (vacillating between seduction and brutality) with these practices and forms of meaningful representation. Western modern and contemporary art history testifies to this. The western origin can thus be justified, along with the preconceived ideas that this may bring. Successive waves of globalization also triggered the more or less achieved, but in any case, original (very different from one and other and from a western source) process of secularization – from the outside, but inevitably, also from resources from within the societies involved. The role played by art, whether popular or highbrow, in these processes, is indisputable; with the same gestures (of seduction or brutality) on the part of the authorities, whether traditional or reformed. To study these forms of expression, to evaluate their impact, is therefore essential, as they contribute greatly to changing the face of contemporary art world, by their reconstruction of deeply different forms of Western expression. They allow us to shed light on the current process via Chinese

society; this light is all the richer, in its teachings, as China is the seat of one of the oldest and most powerful civilizations of humanity.

CONTEMPORARY ART: A SYMPTOM OF A DISACCUltURATION IN PROCESS?

One of the most important artistic events, a prelude to the beginning of a probable “disacculturation” of art practices, and the beginning of a re-appropriation, for Chinese artists, of a cultural base of their own, is the dialogue that began in 1985 with Robert Rauschenberg. His work, with the use of poor materials and intentionality, in his approach to making art, reveals the predominance of gesture, and thus resonates with traditions inherited from Taoism and Zen Buddhism²⁶. His influence on Huang Yongping (1954), Guwenda (1955), Xu Bing (1955) and Wu Shanzhuan (1960) has been significant. The decisive step of this process was marked by a strong hybridization of artistic references in China²⁷. Only the future will tell us, beyond these examples, whether or not it this will be “long lasting”, and, to take up the terms of Fernand Braudel, a phenomenon that is recurrent in the history of Chinese civilization²⁸. This hybridization has already allowed hitherto unforeseen exchanges with the American art scene which, here as elsewhere²⁹, and has become – but only partly – a benchmark for Chinese creation.

Wenhua Popu (“Pop Cultural Art”) also known as Zhengzhi Popu (“Political Pop Art”) – begun in 1991, developed through the writing of critique Li Xianting (1949) and *Cynic Art* with Fang Lijun (1963), Yue Minjun (1962) and Liu Wei (1965) make the multi-referential choices of these visual codes more complex. One can see references to Warhol and also to the new consumer languages displayed by post-realist socialist creations by Wang Guangyi (1956) and Li Shan (1942). Post-cultural studies, Derridian deconstructivism and “Westernism” (*xifangzhuyi*) – antonym of “orientalism” (*donfangzhuyi*), no less criticized scrutinize these works, showing that since the eighties China has become the fertile soil of debates, far exceeding the simple issues of art. Chinese society, like its artists, is characterized by what defines it best: It is a fundamentally “glocal” reality, in the sense that it is the global and the local, in constant interaction, that finally convey all of its practiced activities. This is a “transexperience”, as the artist Chen Zhen (1955-2000)³⁰ described it, that many of his peers, have repeatedly experienced; with the clear benefit of freeing themselves from the East/West dichotomy. They lay claim to new feelings of be categories. This disorientation opens up a new horizon, access to an “alter-modernity³¹”. Protean, it can be a sign of adherence to an internationalist lifestyle posture

26 - Emmanuel Lincot, *L'Art contemporain chinois dans les années Deng Xiaoping*, Hong Kong, CEFC, Perspectives chinoises, 2004: <https://journals.openedition.org/perspectiveschinoises/1362>

27 - In a context other than China's, that of Brasil, in its relations with Europe – we can benefit from reading: Maria de Lourdes Parreiras Horta, «Hybridation. Insignes du pouvoir et anthropophagie symbolique au Brésil» in *Dictionnaire mondial des images*, edited by Laurent Gervereau, Éditions Nouveau Monde, 2006, p. 499.

28 - Thus, in the Chinese context of imperial and antiquity periods, we can refer to the work by Danielle Elisseeff: *Hybrides chinois. La quête de tous les possibles*, Paris, Hazan, 2011.

29 - Serge Guibaut, *Comment New York vola l'idée d'art moderne*, Paris, Jacqueline Chambon, 1995.

30 - Chen Zhen, *Invocation of washing fire*, Prato-Siena, Gii Ori, 2003.

31 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radical: pour une esthétique de la globalisation*, Paris, Denoël, 2009.

and express itself through cultural singularities that are perfectly assumed. “Localist values” (*bentuzhuyi*)³² are also a power game that do not only advocate for cultural diversity. In their deepest meaning, they have the effect of defending for a certain imperviousness of cultures³³. This is the assertion of a singular feeling of belonging, that we will describe here as Chineseness.

32 - Term used for the title of the Chinese contemporary art exhibit organized by Phil Tinari at the Louis Vuitton Foundation, during the winter of 2016.

33 - Furthermore, in a completely different context, this is the idea that anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss defended. According to him, humanity «should learn once again that all true creation involves a minimum of deafness to other values, to the point of refusing them, or even negating them» in *Le regard éloigné*, Plon, 1983, p. 47.

Wu Shanzhuan (1960),
Red Humour, 1985,
Installation
©Courtesy of the artist.



*This chapter takes up and adds to a book chapter, «Artistes de Chine. Ambassadeurs culturels et nouvelles géopolitiques» edited by Éric Bonnet, in *Biennales d'art contemporain. Œuvres et frontières*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2016, pp. 137-153. It is also the fruit of several successive studies: «Création et similitude, vers une nouvelle géopolitique des arts visuels ?», University of French Polynesia (UPF), «Migrance et mémoire dans les films d'expression chinoise», Tahiti - Polynésie française, le 8 novembre 2018 ; «Mythologies chinoises contemporaines», Interface research seminar Master 2 — Fine Arts - Esthetics, Paris - Pantheon-Sorbonne University, 30 January 2019. At the initiative of Professeur Richard Conte, whom we warmly thank.

**“CHINESENESS” IN
YIMOU ZHANG’S
TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA**

Qiao Li

ABSTRACT

Hollywood and non-Hollywood national cinemas both seek to depict “universal” meanings to ensure better global distribution and reception. “The national” in national cinema is also in a state of hybridity (Bhabha 2004). “The national” becomes even more complicated in this era of economic globalization. Among many issues, the “Otherness” of national cinema has been historically emphasized in relation to Hollywood. If film is designed to offer transnational language, what is the impact on gender, culture, ethics and eventually “the national” in a transnational context? This article pushes the boundaries of the idea of “the national” in national cinemas by looking at the ways that auteur director Yimou Zhang took his understandings of Chinese traditional culture to films that were intended for Western audiences. In so doing, he further problematized notions of “the national” by embedding understandings based on Chinese culture within his transnational films. The article investigates whether he still remain signifiers of Chinese traditional culture and furthers the investigation of the role of auteur directors and the signification of complex national meanings in contexts beyond that of the nation-state.

KEYWORDS

The national

Auteur director

Chineseness

Transnationalism

Orientalism

Yimou Zhang

When the directors of Chinese origin looked beyond the national mode of production by creating transnational production, how is the “Chineseness” represented in their films? This study of Yimou Zhang’s films made for a transitional context provides us with an interesting chance of further problematizing ideas of national cinema, as traditionally formulated in film scholarship that is, focused on the nation-state.

Zhang is perhaps the best-known Chinese director and spokesman for Chinese culture at the international stage. «...for the past two decades, he has inspired the world’s fascination with China through his cinematic vision » (Spielberg 2008). This is further confirmed by the fact that Zhang directed the 2008 Summer Olympics opening ceremony in Beijing and was nominated for Person of the Year 2008 by *Time Magazine*. Steven Spielberg points out that Zhang has an important role in projecting a vision of Chinese culture on the world’s stage. As *he* indicates, « In telling China’s story (in the Olympic Opening Ceremony), Zhang explored the character he, or peaceful harmony – an ideal critical to Chinese culture » (Spielberg 2008). Harmony is the basis of Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese tradition. In the same way as Zhang’s films, the 2008 Summer Olympics opening ceremony in Beijing becomes a vehicle for him to express his vision and interpretation of Chinese traditional culture (Figure 1). Zhang therefore can be seen as the standard bearer for both Chinese national cultural identity and Chinese national cinema.



Figure 1: Yimou Zhang, *The Summer Olympics opening ceremony in Beijing, 2008*.

Following his directorial successes at the Venice and Berlin international film festivals in the 1980s, his trilogy of wuxia films constituting transnational projects were successfully distributed in the global film market with *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006). This article explores how Zhang uses these projects to address transnational audiences. The article, therefore, reveals how the construction of national/cultural identity is manipulated in today's commodity culture.

The juxtaposition of authorship and national cinema, or auteur directors and national/cultural identity is at the centre of the analysis in this article. National cinema is often associated with auteur directors and their *œuvres*. For example, Akira Kurosawa is the representative of Japanese cinema between the 1950s and 1980s and Ingmar Bergman, the representative of Swedish cinema for audiences outside of their home countries during the same period. Consequently, the studies of a national cinema have often been focused on a handful of its auteurs and their cinematic styles and visions. The emergence of auteur directors has often been through film festivals. Jinhee Choi (2005) notes:

« The relation between auteur and national cinema is quite complex in that non-Hollywood auteur directors are often recognized as such at venues such as international film festivals, which form a market distinct from mass-oriented markets...Despite the pitfall of attributing the originality and creativity of the styles in traditional art forms unique to their respective cultures – films directed by auteurs do elicit in the viewer some conception of a national cinema.»

(Choi 2005: 314)

The status as national cinema has been consolidated by the emergence of auteur directors. As Thomas Elsaesser (2005: 46) points out: « For these films, international (i.e., European) festivals are the markets that can fix and assign different kinds of value, from touristic, politico-voyeuristic curiosity to auteur status conferred on the directors.» In the Taiwanese case, Hsiao-Hsien Hou, Edward Yang and Ang Lee are also such examples of auteur directors who put Taiwanese cinema on the map as a national cinema worthy of critical attention. Interestingly, although Hong Kong cinema has its auteurs such as John Woo and Kar-wai Wong, it is more like Hollywood which has a more mixed economy that includes genre films, such as martial arts films, which are more for internal consumption but have also been successful elsewhere (Bordwell 2000). These auteur directors, like any other auteurs of national cinemas, achieved their reputation by winning awards at international film festivals. Consequently, their international reputation further consolidated their status as the principal creative decision maker

in their filmmaking. Choi's assertion establishes a clear link between auteur directors and the projecting of «the national» in national cinemas. This is especially true in the case of Chinese language cinemas. Chinese language films (especially the films of the Fifth Generation) were applauded at Western film festivals in the 1980s and 1990s. The projection of "Chineseness" through Western film festivals raises a number of issues regarding interpretation and reception in cross-cultural communication. Rey Chow (1995: 170) points out that «from the very earliest moments, the modes of identity construction offered by film were modes of relativity and relations rather than essences and fixities.»

According to Janet Harbord (2002: 60), film festivals are «mixed spaces crossed by commercial interest, specialized knowledge and tourist trajectories.» Harbord's remark indicates some of the reasons for the fascination with Chinese culture and Chinese films at Western film festivals such as the success of Zhang's *Red Sorghum* (1987) at Berlin International Film Festival in 1988, Hsiao-Hsien Hou's *City of Sadness* (1989) at Venice International Film Festival in 1989, and Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) at Berlin International Film Festival in 1993. The festivals bring together the preoccupations of Western film criticism and production. In so doing, they reinscribe the Orientalist lens (Harbord's point about tourist trajectories fits well with notions of the exotic Orient so prominent in Orientalist thinking). Though Hong Kong cinema is mostly known for its action genre, and Taiwanese cinema for its social and cultural construction of its identity, overall the Oriental exotic is preferred at the international stage.

