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# GLOBAL FENCES

Literatures, Limits, Borders

Edited by Corrado NERI and Florent VILLARD

Cover

Photo courtesy of the author

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## Global Fences: editorial

In a recent book, published after a series of conferences held in Japan, French philosopher Régis Debray makes a praise of “frontiers”<sup>1</sup>. His stand is polemical, paradoxical, and challenging in a world more and more influenced both by discourses on globalization and internationalization, as well as by an (inter)national withdrawal to (imagined) national traditions, beliefs, narratives. The polemical intent was effective, and the essay was received with many critics; of course we do not endorse a discourse that defines what is in and what is (or shall be) out; but it surprising how effective and potentially explosive every politically incorrect stand against a world without frontier could still resonate in a consensual intellectual milieu. The interesting point in Debray’s essay is a re-evaluation of the borders; of course, not intended as seclusion or a closure, but as a source of (intellectual) pleasure: crossing a border could be an exciting experience, meant to fuel curiosity, to arouse questions and relativize a worldview that could become claustrophobic. The idea is to discuss and give nuance to a category too often given for granted. The “border”, the limits connected to the frontiers, could be cultural, sociological, political, physical and psychological. Many of the articles presented in this volume do not stand for a recreation of fictive delimitations – the very fact that we met and discussed and exchanged should be a proof of intellectual curiosity and challenge – but question the very notion of border and frontier. Maybe to disqualify it – but it would be naïve to pretend that we live in a world without lines. We think now – writing these lines – about *The Fly* by David Cronenberg, where the Faustian scientist erases the boundaries between animal and human and ends up diluted in a monstrosity that asks for termination: here, the limits need to be traced in order to keep a discernible form and identity – as well as a place in

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<sup>1</sup> Régis Debray, *Eloge des frontières*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010.

society; but Cronenberg does not hide, in the description of the first stages of the human-to-fly transformation, the pleasure of crossing borders, of challenging the natural boundaries and creating something new. If Debray's "eloge" is meant to underscore the positive feature of frontiers, as a way to define ourselves and go to the encounter of the other with respect and open-mindedness, we are well aware that the political borders could be the site of tragedies and contradictions – the often imaginary line that divides states creates doubts, desires, wars, complex interrelations of narratives and economy.

During the three encounters of the workshop "Literatures, Limits, Borders: Migration and Citizenship" a conspicuous and prestigious group of scholars debated over these concepts through heteroclit points of view and case studies. Literature in primis, but also politics, visual culture, sociology and history. We had the opportunity to share concerns about sensible issues like migrations and global politics, we shared the pleasure of discovery – via translation, dialogue, the vertigo of novelty; we also debated sensible issues like the representation of the underrepresented, of the "minorities", and asked ourselves – from different point of views and political stands – about the meaning of contemporary barriers that seems erased only to appear again, stronger than ever.

That's why we chose, when editing this volume, to use a title different from the one used during our meeting: no more frontiers, or barriers, but "fences". Actually, the idea came from the machine: I have had installed a software called "fences" (this is no placement product: just pretend you're reading a Bret Easton Ellis novel and you keep being told what brand the character is wearing or eating or consuming). The "fences" freeware is just a simple organization system for desktops. You can sort your folders in a semi-transparent case and, of course, you can move them around according to your needs and desires. The graphics of the program show an old fence, made of wood, evoking a Swiss prairie with cows slowly pasturing. And somehow that reminded me of our encounters (the permeability of the frontier, not the cows): there are barriers, but they can be transgressed. There are barriers: linguistic (we all speak English, but it's only the mother tongue of a few scholars); cultural (we all have different backgrounds), political and national (we hold different passports), etc. But somehow these barriers enrich us all creating a constructive dialogue, instead of keeping us from talking. We were discussing, leaning on our fences, confronting our herds. And even if sometimes the discussion can become fierce, this delimitation grants us a mutual respect and – what is more important – the urge to communicate.

We traced borders: we chose to divide the selection of articles into four thematic sections – inside these sections we followed a boring and western-oriented alphabetical order.

### Connected World(s):

Isabelle Garnier-Mathez interrogates writer François Cheng using the prism of the “Poetics of Connivance” that binds transcultural communications.

Invisible borders and their connections are to be found in Hsiao Mei-ling’s essay; it’s an atypical work (at least in an academic context): the filmmaker details the intellectual, poetical and technical process to the making of her movie. The film centres on the complicated transnational relationships of a family separated by geography (Taiwan and France) and united by a webcam – and the contradictions, suffering and voyeurism that this situation creates.

Boundaries can be overcome: notably, via translations. One of our most acute translators from Chinese, Sandrine Marchand, reflects on conversion and interpretation, and details the universes of the literary work she is so familiar with.

Florent Villard analyses the recuperation of a famous poem by Wen Yiduo (written in the 20s) in contemporary propaganda songs; what’s more, the poet used a reference to France’s lost territories of Alsace-Lorraine. The vertiginous essay analyses national narratives with a comparative approach that helps us see through space and time.

### Power and Representation:

Thomas Boutonnet’s in-depth analysis of the discourse on “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*) questions the official ideology of contemporary China. In more detail, Boutonnet analyses how concerns about disciplining and controlling the atomized and unstable social body conceal the intention to civilize and educate. The background of this study is the contradiction and inequality that are intrinsic to capitalism in contemporary China.

Vanessa Frangville studies the image of Aborigines in contemporary Taiwanese cinema; through an attentive analysis of representative case studies, together we will learn to see invisible borders inside a “national” representation.

The Japanese occupation of Taiwan is one of the concerns of Wafa Ghermani, who works on the representation of Formosa from the pre-war period until the classic golden age of Nationalist cinema.

Lee Yulin and Hsu Shan-Hui write about poetics and colonialism, within the framework of Japanese occupation of Taiwan and its literature. How is colony represented? How was it written? What degree of orientalism is influencing Sato Haruo’s production? Reading their essays, we will travel in a paradoxically urgent past that has not ended its influence on contemporary politics.

### Shaping Identities:

Chen Fanghwey interrogates how contemporary calligraphy questions and shapes Taiwan identity.

In the context of Asian American studies, Marie Agnès Gay is also interested in novels and citizenships: she analyses the ground-breaking work of Shawn Wong and his negotiation of nationality, citizenship, cultural belonging and the anguish of diasporic existence.

Tsung-Huei Huang's paper reinterprets Ka-shiang Liu's novel *Hill of Stray Dogs* (*Yegou zhi qiu*) through a clever and audacious theoretical usage of the Deleuzian and Guattarian concept of "becoming". In this paper Tsung-Huei Huang stresses the novelist's capacity to speak *for* the animal-other without being caught up in an anthropocentric perspective, questioning therefore the "becoming-dog" possibility for the speaker.

#### Historical Intertextualities:

Marie Bizais's article analyses the political and aesthetical imbrications of different portraits of Qin Shihuangdi – and his wannabe assassin. With a vertiginous *mise-en-abyme* of literary, cinematographic, ancient and contemporary texts Bizais crosses boundaries and reflects on history and representation, resistance and nationalistic discourse.

Another – *mutatis mutandis* – bridge from the 20s to contemporary society and politics is built by Virginie Privas. She tells us stories about how the Northern Irish playwright Gary Mitchell borrows Brechtian techniques to create a new epic.

Discussing the borders of performing art and literature, Zhan Min-xu talks about contemporary opera, a "traditional" art forms confronting modernity.

The fruitfulness of these encounters is reflected in this rich, heteroclit and intellectually challenging collection – disseminated but opulent, full of drifts and concentrations. The centrifugal force is individual interests, passions and concerns; the centripetal force is the focus on the (re)definition of borders, and their transgression. These forces cross and meet through global fences.

CORRADO NERI

# How Jing Ke planned but failed to assassinate the to-be First Emperor of China: Different Narratives, Different Politics

MARIE BIZAIS

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China is no exception in the world : it defines itself physically through borders and creates a cohesive cultural group thanks to historical references. One of these founding events is Jing Ke's attempt to kill the king of Qin, who was to become the First Emperor of China. This story has been told over and over through centuries. It was first recorded in Jing Ke's biography in Sima Qian's 司马迁 *Shiji* 史记 (Records of the Grand Historian). More recently, it was shown in two commercial films : Zhang Yimou's 张艺谋 *Yingxiong* 英雄 (Hero) and Chen Kaige's 陈凯歌 *Jing Ke ci Qin Huang* 荆轲刺秦皇 (The Emperor and the Assassin). Both films offer contrastive perspectives. A comparative analysis of these differing versions of the same (hi)story reveals a striking parallel between past and present. Tradition shall continue to stand as a reference and play an active role in the assertion of a Chinese China.

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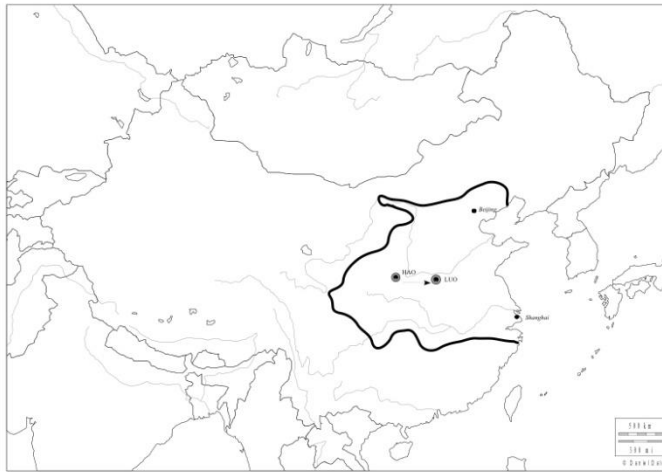
I am about to tell you a story, over and over again, with a few differences though. This is the story of a man who failed in his attempt to assassinate the king Zheng of Qin who was to become, a few years later, the First emperor of China.

Through my recounting of this story, we shall see how different choices in the construction of a narrative greatly influences the interpretation of this very story. We shall see this phenomenon applied to some kind of national founding myth.



## The end of the Zhou dynasty : a quick overview

This story takes place in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, at the end of the Zhou dynasty. The Zhou dynasty was founded in 1050 BC but it had to move East in 771 BC under the pressure of tribes in the North-West who were supported by some rulers inside the kingdom. From then on, the legitimacy of the Zhou rulers weakened.



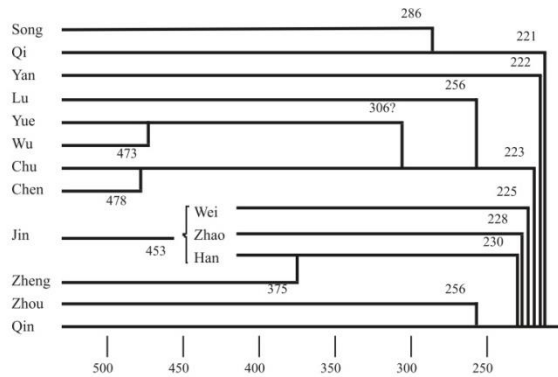
*Zhou dynasty, Warring States period (ca. 453-256 BC)*

How was the Zhou dynasty organized ? It was a federation of States that submitted to the State of the royal family of the Zhou.

As the Zhou State lost its legitimacy, the indentured States struggled to acquire the power of the head-State of Zhou. This struggle took place on a diplomatic stage at first. From the 5<sup>th</sup> (453 BC) century on though, it transformed into an unceasing war between States that contracted and broke alliances over the time.

HOW JING KE PLANNED BUT FAILED TO ASSASSINATE THE TO-BE FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA : DIFFERENT NARRATIVES, DIFFERENT POLITICS

MARIE BIZAIS



First the southern State of Chu appeared to be very powerful and absorbed many other States, as shown on the graph. And then, at the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, it was the western State of Qin that proved to be the most powerful.



*Qin dynasty (221-206 BC)*

In 221 BC, the Qin had defeated all the States that were once part of the Zhou, including the royal State of Zhou, and its king, whose name was Yingzheng,

established a new dynasty, the Qin dynasty.

The Qin dynasty differed radically from the Zhou organisation, and this for a series of particularities. To say it simply and briefly :

The Qin was a legist State, and as the name of this school of thought suggests, it considered that laws and rules are the best means to rule a population. Legism is very efficient, since no one can escape from law. Who follows the rules will benefit from it, who breaks the laws will pay for it. It was a harsh State that organised society and applied laws through a basic bureaucratic system. Therefore, there were no more centrifugal forces like under the royal dynasty of the Zhou. The Qin empire was centralised. This centralisation was human, with a bureaucratic system, as well as material, with uniformed writing, weighing, and pecuniary systems.

According to many history books, the establishment of the Qin empire founded the political system that was to last until 1911, when the Qing empire collapsed and the Republican era began.

The foundation of the empire in 221 BC was a major event in Chinese history, and its influence on the political organisation of "China" was great through the ages. Still, such a shortcut has of course its limits. And we should keep in mind that history and myth are sometimes intermingled.

### **Jing Ke's attempt to kill the king of Qin : an ancient version**

Now that historical background is set, let us enjoy the story of the assassination attempt of the king Yingzheng of Qin.

Among the ancient versions of this story, one of the most precise, famous, fact-grounded and dynamic is the story told in the *Shiji* 史記 (Record of the Grand Historian) by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-85 BC).

The *Record of the Grand Historian* is a monument of Chinese literature and history. It is outstanding because it became a model for all the following official histories commissioned by the emperors of each dynasty. Also, with its concise style, Sima Qian's language has a vivid effect, as we shall see very soon.

Jing Ke's biography appears along with the biographies of other assassins. Although an entire biography is dedicated to him, we actually don't know much about this character. He became famous because of one action, which in addition didn't succeed. This was, we can deduct, no common action.

All we know from the *Record of the Grand Historian* is that Jing Ke was not born in Yan, that he moved to Yan after going to different places where, as many educated men did, he offered his services as a counsellor, a swordsmanship counsellor.

荊卿好讀書擊劍，以術說衛元君，衛元君不用。<sup>1</sup>

Jing Ke excelled in reading books and wielding the sword. He talked to the lord Yuan of Wei about techniques, but the lord wouldn't employ him.<sup>2</sup>

At the time when Jing Ke arrived in Yan, a crisis was building up. The heir apparent of the State of Yan, who had had personal disagreements with the king of Qin, whom he considered relatively intimate, was in a hurry to take revenge over him. Since the State of Qin was conquering one State after another, this personal disagreement crystallized on the political stage.

His personal counsellor advised him to be patient and proposed a plan that would take a few years to be realized and would limit the ongoing conquest of all States by the Qin. The heir apparent refused and asked for the advice of a sage. This sage was old, and he recommended Jing Ke. This is how Jing Ke was brought to meet the heir apparent of Yan. He was the friend of the sage and was considered reliable by him.

儂行見荊卿，曰：「光與子相善，燕國莫不知。今太子聞光壯盛之時，不知吾形已不逮也，幸而教之曰『燕秦不兩立，願先生留意也』。光竊不自外，言足下於太子也，願足下過太子於宮。」荊軻曰：「謹奉教。」<sup>3</sup>

His body bent down, [the sage Tian Guang] met with Jing Ke. He said : “As everyone in Yan knows, we are good friends. Today, the heir apparent, who has heard of me when I was strong and excellent and doesn't understand that my body is now weak, urged me : “Yan and Qin cannot co-exist. I ask you to give me some advice”. I took the liberty of expressing myself and mentioned you to his majesty. I would like you to pay a visit to the heir apparent at his palace. Jing Ke answered : “I shall respectfully follow your instructions.”

Then, after he met the heir apparent of Yan, my guess is that he had no choice but to accept his mission. And the mission was unclear.

Jing Ke was not to kill but to force or push the king of Qin to retrocede the territories that he had conquered. But at the same time, the heir apparent gave him a poisonous dagger that killed instantly anyone who touched it.

Jing Ke carried his task one step after another, slowly finding the means to meet the

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<sup>1</sup> *Shiji*, Zhonghua shuju, Beijing, 1997, p. 2527.

<sup>2</sup> Unless specified, translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> *Shiji*, *ibid.*, p. 2530.

king of Qin face to face. Most notably, he convinced a general that had fled from Qin, Fan Wuqi, to commit suicide and to give him his head, and explained to the heir apparent of Yan the strategic importance of a map for the State of Qin. He postponed his journey for a while, but at one point, there was no option but to go. He left, along with Qin Wuyang, a thirteen year old murderer chosen by the heir apparent. They carried with them the head of general Fan Wuqi, a map of Dukang in the State of Yan, and a poisonous dagger hidden in the rolled map.

The last part of the story goes :

荊軻奉樊於期頭函，而秦舞陽奉地圖匣，以次進。至陞，秦舞陽色變振恐，群臣怪之。荊軻顧笑舞陽，前謝曰：「北蕃蠻夷之鄙人，未嘗見天子，故振懼。願大王少假借之，使得畢使於前。」秦王謂軻曰：「取舞陽所持地圖。」

軻既取圖奏之，秦王發圖，圖窮而匕首見。因左手把秦王之袖，而右手持匕首搃之。未至身，秦王驚，自引而起，袖絕。拔劍，劍長，操其室。時惶急，劍堅，故不可立拔。荊軻逐秦王，秦王環柱而走。群臣皆愕，卒起不意，盡失其度。而秦法，群臣侍殿上者不得持尺寸之兵；諸郎中執兵皆陳殿下，非有詔召不得上。方急時，不及召下兵，以故荊軻乃逐秦王。而卒惶急，無以擊軻，而以手共搏之。是時侍醫夏無且以其所奉藥囊提荊軻也。秦王方環柱走，卒惶急，不知所為，左右乃曰：「王負劍！」負劍，遂拔以擊荊軻，斷其左股。荊軻廢，乃引其匕首以擗秦王，不中，中桐柱。秦王復擊軻，軻被八創。軻自知事不就，倚柱而笑，箕踞以罵曰：「事所以不成者，以欲生劫之，必得約契以報太子也。」於是左右既前殺軻，秦王不怡者良久。<sup>4</sup>

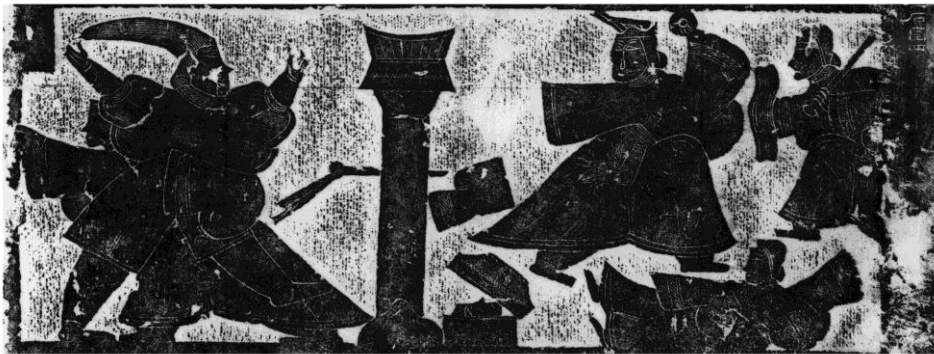
Jing Ke carried the box containing Fan Wuqi's head, while Qin Wuyang was to offer the case with the map. They entered [the hall] one after the other. When he reached the throne, Qin Wuyang went pale, his expression shackled by fear. Officials considered him with suspicion. Jing Ke looked back on Qin Wuyang with a smile, went forward and apologized : "Our hillbilly savage from nowhere has never met with a Son of Heaven. Thus, he is terrified. May I ask your majesty to consider him with some leniency and to allow me, your envoy, to fulfil my duty ?" The king of Qin answered Jing Ke : "Take the map hold by Qin Wuyang".

Jing Ke bade the map to [the king] after taking it [from Qin Wuyang's hands]. The king of Qin began unrolling it. When the map was [completely] unrolled, the dagger appeared to the eyes. With his left hand, [Jing Ke] grabbed the king of Qin's sleeve whereas with his right hand he seized hold of the dagger with the intention of stabbing him. Before [Jing Ke] reached him, the king of Qin, terrified, pulled away by standing up. His sleeve was ripped off. He [then tried] to draw his dagger out, but the dagger was [too] long, he had to hold the scabbard. At that [very] moment, he panicked : he couldn't draw the dagger out, it was stuck. Jing

<sup>4</sup> Shiji, *ibid.*, p. 2534.

Ke [began] to chase the king of Qin who circled around the columns and ran. The officials were all distraught. This was sudden and unexpected. They completely lost composure. Also, according to Qin laws, officials in attendance in the hall should not carry the tiniest weapon ; the guards carrying weapons were all arranged in ranks outside the hall, but unless a royal order, none was to go inside. When [the king] got caught [by Jing Ke's move], there wasn't time to call for the soldiers standing outside. And therefore, Jing Ke was chasing the king of Qin. And thus [the king] panicked, left with nothing [to fight against] Jing Ke. And finally he fought back with his two hands. At that point, Xia Wuju, his doctor, through the bag where he stored his medicinal herbs towards Jing Ke. The king circled around the columns, running, panicked, not knowing what to do. Then, his entourage said : "The sword [should be pushed] on your majesty's back !" [The king] drew the sword on his back [and was able] to pull it out. He hit Jing Ke and wound him at the left thigh. Jing Ke was hurt : he raised his dagger and tossed it towards the king of Qin. But he didn't reach his target : he hit the column. Once again, the king of Qin hit Jing Ke who had to suffer eight injuries. Jing Ke was aware that he wouldn't be successful. He leaned against a column and laughed. His legs sprawled out, he slung : "I didn't succeed because I was told to seize you alive, obtain from you a formal agreement and report to my prince." Then, the entourage went up to Jing Ke and killed him. The king of Qin looked unhappy for a long time.

A intensely vivid and kinaesthetic scene, from my point of view.



*The assassination attempt<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Part of a rubbing from the Wu Family Shrines (Shandong). Chamber 2, South wall, Bottom to the right.

## Reception of the story : part of the myth of foundation

This story could have remained a small anecdote recorded in Sima Qian's *Memoirs* – many murders have been forgotten, why not this one ? But very early on, Jing Ke's attempt to kill the to-be First emperor was re-written and commented upon. What did later writers, e.g. literati, retain of this story ? And, first of all, why did they consider it an important event ?

Its importance in Chinese history is due to the identity of the king of Qin, as Yuri Pines puts it :

Jing Ke's advantage over the fellow 'knights-errants' and 'assassin-retainers' is directly related to the identity of Jing Ke's victim. (...) The First Emperor of Qin (...) reshaped the life of China. (...) And it was precisely this monarch who barely escaped the assassin's dagger, running pathetically around the column of the audience hall, and being unable to utilize all his might to repel a man of humble origins armed with nothing but a dagger.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence the story was recalled in many texts, mostly essays and poems, but also novels.

Jing Ke provoked some kind of fascination, but in an ambiguous way. A Song author, Su Shi, summarized the perception of Jing Ke through history in the clearest way :

至今天下人，愍燕欲其成。廢書一太息，可見千古情。<sup>7</sup>

Until now, the people under Heaven,

Are sorry for [the state of] Yan and would like it to succeed.