If the reading of a film text is conditioned by the viewer's own cultural context, then in order to enrich reading, a broad range of general and specific cultural capital is useful. However, misrepresentation occurs not only in the process of reception but also because Orientalist and self-Orientalising tendencies specifically manipulated the filmmaking itself. The influences of Orientalism in film reception and filmmaking are like two sides of a coin, and this becomes particularly interesting when exploring transnational filmmaking which aims to please audiences worldwide.

However, academic writings on auteur theory in relation to national cinema have been criticized by James Naremore (1990: 21) suggesting that: «... the decision to write about specific directors, producer, writers, or actors doesn't in itself involve a commitment to theory, a method, a formal taxonomy, or even a politics.» Gary Needham (2006a: 362) tackles this assertion and argues that Naremore «is incorrect in assuming that auteur criticism is politically barren particularly

when positioned against Asian cinemas' struggle to localize and nationalize simultaneously, as a challenge to Hollywood's hegemonic position in their region and to the more troubling issue of colonial history.»

Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (2006) further relate auteur theory to the projecting of "the national". They also point out the importance of auteurs as signifiers of meaning and national style in *Transnational Cinema*:

«...national elites have sought to use film to establish or solidify official cultural narratives. (For example, the notion of the "auteur" as representative and bearer of national and/or ethnic identity has been central to the international reception and reputations of filmmakers as varied as Jean Renoir, Satyajit Ray, Lena Wertmuller, Akira Kurosawa, and Spike Lee.)»

(Ezra and Rowden 2006: 3)

This is a central idea for the analysis regarding the auteur director Zhang and the projecting of "the national" within and beyond the Chinese context. Elsaesser also points out the relationship between national identity and *films d'auteur* in Chinese language cinemas:

«Such might be the case with the films of Zhang Yimou's RAISE THE RED LANTERN or Chen Kaige's FAREWELL MY CONCUBINE, fanning out towards a broader festival and media interest in Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese cinema since the mid-1980s, where (to us Europeans) complicated national and post-colonial histories set up tantalizing fields of differentiation, self-differentiation and positions of protest.»

(Elsaesser 2005: 46)

By focusing on auteurs such as Yasujiro Ozu and Hsiao-Hsien Hou, *Needham's Ozu and the Colonial Encounter in Hou Hsiao-Hsien* (2006b) is a good example of this critical discourse. Needham (2006b) explores authorial signatures and cultural identity of Japanese cinema and Taiwanese cinema. However, like most writings on Asian auteur directors, these studies have regarded auteur directors as signifiers of national style and are all placed (geographically, historically and culturally) within a particular nation-state/territory. The meaning of what or who is an auteur has been continuously contested. From Ingmar Bergman to Federico Fellini, from Akira Kurosawa to Zhang, the fact that auteur as signifier of national style or cultural bearer of national themes has always been identified by moviegoers or film scholars. While the title of an auteur suggests a continuous signature in his/her films, it is also used to promote an auteur cinema or national cinema for commercial purposes. As Elsaesser states:

« In this respect, however, there is little difference between contemporary Hollywood and the European cinema because auteurs today have to be the promoters and salespeople of their own films at festivals, while one or two become pop star role models and idols for their fans.»
(Elsaesser 2005: 51)

It is clear that Elsaesser (2005) outlines a different dimension of auteurism: auteur as marketing tool which is used as label for established artistic or commercial conventions, genres and their breakdown and reinventions of film to fulfil their fans' expectations. Hence, there are two different types of auteurism. The difference lies in the different dimensions these two types of auteurism point to: they describe different things and refer to two different phenomena.

“THE NATIONAL” IN ZHANG’S TRANSNATIONAL FILMS

Taking action cinema as an example, Meaghan Morris (2004) outlines a historical approach to the transnational study of globally popular cultural forms. Morris notes:

« How do we *imagine* the “transnational” flows and movements in culture so often invoked in critical rhetoric today? Acts of imagining enable as well as shape our research projects and in cultural domains of enquiry (as distinct from, say, the study of capital or population movements), the imaginings we work with are often surprisingly thin – a blurry wash of rhetoric about movement, speed and space, spread through a critique of national or “bounded” categories and affects as though the transnational can be imagined only in terms of what it is not.»

(Morris 2004: 181)

Morris (2004) points out the complexity of “the national” in a transnational context. In this era of globalization, film has become a transnational language and the idea of transnationalism has become a critical concept in film scholarship. The category of national cinema is, thus, problematized by a number of factors. Ezra and Rowden (2006) provide an overview of the key concepts and debates within the developing field of transnational cinema. They note:

« The global circulation of money, commodities, information, and human beings is giving rise to films whose aesthetic and narrative dynamic, and even the modes of emotional identification they elicit, reflect the impact of advanced capitalism and new media technologies as components of an increasingly interconnected world-system. The transnational comprises both globalization—in cinematic terms, Hollywood’s domination of world film market—and the counterhegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Third World countries.

(Ezra and Rowden 2006: 1)

According to Ezra and Rowden (2006: 1-5), the term transnationalism is determined by not only « the permeability of national borders », but also determined by « the physical or virtual mobility of those who cross them ». In relation to cinema, an important phenomenon emerges: the transnational actions of a number of auteur directors moving from their national contexts to Hollywood. Indeed, auteur directors such as Pedro Almodóvar from Spain and Luc Besson from France have recently contributed to the cultural diversity of contemporary Hollywood cinema in the same way that Hitchcock, Billy Wilder and Charlie Chaplin made earlier. In his essay, Morris (2004: 181) points out that « the term transnational itself is heavily spatialized today, carrying an insistent flow of images about “global” forces rolling round “borderless” worlds. » It is in such a transnational context that the projection of “the national” can be challenged in cross-cultural communication. Jennings (2002) problematizes the relationship between auteur and “the national” through a case study on Australian/Hollywood director Peter Weir. She (2002: 379) argues that the dualism of national/transnational « has been sustained partly through a reverence of key directors and the establishment of the auteur as signifier of national style. » Thus, the binary opposition between national cinema and Hollywood must further problematize the complex meanings of “national identity” or “auteurial signatures” when a signifier of a particular national style is produced in a transnational (or another cultural) context.

In this era of economic globalization, Hollywood continues to seek film talents from every corner of the world and other national cinemas also import Hollywood’s transnational capital and film professionals. Thus, the boundary of national cinema becomes ambiguous. Since the new millennium, Zhang has tried to find a conciliatory approach for Chinese national cinema in this context of cultural hybridity: to use national images, allegories and emblems to make films to cater for a transnational market. One major characteristic of Zhang’s *wuxia* films such as *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers*, *Curse of the Golden Flower*, and more recent film *The Great Wall* (2016) is his (or his films’ investors’) ambitions of a global market. Thus, inevitably, he aimed to cater for Western audiences as well as Chinese audiences, which has resulted in a contradictory representation of “the national”.

The spirit of *Xiayi* is important in Chinese traditional culture and is one core element of *wuxia* cinema. This is a rebellious ideology which in return makes *Xia* very popular among ordinary people in China since ancient times. Although *Xia* is able to challenge and destroy hierarchy of governance and disorder common customs, it cannot overturn social morality and conventions. In Zhang’s transnational works such as *House of Flying Daggers*, the spirit of *Xia* disappears

and is simply replaced by the images of *Xia*: dazzling martial arts techniques. In Zhang's film, the traditional conflicts of *wuxia* films such as the conflict between governance and common people; and the conflict between evil and goodness, have all been curtailed and represented as sub-plots. The focus of narrative on personal deception, love and hatred distracted the spirit of *Xiayi*.

In transnational cinema, the adaptation of films between Asian cinema and Hollywood has become a common practice. *Infernal Affairs* (Liu Weiqiang, 2002) is the most commercially successful film in Hong Kong film history and the film was adapted by Hollywood to an American film as *The Departed* (Martin Scorsese, 2006). *The Departed* won four Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Achievement in Directing for Martin Scorsese in 2007. The plot of undercover and anti-undercover activities of *The Departed* has obviously been imitated by *House of Flying Daggers*. The latter uses the love triangle of Xiao Mei (Figure 2), detective Liu and detective Jin as the main narrative, whereas the former tells the story of a police officer who infiltrates the Triads, and a police officer secretly working for the same gang.



Figure 2: Yimou Zhang, *House of Flying Daggers*, 2004. Ziyi Zhang as Xiao Mei.

Zhang's other martial arts film *Hero* is influenced by the Japanese film *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950) in terms of its narrative and the way the narrative progresses. *Rashomon* uses different characters to tell a story from different perspectives. In *Hero*, similarly, Zhang uses different colours to tell a story. At the end of the film, Wumin (Jet Li) abandons the assassination for the concept of *Tianxia* (beneath heaven) and peace, and submits to the power of the King (the most merciless tyrant

in Chinese history), betraying his promise to the other two assassins Vast Sky and Flying Snow (Figure 3). Here the spirit of *Xia* is represented as sacrifice for the King's tyranny, which is completely against the true spirit of *Xia*.



Figure 3: Yimou Zhang, *Hero*, 2002. Wumin abandons the assassination and is surrounded by the King of Qin's soldiers.

Targeting at a transnational/global market, it may seem ironic that Zhang needs to locate/represent “the national” in his trilogy of *wuxia* films because these films are labelled as “Chinese national cinema” for global distribution. The promotion of “national cinemas” and auteur cinema as a marketing strategy in the era of globalization makes auteur directors such as Zhang seek cultural alternatives to representations of “the national”. It might seem a critical shift in terms to consider Zhang as cultural spokesperson for China but criticising him for his manipulation of “Chineseness” for commercial purpose. As indicated earlier, auteurism has been used in film theory to refer to two different sets of phenomena. Authorship here, as recognized by Timothy Corrigan (1998: 40), is bound up with promotional discourses with « industrial desires, technological opportunities, and marketing strategies. » Even though one can look at this trilogy as a vision or coherent set of stylistic or thematic practices (auteur as agent of film's meaning), a film can be still categorized as a commodity for commercial distribution. This is particularly true in the case of Zhang's trilogy of *wuxia* films. One of the strategies for him is to use a visual language to draw in particularly Western audiences who would not be familiar with the more philosophical dimensions of the essence of Chinese culture. The following section will examine such cultural alternatives Zhang makes for his transnational attempts.

“CHINESENESS” AS CINEMATIC VISUAL SYMBOLS

National/cultural identity is constituted by a variety of elements in a national cinema such as the language spoken, the nationalities of the protagonists, the dress, the setting, the locale, and the music (Higson 2002). «On the perennialist view, then national identity is a matter, not of the imposition of “invented traditions” ... with largely fictive connection to the past, but rather of the rediscovery and authentication of already existing myths and symbols with collective value» (Hjort and Mackenzie 2005: 6). The use of symbols is key and they are socially, culturally and historically inflected. Thus the meanings of symbols are developed through a lengthy process. They are marked with the brands of national spirit, culture, consciousness and significance. Symbols exist in a specific cultural context and their meaning cannot be separated from it. Once these symbols become the symbolic of national/cultural identity, they are often used by artists. In the case of national cinema, «shared memories, collective myths» (Hjort and Mackenzie 2005: 6) are projected through cinematic representation.

Obviously, Zhang is good at utilizing symbols from Chinese traditional culture and representing them in filmic language. Red lanterns, the architecture of old building (compounds), red sorghum fields, shadow play and wedding ceremonies are all represented in Zhang’s cinema and created as beautiful exotic/Orientalized visual images. However, when Zhang employs these symbols to create transnational films, two issues arise: first, the originality of the meaning of form; second, the conflict between the meaning of form and the meaning of presence. If the originality of the meaning of form is ambiguous, then it is arguable whether or not they could represent national culture. Third, if there is a conflict between the meaning of form and the meaning of presence, then it is unlikely to create meaningful significance for that symbol. Thus “the national” is problematized in Zhang’s transnational projects such as his trilogy of *wuxia* films.

Symbols/emblems not only represent national/cultural identity, but they also should be connected with the film’s narrative. Zhang is a master of inheriting, employing and inventing national symbols/allegories for the projection of “the national” in Chinese mainland cinema. However, in a global context, with the purpose of giving attention to both the East and the West, Zhang has become impatient and eager for quick success and instant benefits. In his films, national symbols are little by little separated from national culture or “Chineseness”. In *House of Flying Daggers* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*, the peony house and Chongyang festival become pure ornaments (Figure 4 and Figure 5). He uses them as tools to create elegant and beautiful images. Symbols have not been able to unite with narrative

and neither do they represent national culture. The casual shifts of colour expression in *Hero* and the pure and complete green colour for the fight sequence in bamboo woods in *House of Flying Daggers* have no deep connection with national culture but merely add a superficial acknowledgement. Consequently, these efforts have not helped to explore the protagonists' emotional/psychological world.



Figure 4 : Yimou Zhang, *House of Flying Daggers*, 2006. Dance scene in the Peony House.

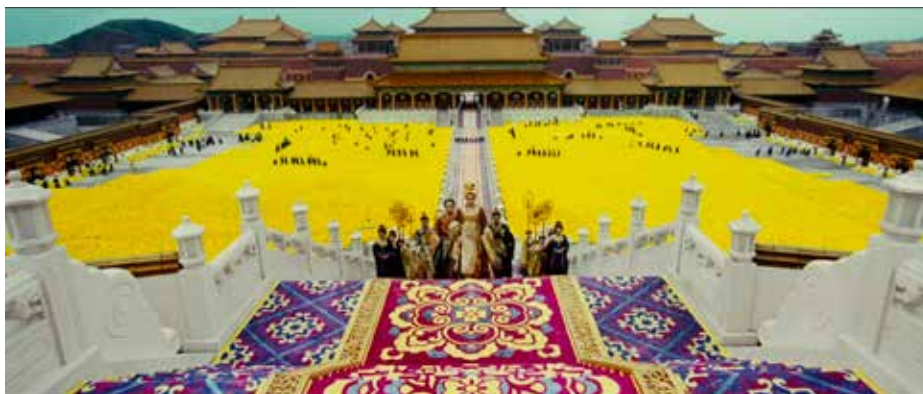


Figure 5: Yimou Zhang, *Curse of the Golden Flower*, 2006. Chongyang festival.

Zhang's trilogy of *wuxia* films are all period martial arts films and his tendency for self-Orientalism has been overly developed in these films. Period costume dramas are major box-office commodities in the West (Vincendeau 2001). For Zhang, the choice of period martial arts films is a result of seeking "universal" appeals in cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, period drama gives Zhang maximum freedom for artistic creation as it avoids conflict with contemporary Chinese political ideology. Also, the presupposition of history provides Zhang with abundant space for Orientalist manipulation. In all three films, there is a tendency of desinicization: the histories portrayed in the films are all fictional devices which manipulated ideas of authenticity of history/culture itself.

Hero attempts to create imaginary historical heroic characters with the purpose of re-constructing history by the way of individual experience and idealism. The film has a magnificent subject in terms of narrative, encompassing ideologies such as worship of power (tyranny in this case), ignorance of humanism and cynicism. What Zhang delivers in this film is the ideology of individual's sacrifice for the peace beneath heaven. However, when Wumin abandons the assassination at the end of the film, what he actually gives up is the chance of assassinating the most tyrannical king, Qin Shi Huang (BC221-BC206) in Chinese history (Figure 6). Although united China as a nation-state for the first time in BC221, the King of Qin has been criticized by today's Chinese historians for his abuse in killing a large number of Chinese people and he shares a negative image in Chinese history. For Chinese people, a true hero with the spirit of *Xiayi* should definitely not give up such a chance of ending the tyranny. In fact, there have been a number of assassins attempting to kill the King of Qin but only ended with themselves get killed by the King's army. Therefore, Zhang's Orientalist visual construction of history is contradictory to the truth of history. There is no deep cultural significance when juggling history and culture itself, except an anti-historical imagination of Zhang's own powerful unconstrained style.



Figure 6: Yimou Zhang, *Hero*, 2002. Wumin is killed by order of the King of Qin by a shower of arrows.

Similarly, *House of Flying Daggers* is an example of how history is lost in a period drama. The love triangle story is set in Tang Dynasty. But it can also be inserted into any other historical periods, as the narrative has no historical reference except martial arts sequences and a love sub-plot. With such ignorance and narrative reference to actual history, the film presents its audiences with a splendid visual/audio representation. For *Curse of the Golden Flower*, although it is an adaptation of a famous Chinese drama *Lei Yu* in the 1930s, the sense of history and humanism is Western rather than Chinese: it belongs to the European period of Shakespeare and Renaissance.

CONCLUSION

The article examines manipulated “Chineseness” represented in Zhang’s transnational films. First, it establishes Zhang as the cultural spokesperson of China (his role orchestrating the 2008 Summer Olympics opening ceremony being paramount), and secondly, it further explores the juxtaposition of authorship and national cinema, or auteur directors and national/cultural identity. Finally, the article argues the contradictory nature of “the national” in Zhang’s transnational films, the trilogy of *wuxia* (*Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*).

In the context of globalization, Zhang changes his filmic ideology. Although he still deliberately uses symbols/emblems of Chinese literary tradition such as defoliation, bamboo sea, chrysanthemum, guzheng (a Chinese traditional violin) and desert, the aesthetic ideology of restraints and blank-leaving (*Liubai*) is replaced by modern aesthetic habits such as fast paced editing and visual stimulation. The result is that the meaning of symbols only stays on a perceptual level instead of bringing audiences to meditate upon its profound significance. It may seem that Zhang lacks Western cultural understanding and the ability to culturally (not manipulated aesthetically) represent “Chineseness” in transnational filmmaking.



Figure 7: Yimou Zhang, *Hero*, 2002. The fighting sequence between Wumin and Vast Sky.

Furthermore, there is the gulf between emblems and significance. The formation of significance comes from emblems, and emblems are often developed to certain fixed significance after repeated use in traditional arts. For example, in Chinese traditional culture, plum blossom, orchids, chrysanthemums and bamboo have been endowed with characteristics of human being’s dignity, nobleness, unyielding character and indifferent to fame or benefit (Xu 2009). However, in *House of Flying Daggers*, the bamboo sea becomes a slaughterhouse and is full

of blood. All these emblems are manipulated by Zhang for his Orientalist construction as he abandons the familiar contexts of these emblems in his visual representation. In *Hero*, the fighting sequence between Wumin and Vast Sky takes place in a temple where the camera takes us to see Chinese cultural emblems such as *quzheng*, Chinese chessboard and raindrops (Figure 7). These emblems are associated with lovesickness and grief in Chinese traditional culture. The battle between the two protagonists is obviously antipathetic to the original meanings of these emblems. Thus the high-speed cinematography of raindrops and close-up of Chinese chessboard become the director's aesthetic decoration and fail to reach any profound significance. The significance of their existence in these films may be Zhang's intention of creating/constructing a more commercially "universal Orient". "The national" or "Chineseness" is manipulated by Zhang who made films labelled as "Chinese national cinema" but deliberately targeted a transnational/global market. It further questions the concept of national cinema has been at once useful and problematic, liberating and limiting, by employing an auteurist approach to the case study of the manipulated representation of "Chineseness" in Zhang' transnational film projects.

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 -- (2002), *Curse of the Golden Flower*,
 China: Beijing New Picture Film Co.
 -- (2016), *The Great Wall*, China/USA:
 Legendary Pictures and Wanda Group.

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

ROMAN TYPE	CHINESE CHARACTERS	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT-TERMS
A City of Sadness	《悲情城市》	
Ang Lee	李安	
Chongyang Festival	重阳节	Double Ninth Festival
Curse of the Golden Flower	《满城尽带黄金甲》	
Edward Yang	杨德昌	
he	和	Peaceful harmony
Hero	《英雄》	
House of Flying Daggers	《十面埋伏》	
Hsiao-Hsien Hou	侯孝贤	
Infernal Affairs	《无间道》	
John Woo	吴宇森	
Karwei Wong	王家卫	
Liubai	留白	Blank-leaving
Red Sorghum	红高粱	
The Great Wall	《长城》	
The Wedding Banquet	《喜宴》	
Wuxia	武侠	Martial heroes
Xia	侠义	Chivalrous
Xiayi	侠	Chivalry
Yimou Zhang	张艺谋	

TEXTES FRANÇAIS ORIGINAUX

PRÉFACE

Éric Conte

Cet ouvrage est le premier d'une collection dédiée en priorité à la publication de colloques organisés par la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme du Pacifique, seule ou en collaboration. Subtile touche du Pacifique, le dos de chaque ouvrage, déclinera, selon le thème abordé, une palette de couleurs tirée du beau tableau de Paul Gauguin *Femmes de Tahiti* (1891, Musée d'Orsay).

La MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE, création conjointe du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) et de l'Université de la Polynésie française (UPF), n'a que deux ans d'existence. Elle est le plus jeune membre du Réseau national des vingt-trois M.S.H. et le premier implanté hors du territoire de l'Hexagone avec pour objectif de développer les recherches en sciences humaines et sociales dans le Pacifique.

Le champ scientifique couvert est très vaste, allant de l'étude des sociétés du passé aux enjeux les plus contemporains, le principe étant de favoriser des approches pluri-disciplinaires.

Outre la conduite de programmes de recherche et de formation de haut niveau, la MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE a pour mission de favoriser les échanges scientifiques internationaux et la diffusion des connaissances.

C'est à ce titre que, dans le cadre des « Journées des cinémas d'expression chinoise » qui se sont tenues du 5 au 8 novembre 2018 à l'Université de la Polynésie française, nous avons organisé, le 8 novembre, en collaboration avec l'Institut Confucius de l'UPF et l'association culturelle Wen Fa, un symposium international sur le thème « Migration et Mémoire dans les films d'expression chinoise ». Le présent ouvrage réunit une sélection des communications présentées lors de ce symposium.

Les douces sonorités du mot « migration », sorte de concentré un peu poétique de « migration » et « d'errance », furent pourtant pour les femmes et les hommes qui vécurent cette aventure individuelle, devenue histoire collective, synonyme de déchirement de quitter une famille et un pays aimés, de voyages dans des conditions parfois à la limite de l'humain, mais aussi d'espoir d'un ailleurs et d'un avenir plus favorables.

Des épreuves et des aspirations qui font écho à des situations actuelles même si, bien sûr, les conditions en sont très différentes.

L'enracinement des migrants chinois dans les diverses îles du Pacifique comme dans une multitude d'endroits au monde, leur symbiose avec les populations locales tout en s'efforçant de conserver à travers le temps leur langue et l'essentiel de leurs valeurs, ce à quoi fait aussi référence le terme « mémoire » contenu dans l'énoncé de ce symposium, tout cela témoigne d'une intelligence pragmatique exemplaire.