I am putting the book aside and sigh deeply,

One can see the sentiments lingering throughout the ages.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pines Yuri, "A Hero Terrorist: Adoration of Jing Ke revisited", *Asia Major*, Third Series, Vol. 21, Part 2, 2008, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Su Shi 蘇軾, "He Tao shi wushiqi shou" 和陶氏五十七首 (Fifty-seven poems in echo to Tao Qian), in *Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集 (The complete works of Su Dongpo), Siku quanshu ed., j. 33, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Trans. Yuri Pines, *ibid.*

The courage of the character was a source of admiration, whereas the motivation and the preparation of the assassination were vigorously criticized.

This almost univocal position through centuries could sound surprising, considering that the Han dynasty, which followed directly the Qin, adopted confucianism instead of legism as the mainstream thought and that this change benefited to the so-called “mandarins” who had had to suffer from the Qin regime and were thus opposed to the system that was established by the Qin king. Moreover, there were philosophical grounds in confucian texts that would have justified a murder. For example, the Mencius reads :

齊宣王問曰：「湯放桀，武王伐紂，有諸？」孟子對曰：「於傳有之。」曰：「臣弑其君可乎？」曰：「賊仁者謂之賊，賊義者謂之殘，殘賊之人謂之一夫。聞誅一夫紂矣，未聞弑君也。」<sup>9</sup>

The king Xuan of Qi asked, saying, 'Was it so, that Tang banished Jie, and that king Wu smote Zhou?' Mencius replied, 'It is so in the records.'

The king said, 'May a minister then put his sovereign to death?'

Mencius said, 'He who outrages the benevolence proper to his nature, is called a robber; he who outrages righteousness, is called a ruffian. The robber and ruffian we call a mere fellow. I have heard of the cutting off of the fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of the putting a sovereign to death, in his case.'<sup>10</sup>

Still, almost all mandarins through history considered that Jing Ke was admirable but that assassination was not a way of solving political problems, and that his deeds were not right. However, recently, a film happened to question this type of logic. Namely, Chen Kaige's *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1998).

## Chen Kaige's version

In Chen Kaige's version, whose title is anachronistic in English but not in Chinese<sup>11</sup>,

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<sup>9</sup> Mengzi, I.II.8 (梁惠王下)

<sup>10</sup> Trans. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics : The works of Mencius*, SMC Publishing (ref. Oxford University Press), Taipei; 1998, vol. 2, p. 167. The phonetic transcription has been changed for *pinyin*.

<sup>11</sup> Chen Kaige 陈凯歌 (1952-), *Jing Ke ci Qin wang* 荆轲刺秦王 (How Jing Ke stabbed the King of Qin)



the actions of the characters are much more motivated by their personal and psychological characteristics.

Jing Ke's depiction is not blurred and imprecise. On the contrary, he appears as a thief and an assassin that after a violent experience decides to respect the life of others. Later on, Jing Ke is indirectly hired by the prince of Yan. It is actually a woman, Lady Zhao, who is fictional and not historical, who asks him to serve Yan as an assassin. Jing Ke refuses. While the State of Qin conquers the State of Zhao, the army massively kills the inhabitants of the capital city. The buried corpses of the people, including of children, is revealed to Lady Zhao.



*Lady Zhao discovers the bodies of hundreds of innocent children killed by the Qin<sup>12</sup>*

Until then, Lady Zhao was playing a double game. She was actually working for the king of Qin. Her mission was to push Yan to attempt to assassinate the king of Qin. Such attempt would of course justify an attack of Qin against Yan. But after she discovers that the Qin is violent and disrespectful of people's lives, she choses to step on Yan's side.

Jing Ke witnesses the psychological crisis that she then has to face – because she was first seduced by the king of Qin's plan to unify “earth under heaven” or China. The beautiful woman's shock and distress make him change his mind. And he decides to kill the horrible king of Qin.

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<sup>12</sup> Caption, *The Empereur and the Assassin*.



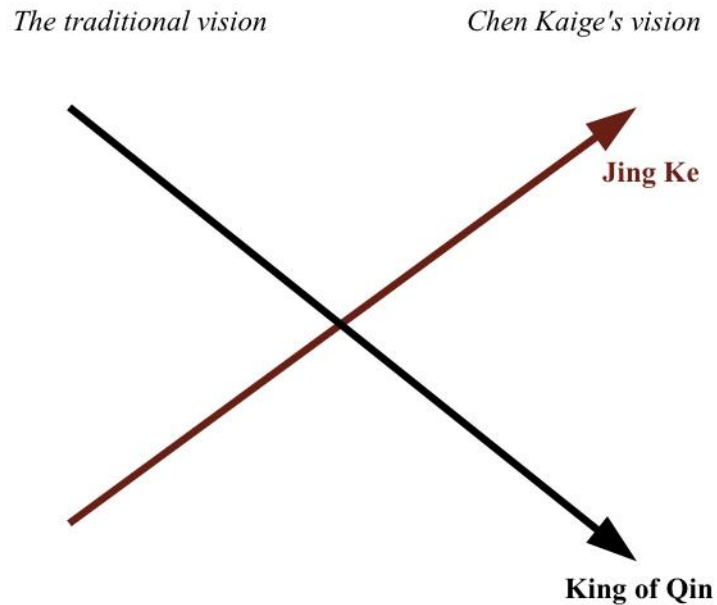
*A crazy and megalomaniac king of Qin<sup>13</sup>*

The attempt differs slightly from the *Record of the Grand Historian*. The result is the same though. The king is not killed, but he still isn't victorious of the fight. Jing Ke in the end is killed.

Nevertheless, both the characters depicted and the narrative, which are both clearly different from Sima Qian's, construct a contrastive perception of the assassination. Jing Ke doesn't appear here as someone who fulfils his duty. He is a much more positive character who, through this experience, seems to redeem himself. From the heartless assassin, he becomes the man who has both the heart and the strength that are needed to resist against a crazy dictator. And the contrast between the two characters and the opposite transformation of the figures of the king and the assassin is even more obvious since the king becomes a repulsive figure, the one of a mad man.

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<sup>13</sup> Caption, *ibid.*



Before we try to understand this major change in this traditional narrative change through the present historical context, let us first turn our attention onto a version that is much more loyal to the official theory which considers the foundation of the empire by the Qin dynasty as an event of paramount importance in the construction of the Chinese State and identity. As we shall see, Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002)<sup>14</sup> doesn't simply present the emperor as a major character in Chinese history.

### **Zhang Yimou's *Hero***

Although Zhang Yimou's movie entitled *Hero* doesn't precisely recall Jing Ke's story, its plot cannot but remind us of this founding story. It mainly takes place at the palace of the king of Qin, who has granted an audience to a man "No-name" after exceptional deeds.

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<sup>14</sup> Zhang Yimou 张艺谋 (1951-), *Hero* 英雄 (2002).



*"No-Name"<sup>15</sup>*

The first part of the film tells us that he "No-Name" killed the three great warriors of the State of Zhao who had been trying to kill the king of Qin in the last ten years. How he managed to annihilate each one of them is what he recalls for the king during the audience. Of course, each of them was a great swordsman or a great fighter. Due to the limits of this article, I will not describe the complex and intense fight scenes. Nor will I enter into the details of "No-Name"'s strategy to eliminate them one after the other. The point being that he depicts with great precision what was at stake during his quest and how he managed to fulfil his duty.

The king expresses doubts from the beginning about the ability of "No-name" to kill the three great fighters. Three years earlier, they had managed to enter the palace, and it took time and energy to three thousand men to get rid of them and have the king secure.

After "No-name" has told the story of how he killed each of the heroes one after the other, a reversal suddenly occurs. During a minute of silence, the king watches intensely the rows of candles which separates the two characters. The flames are not straight. They flicker in the king's direction. This sign is enough for the king to understand that "No-Name" intends to kill him and that the whole story that he was

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<sup>15</sup> Caption, *Hero*.

told was a deception. Thus, the story is told once again. But this time, it is the king's version.

How could the king guess that “No-Name” was trying to mislead him by watching the candles? This is of great importance since it reverses the development of the story. We shall remember how essential is the flow of energy called *qi* 氣 in Chinese. As Mencius says, it is a priority to cultivate one's *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣 (flowing energy). The concept of *qi* and all the relating practices are at the core of martial arts. “No-Name”'s *qi* is so strong that it moves the candles between him and the king. However, the king is able to notice it, and one may guess this his own *qi* is as strong as “No-Name”'s. Maybe he even controls it better.

In this scene of the film, “No-Name” is revealed. Still, he will not even try to kill the king. Thus, “No-Name” turns out not to be the hero of the film. He is impressed by the king's perspicacity. He will also be convinced by the king's discourse. The unification of “the country” can not be seen but as outstanding. The one and only hero is the king of Qin, the future Qin Shi Huangdi – the first emperor of China.



*The king of Qin, future Emperor Qin Shi Huang<sup>16</sup>*

Let us say a few words about this Hero, compared to the king depicted in Chen Kaige's story. The contrast is striking. Zhang Yimou pictures a very clever king, who is capable to understand a man's mind and heart. He is in no way the demented king of *The Emperor and the Assassin*.

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<sup>16</sup> Caption, *Hero*.

This Hero is also confirmed at the very end of the film, when he has to take the decision of killing “No-Name”. He seems to admire the man, but he still has to follow the rules of the State, no exception is possible. For the sake of the legist State, he relinquishes his own envies and feelings, and decides that the man should be condemned to death.

The First Emperor, who ensures the unity of the territory, becomes such a model that even the swordsman prefers to let go and renounces his project. The assassination fails not because of a series of circumstances but because the king is brave, clever, refined, balanced and convincing.

## To conclude

The primer ingredients of these three narratives are the same, but because they are put together very differently, their signification differs greatly. The telling and re-telling of this founding story as well as the narrative proposed by Zhang Yimou become a message of unity which stands as a mean of cohesion for the nation, be it of the past or the present.

This brings us to more general considerations about this “Realm of Memory” (Pierre Nora's *Lieu de mémoire*) and its two main characters. As such, the assassination attempt is more than a story. And its impact on the Chinese as a community may not only be perceived through films.

We shall keep in mind that some forty years ago, the First Emperor was a reference to which Mao would be compared – to condemn him as a dictator by his opponents and to claim his historical importance and his progressive views by Mao himself. During the Cultural Revolution, this reference was even more present. As Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals explain :

The *Pi-Lin Pi-Kong* (Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius) campaign was launched in the summer of 1973, transformed into a campaign to « criticize Confucianism, appraise Legalism » in 1974, and remained a prominent vehicle for allegorical politics, Cultural Revolution style, until the very end.<sup>17</sup>

From the month of June 1974, the campaign acquired a new dimension, with the publication in Red Flag, The Journal of Pekin University and a new journal/magazine published in Shanghai – Studies and Critiques – of a series of articles which more particularly proposed to underline the allegedly progressive qualities of an alternative historical solution to confucianism: the legist

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<sup>17</sup> Mao's Last Revolution, p. 366.

philosophical school. During the winter 1973, Mao had told the Liang Xiao members that “all the reactionary social classes [...] venerate confucianism and oppose both legism and Qin Shi Huang”. The image of Lin Biao quickly fade away whereas more and more energy was put in the creation of a historical discourse whose red thread/red string seemed to tie together the after Cultural Revolution CCP with a number of “progressive” sovereigns from Antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

At the time, Jing Ke was considered a *tiaoliang xiaochou* 跳梁小丑 (a “buffoon who in vain fidgets [against the stream of history]”).

Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou were teenagers when the Cultural Revolution broke out. The impact on their intellectual and political structuring is unquestionable. Thus, it is difficult not to read their films also as a mean to express a political meaning. One which values virtue and criticizes the conception according to which “the end justifies the means” – especially when the end is proposed by someone whose mental stability is dubious. The other which considers that China is great when united behind one man or political party – whose sanity doesn't seem to rise any question.

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18 Trans. from the French version of the book : *La dernière révolution de Mao*, p. 463.

# From Local Control to Globalised Citizenship: The Civilising Concept of *Wenming* in Official Chinese Rhetoric

THOMAS BOUTONNET

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When Deng Xiaoping decided in 1978 to put China on track towards the market economy and to this end planned to implement and initiate a policy of “reforms and openness” (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放), he did so by building a specific ideological framework in order to create an imaginary around the changes to come. This imaginary is most evident in Deng’s “two civilisations” or “two *wenming*” program (*liangge wenming* 两个文明), which differentiates between “material civilisation” (*wuzhi wenming* 物质文明) and “spiritual civilisation” (*jingshen wenming* 精神文明). But does *wenming* (文明) correspond to the English term civilisation? What does civilisation actually mean? And what does *wenming* imply in Chinese contemporary political propaganda? This article proposes to explore these questions.

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When Deng Xiaoping decided in 1978 to put China on track towards the market economy and to this end planned to implement and initiate a policy of “reforms and openness” (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放), he did so by building a specific ideological framework in order to create an imaginary around the changes to come.<sup>1</sup> Deng’s “two civilisations” program (*liangge wenming* 两个文明), which differentiates between “material civilisation” (*wuzhi wenming* 物质文明) and “spiritual civilisation” (*jingshen wenming* 精神文明), constitutes the core of his ideological framework.<sup>2</sup> In this program,

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<sup>1</sup> Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904 - 1997) was the “leader” of the second generation of Chinese communist rulers (also known as the “little helmsman”, in reference to the “great helmsman” Mao Zedong). Deng had a major impact on contemporary Chinese politics even though he did not hold any major positions until 1967. Considered too “right-wing” and liberal during the Cultural Revolution, he was rehabilitated in 1977 and took control of the Chinese Communist Party in order to initiate a new ideological perspective: politics based on the development of China’s economy rather than on Chinese society, political rights and communist ideals. Deng’s policy, which is officially called “reforms and openness” (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) or “Deng Xiaoping theory” (*dengxiaoping lilun* 邓小平理论), is still the official line of policy of the Chinese Communist Party in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> This paper discusses whether translating the Chinese phrase *wenming* 文明 with the English terms *civilisation* or *civilised* is appropriate. For the convenience of non Chinese-speaking readers though, I chose to translate *wenming* by *civilisation* or *civilised* in the text, but decided to use *italics* to distinguish the translation



Deng Xiaoping drew an ideological line in his clear separation of two *civilisations* for the Chinese: “material *civilisation*” refers to economic growth led by market development and mass consumption, while “spiritual *civilisation*”, which can be understood as the “*civilising* of minds”, consists in a set of moral standards and practices such as hard work, abnegation, patriotism and trust in the Party, and therefore requests Chinese people to be morally beyond reproach. Right from its beginning, this “*civilising* of minds” involved a single purpose, that of accompanying the growth and development of “material *civilisation*”, configuring and adapting minds to the new rules and socio-economic practices deriving from capitalist economies.

The staggering increase of social and economic inequities in the 1990s, which were due to the fast implementation of economic and structural reforms and the emergence of a new class of poor, jobless and insecure people – people a modern nation-state needs to control in order to guarantee the stability of society and the smooth operation of economy –, made the “*civilising* of minds” an essential project and an efficient tool for social control. For “spiritual *civilisation*” was set to be the ideological and disciplining counterpart of the “material *civilisation*” of the 1990s, which took the form of an impressive but iniquitous and unbalanced economic growth.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore during the mid-1990s that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) started to publish and display moral aphorisms as part of the process of *civilising* people’s minds. Some were displayed in the “charters of *civilisation*” (*wenming gongyue* 文明公约) in large Chinese cities, promoting “passionate love for labour, respect for profession, honesty, loyalty, self-sacrifice and frugality”, and reminded Chinese people of the moral standards that they should conform to, in order to encourage the acceptance of insecure and precarious classes of the ruling social order and of the requirements of market economy.<sup>4</sup>

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of *wenming* by *civilisation* from the general meaning of the term “civilisation” in English.

<sup>3</sup> On the social crisis in contemporary China, see Sun Liping 孙立平, *Duanlie : ershi shiji jiu shi niandai yilai de zhongguo shehui* 断裂:20世纪90年代以来的中国社会, Beijing, Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003; see Jean-François Billeter, *Chine trois fois muette* [China Three Times Mute], Paris, Allia, 2006. On the environmental crisis, see for instance Richard McGregor, “750,000 a year killed by Chinese pollution”, *Financial Times*, July 2, 2007; Joseph Kahn & Jim Yardley “The dark side of China’s boom”, *Herald Tribune*, August 27, 2007. On increasing mass discontent and popular protest movements, see Lucien Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China*, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2001; William Hurst, “Mass Frames and Worker Protest”, in Kevin J. O’Brien (Ed.), *Popular Protest in China*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp.71-87; Kevin J. O’Brien & Li Lianjiang, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> “热爱劳动,爱岗敬业,诚实守信,勤俭节约”. On the propaganda system of the Chinese Communist Party, see Anne-Marie Brady’s exhaustive study, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. On the role played by mass media in this propaganda system and more generally on the complex triangular relation between state, media and audience in China, see the work of Kevin Latham, “Nothing but the Truth: News Media, Power and Hegemony in South China”, *China*



“Be *civilised residents*”

– a clear example of “*spiritual civilisation*”

Civic Public Messages during the  
Preparation of the 2008 Beijing Olympic  
Games

Beijing, 2006

In the last thirty years, this “two *civilisations*” project has thus implied a long and continuous civilising process (as defined by Norbert Elias) of the Chinese population, a process of spiritual and moral adaptation to the new conditions of China on the road to globalisation.<sup>5</sup> *Wenming* 文明 is therefore a key word and a major concept in contemporary Chinese official rhetoric. It is therefore not surprising to still find allusions and references to the concept of *wenming* at the end of the years 2000, for this concept has been – and is – routinely and chronically used by Chinese political or civic propaganda. Yet as central as the concept of *wenming* may be to contemporary Chinese politics, it remains an ambiguous – and polysemic – notion.

The concept appears so prominently in propaganda discourse in contemporary China that we cannot legitimately bypass this question and uncritically accept the term *civilisation* to translate it. It is indeed difficult to be entirely satisfied with *civilisation* as a translation for the concept and to assume that there is no loss of meaning in the shift from *wenming* to *civilisation*. Does *wenming* correspond to the English term *civilisation*? And what does *civilisation* actually mean? What does *wenming* imply in Chinese contemporary political propaganda? This article attempts to contribute to a better understanding of these concepts.

## Civilisation: Homogenising Minds and Bodies

The first step in understanding the relation between *wenming* and *civilisation*

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*Quarterly*, n°163, September 2000, pp. 633-654.

<sup>5</sup> See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol.I. The History of Manners*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1969.

necessarily involves a discussion of the meaning of the English word civilisation. In terms of etymology, words such as civilisation, civilised, citizen, civilian, civic, civil, and civility, which are related to social and political standards and urbanity, all originate from the Latin word *civis* (citizen) and its derivatives *civilis* or *civitas* (the city). While citizen refers to a member of a community who is entitled to participate, through his/her rights and duties, in the political organisation of said community, civil can refer both to what is associated with ordinary citizens as distinct from military men, and to a courteous or polite person. As for civility, definitions point to politeness, or individual acts and manners of behaving which conform to social conventions of propriety. Last but not least, the word civilised is generally used to describe someone who is well-mannered and polite, well-bred and educated. In this etymological perspective, civilisation can be interpreted as the process of making someone civil, and therefore polite (polite comes from the Latin *politus*, which means polished or made smoothed), or of bringing someone to civility or politeness. But of course, an etymological approach detached from contemporary and common usage is in itself irrelevant, since a word is mostly defined by how it is used rather than by what root words it originates from.

A more comprehensive semantic approach underlines the fact that civilisation is indeed a complex word. A generally accepted meaning for civilisation is a stage in human social development and organization that is considered advanced; but civilisation can also describe the society, culture and way of life of a particular area; it additionally refers to the comfort and convenience of modern life as available in towns and cities.<sup>6</sup> Although these are regular definitions, the terms culture, society and development that they include are questionable and would need further explanation and definition, since they are strongly linked to power, domination and politics. Civilisation can also refer to urban standards of life in opposition to those of the countryside, when social, political and cultural elites and structures of domination were centralised in cities. Likewise, civilisation used to be a synonym for modernity or progress when Western empires claimed to bring civilisation to people seen as “primitive” and “uncivilised” in their process of colonisation. In this context, civilisation equally referred to evangelisation and the enforcement of certain religions in opposition to paganism, for instance when Jesuits travelled to islands in the Pacific and eradicated local cultures and beliefs in order to “civilise” indigenous peoples. The term involves a binary opposition between something supposedly backward or minor and something supposedly advanced. In this sense, it is difficult not to see in the term

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<sup>6</sup> Civilisation, *Oxforddictionaries.com*, [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m\\_en\\_gb0152060#m\\_en\\_g\\_b0152060](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0152060#m_en_g_b0152060), last accessed on January 11, 2011.

civilisation a modelling process, whose purpose is to control and dominate, while pretentiously claiming to bring a community of (internal or external) people to a superior and better stage – and yet even these terms (superior, better) are more than questionable.

Sociologist Norbert Elias has adopted a similar approach, for he sees civilisation not only as a state but also as “a process that needs to be promoted”.<sup>7</sup> For Elias, the civilising of moral standards and social practices is linked with the development of modern nation-states. Civilisation needs to be seen as a standardisation and normalisation of behaviours, habits and attitudes in a given society in order to comply with the social conventions and moral standards practiced by the upper classes and the urban elite (it also significant that such practices were actually developed to distinguish the upper classes from the common people). The process of civilising moral standards, social practices and habits is first and foremost an act of domination: it is an embodiment of dynamics of subjection, a relation that is implemented into the body. The civilising process is the expression of a domination upon the Other by a reconfiguration of his/her practices, “the desire not (simply) to conquer the Other, but to be desired by the Other”.<sup>8</sup> It is a process of standardisation, a totalitarian tool for social control concealed by the discourse of the “civilizing mission”.

As Michel Foucault has suggested, normalisation, along with “monitoring (...) has become one of the major technologies of power” of modern states, so that it is essential not to address civilisation in monolithic national terms (such as in Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilisations*) but as a process of domination that aims to subject and normalise heterogeneous social practices in a specific space, such space being created and shaped by this very process of standardising social practices.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Norbert Elias has remarked that,

Before the term “civilisation” was created and commonly used, other words such as “politeness” or “civility” were fulfilling the same role: they were used to express the feeling of superiority of the European ruling class upon others classes that they considered more simple or primitive, to

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<sup>7</sup> Norbert Elias, *La Civilisation des mœurs*, Paris, Calman-Lévy, 1991, p.69, (“un processus qu’il s’agit de promouvoir”). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French or Chinese into English are my translations.

<sup>8</sup> Prasenjit Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 12, issue 1, 2001, p.106.