Ce symposium abordait la complexité des situations locales de la diaspora chinoise à travers l'objectif de cinéastes qui, s'ils ont en partage une origine commune, sont aussi les témoins subjectifs d'expériences toujours singulières.

Trois collègues ont été à l'initiative de ces « Journées des cinémas d'expression chinoise » et de ce symposium : les Pr Qiao Li et Richard Conte qui ont, en outre, assuré la direction du présent ouvrage, et le Dr Léopold Mu Si Yan, directeur de l'Institut Confucius, dont l'énergie souriante a garanti la belle réussite de cette manifestation.

Qu'ils soient ici vivement remerciés.

Pr Éric Conte

Directeur de la MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME DU PACIFIQUE

INTRODUCTION

**LE CINÉMA, MÉMOIRE
DE NOS MIGRANCES**

Richard Conte

Depuis leur arrivée en Océanie française au XIX^e siècle, les premiers émigrants originaires du Guangdong ont presque tous fait souche. Leurs descendants n'ont plus aujourd'hui les mêmes types de liens avec ce qu'était la Chine de la dynastie Qing ou de Sun Yat-Seng. S'insèrent-ils toujours dans les réseaux traditionnels de relations diasporiques de la même façon que dans d'autres régions du monde? Deux ans après des journées d'études et une publication¹ consacrées à ce sujet, l'Institut Confucius de l'Université de la Polynésie française explore ici ces questions sous un angle original, au travers de l'expression cinématographique et de l'art contemporain.

1 - *Diasporas chinoises et créolisations*, sous la dir. d'Emmanuel Ma Ming, Léopold Mu Si Yan, Bruno Saura, Éd. You Feng, 2016.

Pour cet événement ont été rassemblés des spécialistes de l'art cinématographique, des arts visuels et des réalisateurs et producteurs représentatifs du cinéma de fiction et de non-fiction de langue chinoise. Il a été offert, parallèlement aux interventions publiées ici, une série de projections publiques de réalisations cinématographiques illustrant les rapports entre une identité culturelle et ses multiples déclinaisons et transpositions consécutives à des phénomènes migratoires divers.

Au-delà d'une rencontre entre l'Orient et l'Occident, à égale distance de ce que le philosophe et sinologue François Jullien² appelle un « universalisme facile » et un « relativisme paresseux », les participants à cette journée d'études ont interrogé non pas les différences culturelles conventionnelles mais le jeu des tensions fécondes en usage par des communautés séparées et proches à la fois de ressources variées, aux fins de création et de représentation esthétique.

2 - François Jullien, *Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle*, éditions de l'Herne, 2016.

Dans quelle mesure la recherche d'un « fonds intelligible commun » peut-elle passer par l'analyse et la pratique du langage cinématographique, et la matrice culturelle, devenir une ressource artistique? Que les films soient réalisés en Chine, en Malaisie, aux États-Unis, à Taïwan, en Nouvelle-Zélande, à Hongkong, ou au Canada, sur un mode dramatique, comique, épique, héroïque ou intimiste, quelles traces et rémanences dans le rapport direct ou plus pragmatiste à la sinité, les migrations historiques et contemporaines laissent-elles dans les esprits des individus et des communautés, voire dans leurs mythes collectifs? Quel imaginaire, quelles émotions, quelles expériences vécues et quelles projections vers l'avenir dans un univers globalisé, les cinéastes essaient-ils ainsi de traduire? Quelles contributions thématiques, esthétiques et stylistiques apportent-ils³? Voilà quelques-unes des questions dont traitent les textes de cet ouvrage auquel nous avons associé les notions problématiques de « migration » et de « mémoire », que je me propose de préciser dans cette courte introduction, laissant le soin aux auteurs d'en développer la pertinence, dans le contexte des arts et cinémas de culture chinoise, n'étant moi-même ni sinologue ni spécialiste du cinéma asiatique.

3 - Tout le début de mon texte est très largement inspiré de la présentation du symposium de Tahiti de novembre 2018, élaborée par Léopold Mu Si Yan, directeur à cette date de l'Institut Confucius de Polynésie française, que je remercie pour ses initiatives, son soutien et son précieux apport.

Voici donc quelques remarques concernant le fait filmique à la fois comme phénomène cinématique et comme héritage mémoriel.

Déjà pour les organisateurs du Colloque de Dublin en 2007 intitulé *La Migrance à l'œuvre*⁴ : « La migrance n'est plus le seul fait de l'immigrant, mais concerne aussi au plus haut point « l'autochtone ». Elle caractérise désormais notre commune humanité en perpétuel déplacement, déterritorialisée et déshistoricisée, en quête d'une nouvelle définition de soi et de l'autre, appelée selon Édouard Glissant à opérer un difficile passage du Même au Divers⁵. »

4 - *La Migrance à l'œuvre : repérages esthétiques, éthiques et politiques.* Colloque international à University College Dublin les 14 et 15 décembre 2007.

5 - Cf. Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Gallimard, 1996.

Quant à la migration du moins au sens français du terme, si elle caractérise *a priori* le mouvement d'une population d'un lieu vers un autre, elle ne se laisse pas définir si simplement : elle concerne par exemple les civils – un convoi militaire ne peut constituer un phénomène migratoire – ; on ne peut confondre non plus une colonie de migrants avec une caravane de marchands... Migrer implique de déménager et le plus souvent de traverser des frontières, de quitter les siens pour jouer son avenir dans une autre société. Souvent, et nous en avons des exemples chaque jour, ce sont des raisons vitales qui forcent le migrant à tout quitter car une migration est toujours un déracinement et souvent un drame.

Aussi, pour la manière dont les cinémas et les arts de la diaspora en langues chinoises traitent de ces questions, le terme de *migrance* – qui suggère un mouvement plus diffus, une errance avec les multiples croisements qu'occasionne l'expérience de l'exil –, nous a donc semblé plus pertinent que celui de *migration*. C'est aussi que ce mot de *migrance* ajoute à celui de migration l'espace du rêve : celui du monde quitté comme celui du monde convoité. Il laisse ouverte la souvenance du pays natal tout en insufflant l'énergie d'un avenir meilleur sur des rives encore incertaines.

Le cinéma n'est-il pas une trajectoire qui nous emporte dans sa mouvance depuis une situation initiale jusqu'à une situation finale ? Ou tout autant une traversée dans laquelle nous sommes *embarqués* ? Un flux, un rouleau d'images, de mots et de sons combinés ? Or, sauf à quitter la salle ou à éteindre l'appareil de réception, nous « introjectons » des contenus historiques qui se substituent souvent à notre mémoire personnelle, de sorte que le cinéma, pour la première fois dans l'histoire humaine a pu se constituer au XX^e siècle comme le lieu commun d'une mémoire-mouvement.

Qu'il me soit permis ici de prendre un exemple personnel. L'une des migrations les plus significatives de l'histoire récente de la décolonisation est l'exode soudain et inattendu des Français d'Algérie en 1962

vers la métropole. En quelques mois 800 000 « pieds noirs » quittent le pays natal après la guerre d'indépendance. Encore enfant, je me trouvais parmi eux et je garde du voyage de vives sensations mais des souvenirs flous. Les images que j'y adjoins sont celles des films et documents vus plus tard et qui se sont substitués aux impressions diffuses et fugitives du départ. Les films ont en quelque sorte phagocyté ma mémoire personnelle. Ce que Deleuze appelait dans ses cours à Vincennes⁶ « images-perception », « images-action » et « images-affection »⁷, se chargent de construire pour chacun de nous une mémoire en partage, une mémoire à la fois commune et individuée qui comble en partie les « blancs » de notre passé.

Certaines séquences de films, qu'ils soient dits de fiction ou documentaires, tissent donc nos souvenirs par des images en mouvement comme jamais cela ne s'est produit dans le passé. Mieux, ils nous offrent la mémoire d'un passé historique que nous n'avons jamais vécu. Prenons l'exemple parmi cent de la Révolution française : nous en avons certes, quelques tableaux et gravures, mais ce qui s'impose à notre représentation avec une abondance de situations et d'actions dotées d'un relief et d'une véracité irremplaçables, ce sont bien les nombreux films de fiction sur le sujet, de *La Marseillaise* de Jean Renoir (1938), ou *La Révolution française* de Robert Enrico (1989) à *Les Adieux à la reine* de Benoît Jacquot (2012), pour n'en citer que trois parmi les plus connus.

Le cinéma a donc partie liée avec la mémoire tout autant qu'avec le mouvement qui en motive la projection⁸. Il faut d'ailleurs remarquer que les films que voient la plupart des spectateurs non cinéphiles sont ceux de leur génération, que du coup, le patrimoine visuel qui se tisse à la mémoire de chacun change en permanence et qu'il ne s'agit donc pas à proprement parler d'une mémoire commune.

J'ai dit que le cinéma est un voyage avec un début et une fin. Mais si nous le considérons plus du point de vue de la migration que de la migration, alors il sera dans nos souvenirs une errance de l'imaginaire, un déplacement des sens, un dépaysement de la perception. Ce qui lui donne cette virtualité, ce sont les effets hypnotiques induits par le scintillement du faisceau lumineux de la projection dans la nuit de la salle, avec ce public dont toutes les têtes sont orientées vers l'écran, prêtes pour une hypnose collective d'une durée variable mais suffisamment longue pour constituer ce que Smithson appelait un « trou dans la vie »⁹. On notera que ce qui est vrai pour le cinéma – et que Christian Metz a analysé comme dispositif¹⁰ – l'est moins pour la télévision ou pour l'ordinateur dont l'immanence lumineuse des écrans ne produit pas du tout le même type d'excursion psychique et ne rompt pas radicalement avec l'environnement spatial et temporel.

6 - Deleuze s'appuie pour ses démonstrations sur *Matière et mémoire* de Bergson (1896). Deux livres seront écrits à partir de ces cours : *Cinéma 1. L'image-mouvement* (1983) et *Cinéma 2 L'image-temps* (1985).

7 - Avec respectivement comme exemples les westerns, les films policiers et *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Dreyer, 1928) où le gros plan fait visage.

8 - Quand il n'y a pas de films (ou de photos), il peut donc y avoir défaut de mémoire. Certains événements graves voire catastrophiques, pour cause de censure directe ou indirecte, n'ont fait l'objet ni de reportages ni parfois de fictions. Ce qui n'est pas investi par l'image, dans une société moderne, tend vers une sorte de néantisation historique. Bien entendu, les films peuvent en sens opposé, servir de propagande de la terreur et donner à voir l'irreprésentable. (Cf. Jean-Louis Comolli, *Daesh, le cinéma et la mort*, Verdier, 2016).

9 - Jean-Pierre Criqui, *Un Trou dans la vie. Essais sur l'art depuis 1960*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2002.

10 - « Je m'installe dans une salle de cinéma. Les lumières s'éteignent. J'arrête toute conversation et toute relation avec mon voisin. Je ne bouge plus. Ma situation peut être comparée à celle d'une personne endormie. Bien sûr je reste conscient. Je ne perds pas la perception de l'espace comme dans le rêve. Mais j'oublie mes soucis habituels. Je renonce à ce qu'on pourrait appeler ma personnalité diurne. Je me transforme en surface d'enregistrement. » Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire, psychanalyse et cinéma*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Coll. 10/18, 1977, p. 123.

11 - En 1895, les deux frères tournent leur premier film (45') - *La Sortie des usines Lumière* - et organisent la première projection publique au monde.

Mais à y regarder de plus près, la dualité notionnelle *Migrance et Mémoire* ne pourrait-elle pas être la définition même du cinéma? Celui-ci n'est-il pas l'art du mouvement enregistré et projeté? Qu'on songe à *La Sortie des usines Lumière*¹¹, à *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896), aux folles courses-poursuites des films de Buster Keaton, à *La Chevauchée fantastique* de John Ford (1939) et aux road-movies comme *Easy Rider* de Dennis Hopper (1969) ou *Duel*, le premier film de Steven Spielberg (1971)... On n'en finirait pas de citer tous ces films où l'on circule à pied, à vélo, à cheval, en auto, en avion ou en fusée... Ainsi, le plus souvent l'art du mouvement célèbre... le mouvement, c'est-à-dire la poursuite, la traque, la course, le périple, l'odyssée et toutes les formes ambulatoires. Ainsi, les déplacements de population, les exodes, les conquêtes de territoires ont été souvent fixés sur pellicule et ce qui nous reste de représentations fidèles de ces événements migratoires a ce caractère d'enregistrement animé que n'apportent ni les mots des articles ni les images fixes des photos. C'est que là où les autres arts visuels se retiennent de bouger pour mieux déplacer nos imaginaires, le film défile devant nos yeux avec la semblance du réel, car un film est à la fois une migration et une mémoire.

**DIASPORA ARTISTIQUE
CHINOISE ET « SINITUDE »***

Emmanuel Lincot

ABSTRACT

Cet article analyse la complexité des phénomènes diasporiques en milieu artistique chinois. Loin de former une communauté homogène, les artistes issus notamment de la première génération de l'exil - celle contemporaine des réformes et de Tiananmen - ne s'en singularisent pas moins par un sentiment et des postures qui sont celles d'une appartenance au langage que nous qualifions ici de « sinitude ». L'État-parti cherche à son tour à en instrumentaliser les ressources au nom d'une singularité identitaire chinoise qu'il oppose aux valeurs occidentales. Ce projet néo-conservateur s'associe à une dimension autant nationaliste que culturelle qui, loin de réfuter l'héritage emprunté à la modernité occidentale, parvient avec ou sans le consentement des artistes chinois eux-mêmes à en siniser le propos.

MOTS-CLÉS

Sinitude

Relations culturelles internationales

Représentation

Modernité

Hétérotopie

Diaspora

*It's about going from one place to another,
and bringing what you have to offer to each new place¹.*

Zhang Huan

C'est grâce à ces premiers artistes de la diaspora, inlassables passeurs culturels entre la Chine et l'Occident, que la reconnaissance d'une scène artistique en Chine même a pu s'affirmer². Non seulement par leur intégration au système international du marché de l'art mais aussi en Chine où bien des années après les réformes amorcées par Deng Xiaoping, il demeurait très difficile d'accéder, dans l'espace public, à la création contemporaine. Pourtant, les artistes travaillaient et s'entraidaient. De gigantesques réseaux reliant Pékin, Chengdu, Wuhan, Chongqing, Shanghai, en passant par Shenzhen, se développaient. Le paradoxe est que la reconnaissance sociale de ces artistes se faisait à l'occasion d'une censure ou par leur participation à des biennales étrangères³. Le public chinois restait le plus souvent dans l'ignorance de leurs expérimentations. Toutefois, les succès des premiers avant-gardistes chinois à l'étranger encourageraient les plus jeunes à poursuivre les initiatives de leurs aînés. L'après Tiananmen (1989) agira comme un véritable aiguillon dans la nécessité de donner corps à des professions nouvelles – critiques d'art, commissaires d'exposition et éditeurs... – et donnera lieu à un engagement souvent courageux de ces professions. L'une de leurs initiatives, et qui eut un impact psychologique des plus importants, fut l'exposition au nom provocateur – « FUCK OFF! » – organisée en 2000 par l'artiste Ai Weiwei (1957) et le critique Feng Boyi (1960) à Shanghai. Elle le fut d'autant que son inauguration survint, et à dessein, au même moment où s'ouvrait la très officielle et déjà conservatrice Biennale de Shanghai. Ai Weiwei, auréolé de son proche et prestigieux passé (fils du dissident et poète Ai Qing (1910 -1996), et ayant fréquenté des années durant, dans son exil new-yorkais, les derniers grands noms de la *Beat Generation*⁴ était sans doute le plus radical des protagonistes de cette époque. Le séjour à l'étranger pour Ai Weiwei et ses contemporains était un gage d'ouverture mais aussi de sérieux et de respect. Comme pour la génération de l'entre-deux guerres, ces artistes reproduisaient une modernité empruntée à l'Europe et aux États-Unis à laquelle la Chine avait été partiellement soustraite pour cause de fermeture maoïste.

1 - Gérard A. Goodrow, *Crossing China. Land of the rising art scene*, Cologne, Daab Media GmbH, 2014.

2 - Nous empruntons partiellement à Shu Mei-shih cette expression de « géopolitique » à laquelle elle ajoute « des désirs ». Cette expression nous paraît exclure d'autres motivations qui échappent aux artistes eux-mêmes ; celles ayant trait aux pouvoirs. *Shu Mei-Shih, Visuality and identity. Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*, Berkeley, Berkeley University of California Press, 2007.

3 - Emmanuel Lincot, *Peinture et pouvoir en Chine (1979-2009) : une histoire culturelle*, Paris, You Feng, 2010.

4 - Jean-François Chougnat et Judith Benhamou-Huet, *Ai Weiwei. Fan-Tan* (avec les contributions de Uli Sigg, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Emilie Girard et Emmanuel Lincot), Paris, Manuella éditions, MUCEM, 2018.

DES PARCOURS HÉTÉROGÈNES

Si Ai Weiwei demeure le plus célèbre d'entre eux par la médiatisation de la lutte qu'il a engagée par ailleurs et sans détour avec le pouvoir au sujet des victimes du tremblement de terre du Sichuan (2008), d'autres artistes ont, par leur action, largement concouru à la reconnaissance de la scène artistique chinoise. Sheng Qi (1965) et Xu Bing (1955) sont des cas particulièrement intéressants. Le premier a fui la Chine en 1989. Dix ans après un long séjour européen, il est retourné vivre et travailler à Pékin. Des références à Mao Zedong ou à des rassemblements de masse caractérisent son œuvre peinte sur de grands formats. Xu Bing, quant à lui, a séjourné à New York durant les années quatre-vingt-dix avant de revenir s'installer à partir de 2008 dans la capitale chinoise, où il exerce la responsabilité de vice-président de l'Académie centrale des Beaux-Arts. Artiste majeur, il avait défrayé la chronique en 1994 par la mise en scène d'un couple de porcs, au corps parsemé de pseudo-aphorismes composés de lettres alphabétiques pour le premier et de sinogrammes pour le second. En 1988, son installation *Livre céleste (Tian shu)*, montrée au *Zhongguo meishu guan*, principale institution muséale de la capitale, avait dévoilé l'ambition de Xu Bing dont la majeure partie de l'œuvre n'a jamais cessé de questionner, sur un mode parfois très cru, le rapport de la Chine en tant que civilisation textuelle à son usage et de l'écriture et des cultures empruntées à l'Occident.

Gu Dexin (1962) est un autre cas particulièrement intéressant pour la trajectoire historique qui a été la sienne. Sa participation à l'exposition *Les Magiciens de la terre* (1989) au Centre Pompidou aurait pu le convaincre de rester en France. Il n'en fut rien, alors que trois de ses compatriotes, également associés à cet événement international, firent le choix de s'y établir. Il s'agit de l'artiste conceptuel Huang Yongping (1954) revendiquant une double filiation (celle de Marcel Duchamp et des penseurs taoïstes) mais aussi du peintre adepte d'une tradition des encres pleinement réinventée, Yang Jiechang (1956), et enfin, de Fei Dawei (1954), ce dernier étant critique d'art et alors conseiller pour la réalisation de l'exposition. Pour Gu Dexin, le système ne peut changer que de l'intérieur. D'où son engagement de retourner travailler et vivre en Chine. En revanche, diamétralement opposée dans ses choix est la démarche d'un autre artiste d'envergure internationale : Yan Pei-Ming (1960). Écoutons-le :

« Je n'entre dans aucune catégorie. Ni Français, ni Chinois : je suis avant tout un artiste. La vocation de peindre m'est venue à l'âge de treize ans. Car je voulais me retrouver seul. C'était en pleine Révolution culturelle. Je ne l'ai pas du tout vécu comme une tragédie. D'autres - les intellectuels, les nantis - l'ont vécu comme tel⁵.

5 - Entretien avec Yan Pei-ming, Dijon, 27 janvier 2015.

Volonté de s'exiler non pour des raisons politiques, mais bien pour y étudier la peinture à laquelle il se consacre par la réalisation de très grands monochromes. Ces derniers représentent des personnalités célèbres (Barak Obama, le Pape François, Mao Zedong, Bruce Lee, Mona Lisa...) ou encore nous renvoient à la citation d'une peinture d'histoire tragique, celle d'un Goya notamment. Bien sûr, on pense à Warhol, Liu Xiaodong ou Richter en observant sa peinture mais il renouvelle un genre qui, dans le tracé même de son pinceau, n'est pas sans évoquer le geste d'un calligraphe. Bien qu'il n'ait pas participé aux *Magiciens de la terre*, l'artiste Wang Du (1956) quant à lui se rendit en France, après avoir étudié à Guangzhou, pour y rejoindre ce petit groupe d'artistes chinois établis avant lui à Paris. L'une de ses œuvres les plus célèbres est une sculpture (*World Markets*, 2004) collectionnée par le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. Elle témoigne d'une influence, celle d'un Claes Oldenburg, dans son choix d'une réutilisation monumentalisée des objets de la consommation courante. Wang Du a réalisé d'autres sculptures (*Family*, 1997) critiquant l'obsession des Occidentaux dans leur recours à la chirurgie esthétique. Tous n'ont pas fait le seul choix d'une résidence en France. Mentionnons trois Berlinoïses d'adoption : Ai Weiwei, déjà abordé, mais aussi Feng Lu (1979) et Ling Jian (1963).

Indésirable dans son pays d'origine pour des raisons politiques, le premier a mis à profit son séjour allemand pour réaliser notamment un film documentaire choc, *Human Flow* (2017) sur les migrants en Europe. Fortement imprégnés de cultures allemande et chinoise, ses deux cadets ne cessent de nomadiser entre la capitale allemande et la Chine. Feng Lu attache une grande importance au monde de l'animalité, des êtres hybrides et de l'absurde qui ne sont pas sans rappeler les scènes de carnaval peintes par Brueghel. Le second s'inspire de l'univers du *pop art* et de l'ambiguïté de femmes lascives, parfois en uniforme, dont il théâtralise les postures. Une impression très kitsch se dégage de ses peintures. En cela, elle reste très symptomatique d'une génération profondément globalisée. Toutefois, cette génération n'en reste pas moins attachée aux villes-mondes comme l'atteste, entre autres exemples des plus significatifs, Cai Guo-qiang (1957).