<sup>9</sup> “comme la surveillance (...) devient l’un des grands instruments de pouvoir”, Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p.216.

characterise the specific behaviour through which the ruling class deliberately distinguished itself from ruder or more primitive people.<sup>10</sup>

This superiority, signified in and displayed by the moral standards and behaviours of the ruling classes, was later used during the formation of modern nation-states as an efficient power to homogenise the social fabric. This superiority implied “a whole set of grades of normality, which are signs of belonging to a homogeneous social body, but which involve a function of classification, of hierarchical organisation”.<sup>11</sup> The civilising process at work in nation-building, this enforcement of attitudes and behaviours to comply with a specific set of norms within a social space thereby shaped and determined, was also characterised by “a rise of feelings such as disgust, embarrassment, reserve and propriety” through which one learns “to hide one’s emotions, restrain one’s passions and control one’s impulses”; it was also supported by the development of forms of self-control and restrictions that individuals “imposed to [themselves], less and less consciously” in the social public space.<sup>12</sup> As Cas Wouters has suggested,

Any code of social habits operates like a regime, as a form of social control requiring the exercise of self-control. (...) Generally, the ruling moral code serves to maintain a social distance between established groups, or between the ruling class and those who are trying to access to it. Moral standards act as tools of exclusion or rejection, as well as inclusion or group charisma: individuals or groups that possess the required qualifications are admitted in it, while “ill-bred” individuals – that is, those who are in the lowest social status -- are forbidden access.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Avant que ne fut créé et imposé le terme de ‘civilisation’, les mots tels que ‘politesse’ ou ‘civilité’ assumaient une fonction absolument semblable : ils servaient à exprimer le sentiment de supériorité de la couche européenne dominante par rapport aux autres couches jugées par elles plus simples ou plus primitives, à caractériser le comportement spécifique par lequel elle entendait se distinguer des hommes plus frustrés et plus primitifs.”, Norbert Elias, *La Civilisation des mœurs*, Paris, Calman-Lévy, 1991, p.58

<sup>11</sup> “tout un jeu de degrés de normalité, qui sont des signes d’appartenance à un corps social homogène, mais qui ont en eux-mêmes un rôle de classification, de hiérarchisation”, Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p.216.

<sup>12</sup> “montée en puissance des sentiments de dégoût, de gêne, de pudeur ou de bienséance” [par laquelle l’individu apprend] “à dissimuler ses émotions, à réfréner ses passions, à maîtriser ses pulsions” [et par le développement d’autocontrôles, de contraintes que l’individu qui évolue au sein de l’espace social] “s’impose à lui-même, de manière de moins en moins consciente.”, Florence Delmotte, *Norbert Elias : la civilisation et l’État, enjeux épistémologiques et politiques d’une sociologie historique*, Bruxelles, Université de Bruxelles, 2007, p.48.

<sup>13</sup> “Tout code de mœurs fonctionne comme un régime, c’est-à-dire comme une forme de contrôle social exigeant l’exercice d’un autocontrôle. (...) En général, le code dominant des mœurs sert à préserver une distance sociale entre les groupes établis ou les classes dominantes et ceux qui essaient d’en faire partie. Les

When this code comes to be defined by the modern nation-state rather than by the upper class, it involves a much larger scale and becomes a strong tool for the control of social standardisation. These moral and social standards and practices, to which the whole population is expected to conform, constitutes a civilising and normalising process that expels those whose behaviours or moral standards do not comply with the social order to the margins of the nation. This process distances those who can't be part of the nation from the national community, but it also exercises a centripetal normalising force capable of bringing those who were sent to, or were considered part of, the periphery back to the centre of the social space.

Because it is mainly a standardisation process, civilisation aims at creating a homogenised space that feeds political concepts and ideologies. In the modern nation-state, the civilising process is a tool of control that not only defines the social and moral conventions that the whole population is expected to comply with, but that also legitimates, *in fine*, the social order and allows it to be perpetuated.

It is now possible to return to the relation between *wenming* and civilisation. I have presented civilisation as a process that implies a discourse, that comes from above, that is an assertion of superiority from the ruling authority, and that has been used by dominant structures to dominate and control. We must now question whether the Chinese concept of *wenming* is commonly, politically and/or officially used to enforce this hierarchic and normalising (di)vision of social practices in order to homogenise them. The official use of the term *wenming* by ruling authorities and in official and ideological rhetoric in China must be discussed, in order to see if it can be seen as (part of) a discourse of control aimed at shaping the behaviours, social practices and morality of the Chinese.

### ***Wenming*: Shaping the Ideal Civilised Citizen**

The standard definition of *wenming* that can be found in Chinese dictionaries remains rather vague. *Wenming* is defined as: 1. Culture, and 2. A relatively high stage of development and high cultural achievement. Such definition, however, remains problematic because the word culture is as vague as it is polysemic, and does not bring

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mœurs fonctionnent comme des instruments d'exclusion ou de rejet tout autant que d'inclusion et de charisme de groupe : les individus ou les groupes qui ont les qualifications nécessaires sont admis alors que ceux qui sont mal 'élevés' - c'est-à-dire qui se situent plus bas sur l'échelle sociale - sont interdits d'entrée.", Cas Wouters, "La Civilisation des mœurs et des émotions : de la formalisation à l'informalisation", in Yves Bonny, Jean-Manuel de Queiroz & Erik Neveu (Ed.), *Norbert Elias et la théorie de la civilisation : lectures et critiques*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003, p.148.

particular insights into the meaning of *wenming*. The dictionary further mentions that the term, when applied to a person, implies good manners, which is close to the connotation of the word civilised in English.<sup>14</sup> An etymological approach provides additional – though limited – elements to understand the meaning of *wenming*. *Wenming* is made of two characters: *wen* 文, which refers, among other meanings, to writing, language and to what is literary, refined or elegant; and *ming* 明, which is associated with brightness, clarity and obviousness.<sup>15</sup> In classical Chinese language, *wenming* meant clear-sightedness and talent. Borrowed by Japanese intellectuals during the nineteenth century as a translation for the word civilisation, the word *wenming* became associated with westernisation and modernisation, before being used in China at the end of nineteenth century. *Wenming* was then used to refer to someone civilised, enlightened, in opposition to barbarism and in association with the Western world and modernity. It is therefore essential to understand that the term *wenming* contains several historical layers of meaning, including a clear interaction with – in fact the addition of – connotations coming from the English word civilisation. *Wenming* should therefore not be regarded as an autonomous concept, but rather as a palimpsest that carries several layers of meanings which overlap and at times contradict one another.<sup>16</sup> Its meaning evolved throughout the twentieth century in China, but kept revolving around notions of excellence and high standards of culture, social practices and morality.<sup>17</sup> Since the 1980s and the launch of the “two *wenming*” program, however, the concept of *wenming* has been substantially exposed and deployed in social and public spaces through all kinds of manifestations and items related to “spiritual civilisation”. *Wenming* has become synonymous with righteous, correct, appropriate and high standard, and its meaning is closely associated with the “two civilisations” campaign and ideological perspective which has been in force since then.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “1. 文化; 2. 社会发展到较高阶段和具有较高文化”, *Xiandai hanyu cidian* 现代汉语词典, Beijing, Shangwu yinshuguan, p.1319.

<sup>15</sup> *Hanfa zonghe cidian* 汉法综合词典, Taipei, Institut Ricci-Kuangchi Press, p.1050.

<sup>16</sup> For the anthropologist Sara Friedman, “The catchall nature of these campaigns reflected the diverse connotations of the very concept of spiritual civilization, its vagueness enabling local officials to subsume a wide range of goals under its rubric.”, see Sara L. Friedman, “Embodying Civility: Civilizing Processes and Symbolic Citizenship in Southeastern China”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.63, issue 3, August 2004.

<sup>17</sup> On the civilising process in China, see for instance Ann Anagnost, “Constructing the Civilized Community”, in Theodore Hutters, R. Bin Wong & Pauline Yu (Ed.), *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations and Critiques*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997; Prasenjit Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Decolonization”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 15, issue 1, March 2004; Madeleine Yue Dong, “Defining Beijing: Urban Reconstruction and National Identity, 1928-1936”, in Joseph W. Esherick (Ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> To enhance the spiritual civilisation of the Chinese, a national office was created in 1997 within the Chinese Communist Party to coordinate all the activities related to the “two civilisations” program (it is the Central

In the middle of the 1990s, the Chinese economic system drastically switched to a “socialist market economy” (*shehuizhuyi shichang jingji* 社会主义市场经济), a capitalist economy whose access is restricted and controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. The transition from a plan-based to a market-based economy forced the shutting down of numerous state-owned industries, which led to massive unemployment and major social issues. At the same time, the new rules of capitalist economy, the hard conditions of life in the countryside and the attraction of major Chinese cities in terms of employment forced millions of jobless peasants to migrate to large cities looking for professional perspectives and incomes. Those migrant peasant workers, who are referred to as *mingong* 民工, were regarded as outsiders (*waidiren* 外地人), and suffered, and are still suffering, from discrimination as some of the locals (*bendiren* 本地人) saw in them a threat for social stability.<sup>19</sup> They were commonly associated with images of danger and otherness, in a typical amalgam between poverty and crime, dirt or illness. It was however these very workers (millions of urban jobless workers and *mingong*) who, working in tiring and terrible conditions, built the spectacular economic growth of China often described in Western countries as “the Chinese economic miracle”. It was in fact no miracle, but rather the result of the efficient combination of different elements: some efficient economic reforms that discarded major socialist aspects both of the society (education, health care, pensions) and of the economic production (only the most efficient units of national firms were supported, leading to the lay-off of millions of people) in order to establish the bases of a capitalist society (where ideals are no longer collective but individual). These economic changes led to the low-wage employment of the millions of jobless people created by these shifts in order to operate a very profitable “socialist market economy”. It was therefore necessary and imperative for the ruling authority to accompany and frame this transition towards a capitalist economy (“material *civilisation*”) with a substantial civilising process. In the mid-1990s, a framework of rules regarding morality and behaviour started to be extensively displayed in the form of formal “charters of *civilisation*” (*wenming gongyue*

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committee in charge of supervising and enhancing the spiritual civilisation, *zhongyang jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao weiyuanhui* 中央精神文明建设指导委员会). A comprehensive web portal was also created and launched to broadcast the program and *civilising* the minds: it is indeed called the Web portal of the Chinese spiritual *civilisation* (*zhongguo jingshen wenming wang* 中国精神文明网), on [www.godp.gov.cn](http://www.godp.gov.cn).

<sup>19</sup> The massive migration of jobless peasants and *mingong* (民工 is the shrinking of *nongmin* 农民 (peasant) and *gongren* 工人 (worker)) towards large cities did not start in the 1990s, it is a more ancient phenomena that was already taking place in the early 1980s. On the *mingong*, see Eric Florence, “Debates and Classification Struggles Regarding the Representation of Migrants Workers”, *China perspectives*, n°65, May-June 2006; Hein Mallee, “Migration, *hukou* and resistance”, in Elizabeth J. Perry & Mark Selden, *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, London & New York, Routledge, 2003.



文明公约), which mostly targeted poor, underprivileged people living in urban areas or attracted by them.

In 1996, the city of Beijing established a formal definition of how a model citizen, a *wenming* resident of the city, should behave. This definition became an elaborate “charter of *civilisation* of the citizen of the capital” (*shoudu shimin wenming gongyue* 首都市民文明公约), a series of aphorisms addressing many aspects of Chinese daily life, stipulating norms and standards regarding the morality, behaviours and political thoughts that every ordinary citizen should comply with.<sup>20</sup> As Anne-Marie Broudehoux has pointed out, “this golden list appeared everywhere in Beijing, on construction sites, near bus stops, and along major streets” and constitutes an obvious attempt to force newcomers to the city to comply with norms of civility, and “conveys a clear picture of the ideal citizen”.<sup>21</sup> This charter has been in place since 1996, and was substantially displayed in Beijing a few years before the 2008 Olympic Games in order to control and pacify the local population.<sup>22</sup> The “charter of *civilisation* of the citizen of the capital” stipulates the following comprehensive set of rules:

1. [The *civilised* citizen] passionately loves the country, passionately loves Beijing, promotes the harmony of the nation and preserves its stability.
2. [The *civilised* citizen] passionately loves the work, loves his/her position and respects his/her profession, is honest, loyal and shows abnegation and frugality.
3. [The *civilised* citizen] respects the law and the discipline, preserves the public order, devotes him/herself with courage to justice and fairness and shows righteousness and integrity.
4. [The *civilised* citizen] beautifies the city, cares about hygiene, promotes ecological public spaces of Beijing and protects the environment.
5. [The *civilised* citizen] cares about community, respects public goods, devotes himself to the public interest and protects cultural legacy.

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<sup>20</sup> The household, work units, institutions or individuals that were considered as following the charter in a satisfactory way were formally honoured by a “*wenming* household” or “*wenming* unit” award. Some of them could even get the “ten stars *wenming* household” award when they were considered as fulfilling some of the major rules of these charters, such as loving the Party and the country, obeying the law, loving hard work, conforming to birth control, and so on (see Nicholas Dynon, “‘Four Civilizations’ and the Evolution of Post-Mao Chinese Socialist Ideology”, *The China Journal*, n°60, July 2008, p.97).

<sup>21</sup> Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p.181.

<sup>22</sup> The Chinese term *shimin* 市民 means resident of the city, so it can also be literally translated by “citizen” in the sense that it refers to an individual who has right to live in the city and participate in the political life of his/her community.

6. [The *civilised* citizen] praises science, respects educators, improves him/herself without sparing his/her efforts and raises his/her quality.
7. [The *civilised* citizen] respects the elderly and loves children, loves the people and supports the army, respects women and helps the poor and the weak.
8. [The *civilised* citizen] gets rid of old habits, has a healthy life, uses birth control and keeps his/her body in perfect shape.
9. [The *civilised* citizen] acquires *civilised* manners, welcomes hosts with politeness, is noble and generous and enjoys helping people.<sup>23</sup>

While some of these aphorisms promotes greater respect and tolerance within a collective space (the emphasis on protecting the environment and respecting public areas and goods), others can only be described as forceful intrusions into individuals' moral and intellectual practices (love work, love the country, raise one's *quality* – another ambiguous term (*suzhi* 素质 in Chinese) which is used in the negative to describe those considered not *wenming* enough).<sup>24</sup> More than a simple definition of the good manners that a city resident should have, this charter displays all the virtues of the Chinese “new man”: an ideal resident and *civilised* citizen who represents an early definition of the *homo harmonicus* that current Chinese president Hu Jintao has attempted to promote in 2005 in his “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) program, which is, as I remark below, based on the moral foundations established in the charter.<sup>25</sup> The charter's definition of the ideal citizen in fact “masks the division of society between lower and higher classes, poor and rich, exploited and exploiter”,

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<sup>23</sup> The original text is: “一、热爱祖国 热爱北京 民族和睦 维护安定; 二、热爱劳动 爱岗敬业 诚实守信 勤俭节约; 三、遵纪守法 维护秩序 见义勇为 弘扬正气; 四、美化市容 讲究卫生 绿化首都 保护环境; 五、关心集体 爱护公物 热心公益 保护文物; 六、崇尚科学 尊敬教师 自强不息 提高素质; 七、敬老爱幼 拥军爱民 尊重妇女 助残济困; 八、移风易俗 健康生活 计划生育 增强体质; 九、举止文明 礼待宾客 胸襟大度 助人为乐”, see Zhonggong beijingshiwei xuanchuanbu 中共北京市委宣传部, *Shoudu gongming daode jianshe xuexi cailiao* 首都公民道德建设学习材料, Beijing, Taibai wenyi chubanshe, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> This elusive and relative concept of “quality” (*suzhi* 素质) serves the official rhetoric as a polysemic term that allows a myriad of interpretations. It allows, behind the rhetoric of “improving and raising the quality” of individuals, the imposition and enforcement of political measures that may be seen as socially coercive or individually offensive.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed study of the “Harmonious society” project and the civilizing process of the Chinese population, see Thomas Boutonnet, “Vers une ‘société harmonieuse’ de consommation? Discours et spectacle de l'harmonie sociale dans la construction d'une Chine ‘civilisée’ (1978-2008)” [Towards a ‘Harmonious’ Consumer Society? The Discourse and Spectacle of Social Harmony in the Construction of a ‘Civilised’ China (1978-2008)], PhD Thesis, November 2009, Université Lyon III, [http://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00437152\\_v1/](http://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00437152_v1/); see also Thomas Boutonnet, “‘Harmonious’ Consumer Society Exposed: Visual Cacophony and Schizophrenia on Beijing's Street Billboards in 2006”, *Journal of Chinese Studies – Portuguese Institute of Sinology*, n°6, March 2011.

since “citizenship does not level individuals themselves, but rather the image that circulates around them. Citizenship glorifies formal political equality by concealing real social inequalities”.<sup>26</sup>

Whether this charter has an impact on people’s behaviour is a different question altogether which is not the focus of this paper. However, it would be essential to study the actual influence of propaganda on the Chinese: many Chinese may be simply used to seeing propaganda posters and may no longer notice them, as they have become part of the urban landscape (just as advertisement billboards in Western societies). Returning to the main focus of this paper, the implications of the concept of *wenming*, the charter clearly reveals that *wenming* evokes more than good manners and politeness. It is a large set of rules and conventions that have to be followed in order to become a good citizen. Interestingly, the notion in the charter is even more invasive than the English word civilised, since the document emphasises the importance of “loving the motherland and maintaining social stability”. *Wenming* shapes a way of life, cornering every of its aspect, from political to social appearance, including interpersonal relations, work, family, education and ethics.

This charter needs to be analysed in relation with an even more massive civic campaign launched in 2001, when the Chinese government decided to take steps to enforce an ideal of morality. This program was called “program to build and implement a citizen morality” (*gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao* 公民道德建设实施纲要).<sup>27</sup> In the document that announced the main lines of the program, the Chinese Communist Party admitted that while twenty years of reforms brought much economic growth in China, it also led to many social issues, such as corruption, poverty and inequity, which are presented in the program as a result of a lack of morality and a blurred perception of what is good or wrong. The program lists the issues that contemporary Chinese society then faces, and asserts the necessity to implement a new citizen morality that would eventually resolve these issues:

Some places or sectors of Chinese society are lacking a moral framework, and the border between true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly

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<sup>26</sup> Marc Jacquemain, “Citoyenneté”, in Pascal Durand (Ed.), *Les nouveaux mots du pouvoir : abécédaire critique*, Bruxelles, Aden, 2007, pp.57-58 (“occulte la division de la société entre prolétaires et bourgeois, pauvres et riches, exploités et exploités” [car] “la citoyenneté égalise, non les hommes mais l’image qu’on s’en fait. Elle exalte l’égalité politique formelle en passant sous silence l’inégalité sociale réelle”).

<sup>27</sup> For the integral text of this program, see Xu Qixian 许启贤, *Wenming beijingren “gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao” shimin duben* 文明北京人“公民道德建设实施纲要”市民读本, Beijing, Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2003; see also online *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, “‘Gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao’ quanwen ‘公民道德建设实施纲要’全文”, *Renminwang* 人民网, published the 24 October 2001, accessed 12 August 2009 on <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20011024/589496.html>.

is becoming blurred and vague; the worship of money and profit, the search for pleasure and extreme individualism are all increasing; the search for one's own benefit to the detriment of justice and equity, and the search of one's own interest to the detriment of public goods are common behaviours that one can see here and there; the lack of loyalty and truthfulness, cheating and fraud are now dangerous public nuisances in our society; the misuse of authority for personal benefit, corruption and decadence are persistent and grave. If these problems are not addressed efficiently and in time, they will inevitably affect the smooth operation of both the economy and the social order, and they will jeopardize the stability of reforms and the policy of openness. This is why the Party and the whole society need to give close attention to these problems.<sup>28</sup>

This official description of contemporary troubles and issues exposes the concerns of the Chinese Communist Party regarding social upheavals and the social damages made by the irruption of a market economy in China. The issues are exclusively addressed in terms of (bad) morality, and the program concludes that "strengthening the construction of a morality for all citizens is a long-term, but also an urgent, task". In order to resolve social and moral issues, the program thus proposes to remind Chinese people of the difference between good and evil. It aims to clarify the idea of citizenship for the Chinese population, a citizenship that is essentially designed and articulated around morality and the implementation of "good moral standards" and good social practices, in order to create a correct "social atmosphere". The program underlines the "necessity to build a citizen morality", which is defined as "an essential part of an advanced culture"<sup>29</sup>. Supported by a "socialist spiritual *civilisation*" (*shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming* 社会主义精神文明), whose construction and implantation are apparently "taking place in a ideal way, positively and healthily (...) following in the footsteps of the substantial development of reforms, openness and modernisation of the country", the building of a citizen morality in this new millennium has already, according to the text, "moved up to a new level": "day after day, patriotism, collectivism and socialism are getting deeply into people's minds".<sup>30</sup> While it lauds the

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<sup>28</sup> "社会的一些领域和一些地方道德失范，是非、善恶、美丑界限混淆，拜金主义、享乐主义、极端个人主义有所滋长，见利忘义、损公肥私行为时有发生，不讲信用、欺骗欺诈成为社会公害，以权谋私、腐化堕落现象严重存在。这些问题如果得不到及时有效解决，必然损害正常的经济和社会秩序，损害改革发展稳定的大局，应当引起全党全社会高度重视". The text of this program actually sets the bases of the "harmonious society" and "eight honours and eight disgraces" (*barong bachi* 八荣八耻) programs to come respectively in 2005 and 2006.

<sup>29</sup> "公民道德建设的重要性", "发展先进文化的重要内容".

<sup>30</sup> "随着改革开放和现代化建设事业的深入发展，社会主义精神文明建设呈现出积极健康向上的良好态势，公

“undisputable” success of the “reforms and openness” policy of and modernisation in China, it also congratulates the fact that Chinese people are now unanimously seeking a “civilised and healthy way of life” – a way of life that is itself defined by the program.<sup>31</sup>

The text of the program concludes that “the moral excellence that comes from Chinese traditions along with new moral concepts embodying the requirements of our times are now well combined to shape the future of Chinese civic morality”.<sup>32</sup> This last section is very important, since it articulates two essential ideas that shape the idea of citizenship presented in the program (as well as in the “harmonious society” program to come): the Chinese traditional “moral excellence” (*meide* 美德), embodied by Confucianist values of abnegation and submission to the social order and to authority, combined with the need to face the “requirements of our times” (*shidai yaoqiu* 时代要求), a euphemism that refers to the newly-introduced market economy and its direct and/or collateral damage onto the Chinese social fabric. Citizenship is thereby theorised as the natural and obvious attitude to adopt to face the demands of modernity. To face contemporary social issues, the program argues for the necessity to promote a moral framework based on “the love of the country, obedience to the law, civility, honesty, unity, fraternity, abnegation, self-improvement, devotion to work, self-sacrifice” and on the effort “to raise the moral quality of the citizen”.<sup>33</sup> In the text, this moral framework to implement must be “adapted to socialist market economy”, and the Chinese population is invited to “support the reforms, the openness and the modernisation of China with a strong spiritual force and ideological guarantees”.<sup>34</sup>

This program does not blame social disruptions on the economic reforms launched decades ago nor on the capitalist economy that became particularly extreme in 1990s China, it rather locates the crux of the problem on the failure of Chinese people to integrate and apply these new rules, and therefore asks them to accompany modernisation with a better attitude and a “correct” (*zhengque* 正确) morality. This program is very clear on what should be done to solve contemporary social issues, for its conclusion mentions a specific definition of what citizen morality should be:

Love the country, love the people, love hard work, love science and love socialism, those are the fundamental requirements for the building and

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民道德建设迈出了新的步伐。爱国主义、集体主义、社会主义思想日益深入人心”。

<sup>31</sup> “文明、健康生活方式”。

<sup>32</sup> “中华民族的传统美德与体现时代要求的新的道德观念相融合，成为我国公民道德建设发展的主流”。

<sup>33</sup> “爱国守法、明礼诚信、团结友善、勤俭自强、敬业奉献”，“努力提高公民道德素质”。

<sup>34</sup> “与社会主义市场经济相适应”，“为改革开放和现代化建设提供强大的精神动力与思想保证”。

the implementation of a citizen morality, those are a moral obligation and a duty for every Chinese citizen.<sup>35</sup>

The “program to build and implement a citizen morality” is a new formulation of what Deng Xiaoping had called the “spiritual *civilisation*”, for it specifies in a new way a set of old and traditional moral rules that can be found in earlier official rhetoric, and intricately combines them with some key concepts such as *civilisation* (*wenming* 文明), morality (*daode* 道德), citizenship (*gongmin* 公民) and harmony (*hexie* 和谐). This combination produces a highly efficient tautological effect where all these concepts mutually legitimate and assert one another.