CRÉATEURS INSPIRÉS DES VILLES-MONDES

Basé à New York depuis 1955, cet artiste est connu pour ses spectaculaires installations pyrotechniques ou sculpturales. Il est l'un des artistes les plus célèbres du monde. Originaire du Fujian, là-même où Huang Yongping dans les années quatre-vingts, écrivit un manifeste en l'honneur de Dada, Cai Guo-Qiang a réalisé un ensemble en 2006 - *Head on* - où quatre-vingt-dix-neufs loups taxidermisés prennent leur élan avant d'échouer sur un mur en plexiglass. Montrée au Guggenheim Museum de Berlin, cette oeuvre se réfère – contexte allemand oblige –

6 - On lira dans la même veine le roman de l'écrivain Jiang Rong : *Le Totem du loup* (*Lang Tuteng*) publié en 2004 en Chine (2008 en France aux éditions Bourin). Véritable best-seller, cette œuvre comptabilise, en 2015, plus de 20 millions d'exemplaires vendus (5 millions de manière légale et plus de 15 millions sous forme piratée). Elle a été traduite en 39 langues dans 110 pays.

la performance de Joseph Beuys : *I like America and America likes me* (1974). Le sens n'en est pas moins différent. Coyote associé pour l'un à la mythologie romaine et aux fils de la louve comme de la nouvelle Amérique, ces prédateurs – à travers les critères de l'histoire chinoise – peuvent avoir une toute autre signification. Celle d'une barbarie – des Turco-Mongols en l'occurrence, que l'imaginaire chinois décrit sous les traits d'hommes-loups⁶ – se brisant sur le mur (la Grande Muraille ?) de la civilisation, chinoise s'entend. Cette réappropriation des codes pour Cai Guo-Qiang s'est traduite d'une toute autre manière lors d'un événement d'une portée encore plus considérable : les Jeux Olympiques de Pékin (2008). Concepteur général des effets visuels pour la cérémonie d'ouverture, l'artiste fut avec le cinéaste Zhang Yimou (1950) l'un des deux plus grands de sa génération à avoir participé à l'organisation de ce gigantesque rassemblement. Artificier, il illumina la soirée d'ouverture. Ce spectacle grandiose eut valeur de symbole. Celle d'un peuple fier de voir son pays recouvrer sa puissance et imposer son *Soft Power*. Retour aussi à un projet de fraternité universelle, le sport, tel que l'avait conçu en son temps, le Français Pierre de Coubertin, et bien avant lui, ses illustres mentors, les citoyens grecs.

D'origine chinoise, la poudre à canon fut inventée par un médecin et alchimiste taoïste, Sun Simiao, à la recherche d'un élixir d'immortalité, dont le pouvoir explosif ne fut découvert que bien plus tard. Cai Guoqiang en est le digne héritier. Il se définit lui-même comme un chaman, passeur d'énergies, renouant avec le mythe d'une origine chaotique du monde, le *Kai tian pidi*. Sa vision de l'art est celle qui dépasse l'image pour faire partager la force d'un geste démiurgique. Les empreintes de feu qui se formèrent alors dans le ciel de la place Tiananmen ne purent, toutefois, être réalisées, pour des raisons de sécurité, le soir du 8 août. Elles furent reconstituées par l'artiste qui lui substitua des images de synthèse projetées. Les images de cette extraordinaire performance ne sont donc qu'un montage photographique. Son pouvoir d'illusion n'en est que plus frappant. Signe des temps, la photographie qui en conserve la mémoire fut exposée un an plus tard au Taipei Fine Arts Museum de Taïwan. La détérioration des relations inter-détroits qui est à l'œuvre depuis lors, et plus généralement encore celles entre la Chine et sa périphérie⁷, ne permettrait sans doute plus aujourd'hui ce genre d'opération. Elle nous montre un spectacle associant le « feu » (*huo*) à la « vie » (*huo*) dans un rapport d'homonymie où se devine l'émotion de tout un peuple, uni dans le sentiment d'avoir franchi, l'espace de soixante-trois secondes, une étape décisive de son histoire. Le parcours des pas artificiels réalisés par l'artiste dans le ciel n'est évidemment pas anodin. Ils suivent une trajectoire parallèle à celle que les Pékinois, selon des croyances très anciennes inspirées de la géomancie, décrivent comme l'épine dorsale du dragon. Ils semblent accompagner

7 - Emmanuel Lincot, *Strategic challenges in the Centre / Periphery relations in China*, Paris, IRIS, ASIA FOCUS #84, septembre 2018 : <http://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Asia-Focus-84.pdf>

ceux des manifestants qui, tout au long du XX^e siècle, n'ont jamais cessé de se rassembler sur cette place mythique qu'est Tiananmen. Mais les pas de ce géant s'apparentent aussi à ceux de Yu Kong, héros légendaire déplaçant les montagnes.

Aérien, son retour n'annoncerait-il pas un tout autre projet ? Celui, pour la Chine, de repousser ses frontières. De conquérir l'espace. Autres frontières donc. Oniriques en ce qu'elles permettent à l'artiste d'épouser en apparence les projets du régime, Cai Guoqiang n'en préserve pas moins son indépendance dans l'ambiguïté même des interprétations auxquelles se prête l'exécution de ses œuvres dont la monstration coïncide toujours avec un lieu/une ville à très forte visibilité et si possible, de prestige. Les autorités chinoises l'ont bien assimilé au point de faciliter des projets d'artistes qu'elles condamnaient il y a encore quelques années. Ce qui pourrait s'apparenter à un revirement correspond en réalité à une profonde transformation de la diplomatie et des industries culturelles chinoises⁸. Ai Weiwei étant l'exception qui confirme la règle, soutenir un artiste d'envergure internationale s'inscrit dans une logique globale, celle d'un *Soft power* proprement chinois. À sa manière, l'artiste Gu Wenda a intégré, comme Cai Guoqiang, cette nouvelle et complexe configuration. Présentons-le.

IMAGE D'UN SEUL, IMAGES DE TOUS

Né en 1955 à Shanghai et diplômé du département des Encre de l'Académie du Zhejiang à Hangzhou, Gu Wenda est censuré pour l'une de ses premières expositions organisée à Xi'an en 1986. Accusé de « confusions linguistiques », étant donné les choix de l'artiste de présenter des pseudo-caractères chinois, il quitte la Chine en bénéficiant d'une bourse d'études qui le conduit, en 1989, à l'Université du Minnesota. *Oedipus refound* est le nom de l'installation à laquelle il se consacre durant son séjour. La référence à Jacques Lacan est évidente ; le complexe d'Œdipe demeurant dans le contexte des années quatre-vingt-dix, l'un des sujets les plus polémiques débattus sur les campus américains pour la compréhension d'une démarche artistique. Cette installation présentait des serviettes hygiéniques ainsi que du sang menstruel de soixante donneuses en provenance de 16 pays, accompagnés de lettres rapportant leur vécu. L'installation fit grand bruit et déclencha la fureur des associations féministes. GuWenda n'en demeura pas moins persuadé que ces matériaux ou témoignages humains devaient être exploités. Ce qui s'apparentait jusqu'ici à un banc d'essai donna lieu à un renouvellement total de sa pensée et de ses choix artistiques, prélude à l'utilisation de matériaux capillaires rassemblés en une gigantesque installation qui devait l'occuper de 1993 à 2004. Entrée dans les collections permanentes du Hong Kong Museum of Art, cette œuvre majeure s'intitule *United Nations - China Monument : Temple of Heaven*.

8 - Emmanuel Lincot, « Les industries culturelles en Chine. Enjeux et perspectives », *Monde chinois Nouvelle Asie*, n° 41, avril-mai 2015, pp. 56-63 ; « D'une révolution culturelle à l'autre » in Eric Mottet, Barthélémy Courmont et Frédéric Lasserre (éd.), *La Chine et le Monde. Quelles nouvelles relations, quels nouveaux paradigmes ?* Préface de Jean-Pierre Cabestan, coll. « Asie contemporaine », Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2015, pp. 73-86.

Le cheveu est le support principal de ces bannières calligraphiées par l'artiste dans les langues les plus diverses. Babel en hommage à la diversité, cette installation déclencha la protestation de milieux à la fois polonais et israéliens qui y virent au contraire une insulte à la mémoire des victimes de la Shoah. Ainsi, en Pologne, l'installation de Gu Wenda se vit interdire vingt-quatre heures seulement après avoir été rendue accessible au public.

Dans le même esprit, l'artiste réalisa une installation créée aux États-Unis avec la réutilisation de poèmes datant de l'époque des Tang, et gravés sur des stèles telles qu'elles figurent à *Beilin* – littéralement : *La forêt des stèles* – lieu de mémoire scripturaire de la Chine et sanctuaire de la culture lettrée se trouvant à Xi'an. Dans un souci de transculturalité, GuWenda les fit traduire dans un premier temps en anglais puis, à partir de la transcription qui en fut faite, en chinois. Il en résultait un sabir incompréhensible et délibéré ; Gu Wenda pointant ainsi du doigt les limites d'un langage aux prétentions universelles. L'inanité même du langage est un principe dénoncé par la tradition taoïste d'un Zhuangzi (IV^e siècle avant JC) qui ne cessa d'inspirer les artistes chinois dès les années quatre-vingts⁹. Gu Wenda et plus récemment Xu Tan (1957) pour ses séries *Key word* réalisées à partir de 2005 ou encore Huang Xiaopeng (1960) tentant, non sans humour, de traduire les chansons manifestes communistes via Google s'inscrivent à leur tour dans cette filiation. Mais Gu Wenda innove dans ses préoccupations environnementales à la croisée de l'écologie et d'un *Land Art* revisité par la conceptualisation en 3D d'une ville du futur reprenant les agencements des cités chinoises antiques (cercle et carré) auxquels l'artiste se consacre depuis New York en affirmant que l'urbanisation ne doit pas être exclusivement synonyme d'occidentalisation. *China Park*, nom de ce projet encore virtuel répond en outre à d'autres préoccupations exprimées par Gu Wenda :

«Je ne veux pas que mon art soit seulement entre les mains de collectionneurs ou montré dans des musées. Les artistes doivent être responsables du monde dans lequel ils vivent et proposer des solutions en se préoccupant peu du temps qui sera nécessaire à leur mise en application¹⁰.»

Qui ne se reconnaîtrait pas à travers les postures et les choix qu'incarne Gu Wenda ? Il correspond à ce que Yolaine Escande et Denis Vidal ont appelé une « figure de l'universel¹¹ ». La majorité de ces artistes sont des hommes. Signe des temps pourtant, des femmes finissent par s'affirmer également.

9 - Emmanuel Lincot, *La Figure de l'artiste et le statut de son œuvre en Chine contemporaine: Mélanges 2*, Paris, You Feng, 2009

10 - Gérard A. Goodrow, *Crossing China. Land of the rising art scene*, Cologne, Daab Media GMBH, 2014, p. 346.

11 - Séminaire de Yolaine Escande et Denis Vidal (dans le cadre du pôle « création et processus créatifs » du LabexCAP) : *Les Nouvelles Figures de l'artiste universel* - Musée du quai Branly, EHESS.

L'EXIL COMME HÉTÉROTOPIE

L'une des plus célèbres est Zhang O. Née en 1976 à Guangzhou, elle a émigré à Londres pour étudier au St Martins School of Art avant de s'installer à New York. Sa série de portraits intitulée *Horizon* (2004) rend compte des bouleversements rencontrés par la société rurale chinoise. Des jeunes filles posent devant l'objectif de son appareil et nul ne peut éviter de s'interroger sur l'avenir de ces enfants soumis, il y a peu encore, à la politique de l'enfant unique et dont les vies sont singularisées par rapport à celles de leurs aînées. Les filles semblent être l'obsession de cette artiste engagée qui, deux ans plus tard, a photographié une série dérangeante intitulée *Daddy and I*. On y voit des préadolescentes chinoises posant aux côtés de leur père d'adoption. Un Blanc. Dénonciation des effets pervers de la politique de l'enfant unique acculant les familles modestes à privilégier leur enfant mâle et à abandonner ainsi leur fille auprès de ces Américains d'âge mûr issus de la classe moyenne : la démarche participe du documentaire. Elle véhicule également un malaise tant l'effet de décalage entre ces jeunes filles et ces hommes beaucoup plus âgés nous paraît indécent. À charge pour celui qui regarde ces photographies de donner une interprétation que l'artiste est loin d'orienter dans un sens qui se voudrait univoque. Mais les États-Unis et l'Europe ne sont pas les seuls lieux où se réalise cette diaspora d'artistes chinois.

L'Australie est un continent important pour un artiste tel que Shen Shaomin. Né en 1956, sa reconnaissance a été tardive. Il est aujourd'hui l'un de ces artistes sino-australiens les plus célèbres et bénéficie en cela d'un contexte porteur visant à promouvoir ses relations avec la Chine. Shen Shaomin est principalement connu pour ses *Unknown creatures*, squelettes d'espèces hybrides zoomorphes ou anthropomorphes voire empruntées à la flore, qu'il réalise depuis 2002. Sur l'un de ces squelettes, assemblé à l'aide des ossements d'une quinzaine de vaches, il a gravé des enseignements empruntés aux religions bouddhiste, chrétienne et musulmane, comme si de cette créature hybride pouvait éclore la pensée d'un monstre... À moins que l'artiste ne fasse référence ici au dragon qui, dans la mythologie chinoise, est bien au contraire source de vie. À partir de 2010, Shen Shaomin s'est tourné vers la réalisation de sculptures modifiées. Celles, peu politiquement correctes, de dirigeants communistes disposés dans des cercueils de verre. Parmi eux, Liu Shaoqi, Lénine, Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung et, par anticipation, le déjà supposé mort Fidel Castro, dont les corps furent disposés en étoile dans le cadre de la biennale de Sydney. D'où l'appellation donnée par l'artiste à son installation : *Summit*.

Réalisée deux ans seulement après le Krach financier, *Summit* répondait à la crise idéologique du capitalisme par une convocation des chefs charismatiques du communisme international. Action. Réaction. Avec l'acuité de celui qui depuis ce « lieu autre », cette *hétérotopie* – comme la désignait dans *Les Mots et les Choses* Michel Foucault¹² – a pu s'abstraire du langage dominant en lui infligeant une critique et ceci, par la convocation d'une histoire que l'Occident, depuis la fin de la guerre froide, a tôt fait d'enterrer. C'est à cette critique des langages dominants que se livre un autre artiste ayant fait le choix de l'émigration. Il s'agit de Ni Haifeng (1964), ancien diplômé de l'Académie de Hangzhou qui, après avoir séjourné à Amsterdam, rentra en Chine et se prit – à l'instar du cinéaste Jia Zhangke (1970) – d'une passion pour les langues vernaculaires. Comme l'atteste sa vidéo *Xeno-writtings* (2003), il travaille sur la frontière qui semble relier ces langues ou les rejeter en marge du système. Qu'est-ce à dire? La Chine et ses artistes, dans le choix d'une migration ponctuelle ou permanente, redéfinissent des pratiques complexes touchant à la cartographie même de leur existence et de leur art. Ces pratiques sont à l'origine de nouvelles articulations entre localisation et mondialisation comme l'ont observé également, et dans d'autres contextes, Eric Bonnet et François Soulages¹³.

12 - Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses : une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

13 - Eric Bonnet et François Soulages (dir.), *Lieux et mondes. Arts, cultures et politiques*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2015.

14 - Chen Yan, *L'Éveil de la Chine. Préface de Léon Vandermeersch*, Paris, L'Aube, 2002.

15 - Kantura Quiros et Aliocha Imhoff, *Glissements de terrain dans : Géoaesthétique* (dir. Kantura Quiros et Aliocha Imhoff), ENSA, Dijon, 2012, pp. 5-16.

16 - Anny Lazarus, *La Critique d'art contemporaine chinoise. Textes et contexte*, Presses Universitaires de Provence, Aix-Marseille Université, 2017.

17 - Victor Klemperer, *LTI, La Langue du Troisième Reich. Carnets d'un philologue*, Paris, Albin-Michel, 1996.

UN TOURNANT CONCEPTUEL

Avec ces artistes s'ouvrent de nouvelles perspectives. Elles participent à une déconstruction des hégémonies postcoloniales. Tous ont été, à des degrés divers, marqués par la pensée d'un Edward Saïd ou d'un Frederic Jameson, traduits dans le contexte des réformes¹⁴, et dont la radicalité continue à nourrir, dans une interaction permanente, les expositions de chacun. Leur contribution continue de façonner une nouvelle géopolitique des arts. Rarement mus, sauf en 1989, par des décisions politiques autrement abordées que d'une manière allusive, ces artistes ont fait émerger une « géocritique », pour reprendre – dans un autre contexte il est vrai – une expression chère à Kantura Quiros et Aliocha Imhoff¹⁵. L'un des exemples les plus intéressants est sans doute celui exploré par Anny Lazarus. Elle montre toute la diversité des approches de la critique en Chine¹⁶. La *French Theory* – par le truchement de traductions anglaises empruntées au monde des universités nord-américaines – y a connu un engouement très réel alors que le statut de la critique se reconstruisait à l'aune d'un abandon relatif de la doctrine maoïste dans bien des domaines du savoir. La critique devenait dès lors synonyme de réhabilitation d'une parole libre, longtemps altérée – comme l'avait remarqué, en son temps, Victor Klemperer¹⁷ dans le contexte de l'Allemagne nazie – pour cause du totalitarisme intégral que devait subir, trois décennies durant, la société chinoise.

L'histoire pensée en des termes téléologiques et marxisants se marginalisa au profit des schémas inspirés soit d'un Benedetto Croce, soit par la remise à l'honneur des thèses kantienne d'un Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) par le philosophe Li Zehou (1930). Ainsi, la génération montante d'un Gao Minglu (1949), Lü Peng (1956), Lu Hong (1954) ou Pi Daojian (1941) n'eut de cesse que de vouloir se démarquer des interprétations causales donc linéaires de l'histoire en portant l'essentiel de sa critique sur une compréhension structurale des phénomènes sociaux. Symptomatique de cette évolution est la radicalité des propos tenus, en 1985, par un Li Xiaoshan (1959) – auteur de *La Peinture traditionnelle est dans une impasse* – dont il faut rappeler ici que le médiateur culturel néerlandais Hans Van Dick (1946-2002) fut le premier à traduire l'article en langue européenne. Dans ce sillage, Wang Nanming (1962) convoqua l'École de Francfort en questionnant le concept d'« aliénation » né de la modernité et de l'observation faite à partir des industries culturelles, tandis que Gao Minglu se proposait de subvertir le concept foucauldien de « représentation » (*zaixian*) à travers l'une des œuvres les plus importantes de la critique d'art jamais publiées en Chine : *Théorie de l'École du Yi*. « Tradition réinventée¹⁸ » et réappropriation du discours de la critique d'art imposaient dès lors de nouvelles normes se voulant universelles. Elles constituaient le corps d'une réflexion théorique très hétérogène, s'appuyant sur une réinterprétation des Classiques.

18 - Nous empruntons cette expression à Eric Hobsbawm et Terence Ranger (dir.), *L'invention de la tradition*, Paris, éditions Amsterdam, 2006.

L'œuvre de Gao Minglu est de ce point de vue des plus symptomatiques. L'abandon voire la répudiation du legs des premières Lumières chinoises, celles dites du « 4 mai 1919 », d'une occidentalisation de la Chine et de ses élites, est sans doute au bout de ce cheminement. La remise en cause profonde des structurations temporelles (*avant-garde*, « contemporaine »...) ou la création de néologismes, tel que le « maximalisme » (opposé au « minimalisme »...), participent d'une démarche qui va dans le sens d'un nationalisme culturel. L'une de ses acceptions est de considérer l'occidentalisation partielle de la Chine comme une erreur de parcours. Quelle qu'en soit l'interprétation, ces critiques pointent du doigt le fait que toute écriture de l'histoire s'accorde sur un mode qui est à la fois pendulaire et exclusif. Ils expliquent en partie que les choix de certains paradigmes conceptuels, tombés en désuétude dans les universités européennes ou violemment combattus, soient intégrés dans le discours des critiques d'art et penseurs chinois les plus contemporains. Le déterminisme d'une « pensée nordique » que Gao Minglu semble devoir assigner à la peinture d'un Wang Guangyi (1957) en est un exemple. Même observation, mais dans un tout autre registre, pour Dai Dan (1983) qui emploie la notion, idéologiquement connotée s'il en est, de « gènes culturels » (*wenhua jiyin*). Plus qu'un phénomène isolé, c'est une tendance qui a cours en Chine.

Celle-ci vise, paradoxalement, à réfuter - dans l'énonciation même du discours - la Raison au nom d'un rationalisme dont le régime fait également usage dans l'élaboration de sa propre phraséologie. Ainsi, parlera-t-on de « civilisation spirituelle socialiste » (*She hui zhu yi jing-shenwen ming*), d'« édification du socialisme moderne » (*She hui zhu yi xiandai hua jianshe*) dans tous les communiqués gouvernementaux et les slogans, omniprésents dans les villes comme dans les campagnes. Les déclarations officielles ainsi que les règlements administratifs des établissements scolaires, des écoles des Beaux-Arts sont truffés de références visant à un conditionnement collectif. Ainsi lit-on dans une directive émanant du ministère de l'Éducation datant de 2002, à ce jour encore en vigueur, les orientations suivantes :

19 - Lei Peng, *L'Éducation artistique dans les politiques éducatives de la Chine contemporaine - Quelles raisons, quels rôles et quelles fonctions?*, Thèse de doctorat (sous la direction d'Alain Kerlan), Lyon 2, 2018, p 200 (non publiée).

« Le travail de l'éducation artistique à l'école doit être guidé par la pensée du marxisme léninisme, la pensée de Mao et la théorie de Deng Xiaoping. Grâce aux qualités culturelles et artistiques, on peut renforcer la formation du patriotisme et avoir un bon point de vue esthétique pour résister à toute mauvaise culture¹⁹... »

20- Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Mythe nazi*, Paris, L'Aube, 1991.

Cette forme de discours total et esthétisant n'est pas sans rappeler les dérives idéologiques, étudiées par Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe²⁰ et Jean-Luc Nancy ou Eric Michaud²¹, que connurent jadis l'Allemagne. L'enjeu est considérable car la difficulté où se tiennent les intellectuels chinois à définir l'écart nécessaire qui leur permettrait d'échapper aux risques d'acculturation voire d'une instrumentalisation est un fait récurrent²². À moins que les artistes n'optent pour un choix contraire, situé aux antipodes de toute forme d'identification qui les assigneraient à un territoire ou à une histoire par trop exclusive.

21 - Éric Michaud, *Un art de l'éternité. L'image et le temps du national-socialisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996.

22 - Anne Cheng (dir.), *La Pensée en Chine aujourd'hui*, Paris, Gallimard, 2007.

HISTOIRE CULTURELLE ET RAPPORTS ENTRE ARTISTES ET POUVOIRS EN CHINE DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA GLOBALISATION

Choix de l'entre-deux, d'une pensée frontière, indépendante des États et ouverte à ce que l'historien François Hartog appelait un « régime d'historicité²³ ». C'est à ce choix que souscrivit l'artiste Chen Zhen (1955-2000)²⁴ dont l'apport fécond rappela la nécessaire ouverture des artistes dans l'élaboration d'une nouvelle écriture de l'histoire de l'art, conçue désormais comme un palimpseste de récits discontinus, où parler le langage de Stuart Hall, « d'histoires qui se chevauchent, qui s'emboîtent, mais qui ne correspondent pas²⁵ ». Disparu, il y a déjà presque 20 ans, l'histoire future nous dira s'il avait été un précurseur ou l'un des grands marginaux de son temps. Une chose en revanche est certaine : une histoire culturelle de ces trajectoires individuelles nous renvoie à bien d'autres enjeux. Ils sont ceux des interactions permanentes entre artistes et pouvoirs. Le lien entre ces deux réalités demeure peu étudié

23 - François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expérience du temps*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2013.