This comprehensive civilising moral code has been present in major Chinese cities since the 1990s through the “charters of *civilisation*” analysed above, but it has also been developed and extended in other forms, notably in the 2001 “program to build and implement a citizen morality” and the 2005 “harmonious society” program. The code was not simply internal, but was also aimed at improving external images of China. It encourages Chinese people to adopt high standards of morality and behaviour so that China may be seen as a *civilised* country. Since 2001 when China officially joined the World Trade Organisation, the Chinese Communist Party has tried to get the Chinese population to comply with (invented) globalised and international moral standards and social practices that a “normal” and “civilised” country should display. In Shanghai for instance, the city comity in charge of enhancing the “spiritual *civilisation*” of the Shanghainese launched in 2006 a “Seven civilised behaviours” campaign which asked people to “build a city ruled by law, politeness, trust and friendship, a healthy and educated city and where the environment is protected”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “爱祖国、爱人民、爱劳动、爱科学、爱社会主义作为公民道德建设的基本要求，是每个公民都应当承担的法律义务和道德责任”。The vague meaning of these moral and social standards (what does “love the people” exactly mean?) sets a kind of semantic fuzziness in which the Chinese Communist Party can fit, since it is common practice in China to officially address protesters or objectors with the accusation of “not loving the people” or “not loving the country” in order to dismiss their claims.

<sup>36</sup> This campaign, called “Civilised behaviours for Shanghai to welcome the World Expo – seven objectives to achieve” (*shanghai huan shibo wenming xingdong jihua – qijian mubiao* 上海迎世博文明行动计划-七建目标), was supposed to prepare Shanghainese people to welcome the 2010 World Fair in an appropriate way.



“Seven *civilised* behaviours  
More hygiene, let’s build a healthy city  
More trust, let’s build a trustful city”

Billboard for the “Seven *civilised* behaviours” campaign led by the Shanghai city committee in charge of enhancing spiritual *civilisation*.

Shanghai, 2006

This picture was taken in September 2006. A few days after, the mayor of Shanghai and Secretary of the Communist Party for Shanghai, Chen Liangyu, was dismissed for what has now become one of the biggest corruption scandals of the decade, involving, among others, the (not *civilised*) misappropriation of more than 3 billion Chinese RMB from the retirement funds of the city of Shanghai.<sup>37</sup>

So as we saw, *wenming* does not only imply good manners and good behaviour, it is also used to ascertain how to behave with others in order to build a “harmonious society” and shape the image of a civilised and globalised China capable of interacting with the world with high international and globalised standards. *Wenming* implies moral notions, defines morality and draws a line between what is correct and what is wrong, but it also shapes a comprehensive structure for the *homo harmonicus* to follow, a moral order to abide by, so that Chinese society may operate harmoniously and smoothly, without any disruption.

The photographs below show other meanings for the concept of *wenming*.

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<sup>37</sup> See Xinhua News Agency 新华社, “Shanghai party chief sacked for social security fund scandal”, *Xinhua.net* 新华网, on [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-09/25/content\\_5134994.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-09/25/content_5134994.htm), last accessed on January 10, 2011.



“Do not cross the street without care and caution”

“Do not dispose garbage without care and caution”

Civic public messages –  
Shanghai city committee in charge of enhancing spiritual *civilisation*.

Shanghai, 2006



“Do not swear, nor use rude or gross words”

Civic public messages –  
Shanghai city committee in charge of enhancing spiritual *civilisation*.

Shanghai, 2006

These signboards could be found in Shanghai bus stations in 2006. Under the description of the bus line, we can see slogans on green boards, issued by the Shanghai city committee in charge of enhancing spiritual *civilisation*. These aphorisms are advice for the good citizen to follow, and define a reasonable way of living together in a good, decent and healthy way. Garbage disposal and spitting on the ground are not healthy for the community, crossing the street should be done with care without jeopardizing anyone, and it is rude to swear and say gross words. These *wenming* aphorisms are



close to the meaning of the term civilisation, but the photograph below points to an additional dimension of the term *wenming*.



“Do not spit on the ground”  
“Speak mandarin”

Civic public messages –  
Shanghai city committee in charge of  
enhancing spiritual *civilisation*.

Shanghai, 2006

In Shanghai, the common language is Shanghainese (*shanghaihua* 上海话), spoken by some 80 million people. While mandarin Chinese (*putonghua* 普通话) is officially used throughout China as the national language, many regions or localities still use local languages, which are officially referred to as dialects. The close juxtaposition of the two injunctions “speak mandarin” and “don’t swear or say rude words” raises an interesting question regarding the representation of local dialects. It is possible to suggest that the juxtaposition insinuates that speaking Shanghainese, like spitting, is rude. More provocatively, it may be possible to infer that Shanghainese is a rude and gross language for official authorities. While this is of course a difficult point to argue, there is no denying that these civic aphorisms need to be questioned, for they oppressively assert that speaking Shanghainese is not *wenming*, and that it is somehow not appropriate to speak Shanghainese in Shanghai.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has explained that the creation of modern states creates the conditions for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, a market dominated by the official language that becomes a new linguistic norm.<sup>38</sup> But this new linguistic norm is a linguistic construction and an illusion serving a national project.<sup>39</sup> The construction of a common language was central to the implementation of the Chinese national project in the early years of the Republic of China (*zhonghua mingguo* 中华民国) since 1911 and then of the People’s Republic of China (*zhonghua renmin*

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p.71.

<sup>39</sup> John B. Thompson, “Préface”, in Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, p.13.

*gongheguo* 中华人民共和国) since 1949. It invented a homogeneous linguistic space, but also overcast and depreciated other cultural and social practices (in some cases, it quite simply folklorised them). Some specific linguistic practices were imposed as dominant, but this “victory” of the national language was made at the expense of other linguistic, cultural and social practices, which have come to be seen as minor and subaltern. In this context, *wenming* is not simply a matter of good manners, it is also about levelling out cultural and social diversity, it is about polishing out diversity so that the national language may become the norm. *Wenming* implies a hegemonic pattern, a leading model of what a *wenming* person should be: this does not only involve speaking a common language – *putonghua* 普通话, it’s also about being common – *putonghua* 普通化.

## Towards a *Civilised Harmonious Society*?

The meaning of a word is defined by the various ways in which it is used, and the meaning of the term *wenming* has changed throughout the twentieth century, accompanying modernity as it evolved in China from discussions of Western identity at the end of the nineteenth century to the idea of globalisation in the early 2000s.<sup>40</sup> As Nicholas Dynon has remarked, the repeated and excessive presence of the concept *wenming* in China from the early 1980s was mostly used to order, enact and promote some “criteria that are open to reinterpretation and change depending on the ideological policy emphasis at a given place and time”. In this light, the main point about *wenming* is not so much what it means, but what power stakes it conceals and serves.<sup>41</sup> As I have argued, the main idea in Deng Xiaoping’s “two *wenming*” program was to balance the development of “socialist” market economy (“material *wenming*”) with a constantly elusive concept of “spiritual *wenming*”, the latter being aimed at implementing the appropriate social, cultural, moral and psychological conditions for the former to operate efficiently. After the end of the Cultural revolution, Deng Xiaoping put “the economy back at the centre of Chinese policies” (*yi jingji wei zhongxin* 以经济为中心), and his “two *civilisations*” concept, with its combination of material and spiritual elements, both initiated the progressive “de-ideologisation” of Chinese official discourse and rhetoric, a process that became almost definitive in the

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<sup>40</sup> On modernity in China, see Florent Villard, *Le Gramsci chinois : Qu Qiubai, penseur de la modernité culturelle*, Lyon, Tigre de Papier, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Dynon, “‘Four Civilizations’ and the Evolution of Post-Mao Chinese Socialist Ideology”, *The China Journal*, n°60, July 2008, pp.97-98

1990s, and supported the new legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party based less on political ideals than economic achievements.

Nicholas Dynon has demonstrated that while “material *civilisation*” meant the development of the production and of the consumption of goods in order to bring Chinese people to the stage of material modernity and economic well-being,

spiritual civilization represented the modernization of the Chinese citizenry itself, focusing on moral, cultural and ideological “advancement”. Under the banner of spiritual civilization, the promotion of public morality (*gongde* 公德), patriotic spirit (*aiguo zhuyi jingshen* 爱国主义精神), collectivism (*jiti zhuyi* 集体主义) and the “four have” (*siyou* 四有 [ideals *lixiang* 理想, morality *daode* 道德, culture *wenhua* 文化 and discipline *jilü* 纪律]) were undertaken through a range of activities involving schools, work units, and Party and state organs.<sup>42</sup>

“Spiritual *civilisation*” was mainly about conditioning minds (and bodies). It was about instilling “a ‘proper’ commitment to both the market and the state, promoting an ethos of production and consumption that is market driven yet collectively oriented”.<sup>43</sup> It was about setting behavioural and moral rules by which Chinese citizens had to abide, echoing what Giorgio Agamben calls a “device”, that is, “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings”.<sup>44</sup> Devices seek to influence how one evolves in (public) space and behaves with others, but also how one thinks and what ideological perspectives frame individual thought. In the end, “spiritual *civilisation*” aims at instituting what Bourdieu calls a “corporeal hexis”, a “realised, *embodied*, political mythology, [that] has become a permanent arrangement, a sustainable way of standing, speaking, walking and, thereby, of *feeling* and *thinking*”.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of the “spiritual civilising” of Chinese people was to condition the minds (and social practices) in a way that was appropriate and favourable to the

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Dynon, “‘Four Civilizations’ and the Evolution of Post-Mao Chinese Socialist Ideology”, *The China Journal*, n°60, July 2008, p.88.

<sup>43</sup> Sara L. Friedman, “Embodying Civility: Civilizing Processes and Symbolic Citizenship in Southeastern China”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, n°3, vol.63, August 2004, p.702.

<sup>44</sup> “tout ce qui a, d’une manière ou d’une autre, la capacité de capturer, d’orienter, de déterminer, d’intercepter, de modeler, de contrôler et d’assurer les gestes, les conduites, les opinions et les discours des êtres vivants.”, Giorgio Agamben, *Qu’est-ce qu’un dispositif ?*, Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2007, p.30.

<sup>45</sup> “la mythologie politique réalisée, *incorporée*, devenue disposition permanente, manière durable de se tenir, de parler, de marcher, et, par là, de *sentir* et de *penser*”, Pierre Bourdieu, *Le Sens pratique*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, p.117.

development of the nation and its “socialist market economy”. As Anne-Marie Brady mentioned it, it was and still is a “form of social control, which is backed up by the law and police system” in a society destabilised by the intrusion of new modalities of existence.<sup>46</sup> A quarter of a century later, the “harmonious society” program launched in 2005 by Hu Jintao appears to be following the exact same steps.<sup>47</sup> It is the latest discursive strategy to date deployed by the Chinese Communist Party in order to encourage the Chinese to conform to the new rules of market economy and globalisation. Michel Foucault has explained that

for the population to be the basis of the wealth and the power of the State, the condition is that the population has to be framed by a whole regulatory apparatus that will prevent emigration, call for immigrants, promote birth rate, an apparatus that will also define which products are useful and exportable, that will determine the goods to produce, the ways to produce them, the wages, that will prohibit idleness and wandering. A whole apparatus that will (...) guarantee that this population will work in an appropriate way, in an appropriate place and will produce appropriate goods.<sup>48</sup>

The “harmonious society” is part of this “regulatory apparatus”, for it deploys rules and restrictions in order to guarantee that the Chinese population “will work in an appropriate way, in an appropriate place and will produce appropriate goods” by containing them in a specific spiritual and moral framework. In the original “harmonious society” program, Hu Jintao declared that “the building of ideological morality has to be seriously strengthened” and ascertained that “the harmony of a society and the capacity of a nation to implement a stable government in the long term and without any troubles highly depends on the moral quality of the members of this society”.<sup>49</sup> People therefore need to be educated so they may develop “an

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<sup>46</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*, p.117.

<sup>47</sup> Civic messages displayed on street billboards in China in 2006 called for the building of a “civilised harmonious society” (*wenming hexie shehui* 文明和谐社会).

<sup>48</sup> “que la population soit ainsi à la base et de la richesse et de la puissance de l’État, ceci ne peut se faire, bien sûr, qu’à la condition qu’elle soit encadrée par tout un appareil réglementaire qui va empêcher l’émigration, appeler les immigrants, favoriser la natalité, un appareil qui va aussi définir quelles sont les productions utiles et exportables, qui va fixer encore les objets à produire, les moyens de les produire, les salaires aussi, qui va interdire encore l’oisiveté et le vagabondage. Bref tout un appareil qui va (...) assurer que cette population travaillera comme il faut, où il faut et ce à quoi il faut.”, Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population : cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978*, Paris, Seuil/Gallimard, 2004, p.71.

<sup>49</sup> “切实加强思想道德建设”, “一个社会是否和谐, 一个国家能否实现长治久安, 很大程度上取决于全体社会成员的思想道德素质”.

indestructible trust into socialism with Chinese characteristics” while being trained to the rules of “the spirit of our times, centred on the reforms”.<sup>50</sup> To do so, and build a harmonious society, Hu Jintao asks for a vigorous and strong “implementation of a citizen morality” – a morality defined in the 2001 program studied above:

We have to massively develop public morality in Chinese society, ethics at work, and high moral standards in households; we have to promote in the whole society elementary principles of morality based on the love of the country, the obedience to the law, politeness, good manners, honesty, trustfulness, cohesion, fraternity, diligence, abnegation, self-improvement, respect for work and self-sacrifice. We have to cultivate good moral values and *civilised* habits and practices.<sup>51</sup>

Morality (*daode* 道德) and *wenming* are key elements of the “harmonious society” President Hu Jintao has encouraged, and we can discern the characteristics of the “new man” of twenty-first century China, the *homo harmonicus*: a civilised citizen, patriotic and respectful of the Chinese Communist Party and its policies, with a high moral quality (*suzhi* 素质), that is to say willing to sacrifice his/her own interests to serve the development of Chinese society with “abnegation” (*qinjian* 勤俭) and “self-sacrifice” (*fengxian* 奉献). “Harmonious society”, the “spiritual civilisation” and the “program to implement a citizen morality” are part of a global civilizing process initiated 30 years ago and addressing in particular the disadvantaged and underprivileged part of the Chinese population in order to encourage them to comply, as *civilised* citizen, with the rules of Chinese economic development.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “引导全体人民坚定中国特色社会主义信念”；“以爱国主义为核心的民族精神”；“改革创新为核心的时代精神”。The emphasis on “the spirit of our times” (*shidai jingshen* 时代精神) is a discursive strategy that confines and encases the individual in a fake duality, modernism versus “backwardism”, that prevents any critical thinking. In that way, resisting the reforms in China would be resisting “the spirit of our times”, and therefore display a “reactionary mind”, or “feudal thought” (*fengjian sixiang* 封建思想), both terms being currently opposed to modernity (*xiandai* 现代) in official rhetoric.

<sup>51</sup> “广泛开展社会公德、职业道德、家庭美德教育，在全社会倡导爱国守法、明礼诚信、团结友善、勤俭自强、敬业奉献的基本道德规范，培养良好的道德品质和文明风尚”。

<sup>52</sup> This idea of a lack of morality of the Chinese poor or underprivileged people is a well established discourse in China. In this discourse, the poor and uneducated are inevitably lacking high moral standards (and it is precisely this lack that still keeps China separate from the modern and civilised world), and they should be educated and civilised so that they may fit better into the growing modernity of China. Any resistance to it would be interpreted as a lack of morality and education – resistance is then seen as an expression of blindness and rudeness, not as expression of rejection and protest. There is a substantial literature in China on the topic of morality, such as the work of Chinese economist Mao Yuzhi, *Perspectives for the morality of Chinese people*, in which a whole chapter is dedicated to “rebuilding the Chinese people” (“再造中国人”). In the chapter, the author deconstructs the discourse surrounding Chinese people’s “morality crisis” that prevails in China and underlines the fact that “morality is a factor of stability for a modern

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, I would like to return to Beijing, where great decisions were taken in the name of *wenming*. As Anne-Marie Broudehoux has remarked, in September 1999, one month before the beginning of the October 1 festivities for the People's Republic of China's fifty-year anniversary, Beijing authorities expelled thousands of illegal residents in just one week.<sup>53</sup> The campaign specifically targeted those without official documents, without legal residence permits and without permanent incomes.<sup>54</sup> Broudehoux has rightly explained that

to enhance the capital's human environment and enforce social order, image construction efforts therefore included a series of social reform and public education campaigns which aimed to raise the citizenry to an acceptable level of sophistication. Actions were also taken to hide the most visible manifestations of the reform's failure to benefit all members of Chinese society. Signs of poverty and backwardness, or any visual blight which may question the success of the socialist market economy, were carefully camouflaged.<sup>55</sup>

And this is where the word *wenming* takes all its significance: when it comes to spectacle and image. We saw that *wenming* is not only about good manners and appropriate social behaviour; it is also about following a pattern of stipulations that leads to an ideal and perfect civic life. To be *wenming*, one should get rid of one's "bad minor" habits like speaking *Shanghainese*; to be *wenming*, cities, when required, also need to be rid of their "bad habits" like poverty, migrants and homeless people, to show the bright side of society only. So *wenming* involves a spectacle: it is about

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society" ("道德是现代社会的稳定剂"), see Mao Yushi 茅于軾, *Zhongguoren de daode qianjing* 中国人的道德前景, Guangzhou, Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2003, p.177. The title page of the book gets straight to the point with no ambiguity: just below the main title, *Perspectives for the morality of Chinese people*, and the author's dedication of the book "to all who feel concerned by the development of Chinese society" ("谨以此书献给所有关心中国社会发展的人们"), a black and white picture shows a line of migrant workers queuing up with packages and bundles. The amalgam is well set: the lack of morality of Chinese poor and peasant migrants interferes with the development of Chinese society and has to be solved by a moral education and a civilising process.

<sup>53</sup> Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing*, New York, Routledge, 2004, pp.178-179.

<sup>54</sup> 300,000 illegal residents had reportedly been expelled from the city.

<sup>55</sup> Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing*, pp.174-175.

displaying, showing and staging something that is made to appear *wenming*.<sup>56</sup> In the name of *wenming*, thousands of migrant workers were kindly asked to leave Beijing during the Olympic Games, when all construction fields were closed to prevent air pollution.<sup>57</sup> To present a smooth appearance during the Olympic Games, Beijing taxi drivers were asked to be perfectly shaved, Beijing people were asked not to show their bellies during the heat of the summer when wearing a shirt is unbearable.<sup>58</sup> In the name of *wenming*, the poor and the dirty had to be hidden to show the smooth and shiny face of the city, while other marginal communities were equally camouflaged, as can be seen in the closing of some gay bars during the Olympic Games.<sup>59</sup> Let us now try to answer the very first question of this paper: is it appropriate to translate *wenming* by *civilisation* or *civilised*? If we define civilisation as a levelling process of unification and standardisation, *wenming* is surely to be translated by *civilisation*, for it implies the promotion for a smooth, polished appearance, where poverty has to be hidden, so-called “minor” behaviours denied, and a model pattern followed. For *wenming* is first and foremost a controlling concept in an era of spectacle.

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<sup>56</sup> The concept of spectacle needs to be understood as in French theorist Guy Debord’s “society of spectacle” theory, see Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle*, London, Rebel Press, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Sky Canaves, “Beijing’s Olympic Cleanup Sends Migrants and Homeless Packing”, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 5, 2008, last accessed on <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121788405566611245.html> on January 10, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Lloyd de Vries, “Beijing Paper Wages War on Bellies: Runs Random Photos To Shame The Shirts Back On Topless Men”, *CBSNews*, July 9, 2002, last accessed on <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/07/09/summer/main514604.shtml> on January 10, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> This strategy of social beautification that aims to build and display a perfect image of Beijing is of course related here to both the spiritual *civilisation* program and the hosting of a major international event such as the Olympic Games, for major events help, support and legitimate the spiritual *civilisation* program.

FROM LOCAL CONTROL TO GLOBALISED CITIZENSHIP:  
THE CIVILISING CONCEPT OF WENMING IN OFFICIAL CHINESE RHETORIC

THOMAS BOUTONNET



“Let’s implement the economic development strategy of the capital”

– a clear example of “material civilisation”

Political/civic public messages –  
Preparation to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

Beijing, 2006





# Beyond Chinese Calligraphy? Identity and Subjectivity in Modern Taiwanese Calligraphy as Seen in the Work of Hsu Yung-chin and Chen Shi-hsien

CHEN FANGHWEY

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What has become of Chinese calligraphy? How can the ancient Chinese art of calligraphy express our feelings and vision in the digital era we live in today? This was my starting point. This analysis looks at the present and the future of Chinese calligraphy, in particular, how Chinese calligraphy took root and developed in Taiwan. First, I will compare the difference between two crucial artistic movements that took place both in Taiwan and in China since 1980. After, I will compare two modern Taiwanese calligraphists, Hsu Yung-chin and Chen Shi-hsien, highlighting Taiwanese identity and subjectivity in their work. With reference to Fabienne Verdier's work, where art is inspired directly from Chinese calligraphy, our purpose here is to center the subject on the following question: Is Chinese calligraphy a Chinese specificity or will calligraphy become a universal art, that is to say a medium of expression, like any other?

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## Getting the Picture Right

If we were to ask ourselves what is, or what has Chinese calligraphy become today, *Xiandai shufa* 现代书法, or "modern calligraphy" if you will in English, comes immediately to mind. This major movement of contemporary Chinese art, which started in the 1980s, questions the ancient Chinese art which had remained unchanged for three thousand years. The Association of calligraphists of China (*Zhongguo shufajia xiehui* 中国书法家协会), which was created in 1980, prepared the path of change for the

core of Chinese traditional fine art, after the loosening of maoist cultural policy. The movement was officially activated by the 85 New Wave (*bawu xinchao* 八五新潮), in particular. Modern calligraphy, inspired by Western art, especially by painting and conceptual art, reunited finally, after much effort, with the artistic research of the Chinese in their quest for modernity dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century. After all the persecution and the ban of this art during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government has now chosen this “deprived” art, which was considered a decadent symbol of “the old society” at that time, as the emblem at the heart of its Chinese culture renaissance campaign. At the crossroads of the twenty-first century, Chinese calligraphy, be it traditional or modern, is now under the spotlight, contrary to what was declared in the past. Chinese modern calligraphy, in a global perspective since the movement has been recognized by the authorities, plays an enormous role in China, which is reconstructing its devastated identity, after more than a century of “modernisation” imposed by the West.

## Modern Calligraphy and Modernity

What is modern calligraphy? The designation of “modern” seems curious, out-of-date even, knowing that this contemporary calligraphic movement is barely two decades old. Why is this detour of “modern” necessary in front of the almighty Other, that is to say, the West? Why designate, yet again, hot, breaking artistic news, with the word “modern” at the end of the twentieth century? Of course, seen from China, the term “modern” or “modernity”, is cause for confusion and thereby conflict, as it happened in the West as well. By confronting the conception of Western modernity to their own tradition, the expression “modern” has become the place and the stakes of fundamental conflicts that have driven the Chinese for over a century. This is where the conflict is based, in all domains between tradition and evolution, between China and its reactions after contact with the West. Generally speaking, the term “modern” or “modernity”, for the Chinese, means to learn the modern of the West, and to change traditional Chinese society by way of Western methods, despite all the meanings and the strategies that the word has provoked. For the revolutionary calligraphists of the mid-eighties, the expression does not only signify the return of this idea, but also, of the declaration of belonging to the movement of “modern Chinese fine art” (*zhongguo xiandai meishu* 中国现代美术) which started much earlier in China.

For about twenty years, in an experimental frenzy<sup>1</sup>, this movement has gained terrain in the art world, and has become the heart of the cultural strategy of the Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> The question here is about the calligraphic movement designated as modern. Again, with respect to the Chinese experience of history: will this “modernity” put forward new solutions to problems between

government. Contrary to the total negligence of the first decade, Chinese academies have supported these works of art financially since 2001, with exhibitions and official publications. About ten years after its beginnings, modern calligraphy is no longer a real subject of controversy in China. Critiques have only to define the workings and the styles of this art, organized now in a global, and even post-modern perspective. Now, part of the Chinese contemporary art world (*zhongguo dandai yishu* 中国当代艺术), the phenomenon of “modern calligraphy”, is a vibrant cultural, and political current affair in China. Where is this art, which is synonymous with Chinese culture going? Is this campaign about un-sinisation or re-sinisation (*qu zhongguohua* 去中国化, *zai zhongguohua* 再中国化)? The debate continues to rage.

## Identity and Subjectivity in Modern Taiwanese Calligraphy

In Taiwan, the history of calligraphy is not the same. It must be specified from the start that there are different titles of “modern calligraphy” in Taiwan. *Xiandai shuyi* 現代書藝 (modern calligraphy) proposed by the Ink Tide Society (*maochaohui* 墨潮會) in 1983, was the first to put modernized calligraphy forward. Indeed the use of the term “*shuyi*” corresponds better to the spirit and esthetics of this Chinese art, whereas the word “*shufa*”, which is used today, does not<sup>2</sup>. The other expressions used to designate this modernist movement of Chinese calligraphy are respectively *Shiyan shufa* 實驗書法 (experimental calligraphy) and *Shuxie yishu* 書寫藝術 (the art of writing). This demonstrates that the field of experimentation of Chinese calligraphy in Taiwan is divided into very diverse groups, and then, divided by individuals. In comparison to China, the movement in Taiwan is far from being a campaign to promote a sort of “cultural nationalism”. One could describe it as a guerilla war led by the calligraphists themselves.

Considering themselves as conservators of Chinese culture, the Nationalist Party headed the movement of cultural renaissance on the island in response to the Cultural Revolution on the continent at that time. Contrary to what was happening in China, Chinese calligraphy was therefore, an excellent tool of assimilation of Chinese culture, imposed in the system of education in Taiwan. Yet, the hope for change in Chinese calligraphy started very early in Taiwan, despite cultural, and in particular, political obstacles. The idea of “taking calligraphy for painting” (*yishuwei hua* 以書為畫) had

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tradition and transformation, and between art and society, or, will it be regimented, once again, by the nationalist vision of the country, as it was during the entire twentieth century?

<sup>2</sup> The term *shudao* 書道 used in Japan is, in fact, the best term to designate this Chinese art, which is an aesthetic as well as a spiritual practice. And the English translation “Chinese calligraphy” can not fully translate the sense and the spirit of the art of the stroke either. But this is another subject.

already been promoted in 1961 by the “revolutionary calligraphist” (*geming shujia* 革命書家), Wang Zhuang-wei 王壯為, the Chinese calligraphist based in Taiwan after the withdrawal of the Nationalist Party from the continent. During his visit to Japan in 1962, Wang Zhuang-wei was fascinated by “New calligraphy” (*xin shufa* 新書法)<sup>3</sup>, which was created in the 1930s, and was already quite strong in the 1950s in Japan. The pictoriality of this new calligraphy touched him profoundly. The call for the “modernisation” of Chinese calligraphy was thus realised after his return to Taiwan. There were even some famous calligraphists who shared the same ideas, Wang Fang-yu 王方宇 and Xiong Bing-ming 熊秉明, for example. “Out-law traditional Chinese calligraphy” (*shufa wufa* 書法無法) the motto of Shi Zi-chan 史紫忱 is representative of the spirit of those revolutionary calligraphists who wanted to bring that thousand-year-old art up to date. Whereas other modernist movements of the time on the island were successful, in literature, painting, etc, the modernisation of Chinese calligraphy had practically no impact. It was only until 1976 that the Ink Tide Society brought the desire of change back to life. Due to the radical change, in all domains, that Taiwanese society is undergoing, the calligraphists of the Ink Tide Society no longer accept to continue writing according to the rules. They want to re-interpret calligraphy with respect to the present, that is to say, transform it to express life and the aesthetic of modern times. Especially after the lifting of martial law, these rebel calligraphists explored even more freely the multiple possibilities offered by this new era, with respect to both substance and form. Indeed lively controversy followed such daring experimentation. And the creation of the exhibition “*Chuangshi* calligraphy — The Biennial of tradition and experimentation” (*chuangshi shuyi — chuantong yu shiyan shuangnianzhan* 創時書藝 — 傳統與實驗雙年展) which took place for the first time in Taipei in 1991, constitutes the most outstanding event on the path of new ideas and creativity. Since then, a growing number of calligraphists have taken part in the exhibition, and, modern calligraphy has its place in Taiwan.

In summary, the modernization of Chinese calligraphy in Taiwan is not just a response to the interior impossibility of this art, that feelings can not be expressed in our digital era, but it is also a response to the great historic changes in Taiwan. Against the modernised painting of the 1930s, promoted by the Japanese colonial regime, the newly-arrived US-backed Nationalists imposed their version of modernized painting in the 1950s. The success of this type of modern abstract painting was great during the 50s and the 60s in Taiwan, and this style is echoed in Zhao Wu-ji’s (趙無極) and Zhu De-qun’s (朱德群) work, who were both in France at that time. The creation of new ideas (*chuangxin* 創新) in order to express the spirit of the time was the main reference of the art world at that time. One could even consider this example of pictorial

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<sup>3</sup> It is called “avant-garde calligraphy” (前衛書道) as well, or “Chinese ink image” (墨象).

Taiwanese modernity as part of the global movement of lyric abstraction which grew simultaneously in France and in the United States in the 1950s. Modern Taiwanese calligraphy was inspired by both the pictorial success that makes contact with the outside world and the *bentu zeitgeist* after the lifting of martial law. The movement of modern Taiwanese calligraphy, mainly by the Ink Tide Society in 1992, was an oscillation between tradition and modernity, between identity and universality. Contrary to the nativist literature of the 1960s, it is the concept of modernity which curiously nourishes the idea of “terroir”<sup>4</sup>. Here, the two rather opposite concepts find their strange point of convergence.

And so, a new theme, the theme of memory or of history, diffuses itself for the first time in the domain of calligraphy. Driven by the desire to find an artistic style that corresponds to a new and ever-evolving social imaginary structure, the modernist calligraphists started asking themselves questions about this art, and its limits, and what Taiwan is today. Certain calligraphists then started to create a dialogue with Taiwan which they had never thought of as a subject. By modernising their calligraphic work, that is to say, with a certain technique, an idea inspired by the West, they discovered and described the earth and the life that surrounded them. If we speak of the identity and subjectivity of Taiwanese calligraphy here, it is to accentuate the double conscience of Taiwanese calligraphists in regards to art and society, at the same time. The crux of the matter is to pin-point the particular aspect of this movement which is so closely linked to the political and cultural upheavals of Taiwanese society, conflicts caused in the name of identity and ethnicity. This ancient art would take on its most current aspect, and would mark the most direct relationship it has with politics on the path of modernisation. From this moment on, Chinese calligraphy has taken root in the land of Taiwan and has found its Taiwanese-ness. In order to know this modern phenomenon better, two very different calligraphists must be mentioned, both have the common theme of memory or history in their modern calligraphic creations: one is Hsu Yung-chin (徐永進), the other, Chen Shi-hsien (陳世憲).

### The example of Hsu Yung-chin: Reformist and Nomad

Considered by some critics as one of the leaders of traditional Taiwanese calligraphy, Hsu Yung-chin is also seen as a ground-breaking member of the Ink Tide Society in 1976. But only in 1993 did he change his orientation with willful determination. The piece, entitled “Wandering, Strength, Hurricane” (*piaobo chuandang kuangbiao* 漂泊闖蕩狂飆) (fig.1), marked a turning point in Hsu Yung-chin’s career. It was a pivotal

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<sup>4</sup> In literature, it is about the same subject. The two concepts, being no longer opposites, blended, bearing the vision of a “new terroir” (*xinxiangtu* 新鄉土), as seen in the work of Wu He (舞鶴), for example.

piece, conceptually and formally, critically acclaimed, both in Taiwan and in China, after 30 years of constancy and performance in the classical sphere. Inspired by historical experience and by the over-zealous dynamism of the Taiwanese economy, Hsu Yung-chin illustrates, through extremely dense and finely-shaded lines that are fed by a unique dynamic, the chaotic and neurotic trajectory of Taiwanese society. Physical strength and speed of execution are needed to create the explosive nature of this piece. This is how the artist liberates himself in a double movement, shamelessly declaring his link to traditional heritage and, at the same time, adopting contemporary ideas. The two poles of artistic expression are inserted and re-interpreted against the challenges of a tumultuous social present.

His work catches Taiwanese society as it is, on extremely diverse subjects, such as the earthquake in 1991, the landslide which ravaged the south of Taiwan, and the corruption of the government with the mafia. A series of pieces about Taiwanese history ensued. Some among the many pieces that he created after that turning point in his career, can be mentioned. Again in 1993, "Elegy to the Crossing to Taiwan" (*dutai beige* 渡台悲歌) (fig.2) bears witness to his reflexion on the origin of his ancestors. Some lyrics of the poem are presented as if the writing was hit by disaster and the danger of the crossing. The calligraphist then rips certain pieces of the rice paper that is glued over red material in order to show "the tears of blood" (*xielei* 血淚) that had been shed during those historical events. In 2000, he created a piece "From China to Taiwan" (*tangshan guo taiwang* 唐山過台灣) (fig.3) which represents yet again the tragic crossing of Chinese immigrants to Taiwan. The creation is marked by an extreme contrast between two types of juxtaposed writing: in the background there is traditional writing of the text of Su Dong-bo 蘇東波, that is to say, refined and elegant, symbolizing the esthetic and spiritual value of this Chinese art; meanwhile, on the surface, violent lines, betraying the classical norms, depict the painful voices of an episode of the history of that wave of immigration. The great tension between the two styles shows the inextricable rapport between the past and the present, between tradition and modernity in his modern creations.

Hsu Yung-chin exploits traditional expression with a modern spirit. His modern calligraphy bears witness to a society in the midst of hybridization, a society trying to define and reform itself.

## The example of Chen Shi-hsien: Revolutionary and Nativist

Like the majority of calligraphists who want to modernise traditional calligraphy, Chen Shi-hsien is on a quest, which is as formal as it is political, using Chinese calligraphy as a medium, or more specifically as a strategy<sup>5</sup>. After a decade of reclusion in the country, he developed his own style of “modern” by using Chinese calligraphy as an art devoted to the land and to its people. By making Chinese calligraphy the instrument of his creation, the Taiwanese calligraphist updates this ancient art in a most contemporary confrontation. A series of work “The Events of February 28” (*ererba shijian* 二二八事件) recalls another aspect of the history of the island in comparison with the piece by Hsu Yung-chin mentioned above. The Taiwanese people became almost mute from the shock of the events of February 28. They had been suddenly forbidden to speak and to think by the Nationalists. “Forbidding Speech Engenders Mutism” (*jinsheng bianya* 噤聲變啞) (fig.4) and “Accumulating Superposing” (*duidie* 堆疊) (fig.5), these two pieces show their feelings of frustration and incomprehension. The massacres of the past of the island, symbolised here (fig.6) by red, are a plea for justice and equality for the society of tomorrow.

First, he questions Chinese calligraphy in its current reason of being, like most modern calligraphists. Second, he confronts it from inside with political stakes in mind by inventing a “Taiwanese calligraphy”. That is how he developed his politically-active artistic vision. He wants to “Taiwanise” this art, which is the emblem, and even the essence of Chinese cultural identity. His work, therefore, is essentially about the life of people living in the land of Taiwan. His attempt to go back to the people and the land helps him create a particular universe: through his work, Chen Shi-hsien is hoping to define himself, and he links himself to a specific geographical space, his native land — the town of Baihe (白河), a rural county of Tainan. He presents Baihe as an immobile space, like a spring, where lotus flowers of the county, thanks to their shape and colours, have become his motif of preference in his creative universe, the centre of his universe. He takes Chinese characters, which he then alters into images, thus calligraphy is transformed into painting. In other words, the meaning is more than suggested by the image, it is consubstantial to the image. His two pieces “Star, Tear, Flower” (*xing lei hua* 星淚花) (fig7) and “Zen” (*chan* 禪) (fig.8) are perfect examples.

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<sup>5</sup> Xu Bing (徐冰), Gu Wen-da (谷文达) and Wu Shang-zhuan (吴山专) are Chinese artists living abroad. All three convey political messages in their modern calligraphic work, each in their own particular way.



The outcome of the confrontation of Taiwanese society has taken shape, in the form of painted calligraphy coming out of the land. For Chen Shi-hsien, poetry, if it can be called as such, is the poetry of every day life in the country-side. Rural life is elevated to the level of a form of beauty that struggles against the unrest of a life alienated from its origins and its time. By challenging his "Chinese" identity, Chen Shi-hsien builds a resilient personal universe through Chinese calligraphy: paradoxical, yet possible after experiencing colonisation. The art of Chen Shi-hsien bears witness to this dynamic and resistant mimicry of violent transculturation.

### **As a Conclusion: Beyond Chinese Calligraphy?**

If politics is not at the heart of the creations of Hsu Yung-chin, it could be said so for Chen Shi-hsien. Of course, Hsu Yung-chin is aware of politics, but he only touches the subject from the outside. However, politics play a decisive role in the work of Chen Shi-hsien. From China to Taiwan, Chinese calligraphy is questioned by Taiwanese calligraphists. It has even become a medium of expression of the unrest, the conflict, and the adaptation of the Taiwanese. This genre, traditionally considered an elitist and spiritual discipline in China, was finally adopted as a medium in itself by artists of a different culture. Like in China or elsewhere, sinicized Asian society has proved it so. The two Taiwanese calligraphists in question have a common goal to take the nobility out of this art by taking it off of its pedestal. Far from being simply aesthetic, the claims of Taiwanese-ness play a part in politics. The debate is now open.

On the other hand, from China to the West, the question must be asked in a different way. Chinese calligraphy accompanies the questions of avant-garde artists of the West during the entire twentieth century. The above-mentioned case of lyric abstraction in the 1950s is an example. The French leader of this movement, Georges Mathieu, claimed that he was continuing the legacy of the ancient Chinese masters like Hui Su 懷素 and Zhang Xu 張旭, although his work was never considered by the Chinese as calligraphy. The most contemporary and most well-known example is perhaps that of Fabienne Verdier. While belonging to Western contemporary art, her work is directly related to Chinese calligraphy. The corpus of her work is double-faceted, it is between two different artistic traditions. Her world-wide success leads us to wonder if Chinese calligraphy would come back in fashion, as a "modern" medium, in the sense of "new possibilities" or "aspirations". Will it inspire the contemporary art world? And would it even inspire the Chinese who, during almost 30 years, had been prevented from using Old Society calligraphy? Since the end of the twentieth century, the Chinese themselves have been discovering and are still discovering the novelty of calligraphy through the eyes of foreigners.

Going back to China, the destiny of Chinese calligraphy is two-fold. On the one hand, thanks to government support, traditional calligraphy is experiencing a renaissance, however limited, by countless contests and clubs. On the other hand, the elitist movement of modern calligraphy, also funded by the authorities, completely integrates it in Western contemporary art, and often transforms it into painting, even associating it with collage, installation and action art. For the Chinese, it is a great chance, among others, to introduce Chinese art to the international market. This ancient cult art of Chinese calligraphy has become an art of exhibition, in other words, stakes of culture and identity today in China. The question is, will it have a future as a particular genre of Chinese art? Or rather, will it become a universal art, that is to say, will it evolve into a form of medium of expression? Modern calligraphy, being polymorphous and polysemic, entails freedom without reins using a classical Chinese base in this contemporary era. Could its future become one of the great artistic adventures of the twenty-first century?



Figure 1 Hsu Yung-chin, *Wandering, Strength, Hurricane*



*Figure 2 Hsu Yung-chin, Elegy to the Crossing to Taiwan*



■ 唐山過台灣 書法 2000 35×400 cm×3

Figure 3 Hsu Yung-chin , From China to Taiwan

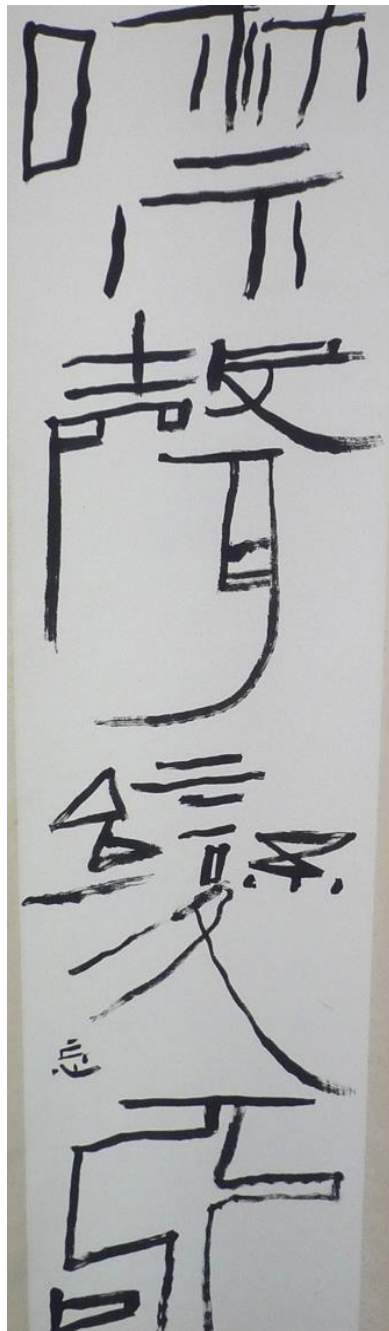
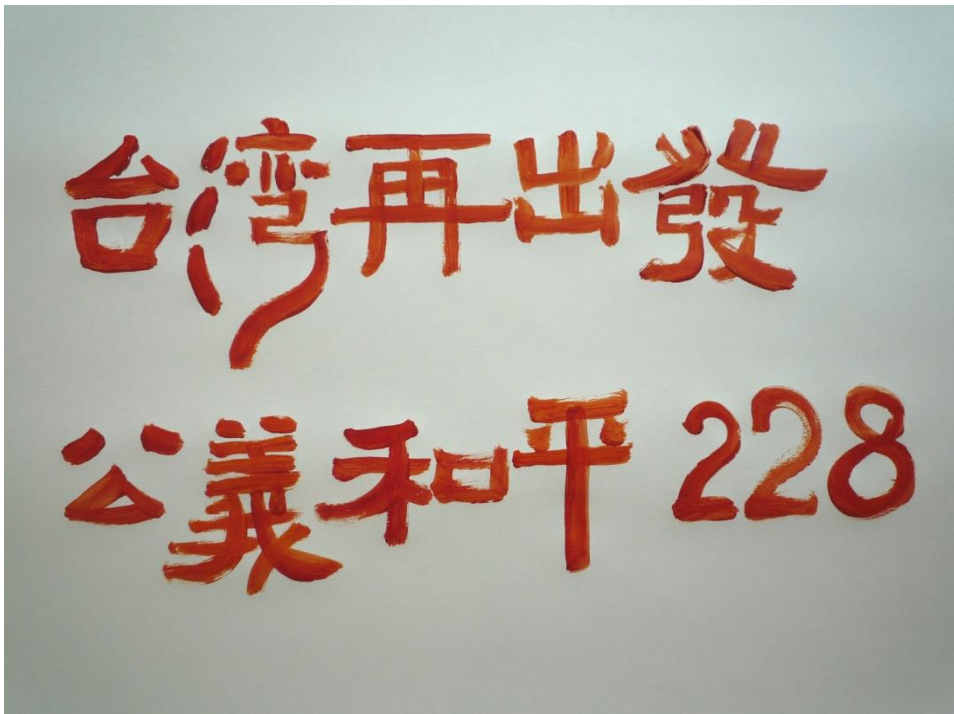


Figure 4 Chen Shi-hsien, *Forbidding Speech Engenders Mutism*



*Figure 5 Chen Shi-hsien, Accumulating Superposing*



*Figure 6 Chen Shi-hsien, Rebirth of Taiwan Now, Remember February 28 through Peace and Justice*





Figure 7 Chen Shi-hsien, Star, Tear, Flower



Figure 8 Chen Shi-hsien, Zen



# Aborigines in Contemporary Taiwanese Film: Mirror or Hammer?

VANESSA FRANGVILLE

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This paper looks into contemporary Taiwanese films on Aborigines directed by non-Aborigines. The main point here is to demonstrate how minority groups are used as figures of «otherness» to explore the anxieties and expectations of the majority group, and how this results in misrepresentations and under-representations. Indeed, film is a medium that not only constructs people's mental image of Aborigines, but that also reflects the collective state of mind of modern Taiwanese society. First of all, this paper will give some essential details about modern Taiwanese society's classifications into four ethnic groups. Then, it will briefly introduce the three films selected for this article, as well as an overview of the political and economic context of the film industry in which they were produced and released. Thirdly, the essay will move on to discuss the implications of such representations of Aborigines in more depth.

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The Republic of China, Taiwan, is often seen from the West, as the champion of democracy in the Chinese-speaking world. The semi-presidential system and the recovery of the freedom of speech were very efficient to establish and maintain this reputation. However, just like any other democracy, Taiwan is facing various paradoxes and difficulties resulting from its complex history, after four decades of Martial Law (1949-1987) and fifty years of colonisation (1895-1945). The role of Aborigines in the cultural heritage and in the construction of a modern Taiwanese nation is one of the key questions that contemporary Taiwanese society has to

settle. This paper looks closely at cultural “mass production” on Taiwanese Aborigines as one of the best indicators, though not the only one and hopefully not the most representative, of what non-Aborigines consumers “should see” and, by extension, “should think” about Aborigines in Taiwanese society.