24 - Che Zhen, *Les Entretiens*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2001.

25 - Stuart Hall, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 1, n°61, 2006, pp. 1-24.

dans les contextes autres occidentaux. L'explication en est simple : les « arts "contemporains" »/« l'Art "contemporain" » sont/est/ souvent perçus à travers le monde, à des degrés divers et de manière différente selon les cultures, comme un phénomène de source occidentale.

Et il y a à cela plusieurs raisons. Économico-culturelles et conjoncturelles d'abord : c'est largement à la faveur des vagues successives (dont celle en cours de déferlement depuis la fin du XX^e siècle) de globalisation-modernisation / occidentalisation – que ce phénomène a pénétré les sociétés non occidentales. Structurelles et plus profondes aussi : si la globalisation est associée à l'Occident par la modernité, c'est dans sa sphère culturelle que s'est déclenché il y a plus de cinq siècles un processus de rationalisation immanente (Max Weber) qui a conduit, en fonction des sphères différenciées de validité et d'usage, à une reconstruction pour ainsi dire intégrale des systèmes de représentation et de pratiques. Au cours de ce processus de grande ampleur, certains de ces systèmes, qui avaient en commun de recourir à des formes de cohérence symbolique (liées à la sensibilité, aux sentiments, à l'imagination) échappant aux formes les plus strictes de rationalisation (cognitive, morale, juridique, etc.), s'autonomisèrent eux aussi progressivement, et, s'imposant comme de puissants moyens d'expression réflexive, critique et donatrice de sens, s'émancipèrent des pouvoirs traditionnels religieux et/ou temporels.

Ce sont ces systèmes complémentaires de la rationalisation, mais destinés à rester à sa marge, que la culture occidentale moderne regroupa sous la catégorie générale de l'art. Largement rationalisés, les nouveaux pouvoirs (de l'État au marché en passant par les institutions religieuses reconstruites) entrèrent en tension (oscillant entre séduction et brutalité) avec ces pratiques et ces formes de représentation significative – l'histoire de l'art occidental moderne et contemporaine en témoigne. La source occidentale se justifie donc – avec ce que cela peut induire de préventions. Il reste que les vagues successives de globalisation ont aussi déclenché – de l'extérieur, mais inévitablement à partir des ressources propres aux sociétés impliquées – des processus de sécularisation plus ou moins complets mais en tout cas originaux (très différents les uns des autres et de la source occidentale). La part prise par les formes d'expression artistique, tant populaires que savantes, à ces processus est indiscutable, avec les mêmes effets (de séduction ou de brutalité) de la part des pouvoirs, qu'ils soient traditionnels ou reconstruits. Étudier ces formes d'expression, évaluer leur impact, est donc une nécessité, tant elles contribuent à changer le visage de l'art contemporain global par leur reconstruction de formes profondément différentes de l'expressivité occidentale. Mais elles peuvent permettre d'éclairer sous un autre jour les processus en cours par le truchement

par le truchement de la société chinoise; un jour d'autant plus riche en enseignements que la Chine est le siège d'une civilisation parmi les plus anciennes et les plus puissantes de l'humanité.

L'ART CONTEMPORAIN, SYMPTÔME D'UNE DÉSACCULTURATION EN COURS ?

L'un des événements artistiques les plus importants, véritable prélude à l'amorce d'une « désacculturation » probable des pratiques de l'art, c'est-à-dire la réappropriation pour les artistes chinois d'un fonds culturel qui leur était propre, est rétrospectivement le dialogue qui s'établit à partir de 1985 avec Robert Rauschenberg. Son œuvre – utilisation de matériaux pauvres et intentionnalité dans la démarche du faire artistique – révèle la prédominance du geste et entre ainsi en résonance avec les traditions héritées du taoïsme et du bouddhisme zen²⁶. Son influence auprès de Huang Yongping (1954), Gu Wenda (1955), Xu Bing (1955) ou Wu Shanzhuan (1960) sera considérable. L'étape décisive de ce processus aura été marquée par une forte hybridation des référents artistiques en Chine²⁷. L'avenir seul nous dira, au-delà même de ces exemples, s'il ne s'agit pas, sur la « longue durée », et pour parler le langage d'un Fernand Braudel, d'un phénomène somme toute récurrent dans l'histoire de la civilisation chinoise²⁸.

Cette hybridation a donné lieu à des échanges jusqu'alors inédits avec la scène artistique américaine qui, ici comme ailleurs²⁹, a servi – mais pour partie seulement – d'étalon à la création chinoise.

Wenhua popu (« Pop'art culturel ») également connu sous le nom Zhengzhi popu (« Pop'art politique ») – né, en 1991, sous la plume du Critique Li Xianting (1949) ainsi que le *Cynic art* avec Fang Lijun (1963), Yue Minjun (1962) ou Liu Wei (1965) complexifient le choix multi-référentiel de ces codes visuels. S'y reconnaissent les citations d'un Warhol mais aussi les nouveaux langages consuméristes affichés par les créations post-réalistes socialistes d'un Wang Guangyi (1956) ou d'un Li Shan (1942). *Post-cultural studies*, déconstructivisme dérridien et « occidentalisme » (*xifangzhuyi*) – antonyme d'un « orientalisme » (*dongfangzhuyi*) non moins critiqué – passent au crible ces œuvres, montrant ainsi que la Chine est devenue à partir des années quatre-vingts le terrain fertile de débats dépassant très largement les seuls enjeux de l'art. La société chinoise, à l'instar de ses artistes, se caractérise par ce qui la définit le mieux : elle est une réalité fondamentalement « globale ». Au sens où le global et le local, dans un interagir permanent finissent par traduire l'ensemble de ses activités pratiquées. Une « transexpérience », comme la qualifiait l'artiste Chen Zhen³⁰(1955-2000), que plusieurs de ses pairs ont chacun à leur tour maintes fois éprouvée, avec un avantage certain, celui de s'affranchir désormais des clivages

26 - Emmanuel Lincot, *L'Art contemporain chinois dans les années Deng Xiaoping*, Hong Kong, CEFC, Perspectives chinoises, 2004 : <https://journals.openedition.org/>

27 - Dans un tout autre contexte que celui de la Chine – celui du Brésil dans ses rapports avec l'Europe – on lira avec profit : Maria de Lourdes Parreiras Horta, « Hybridation. Insignes du pouvoir et anthropophagie symbolique au Brésil » dans : *Dictionnaire mondial des images*, Laurent Gervereau (dir.), Éditions Nouveau Monde, 2006, p. 499.

28 - Ainsi, dans le contexte chinois des périodes antiques et impériales, on pourra se référer à l'ouvrage de Danielle Elisseeff : *Hybrides chinois. La quête de tous les possibles*, Paris, Hazan, 2011.

29 - Serge Guibaut, *Comment New York vola l'idée d'art moderne*, Paris, Jacqueline Chambon, 1995.

Est/Ouest. Ils n'en revendiquent pas moins de nouveaux sentiments d'appartenance mais aussi un dépaysement des catégories de l'art. Ce dépaysement leur ouvre un nouvel horizon, l'accès à une « alter-modernité³¹ ». Protéiforme, elle peut être le signe d'une adhésion à un style de vie internationaliste dans la posture et s'exprimer à travers des singularités culturelles qui n'en sont pas moins parfaitement assumées. Des valeurs « localistes » (bentuzhu³²) en somme faisant aussi le jeu d'un pouvoir qui non seulement plaide pour la diversité culturelle. Dans son acception profonde, elle a pour effet de vouloir défendre une certaine imperméabilité des cultures³³. Elle n'en est pas moins la revendication d'un sentiment d'appartenance singulier que nous qualifierons ici de « sinitude ».

31 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radicant: pour une esthétique de la globalisation*, Paris, Denoël, 2009.

32 - Terme ayant servi, on le sait, d'intitulé à l'exposition d'art contemporain chinois organisée notamment par Phil Tinari à la fondation Louis Vuitton durant l'hiver 2016.

33 - Au reste, dans un tout autre contexte, c'est cette idée en faveur de laquelle plaiderait en son temps l'anthropologue Claude Lévi-Strauss. Selon lui, l'humanité « devra réapprendre que toute création véritable implique un minimum de surdité à l'appel d'autres valeurs, pouvant aller jusqu'à leur refus, sinon même à leur négation » dans : *Le Regard éloigné*, Plon, 1983, p. 47.

*Cet article reprend et augmente un chapitre d'ouvrage - « Artistes de Chine. Ambassadeurs culturels et nouvelles géopolitiques » publié sous la direction d'Éric Bonnet: *Biennales d'art contemporain. Œuvres et frontières*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2016, pp. 137-153. Il est également le fruit de réflexions successives : « Création et sinitude : vers une nouvelle géopolitique des arts visuels ? », Université de la Polynésie française: « Migration et mémoire dans les films d'expression chinoise », Tahiti - Polynésie française, le 8 novembre 2018; « Mythologies chinoises contemporaines », Séminaire de recherche *Interfaces Master 2 - Arts Plastiques - Esthétique*, Paris - Panthéon Sorbonne, le 30 janvier 2019. Et ceci à l'instigation du Professeur Richard Conte que nous remercions chaleureusement.

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Upon their arrival in the nineteenth century, almost all of the first emigrants from Guangdong in French Oceania settled and developed family lines. Their descendants do not have same sort of connections today that their ancestors did, with a China that was then led by the Qing dynasty or Sun Yat-Seng. Is the present generation still to be considered as part of the traditional network of diasporic relations, in the same way as those living in other regions of the world? Sponsored by the Pacific Human Sciences Center, this book examines this question from a previously unexplored angle, through films and contemporary art of the Chinese diaspora. Beyond a meeting between East and West, midway between what philosopher and sinologist François Jullien called "easy universalism" and "lazy relativism", this book does not question conventional cultural differences. Instead, it explores the play of fertile tensions used for creative and esthetic representation, by communities that are both separated from and close to a various resources. This book brings together contributions from specialists in visual arts and film, including fiction and non-fiction Chinese-language film professionals.

Depuis leur arrivée en Océanie française au XIX^e siècle, les premiers émigrants originaires du Guangdong ont presque tous fait souche. Leurs descendants n'ont plus aujourd'hui les mêmes types de liens avec ce qu'était la Chine de la dynastie Qing ou de Sun Yat-Seng. S'insèrent-ils toujours dans les réseaux traditionnels de relations diasporiques de la même façon que dans d'autres régions du monde? Sous le patronage de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme du Pacifique sud, cet ouvrage explore ici cette question sous un angle original, à travers l'expression cinématographique et l'art contemporain de la diaspora chinoise. Au-delà d'une rencontre entre l'Orient et l'Occident, à égale distance de ce que le philosophe et sinologue François Jullien appelle un « universalisme facile » et un « relativisme paresseux », ce livre interroge non pas les différences culturelles conventionnelles mais le jeu des tensions fécondes en usage par des communautés séparées et proches à la fois de ressources variées, aux fins de création et de représentation esthétique. Pour cet ouvrage ont été rassemblés des spécialistes de l'art cinématographique, des arts visuels du cinéma de fiction et de non-fiction de langue chinoise.

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