## Taiwanese Zuqun and Modern Ethnic Classification

Before the 1980s, there was no specific term to express differentiation within Taiwanese society. Distinctions were generally made according to “province origins” (notably *waishengren* 外省人- “born out of Taiwan” and *benshengren* 本省人- “born in Taiwan”), and Aborigines were referred to as “zu” 族 since the Japanese era.<sup>1</sup> The term *zuqun* 族群 was introduced by Taiwanese anthropologists and replaced “zu” from the 1980s. *Zuqun* was defined and used in contrast with *minzu* 民族, which was widely used in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).<sup>2</sup> While *minzu* was approached as an artificial category based on scientific classifications lacking consideration for peoples’ actual feeling of solidarity and common social interests, *zuqun* was said to describe a “natural”, “innate”, “primordial” cohesion of a group of individuals sharing common interests and able to develop an ethno-political movement.<sup>3</sup> Although this distinction is not my main point here, I would like to suggest that the emotional and subjective feature associated with the concept of *zuqun* must not conceal the political and economic strategies that also lead people to gather, reorganise and reinvent collective memories and practices ‘nature’ has actually little to do with.<sup>4</sup> Since the aboriginal status is linked with land rights and

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<sup>1</sup> Aborigines were commonly called “*shandi tongbao*” 山地同胞 (compatriot from the mountains) or *shanbao* 山胞 that referred to the category of *gaoshan zu* 高山族 (ethnic group from the mountains) used in the PRC to depict Taiwanese Aborigines, as opposed to *pingbu zu* 平部族 (ethnic group from the plains). The mountain/plain opposition also suggested the dichotomy non-assimilated or savage versus assimilated and civilised populations. Therefore, from 1994, the term *shanbao* was banned from official discourse and documents and clearly became a pejorative term not to say an insult. See Fiorella Allio, « La construction d’un espace politique austronésien », in *Perspectives chinoises*, n. 47, 1998, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> The term *minzu*, from the Japanese *minzoku*, was limited to the Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*) and the ‘ethnic Chinese’ (*hanren minzu*), but rarely used for differentiation within the Taiwanese society itself.

<sup>3</sup> Anthropologist Xie Shizhong proposed a eight-point list of the main differences between *minzu*, an etically determined group and *zuqun*, an ethnically determined group. See Xie Shizhong 謝世忠, “Zuqun guanxi - yi ge zhishi shang de liaojie 族群關係 一個知識上的了解” (Ethnic Relations: An Intellectual Interpretation), in *Yuanzhumin wenhua gongzuozhe tianye shiyong shouce* 2 原住民文化工作者田野使用手冊 2, 1995, pp.107-40.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Michael Rudolph demonstrates how the extensive work of the aboriginal elite in displaying and reasserting the values of aboriginal religions and practices is not always shared by ordinary people from the same group. See Michael Rudolph, “Nativism, Ethnic Revival, and the Reappearance of Indigenous Religions in the ROC - The Use of the Internet in the Construction of

governmental subsidies, individual and collective applications for recognition of belonging to a distinct aboriginal group also reflect economic and political motivations more than natural and emotional connections between people.

The “ethnic turning point” in Taiwan occurred in the late 1980s, when the concept of “Taiwan’s four great *zuqun*” (*Taiwan si da zuqun* 台灣四大族群) was introduced to recognise differences in social experiences and cultures, but also to set common historical grounds and thus common political interests.<sup>5</sup> The four *zuqun* include Hoklo (*fulaoren* 福佬人), Hakka (*kejia* 客家人), Mainlanders (外省人 *waishengren*) and Aborigines or Indigenous (*yuanzhumin* 原住民). Each *zuqun* is divided into different subgroups from various economic, geographical or linguistic backgrounds. Fourteen groups of Aborigines were recognised from the era of Japanese colonisation to 2008, and about eleven other groups claim official recognition.<sup>6</sup>

As part of the nation-building project of the Republic of China (ROC), the Aboriginal issue has been central in the process of identity formation and the construction of an alternative cultural memory in Taiwan after 1990.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Aborigines could support the construction and the development of an “authentic” and “unique” Taiwanese culture distinct from Mainland China, but they could articulate the new democratic and multicultural policy promoted after the lifting of Martial Law.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Taiwanese Aborigines became largely visible in all media, backed up by Taiwan’s Aboriginal People’s Movement (*Taiwan Yuanzhumin shehui yundong* 台灣原住民社會運動) to preserve and promote aboriginal cultures.<sup>9</sup>

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Taiwanese Identities”, in *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 2.1, 2006. This gap between official and elite-controlled demonstrations and common people’s experiences is also mentioned by Melissa Brown in regards to her fieldwork in Taiwan between 1992 and 1994. See Melissa Brown, “On Becoming Chinese”, Melissa Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, London, Routledge Curzon, 1996, pp. 37-74.

<sup>5</sup> On the concepts of *zuqun* and “Taiwan’s four *zuqun*”, see Wang Fuchang 王甫昌, *Dangdai Taiwan shehui de zuqun xiangxiang*, 當代臺灣社會的族群想像 (Ethnic Imagination in Contemporary China), Taipei, Qunxue, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> The Sediq are the last group to have been officially recognised in 2008.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Rudolph, “The Emergence of the Concept of ‘Ethnic Group’ in Taiwan and the Role of Taiwan’s Austronesian in the Construction of Taiwanese Identity”, conference paper for the “Workshop on Modern Chinese Historiography and Historical Thinking”, University of Heidelberg, May 27, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> See Allen Chung, “Democracy as Hegemony, Globalization as Indigenization, or the ‘Culture’ in Taiwanese National Politics”, in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2000, 35-7, pp.7-27. Allen Chung argues that “the dual policy of market liberalisation and ethnic indigenisation (...) had as its goal a new kind of hegemony that could co-opt the interest of a cultural China and a Taiwanese renaissance.”

<sup>9</sup> Launched in 1984, this social movement tackled the problems experienced by aboriginal

## Taiwanese Aborigine-Related Films and National Identity

Over the past twenty years, there has been growing international sympathy for indigenous cultures and histories as well as the emergence of Aborigine-related film, from *Dances with Wolves* in the USA in 1990 to *Australia* in 2008. At the same time, aboriginal film festivals have been held in Canada, Finland, Nepal or Australia. In Taiwan, the revival of aboriginal cultures in the 1990s also appeared in the cinematographic industry. Representations of Aborigines in Taiwanese film from the era of Japanese colonisation to the twenty-first century have been extensively analysed in the last twenty years by Taiwanese scholars.<sup>10</sup> They show how politics largely influenced the representation of Aborigines, from a colonial perspective on “savage” and “uneducated” aboriginal peoples to more sympathetic points of view that were not necessarily exempt from primitivism and exoticism. After the liberalisation in 1987, political issues and historical reminiscence were further explored in Taiwanese cinema, especially in the Taiwanese New Wave Cinema.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, aborigines-related films and documentaries enjoyed a new boom. However, cinematic production in Taiwan was and is still mostly dominated by non-Aborigines and, to varying degrees, Aborigines-related movies remain problematic in the representations of indigenous peoples.

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communities in the ROC (poverty, discrimination, criminality...). Over the last 20 years, this movement has had many demands, including the restitution of Aboriginal names (they were strongly encouraged to use Japanese names under Japanese rule and Chinese names under Nationalist rule, for administrative purposes), the return of Aboriginal lands, Aboriginal self-determination.

<sup>10</sup> See of instance Yuan Zaiyu 原載於, “Jin yibai nian lai Taiwan dianying ji dianshi dui Taiwan yuanzhumin de chengxian 近一百年來台灣電影及電視對台灣原住民的呈現” (Representations of Aborigines in Taiwanese Film and Television over the Last Hundred Years), in *Dianying yinshang*, n. 69, 1994. Aborigine-related films in Taiwan before 1990 and the evolution of their representations have been examined by Chen Lizhu 陳麗珠 in her Master’s degree’s dissertation. She distinguishes four major periods: a first period (1945-1964) clearly imbued with Han colonialism bringing civilisation to the “savage” Aborigines; a second one from 1965-1975 similar to the first one in objectifying ‘passive’ Aborigines; a third one (1976-1987) during which sympathy with endangered aboriginal traditions is shown while common clichés are maintained; the last period starting from 1987 shows the revival of interest in aboriginal cultures as “primitive” cultures and as a door to a lost “paradise” in the modern era. See Chen Lizhu 陳麗珠, *Taiwan dianying zhong yuanzhumin xingxiang zhi yanjiu - lunshu gongye xia de tazhe tuxiang 台灣電影中原住民形象之研究—論述工業的它者圖像* (Research on the Images of Aborigines in Taiwanese Cinema – A Discussion of the Image of the ‘Other’ in the Industry), Zhongguo wenhua daxue, xinwen yanjiusuo shuoshi lunwen, 1997. Yang also traces back the representations of Aborigines in film from the Japanese colonisation era to the twenty-first century in her Master’s degree’s dissertation. See Yang Huanhong 楊煥鴻, *Tazhe bu xiangying - Taiwan dianying zhong de yuanzhumin yingxiang 他者不顯影—台灣電影中的原住民影像*, Guoli Donghua Daxue, Minzu fazhan yanjiusuo, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> On the New Taiwanese cinema movement, see Douglas Kellner, “New Taiwan Cinema in the 1980s”, in *Jump Cut*, n. 42, 1998, pp. 101-115. See also Charlyne Chien-Lin Tsou, “New Taiwanese Cinema: a Critical Analysis”, Master’s degree, California State University, School of Arts and Humanities, 1992.

This paper will focus on three narrative-feature movies. There are two main reasons why these three movies were selected. Firstly, unlike many Taiwanese movies that are limited to public television and art houses in Taipei or local festivals, these productions were released in DVD format and were largely promoted by major media companies when not directly funded by government and large media corporations. They target a large audience of every age and social background including Taiwanese but also international audiences. Two of them were showed in international film festivals; and English titles, synopsis and subtitles are included in the DVD of the Taiwanese version.<sup>12</sup> They do have some appeal in and out of Taiwan.

Secondly, they are not only part of the entertainment industry in Taiwan, but can also be included in Taiwanese “national cinema” (*guopian* 國片).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, these movies contribute to a national identity and memory as they construct and reinforce a national imaginary.<sup>14</sup> Not all of these movies clearly mark their status as part of a national cinema, but all of them are part of a greater movement to promote the national culture of Taiwan through the discussion and celebration of local

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<sup>12</sup> *Fishing Luck* was selected for the 10th Pusan International Film Festival’s APEC program (2005) and Tokyo International Film Festival “Winds of Asia” (東京国際映画祭, 2005). *Pongso no Tao* was awarded “best film” prize at Venice’s seventh Asian Film Festival in 2009.

<sup>13</sup> A puzzling notion, national cinema theory has been extensively discussed by scholars, as the definition ignores the current dynamics of transnational cinema in the era of globalisation. However, scholars mostly agree on the idea that national cinema is not disappearing, although it is far from being what it was before. In this essay, I use the general definition of national cinema as not necessarily limited to a specific territory in its shooting location and its funding, but as a cinema that constructs or reinforces national identity and its imaginary. National cinema embodies, at the level of text, a reflection and a transformation of history to assert common grounds of people living within the borders of a nation-state. Thus, the viewer is invited to identify or imagine him/herself as a member of a national community or culture. On national cinema, see Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (eds), *Cinema and Nation*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. For a revision of the notion of national cinema, see Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (ed.), *Theorising National Cinema*, London, BFI Publishing, 2006. For a discussion of the territorial and functional approaches of national cinema, see Jinhee Choi’s chapter “National Cinema, the Very Idea”, in Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (ed.), *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 310-321.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview and analysis of Taiwanese national cinema from 1896 to 1978, see the fourth chapter of Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, New York, Routledge, 2004. Analysing Director Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s Taiwanese trilogy, Chris Berry revises the concept of Taiwanese national cinema, suggesting that the national should be redefined in the contemporary era and may be captured in the complexities of the transnational era. See Chris Berry, “From National Cinema to Cinema and the National: Chinese-Language Cinema and Hou Hsiao Hsien’s ‘Taiwan Trilogy’”, in V. Vitali and P. Willemen (ed.), *Theorising National Cinema*, pp. 148-157.



culture and identity, in particular aboriginal ones.<sup>15</sup> While movie theaters are flooded with Hollywood movies in Taiwan and funds remain very slim for Taiwanese production, these films play a major role in the support of Taiwanese filmmaking and its promotion both at local and international levels.<sup>16</sup>

Moving on to the films themselves, I will briefly introduce their plots. In chronological order: *Fishing Luck* (*Dengdai feiyu* 等待飛魚) was produced in 2005 by the documentary maker Tseng Wen-Chen 曾文珍. This is her first long-length feature film, and the very first Taiwanese narrative film featuring Orchid Island (Lanyu 蘭嶼). The two main characters are played by famous and popular MTV video jockey Linda Liao and a popular aboriginal singer and drama actor, Biung or Wang Hong-en 王宏恩. The young woman is sent from Taipei to survey cell phone signals on the small Island and is greeted by the young man she rents a car from. She loses her purse and cannot return to Taipei for she has no ID card and no money left. In the meantime, her fiancé in Taipei breaks up with her over the phone. The young man invites her to live in his house and they unexpectedly spend a large amount of time together. When she is finally able to go back to Taipei, she cannot forget her life on Orchid Island and the engaging young aboriginal man, and finally decides to give up her life in Taipei to live with him.

The second movie, *The Song of Spirits* (*Xinling zhi ge* 心靈之歌) by Daniel Wu 吳宏翔, was released in the same year, 2005. Again, it stars two popular actors, Janine Chang (Chang Chun Ning ) 張鈞甯 as a young aboriginal teacher in a remote mountain area, and Darren Chiu (Chiu Kai Wei) 邱凱偉 as a DJ from Taipei sent to the Bunun tribe to record sounds. The film follows the experience of the urban man, and the change from his unordered and wild life in the city to a mature and more spiritual way among Aborigines. After his return to the city, the recorder realizes that he's missing the Bunun people and the young aboriginal teacher he has fallen in love with, and eventually goes back to the mountains to live with her.

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<sup>15</sup> *Fishing Luck* by director Tseng Wen-Chen clearly states its belonging to national cinema and was part of the television showcase of 'classic national cinema' in 2008. See Anita Wen-Shin Chang's article on the film: "Local, National and Global Articulations in *Fishing Luck*", in *position: East Asia Cultures Critique*, Vol.17, n. 3, 2009, 643-653.

<sup>16</sup> In 2008, films produced in Taiwan represented 12% of the films released in Taiwanese movie theaters. In 2009, the number of Taiwanese films dropped dramatically to less than 2%. See Taiwan Government Information Office's Webpage on "Mass Media" (Sept.2008): <http://www.taiwancinema.com/ct.asp?xItem=50896&ctNode=144&mp=2>

The third movie takes us back to Orchid Island in 2008. Directed by Wang Jingui 王金貴 and starring a famous pop-singer, Bobby Duo 寶智孔 and an emerging young actress Lin Jia-yu 林家宇, *Pongso no Tao* is also a quest for self, love and home. After some years in Taipei where he worked as a sound recorder, a young Tao man returns to his home on Orchid Island to record new sounds and take part in the annual flying fish festival. There he meets a young Han teacher who left a stressful life in Taipei. Through several plot twists and turns, they fall in love and decide to stay in the Tao community.

### **Modernity, Consumption and Alienation**

One can already notice several common points and articulations in these movies. This paper will focus on two main recurring themes: modern Taiwanese society and its relation to modernisation and consumerist society; alienation, self-alienation and the search for a sense of self. I will argue that these films are largely depoliticised and seem to be tools only for entertainment and consumerism; however, they give a romantic and utopian vision of Aborigines in Taiwanese society and suggest a search for the self that is consistent with a stable and unquestioned national identity, thus conveying a hegemonic discourse in a Han-dominated society.

### **Taiwanese Modern Society: Utopian Harmony**

At first sight, it is worth noting that in general these films take place in a contemporary setting, where Aborigines are not excluded from modernisation and globalisation: they ride motorcycles, drive old American cars, use cell phones, celebrate Christmas while attending church service, listen to modern Japanese or Chinese pop music, wear jeans and branded shoes. They live in remote areas but are able to move to bigger cities, mainly Taipei, and experience urban life (although the audience is never clearly told about their experience outside the aboriginal community). As a consequence, the films partly depict some realities in aboriginal societies like youth depopulation or the generation gap resulting from the loss of languages and ways of life. Although directors try to cater to large audiences through love stories, pop music and pop idols, they also attempt to educate, briefly teaching the audience about the Tao or the Bunun populations' demography and territories. Therefore, we can credit directors with non-exoticising narrative and an attempt to describe a quite balanced relationship between Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

However, these films are not exempt from some noticeable problems, exacerbated by the filmic medium and storytelling techniques. The vision of aboriginal societies is indeed imbued with utopian atmosphere and primitivism. As a matter of fact, a historical background and description of current struggles of power are dramatically missing. Thus, the films avoid issues of class, economy and the environment.

As mentioned before, Aborigines are regarded as being part of the modern world. Nevertheless, its impact seems to be limited to a few superficial and material aspects while its negative effects are barely skimmed through if ever mentioned. The political and historical relationship between Taiwan and Orchid Island, for instance, are never examined in *Fishing Luck* and *Pongso no Tao*. Tensions between Aborigines and non-Aborigines in general are completely left out. Social issues (like economic marginalisation, the lack of educational resources, discrimination and the increase of alcoholism and prostitution among Aborigines) do not influence social and interpersonal relationships in the films.

Love stories between an Aborigine and a non-Aborigine complete this image of a harmonious and peaceful union between people from different backgrounds. Aborigines are always very kind to Taipei guests, housing, feeding and protecting them from any danger. Meanwhile, Han characters seem to have no preconceived ideas about the Aborigines: their immediate empathy with aboriginal characters shows their openness and acceptance of differences. The only significant reference to social disparity appears in *The Song of Spirits*: the young aboriginal teacher has a small argument with her brother who tries to convince her to leave the mountains and go to Taipei where she could get a better position and salary and enjoy a modern urban life. The young woman who has studied in Taipei and gone back to her hometown, insists on her responsibility to improve the education of her tribe. In the meantime, she teaches traditional Bunun songs and dances to her students and works hard on promoting Bunun culture. Her efforts thus entail her social and cultural awareness of her tribe's future. However, despite this short digression in the film, the uninformed audience remains clueless about the economic and political reasons that could prevent aboriginal children from accessing a better education or from preserving aboriginal languages and cultural practices.

In comparison, in *Fishing Luck* and *Pongso no Tao*, the exodus of young indigenous people from Orchid Island toward Taiwan is seen as a natural and necessary movement while poverty and unemployment in aboriginal areas are never brought up. Let me make an aside here to note that in *Pongso no Tao*, both Aborigines and non-Aborigines characters are searching for inner peace and a "spiritual home" that they eventually find in aboriginal communities: this suggests that the experience of

urban life is similar for Aborigines and non-Aborigines. This is a good attempt from directors to set them on an equal footing, but it veers towards evenness more than equality, and it fails to assess the difficulties such as discrimination or poverty that Aborigines have to face in cities.

Finally, medical care and social protection are eluded in a very questionable way: the recorder of *The Song of Spirits* is supposed to do a program on health care in the aftermath of the strong earthquake that shook the central part of Taiwan in 1999.<sup>17</sup> But except for a little boy whose parents died during the earthquake and who now lives with the local Pastor, we don't learn anything about the actual situation of the population affected by this calamity: did they receive any care or financial compensation from local or national government? How did it affect their economic activities and daily life? We have no clue about it, and the earthquake is just a quick and insignificant pretext to send the recorder to the Bunun people. Therefore, I argue that these films are nearly devoid of politics and questions of power.

On the other hand, the beauty and purity of Orchid Island as well as the natural environment in which islanders live are largely emphasised. Fresh and nourishing food is opposed to urban non-nutritious food symbolised by instant noodle cup in Taipei; clean and fresh air on the island is compared to polluted and weakening urban life. However, Orchid Island has been a nuclear waste storage site for more than fifty years and the shipment of nuclear waste from Taiwan still continues despite protests and demonstrations by Orchid Island inhabitants.<sup>18</sup> As for the

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<sup>17</sup> This earthquake occurred on September 21st, 1999 in Nantou County where a large population of Aborigines live. Aborigines have received the least attention from the government and have consequently denounced unfair relief policies. The calamity has also provided an opportunity to re-examine the land rights issue, as described by Yi-Fong Chen in "The Impacts of the September 21st Earthquake on Indigenous Peoples' Land Rights and the Reconstruction of Place Identity in Taiwan", in *Journal of Geographical Science*, 31, 2002, pp.1-15.

<sup>18</sup> The nuclear waste controversy started in 1974 when the Atomic Energy Commission of the ROC selected Orchid Island to store radioactive nuclear waste. Pretending to build a fish cannery, the Commission representatives asked illiterate local authorities to sign a document that actually approved the project of a nuclear waste dump on the small island. Since then, radioactive waste from three nuclear plants has been transferred to Orchid Island, despite protests by its population and anti-nuclear organisations. On the question of environmental policy in Taiwan and its interaction with ethnic issues, see Fan Mei-Fang, "Environmental Justice and Nuclear Waste Conflicts in Taiwan", in *Environmental Politics*, 1743-8934, Vol. 15, Issue 3, 2006, pp. 417-434. See also Chih-Tung Huang and Ruey-Chyi Hwang, "'Environmental Justices': What We Have Learned from the Taiwanese Environmental Justice Controversy", in *Environmental Justice*, September 2009, 2(3), pp. 101-108. The issue of nuclear waste on Orchid Island has also been examined in a famous documentary film: *Voices of Orchid Island* by Hu Tai-Li, in 1993. See a comparative examination of documentary films on Taiwanese off-shore islands including *Orchid Island: Yi-Chu Liu, Closed Encounters with Orchid Island: A Study of Voices of Orchid Island, Libangbang and And Deliver Us From Evil*, Master Degree's dissertation, National Chiao Tung

movies, this doesn't seem to have an impact on the Tao population, although anti-nuclear groups actually reported that contaminated fishes and cancer-related deaths have seriously increased over the past twenty years.<sup>19</sup> In *Fishing Luck* or *Pongso no Tao*, the fact that islanders mainly rely on farming and fishing only serves the idea that Tao people are able to live on their own local production. This self-sufficiency is praised for it symbolises a natural and uncorrupted way of life. On the other hand, new economic resources such as tourism are brought up in a very short and superficial way. In *Fishing Luck*, the young Aborigine and his friends try to earn money by renting a car to tourists. Very soon, the car rental service turns into a free and friendly one as the Taipei woman has no money to pay for it after she has lost her wallet. Tourism therefore is unprofitable and the young aboriginal man has no choice but to go back to fishing and farming to be able to feed his unexpected Taipei guest. In *The Song of Spirits*, the young recorder from Taipei is given food and shelter by a local Pastor who warmly welcomes him without any financial compensation. However, domestic tourism to Aborigine-inhabited areas has increased in Taiwan and has inevitably influenced indigenous environments and economic activities. These issues are totally left out in the movies.

As a matter of fact, films do not seem to be aware of political and economic issues concerning Aborigine people and their land in contemporary times. Films are made "safely" without addressing sensitive topics and politics. This contributes to a heartfelt and pleasant image of Taiwanese society but also builds a utopian backdrop of social relations and individual future prospects. In addition, the recurring dichotomy between rural and urban life veers toward a fantasy imbued with primitivism that does not only imply a search for the self but also a search for a national identity.

### **Self-alienation: Issues of Individual and National Identities**

As a matter of fact, films are not exempted from primitivism. Aborigines' bodies are described as strong and healthy in contrast to weakened urban bodies. Although the narratives do not really embody the idea of backward and child-like indigenous people, they tend to depict Aborigines as "noble savage" for all indigenous characters on their lands are said to be "innocent", generous and "pure-minded",

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University, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> See the website of the Taiwanese environmental organisation: Taiwan Watch Institute, [http://www.taiwanwatch.org.tw/Twweb\\_english/index.htm](http://www.taiwanwatch.org.tw/Twweb_english/index.htm)

leading a very “simple” life.<sup>20</sup> Their close relation with nature and disregard for material goods are largely opposed to a superficial and stressful urban consumerist society. Primitivism does not only imply the image of the “noble savage”, but it also involves the myth of some “lost Paradise” or “Eden”. In each movie, the main character finds spiritual redemption among aboriginal communities. All characters can find their “Eden” among aboriginal communities. At first, they experience their trip to aboriginal regions as forced exiles, and they extend their stay in indigenous communities against their own wish. The young woman loses her wallet in *Fishing Luck*; in *The Song of Spirits*, the Pastor from the Bunun area asks the young recorder to stay in the mountains for a few days while he is away for an unscheduled conference; the young Aborigine back to Orchid Island in *Pongso no Tao* is asked by his mentor to record more sounds. There, they learn to appreciate the “traditional” aboriginal way of life and receive an unconditional warmth from indigenous friends. This experience leads them to realise what they have been missing from their own lives back in Taipei: they “lost” themselves and forgot about the dreams they wanted to pursue. This realisation creates a desire for a so called “simple” life far from Taipei among “simple” people, that is to say the Aborigines.

Let me expand on one interesting subplot that can be found in two of these movies, *Pongso no Tao* and *The Song of Spirits*. The two main characters are sent to remote areas to collect “natural” sounds, such as waves crashing and cricket chirping on Orchid Island or wind blowing through trees in the mountainous region. In general, two kinds of sounds can be distinguished: non-verbal and verbal sounds. The first sounds recorders are looking for are all non-verbal sounds: the wind, waves, crickets. Throughout their experience in aboriginal communities, they start capturing verbal sounds: songs by children and old people. This progression from non-verbal to verbal sounds tends to naturalise Aborigines themselves who blend into a so-called “natural” background just like other “natural” elements. In addition, this process omits that sounds are also a cultural system, especially verbal sounds: songs of Aborigines are all symbolic of different myths that require interpretations the audience is given no clue for.<sup>21</sup> Yet except for the songs’ names

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<sup>20</sup> The phrase “bon sauvage” (good/noble savage) dates back to the sixteenth century during the Renaissance and resurfaced in the nineteenth century to serve anthropological and racist agendas. For a historical overview, see Ter Elligson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, University of California Press, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Feld analyses expressive modalities of the Kaluli people in New Guinea through songs, weeping and poetics; the ethnomusicologist argues that sound is a symbolic system that builds on myth and folklore as a culture system. Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in*

(“Song for carrying heavy loads in union”, “Prayer for a good harvest of millets”) that appear as subtitles, we have no clear idea what these ceremonies are actually made for and whether they are still used or not.

This is part of the primitivist process: Aborigines staying on their lands seem to have something urban people have lost, through singing and dancing. Furthermore, the collection of sounds is also a metaphor for a recollection of the self: searching the inner voice to open its heart to the world. However, I argue here that the examination of the Other and self-examination through sounds do not elude a risk of crystallisation and fragmentation. Sound, just like photography or filming, serves as a media to capture a “reality” of the Other and of the self that is actually partial and ephemeral.

This search for the self and the rejection of self-alienation under the influence of urban life shape and define what we can call a national cinema. Behind individual questions on life and destiny (who am I? where am I heading to? what do I really want?), the films also explore social questions through the association of people from different backgrounds, and try to capture a stable entity against which non-Aborigines or assimilated Aborigines can define themselves. Aborigines who did not leave or are going back to their homeland are represented as the keepers of a “lost paradise” where all, indigenous or non-indigenous, can find a “spiritual home”. The films are thus built on this contradiction: aboriginal regions share the same historical time with modern Taiwan; but at the same time the need for primitivism personified by Aborigines is clearly stated.

The new self-fulfilment is perfectly consistent with the idea of a united and harmonious modern society. The love stories and unions between urban and non-urban people, Aborigines and non-Aborigines clearly symbolise this paradigm. The films give a general reflection upon modern life and society in Taiwan that is, in the end, not critical at all. I would contend that, in the spirit of romance story and entertainment, they state a common social and cultural experience, and stimulate the sense of belonging to a same territory, a same nation and finally a same nation-state. So these films are effectively part of a national cinema that is intended to be projected within and outside of Taiwan. They are thus a significant tool for both internal and external diplomacy with social, political and economic impacts.

## Conclusions

The main idea of this article is to try to bridge social connotations of differences with their aesthetic, in this case filmic, interpretation. I have tried to demonstrate that the films analysed here use Aborigines as a medium for constructing better selves but also for strengthening a dominant discourse on a multicultural and tolerant modern society. We can give credit to the films for they seek to bring peace to the relationship between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. But at the same time, their romantic and naive image of the contemporary situation can result in a dramatic lack of space for the negotiation of individual and collective identities while this issue is at the centre of each film.

This contradictory feature can have detrimental effects as one should not underestimate the power of images in contemporary times. The question of ethnicity can be considered as a space of social interactions that are largely influenced by, and at the same time significantly contribute to, political and economic issues at local, national and transnational levels. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a multiplicity of voices and experiences in narrative-feature films accessible to large audiences.

Otherwise, the risk is that films may become, in Brecht's words, "not a mirror, but a hammer".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The exact sentence is "Art is not a mirror held up to society, but a hammer with which to shape it". This quote is attributed to Bertolt Brecht, in Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (eds.), *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 80.







# **“Poetics of Connivance” in François Cheng’s Novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* : the Experience of Boundaries and Inter-cultural Communication**

ISABELLE GARNIER-MATHEZ

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François Cheng’s novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* gives a personal answer to the question of the literary representation of identities and particularly of their trans-cultural conditions. Departing from the remarkably high number of occurrences of the word “connivance” in this French written novel of the Chinese essayist, we shall see that this lexical particularity points out the abolition of frontiers and limits in various contexts: between man and universe in the traditional Chinese vision of the world, between different artistic ways of representing cultural identity (music, painting, literature), and between Eastern and Western cultures. We shall outline that what we call Cheng’s “Poetics of Connivance”, while establishing a proper complicity with the reader, helps him understand how tenuous and subtle frontiers between cultures may appear, and how they may converge in the answer given to the question of the sense of one’s destiny here below – a universal one.

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In post-modern societies, frontiers between cultures tend to fade away. François Cheng’s novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* gives a personal answer to the question of the literary representation of identities and particularly of their trans-cultural conditions. Departing from the remarkably high number of occurrences of the word “connivance” in this French written novel of the Chinese essayist, we shall see that this lexical particularity points out the abolition of frontiers and limits in various contexts: between man and universe in the traditional Chinese vision of the world, between such different artistic ways of representing cultural identity as music, painting or literature, and finally between cultures as distant as Eastern and Western ones. We shall outline that what we call Cheng’s “Poetics of Connivance”, while establishing a proper complicity with the reader, helps him understand how tenuous and subtle frontiers between cultures may appear, and how they may converge in the answer given to the question of the sense of one’s destiny here below – a universal one.

In the foreword at the beginning of the book, a first narrator, who might be considered as the author’s double<sup>1</sup>, introduces Tianyi as a friend he met in the fifties when he was living in France. Soon after that, Tianyi returned to China. They had no more relation except once before his death, when Tianyi, aged and considered as a fool, told his entire life to his friend, and gave him a transcript achieved for his French love. The fiction of the novel consists in the publication of Tianyi’s writings after his death, which makes him the narrator of his own life in Cheng’s book.

One may ask if this second and main narrator is not another double of François Cheng<sup>2</sup>. Despite many differences between the career of the protagonist and the writer, there are several major similarities: an apprenticeship in calligraphy with a Chinese father, studies in France, a fascination for French culture, a double interest in painting and writing (especially poetry), an early literary vocation belatedly achieved, and above all, a double cultural heritage from East and West. Both men also had various experiences of boundaries in their life.

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<sup>1</sup> See Luc Fraisse, « *Le Dit de Tianyi*, un palimpseste de la *Recherche du temps perdu* ? », *Revue de littérature comparée*, « *Hommage à François Cheng* », Avril-juin 2007, n° 322, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

We may at this point introduce a distinction regarding the experience of boundaries that might be encountered: one kind of experience has to do with *borders* or *frontiers*, the other one copes with *limits*. *Border* and *frontier* in that sense refer to the separation between two states or entities normally considered as distinct or even opposite, inside a geographical area (East and West, China and France), but also outside: life and death, body and soul, male and female, the Self and the Other, dream and reality, whereas the term *limit* may refer to all kinds of limitations to one's freedom, imposed by biological constraints (heredity, illness, hunger and thirst, death), family and social conventions (sense of duty, conformism, but also poverty), political features (states, laws, despotism under all forms, proletarian dictatorship for example), that is to say anything that limits human ability to act, think, feel, love, live.

Both experiences of borders and of limits are represented in *Le Dit de Tianyi*. We will focus on the aspects that enable us to understand Cheng's novel as a meditation about the means to escape the limits of human condition – in a more or less illusory way: friendship and love, dialogue between cultures, and above all, Art. In the novel Tianyi claims he is “curious of all limits” and as a matter of fact experiences a series of limits and boundaries during his life; he will assert that “being forced to the limits” means reaching “the essential”:

A la Grande Digue, où je ne pus m'empêcher d'aller, curieux que j'étais de toutes les *limites* [...].<sup>3</sup>

ceux qui cherchent à le réduire au silence n'existent plus. [...] Ils n'ont été sur sa route que de monstrueux obstacles qui l'ont acculé aux *limites* donc à l'essentiel. (p. 399)

As he was seventeen, he discovered the limit imposed to his desire by common decency and social conventions, when stealing a glance at the beautiful Yumei during her toilet. Frustration together with love for her, whom he called “the Lover” in the secret of his heart (p. 56), led him to achieve his first drawing (p. 64): he showed it to Yumei who admired the way he had learnt her “by heart”. This chaste and pure love made him go beyond common limits of perception; “through the eyes of the Lover, all elements composing the universe proved to be perceptible, linked by a diffused light, but a unique and therefore unifying one”:

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<sup>3</sup> François Cheng, *Le Dit de Tianyi*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1998, p. 236. The elements in square brackets have been introduced by me. All indications of pages between brackets in the text itself refer to this edition. All translations of words or quotations from the novel in this paper are mine.

A travers le regard de l’Amante, tous les éléments qui composent l’univers se sont révélés sensibles, reliés par une lumière diffuse et par là unifiante. (p. 86)

On another side of affective relations, Tianyi met a high-school pupil like him in central China, Haolang, who was to become his best friend; the boy’s native country was “outside the Great Wall” – that is to say Mandchuria, Dongbei: “Je viens du pays hors des Murailles” (p. 136); this relation with “the Friend” proved to be of some help during Tianyi’s tribulations in China, thanks to Haolang’s waist and strength. Whereas love for Yumei let Tianyi feel a harmonious perception of the universe, the friendship with the poet Haolang introduced him to the universe of the mind, an “unsuspected und unfathomable universe” with all the expressive potentialities of signs; he thus discovered, as he says, “a split horizon for his own split being”:

La rencontre avec mon ami en revanche, fut une véritable irruption qui provoquait en moi de violentes secousses, m’entraînant vers l’inconnu, vers de continuels dépassements. [...] Ce que l’autre ouvrit devant moi était un univers insoupçonné, insondable, celui de l’esprit. A côté de la nature brute, il y a donc une autre réalité, celle des signes. Les paroles exaltées du jeune poète m’ont fait comprendre qu’à l’homme qui pense et crée tout demeure non clos mais infiniment ouvert. En compagnie de l’Ami, mon être littéralement éclaté avançait désormais vers un horizon lui aussi éclaté. (p. 86)

As a matter of fact, since a traumatic experience he had as a child, Tianyi felt that his life was out of step with everything, as if a lost soul staid in his body, and he considered this permanent gap as “the essence of his life, and of life itself”:

au contraire du sens commun, selon lequel l’être humain est un corps doté d’une âme, pour ce qui me concernait, c’était une âme égarée qui logeait comme elle pouvait dans un corps d’emprunt. Tout chez moi, depuis, sera toujours décalé. Jamais les choses ne pourront coïncider tout à fait. J’en étais persuadé ; c’était là, à mes yeux, l’essence de ma vie, ou de la vie tout court. (p. 17)

Therefore what is at stake in the novel is the conciliation between the lost feeling of harmony with the universe – a harmony glimpsed thanks to Yumei’s love –, and the renewed feeling of going beyond, of bursting out of one’s life in proportion to one’s discovery of limits. It is this dialectic tension between rediscovering an ancient state and creating a new and original one which will lead Tianyi to Art. In his difficult and winding way towards Art, Tianyi will suffer from hard life conditions: hunger, solitude, illness, poverty during his stay in France, as well as humiliations, political imprisonment and re-education camps when he returned to China, in search of “the Lover” and “the Friend” both lost in the storm of life. Searching for them will be the quest of his life. Cheng’s character Tianyi thus exemplifies the ability of someone to take advantage of national and individual turbulent history to find one’s own way and vocation: Tianyi has to struggle against external incidentals, constraints and threats and to cope with internal limits such as fear, lack of confidence, jealousy – when he discovered Yumei and Haolang’s love for instance. He will go beyond all limits because he will open himself to artistic creation and summarize, accomplish the synthesis of all influences in his work, however modest it might appear. To understand and discover Tianyi’s transcultural itinerary we can pay attention to the word “connivance”, which will play the role of Ariadne’s clew in the demonstration. As a matter of fact the frequency of this word is far above the average in French literature, where it usually is rather rare. When it appeared in the French language at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the word connivance was used in a negative and even pejorative way: it qualified relations with heterodox or heretic people condemned by religious or political institutions. People in connivance with each other were supposed to share some special signs to communicate and be understood only by the initiated. Linguistic connivance thus appeared very early in French literature to get round religious censorship and persecution under the reign of Francis the first during the Renaissance<sup>4</sup>. In its modern meaning, the word connivance refers to complicity between people recognizing themselves as sharing an opinion, a feeling or whatsoever. In Cheng’s novel it is always used positively, but only three of the thirteen occurrences of connivance have this regular modern meaning. Those three are located in the French expression *sourire de connivence* (“smile of connivance”), which occurs in situations where one’s life is endangered (revolutionary individuals before the revolution was generalized, runaways threatened by the police, sick people in a hospital) – their meaning is thus not so far from the etymologic French one:

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<sup>4</sup> See Isabelle Garnier-Mathez, *L’Epithète et la connivence : Ecriture concertée chez les Evangéliques français (1523-1534)*, Genève, Droz, THR 404, 2005.

Sans s’être jamais vus, ils [les hommes gagnés à la cause révolutionnaire] se reconnaissaient à des signes sûrs. Les regards échangés et les *sourires de connivence* semblaient toujours dire : « Ah, tu es des nôtres ! » (p. 118)

Au milieu du second pichet, je fus soulagé quand mon ami et l’homme échangèrent un *sourire de connivence*. (p. 139)

Tous [les malades de l’hôpital] avant la nuit, épreuve redoutée de chacun, ressentent le besoin de communiquer un peu avec les autres. Le moindre *sourire de connivence*, le moindre mot d’encouragement est reçu comme un don inespéré. (p. 270)

Exchanging a smile of connivance means you are on the same side of the border. Significantly when the context is not potentially that of a persecution the smile is not of connivance but most simply of “complicity”, for instance when Tianyi travelled to Holland. Alone, anonymous, suffering from the cold in this European area which he felt as an “Extreme North”, not a single “smile of complicity” of inhabitants helped him feel better:

je cherchais parmi les passagers quelques sourires de complicité qui me sortiraient de ma gêne. Mais personne ne bougea. (p. 237)

As within the phrase *sourire de connivence*, the word connivance in a regular French use is supposed to refer to interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless the other ten occurrences of the word in Cheng’s novel refer most of the time to a link between a human being and an element of the universe.<sup>5</sup> Emblematic of this kind of use is the first of the thirteen occurrences of connivance which is located at the very beginning of the novel: the narrator tries to explain what makes him be perceived as someone from a different culture by Europeans during his French scholarship. “The Chinese” as they call him feels as such, less because of the antiquity or everlastingness of his culture, but “because of the pact of confidence, or of connivance, he has entered into with the living universe, as he believes in the virtues of the rhythmic breaths which circulate and connect the All”:

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<sup>5</sup> One apart from them underlines the intimacy of Tianyi with Western privacy: « Quant à moi, l’odeur du corps occidental liée à celle du lait, loin de m’incommoder, suscitait en moi une sorte de



ce pacte de confiance, ou de connivence, qu'il a passé avec l'univers vivant, puisqu'il croit aux vertus des souffles rythmiques qui circulent et qui relient le Tout. D'où peut-être cette manière d'exister à nulle autre pareille. (p. 30)

This pact of confidence which gives him "a way of existing not comparable to any other one" is rooted in the Taoist conception of the universe. Tianyi discovered it as a child when he studied calligraphy with his father, both copying the old masters and observing living models provided by nature (grass, trees, tea terraces), so that he began to feel in "sensual harmony with the landscape":

Pénétré de cette vision que nourrissait mon apprentissage de la calligraphie, je commençais à me sentir en communion charnelle avec le paysage. (p. 19)

While looking at the specificity of Chinese self-consciousness, the narrator defines the agreement between Chinese people and the universe in Taoist terms, completed with the word "confidence" glossed by *connivance*. This strong value granted to the notion of connivance leads the reader to pay attention to it as a potential keystone of a system, which associates various elements or people, especially mankind and the earth in all the metamorphoses of life. This appears as the first sign of what I call "Poetics of Connivance" in Cheng's art of writing, combining vocabulary (*connivance*) and notions (Taoism) stemming from both the French and Chinese cultures. Tianyi experienced the feeling of connivance together with its Taoist background very early in his childhood. While walking with his father around the Lu Mountain, he felt in harmony with the surrounding nature one night as they lost their way. "Despite the gloomy shouts of night birds", Tianyi "was not really afraid", but felt "almost in connivance with the summer night, transparent with brightness":

La lune était claire. Malgré les cris lugubres des oiseaux de nuit, je n'avais pas réellement peur ; je me sentais presque de connivence avec cette nuit d'été, toute transparente de clarté. (p. 35)

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*connivance*. » (p. 93).

*Connivance* here is associated implicitly with the key notion of “confidence”, which was explicitly introduced in the novel a few pages above, but the adverb *presque* (“almost”) points out that there remains a slight limit to the feeling of wellness and communion; the preposition *with* underlines the double-sided relationship which is about to involve the young boy Tianyi actively through direct experience and the night passively as elements of the universe. As a young man, in 1945, Tianyi will remember this night on the Lu Mountain when he is on his way to Dunhuang to learn from the Buddhist paintings, the frescos of the grottos, which will be a decisive artistic experience. He will feel both fear and connivance at the same time, “an intimate and corporeal connivance with the cosmos”:

Tout comme cette nuit-là, j’éprouvai en même temps que de la frayeur une connivence intime, corporelle, avec le cosmos. (p. 183)

Connivance appears as a state of mind propitious to artistic receptivity. As a matter of fact the lessons from the old Chinese painter that Tianyi received prior to his trip to Dunhuang expressed this idea with a key question formulated in the heart of the narrative (“Isn’t it true that at all times through the elements of nature and in correspondence with them – rocks, trees, mountains, rivers –, the Chinese express their inner states of mind, their sensual outbursts as well as spiritual aspirations?”):

Pas une minute que, l’œil à l’affût, le cœur dilaté, on ne fût en communion avec l’inépuisable richesse de la nature. [...] N’est-il pas vrai que de tout temps à travers ces choses et en correspondance avec elles – les rochers, les arbres, les montagnes, les cours d’eau –, les Chinois expriment leurs états intérieurs, leurs élans charnels aussi bien que leurs aspirations spirituelles ? [...] je ne doutais pas que mes pulsions intimes ne se trouvaient en parfait accord avec les pulsations de l’Univers. (p. 174-175)

Instead of *connivance*, the word *correspondence* expresses here the fundamental link of the Chinese with nature in all its manifestations, together with *communion* already met and *perfect understanding*: the three of them belong to the same paradigm of relationship. These terms and context spontaneously make the French reader of Cheng’s novel think of Baudelaire’s poem called “Correspondances” in the collection *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire evokes the communication between the upper world and the earth, between ideal and sensual perceptions; echoing the Platonist theory of Ideas, the poet does a pioneer work in symbols. Through this

discrete intertextuality the words *correspondence* and *connivance* open to a network of artistic correspondences and echoes, in literature but also in painting, which enable to go beyond the limits of one's restrictive experience and are favoured by the interconnection of Western and Eastern cultures.

The novel illustrates this with Tianyi's itinerary. Various experiences of the narrator in exile help him internalize what he could hardly accept when he lived in China. He realized he had never been "that much in connivance with the Chinese painters of the Song and Yuan period as in the museums of Florence and Venice" in Italy. When he saw the works of Western artists, Tianyi rediscovered the principles of the Chinese art of painting. According to Taoist principles, Chinese painters "tend not to imitate infinite variations of a created world, but to take part in the creative gesture of the universe. They wanted to introduce between *yin* and *yang*, between the Five Elements, between the Ten Thousand living entities, the Median Emptiness, which guarantees the circulation of organic breaths":

Je ne crois pas avoir été autant de connivance avec les peintres chinois des Song et des Yuan que dans les musées de Florence et de Venise. [...] les peintres visaient non pas à imiter les infinies variations du monde créé mais à prendre part aux gestes mêmes de la Création. Ils s'ingéniaient à introduire entre le yin et le yang, entre les Cinq Eléments, entre les Dix Mille entités vivantes, le Vide médian, seul garant de la bonne marche des souffles organiques (p. 249-250).

When he lived in China, Tianyi did not perceive it; he laughed at people who considered that "a pictorial masterpiece, which connects the fine beauty of a bamboo leaf to the endless flight of a common crane", is the "only place of real life"<sup>6</sup>, because he did not believe art could have "such a power":

pour bon nombre de Chinois un chef-d'œuvre pictural qui unit la beauté ténue d'une feuille de bambou au vol sans fin de la grue, bien plus qu'un objet de délectation, est le seul lieu de la vraie vie aisément habitable. Tant que j'étais en Chine, je riais de ces gens-là, n'attribuant nullement à l'art un tel pouvoir. (p. 250)

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<sup>6</sup> We shall come back to the important notion of "real life" (*vraie vie*) later on, with reference to Proust.

Experiencing exile, other references led Tianyi to an awareness of connivance with Chinese painters and of the ability of masterpieces to point out “real life”, beyond mere delight. During Tianyi’s scholarship in France, a new experience let reminiscence arise. One day, he was drawing the surrounding landscape of the Loire valley where, he says, stone bridges and slate roofs add their “note of connivance”:

Comme au temps où j’étais avec mon maître [...] je dessinais. Non tant le fleuve lui-même que le paysage environnant, un paysage composé de coteaux boisés, de rochers calcaires, de champs ouverts, auquel les ponts de pierre et les toits d’ardoise ajoutaient leur note de connivance. [...] De cet univers, où toutes les choses gardent leurs justes distances et entre lesquelles mon œil de Chinois percevait sans peine le travail régulateur des vides médians, je n’attendais nulle scène spectaculaire. (p. 288)

At first sight the word *connivance* appears disconnected from any relationship specifically expressed. One could understand that connivance establishes itself between various elements of nature, and lies in the harmony between the landscape above the river (“wooded hillsides, calcareous rocks, open fields”) and human constructions scattered therein (“stone bridges and slate roofs”); this interpretation is coherent neither with the semantic value of the word (one of the sides of the relation must be alive), nor with its network of significations in the novel. *Connivance* here expresses the absence of frontier between the spectator and the landscape thanks to the mediation of human testimonies (bridges, roofs), restoring the communion between man and the universe; in the same way, with the same wording above in the narrative, Tianyi considered a flash of lightning in a landscape by the Italian Renaissance painter Giorgione as a potential “sign of connivance”:

Là je découvrais des espaces emplis d’écoute et d’échange. L’éclair de la tempête qui déchire l’air rayonnant de bleu, et vert, dans le tableau de Giorgione, est-il un signe de menace ou de connivance ? Sa courbe lumineuse, ourlant les nuages, et faisant écho au corps rond de la femme, ne semble-t-il pas par son geste fulgurant rétablir, par dessus la rigide géométrie du pont et des bâtiments qui barre le milieu du tableau, l’invisible mouvement circulaire entre le ciel et la terre ? (p. 252)

Tianyi enters into connivance with the French landscape as an artist, as he does as a Chinese with the universe, recognizing the regulating work of the Taoist principle of “Median Emptiness”<sup>7</sup>: he perceives secret harmony and “right distances” between elements in front of his eyes. Prior to his contemplation of the Loire valley, two pages before in the narrative, Tianyi is charmed by the internal harmony of the architecture of Renaissance castles and by its perfect concord with all elements of the landscape (“trees, hills, watercourses, sky and its soft clouds”). This reminds him of the Chinese tradition called *jiehua*, that is to say “painting with a rule”, in which painters introduce “contrast between the geometrical lines of human dwellings and the natural environment, when at the same time marrying them both in a perfect symbiosis as a sign of a rare moment of agreement”:

Nous visitâmes les châteaux [...] de la Renaissance. Leur architecture, au style parfois trop précieux, trop mesuré, charme par son harmonie interne et par l'accord parfait qu'elle entretient avec le paysage, les arbres, les collines, les cours d'eau et le ciel ourlé de doux nuages. Je ne pus m'empêcher de songer à la tradition chinoise du *jiehua*<sup>8</sup> dans laquelle les peintres s'ingénient à faire contraster les lignes géométriques des habitations humaines et l'environnement naturel, tout en les mariant dans une symbiose parfaite comme le signe d'un rare moment d'entente. (p. 285-286)

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<sup>7</sup> See François Cheng, *Le livre du vide médian*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Peinture à la règle.

The word *symbiosis* is a key one for François Cheng, who explains that he tries to achieve a symbiosis between the two huge cultures he is faced with, establishing a dialogue with major writers from Antiquity to modern times, as well as with Western painters.<sup>9</sup> Whereas ancient Chinese paintings do not generally include man on the front scene, Cheng observes in Tianyi’s narrative that European painters from the Renaissance period began to put the Western man on the foreground, letting him play the first role, whereas the universe was relegated to the background.<sup>10</sup> We can suppose the harmony of the landscape in the Loire valley under Tianyi’s eyes is mainly due to the absence of human beings on the front scene, like in Chinese paintings. However, there is someone beside Tianyi: his French girlfriend Veronique. The way her face and figure conform to the landscape of her native country evokes the kind of connivance with natural elements that Tianyi perceives when admiring this French landscape. “The features of her face and the lines of her body go together with the stones of the houses, that well-proportioned relieves seem to bring alive”:

Les traits de son visage et les lignes de son corps s’accordaient avec les pierres des demeures, finement taillées et rendues vivantes par des reliefs bien proportionnés. (p. 286)

The French writer Marcel Proust observed such a harmony between a beloved woman and the landscape in his masterpiece *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (*Looking for Lost Time*), which did influence Cheng.<sup>11</sup> In the novel, not only does Tianyi quote Proust’s book (that he would have called *Looking for Time to come*), but he also echoes Proust’s experience of paving stones in Venice, when rough paving stones in Paris remind him of his connivance with Chinese ones:

Cette rue montante [rue de B., à Paris], aux pavés rugueux que d’autres peinaient à arpenter, m’était douce sous les pas ; elle me procurait la même sensation de connivence que les rues de Tchoungking. (p. 217)

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<sup>9</sup> J’ai essayé d’opérer une symbiose en moi-même en prenant la meilleure part des deux grandes cultures auxquelles j’ai eu affaire. », entretien avec Catherine Argand, *Lire*, décembre 2001. Tianyi’s narrative often gives place to the dialogue with writers and western painters, see p. 88 sq.

<sup>10</sup> François Cheng, *Le Dit de Tianyi*, p. 249.

<sup>11</sup> Luc Fraisse, « *Le Dit de Tianyi*, un palimpseste de la *Recherche du temps perdu* ? », p. 241.

Reminiscence of Proust's universe still arises with the notion of "real life" already mentioned above<sup>12</sup>, referring for Proust to literature as "life fully lived", and also for Tianyi to the process of creation<sup>13</sup>:

Ce cercle spatial qu'effectuent les mains en connivence avec l'argile posée sur le plateau tournant, aussi parfait, aussi enivrant soit-il, me fascine moins qu'un autre cercle invisible qui me frappe comme une révélation. Ces mains nées de l'argile originelle, qui ne sont autres qu'argile, un jour se sont pourtant mises à malaxer et à façonner cette même argile, à en faire quelque chose d'autre qui n'avait jamais existé auparavant, qui était l'emblème même de la vraie vie. [...] Le mythe chinois ne dit-il pas justement que le Créateur a mélangé l'eau et l'argile pour façonner l'homme et la femme ? (p. 162-163)

Connivance with Western readers is intensified while both Chinese and biblical myths of the origin of man superimpose. The theme of creation (man both as a creature and a potential creator) leads us to the last occurrence of *connivance*. Tianyi, although in a politic prisoners' camp in the North of China, begins the huge painting which he describes as "the work of his life", and feels that he is "about to benefit from the connivance of gods or spirits":

Ayant surmonté les hésitations du début, puis les maladresses en cours d'exécution, je sens que le travail progresse bien, que je commence à bénéficier de la connivence des dieux et des esprits. (p. 409)

He feels in such a situation of confidence that it enables him to open himself – mind, heart and hand – to creation:

Je savais qu'un jour [...] je peindrais ma fresque à moi. C'est ainsi que je rejoindrai tout. (p. 253)

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<sup>12</sup> « [...] un chef-d'œuvre pictural qui unit la beauté tenue d'une feuille de bambou au vol sans fin de la grue, bien plus qu'un objet de délectation, est le seul lieu de la *vraie vie* aisément habitable » (p. 250).

<sup>13</sup> François Cheng, *Le Dit de Tianyi*, p. 442, and François Cheng, *Vide et plein : Le langage pictural chinois*, Paris, Seuil, 1979, p. 7, and also Luc Fraisse, « *Le Dit de Tianyi*, un palimpseste de la Recherche du temps perdu ? », p. 240.

The limits of human condition are postponed and “real life” is given a place to shine forth. In *Le Dit de Tianyi*, the word *connivance* appears as a meaningful linguistic sign disposed throughout the novel to help find the clue to the mystery of one’s destiny, in a dynamic opposition to *limits* of all kinds set up by human conventions or by oneself, described in the narrative. As a child or a young apprentice in the art of painting, the narrator experiences the universal communion between Chinese people and the universe, and seems then to forget all of it. Exile and tribulations in France and in China again force him go beyond the contradictions of life through artistic experience, revealing a trans-cultural comprehension of the universe. Art stems from the perception of the mysterious connivance between all the elements of the universe and cultures that exceptionally sensitive people like Tianyi – and Cheng are able to share with others that can thus go beyond their own limits when contemplating works of art. What Cheng shows through the notion of connivance is that the perception of “real life” does not depend on the culture it arises in. Cheng’s particular art of writing in *Le Dit de Tianyi* gives some kind of answer to the question of the accomplishment of one’s destiny in a multi-cultural post-modern society. The “Poetics of Connivance” of Cheng, as a frontier runner between East and West, also reveals the nature of the relationship that the writer seeks to establish with the reader through reminiscences of both cultures mainly in literature and painting, restoring a lost harmony thanks to Art for the times to come.



## Uncertain Grounds in Shawn Wong's novel *Homebase*

MARIE-AGNÈS GAY

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As one of the four co-editors of the famous *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), a book which led to the rediscovery of a whole field of literature left in limbo by the dominant white culture, Shawn Wong was definitely a precursor of Asian American studies. But his greatest contribution to this field is perhaps to be sought in his 1979 novel *Homebase*, a book which retraces the history of Chinese American immigration in truly poetic prose which has been given too little critical attention. Through a stylistic approach, this article explores the tensions and complexities of a text which depicts the homodiegetic narrator's relentless process of claiming America as his unquestionable homebase yet constantly underlines dispersal and disjunction. By suggesting the dilution of clear landmarks and frontiers and problematizing the very concept of "home", the novel proves the militant act of reterritorialization to be arduous and ultimately indecisive. In a final analysis, this radical sense of in-betweenness perhaps best transpires in the author's aesthetic stance which favors uncertain and endlessly shifting formal grounds.

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In Asian American studies, the name of Shawn Wong remains first and foremost associated to the ground-breaking *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, of which he was one of the four editors with Franck Chin, Jefferey Paul Chan and Lawson Fusao Inada. This book, published in 1974 against the background of budding cultural pluralism, marked the discovery of a whole field of literature left in limbo by the dominant white culture, and is thus an unquestionable landmark in Asian American history. Their discourse is that of cultural nationalism; a unitary identity that stresses racial unity and interethnic cohesion is constructed as an instrument of political agency in the larger context of minorities' common struggle

against marginalization. Emphasizing American nativity and contesting the “myth of being either/or and the equally goofy concept of the dual personality”, “of going from one culture to another”<sup>1</sup>, they strive for identity reconstruction and re-centering. Today, the *Aiiieeeee!* editors often come under criticism for what is felt to be too narrow and rigid a perspective, for their essentialist conception of identity, the primacy they give to social history, and their “formulation of an Asian American literary tradition that develops separately from, or in opposition to, mainstream America”.<sup>2</sup> In the contemporary context of growing Asian American heterogeneity, and with the advent of diasporic positionings and a postcolonial perspective which questions all dichotomous paradigms, the clear-cut frontiers and binary stance expressed by the *Aiiieeeee!* editors in their preface to the anthology may indeed sound somewhat reductive:

Our anthology is exclusively Asian American. That means Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese Americans, American-born and raised, who got their China and Japan from [...] the pushers of white American culture that pictured the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering, whined, shouted, or screamed “aiieeeee!” Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his AIIIEEEEE!!! It is more than a whine, shout, or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice.<sup>3</sup>

Published five years later, Shawn Wong's novel *Homebase* offers, as we will contend, a more nuanced cry articulated in an unsteady voice. A beautifully-written and innovative piece of poetic prose, it features Rainsford Chan, a fourth-generation Chinese American who tries to come to terms with his story and History, both tales of dispossession and loss. Memories of his orphaned childhood mingle with evocations of his ancestors' experiences of radical deprivation on the American soil, as Rainsford, the twenty-five-year old homodiegetic narrator, tries to make sense of the past and to assert Chinese American identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong (eds.), *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), Washington, D.C, Howard UP, 1993, pp. xii-xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Zhou Xiaojing and Samina Najmi (eds.), *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2005, p. 7. In his introduction to the book, Zhou Xiaojing summarizes the shifts in critical methodologies that have affected Asian American Studies in the past few decades, and locates the initial debate around the *Aiiieeeee!* anthology. He quickly hints at the other major critique leveled at the editors which concerns their markedly androcentric stance, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Chin et al, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, p.xii.

In an *Aiiiiiiiii* logic, as it were, the novel indeed stages the narrator's process of claiming America as his – and his community's – unquestionable homebase, the firm ground on which to build up his adult life as a Chinese American. However, this militant act of reterritorialization is shown to be arduous and indecisive, the concept of "home" being called into question by the obsessional motif of traveling and by symbolic disjunctive forces. We will finally suggest that the dominant isotopy of disruption and movement seems to be inscribed in a larger, and willful choice of in-betweenness and symbolic deterritorialization, both an ethic and aesthetic stance which favors uncertain and endlessly shifting grounds.

### Claiming an American home

"Finally, she said, 'Just go back home.' [...] I was already at home."<sup>4</sup> "Just go back home": with four pronounced words, Rainsford's blond-haired "bride of fifteen"<sup>5</sup> – the "true dream of [his] capture of America" as the embodiment of mainstream white America ("She is America"<sup>6</sup>) – sums up decades of denial of Chinese American identity by white America. "I was already at home": in five unvoiced words, Rainsford silently confronts her with the plain truth of the Chinese American claim to the United States. The novel, hinging as it does on the dialectics of denial and repossession, erasure and reinscription, is but a vocal extension of this curt, and suspended exchange.

Throughout the narrative, Rainsford cuts a perfect figure of the All-American boy, all complete with his letterman's jacket as he turns into an athletic teenager. However, he is irremediably returned to his ethnicity when awarded his High School's "Most Valuable Player Trophy": "[...] my coach says to a crowd of athletes, parents, and teachers that I am the first Chinese in the history of the high school to receive this award in any sport [...]. '... Rainsford is a credit to the team, to this school, to his race....'"<sup>7</sup> This scene is but the actualization of a more general, infectious though disembodied, discourse:

And now in America I say to her that I have no place in America, after four generations there is nothing except what America tells me about the pride of being foreign, a visitor from a China I've never seen, never been to, never

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<sup>4</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase* (1979), Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2008, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Though figuring the elided words of the speech, the suspension points efficiently symbolize the erasure of American appartenance as the reader perceives the boy's hopeful, yet disappointed expectation of the word "America.", *Ibid.*, p. 79.

dream about, and never care about. Or, at best, here in my country I am still living at the fringe, the edge of China.<sup>8</sup>

The novel's title appears as the anticipatory answer to such assertions: it proclaims a sense of belonging and underlines the related concepts of fixity and solidity through the two elements of the compound noun, their unusual collusion into a single unit further stressing the sense of unquestionable stability. Besides, by conjuring up baseball – not a mere sport but an iconic landmark of American culture – it leaves no doubt as to the hero's resolutely American identity, while symbolically pushing him back from the fringe to the centre, the home base (or home plate) being the focal point of a baseball field.

"[My American bride] tells me things about me that I am not. America patronizes me and loves me and tells me that I am the product of the richest and oldest culture in the history of the world."<sup>9</sup> America is prone to foregrounding a fake solely-Chinese identity better to hide its erasure of the hero's true, i.e. Chinese American identity:

I was named after my great-grandfather's town, the town he first settled in when he came to California from China: Rainsford, California. Rainsford Chan (Chan is short for California). Rainsford doesn't exist anymore. There's no record of it ever having existed [...].<sup>10</sup>

Resisting white America's attempts at orientalizing and exoticizing him<sup>11</sup>, the narrator chooses to recall the basic facts of Chinese American history, marked by institutionalized racism and segregation.<sup>12</sup> His claiming of America is not synonymous with a rejection of Chinese descent, but the latter only seems meaningful to him when articulated to the American dimension.<sup>13</sup> Rainsford thus evokes the lives of his Chinese American ancestors, "four generations of [his] own life"<sup>14</sup> "who struggled to make a place for [him]".<sup>15</sup> Werner Sollors, in his book *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, addresses the "conflict

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance his symbolic resistance when his American bride insists on his taking her to San Francisco Chinatown.

<sup>12</sup> See p.15 for one of the most direct and factual evocations. Elsewhere, the history of early Chinese immigrants is evoked via the narrator's imagined memories of his ancestors.

<sup>13</sup> There are very few allusions to pure ancestral Chinese tradition in the novel.

<sup>14</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

between contractual and hereditary, self-made and ancestral, definitions of American identity” and underlines that “[t]he reminder that ‘you can’t change your grandfather,’ [...] is central to ethnic rhetoric”.<sup>16</sup> In *Homebase*, the acknowledgement of “immutable ancestry and descent”<sup>17</sup> is indissociable from “volitional allegiance”<sup>18</sup> to American identity as it is this irreducible “Chinese American” affiliation that the narrator repeatedly claims, a descent definition which is “largely based on a consent construction”<sup>19</sup>: “I chose the land around me, my grandfather’s America, to give me some meaning and place here, to build something around me, to establish my tradition.”<sup>20</sup>

The narrator undertakes to tell the story of his great-grandfather who, like so many Chinese men in the 1860s and 70s, emigrated to the United States to build the transcontinental railroad and who, although they “enabled the allure of manifest destiny to take hold”<sup>21</sup> at the price of inhuman labor and sufferings, were never allowed social participation in America. He also recalls his grand-father, born in San Francisco but sent back to China for safety, and who, upon returning to America, had to go through the immigration station of Angel Island.<sup>22</sup> The novel seems to suspend the grand-father in this no-place<sup>23</sup>, while the great-grandfather’s dreams of an American home remain forever inchoate: “Now I am fighting to find a place in this country”<sup>24</sup>, and “I will find a piece of land to work where I can remain in one place and watch the seasons ease on that place, root down in this difficult soil, and nurture my land”<sup>25</sup> (the chiasmic structure *land/place/place/land* seems to betray the desperate striving at securing this elusive piece of land). Because his ancestors’ lives were ones of endless dislodgments and alienation from the land, the

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<sup>16</sup> Sollors explains: “Men can change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent: they cannot change their grandfathers’ [wrote Kallen in 1916]. [...] The opposition between the artificial and the organic, between the organization of one’s choice and the organism of one’s essence, is clear. [...] American identity is often imagined as volitional consent, as love and marriage, ethnicity as seemingly immutable ancestry and descent.”, see Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Oxford and New York, Oxford UP, 1986, p. 151.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>20</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> The Ellis Island of the West Coast where countless Chinese immigrants were detained between 1910 and 1940.

<sup>23</sup> See p.92. A passage recalling the grand-father’s interrogation by the immigration authorities and the common scenes of violence on Angel Island suddenly shifts to the narrator’s visit to the place, decades later, never to return to the initial historical scene.

<sup>24</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

narrator's memorial voyage into the past is doubled by travels across the country. Rainsford's journeys – real or imaginary – in the footsteps of his forefathers are his symbolical attempt to reinscribe them in the nation's geography, as explained by Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong: "Each place where Chinese men once lived, toiled, and vanished is redeemed by remembrance, put back on the map: the map of Chinese America. And the American land and the 'ethnic' map are now one."<sup>26</sup>

Rainsford's travels across the American West stand as a mature version of his own father's somewhat meaningless spanning of the American continent: "When I was three, [my father] had decided it was time that he and his family saw America. He drove [...] across the country and back [...]. And when we came home, he never spoke of that journey again while I was growing up except to say that 'we had done it.'"<sup>27</sup> In sharp contrast to this superficial claiming of America, Rainsford's journeys are patiently attentive ("[Rainsford] lovingly traces a route of places of the heart"<sup>28</sup> and vocal: the novel's final chapter offers an incantation, several times renewed, of place names:

Then I was in Reno waiting to take the train home to San Francisco. It was 1875. [...] I said the names of stations and towns like prayers, as if they belonged to me: Reno, Verdi, Essex, Bronco. We moved into California and passed Boca, Prosser Creek, Proctor's, then into Truckee. Out of Truckee along Donner Creek [...]

Down into Summit Valley [...] There were prayers here that meant 'home'. [...] We are buried in every town: Cascade, Tamarack, Cisco, Emigrant Gap, Blue Canyon, China Ranch, Shady Run, Dutch Flat, and Gold Run.

[...] It is a smooth ride all the way home now through Davisville, Tremont, Dixon, Batavia, Elmira, Fairfield, Army Point, Benecia, Port Costa, Valona, Vallejo Junction, Tormey, Pinole, Sobrante, San Pablo, and Oakland. And home where I remembered all these names and repeated them [...]. Each town is a day in a journal, an entry in a diary, a letter, or prayer.<sup>29</sup>

Where his father has just "done [America]", the narrator, in a performative gesture, "does Chinese America with words."<sup>30</sup> In a dream-like scene on Alcatraz Island, an Indian man in whom the narrator sees his grandfather points at the walls: "Look at

<sup>26</sup> Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature*, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature*, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>30</sup> We are here alluding to the famous title of John Austin's study of speech acts: *How to Do Things with Words* (1962).

this. These things we've painted on the walls, claiming this piece of land. [...] It's funny how people write on walls. Most times it's a desperate and lonely job."<sup>31</sup> This remark cannot but indirectly conjure up the poems in Chinese carved on the barrack walls of the neighboring Angel Island, an episode of Chinese American history precisely evoked just after the Alcatraz scene. *Homebase*, with its narrator who revives "the muted voices of Chinamen"<sup>32</sup> – he repeatedly lends his voice to his forefathers – and who articulates in language the history and geography of Chinese America, can be interpreted as a vocal amplification of these signs carved on Angel Island's walls. Rainsford's narrative is indeed a performative speech act which claims a specific "piece of land" long disappeared from written records ("This is my home base, my Rainsford, California"<sup>33</sup>, Rainsford asserts as he visits Angel Island)<sup>34</sup>, but also, beyond, a greater piece of land, America at large. The novel's final chapter ends on the highly symbolical act of naming:

I take myths to name this country's canyons, dry riverbeds, mountains, after my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. We are old enough to haunt this land like an Indian who laid down to rest and his body became the outline of the horizon. See his head reclining, that peak is his nose, that cliff his chin, and his folded arms are summits.<sup>35</sup>

Its performative logic pushed to the extreme, language works wonders as it seems magically to conjure up the Chinese American forefathers. More lasting than a potentially erasable signifier, Chinese America – albeit through the mediation of an Indian<sup>36</sup> – is ultimately spelled neither by way of letters nor Chinese characters but in natural signs on the *outline* of the American horizon.

## A shaky base

The previous quotation, which closes the opening paragraph of the final chapter, is taken up in its very last lines, the novel ending as follows:

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<sup>31</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> Four pages before the end of the novel, the deictic formulation "This is [...] my Rainsford" fills the void left so long on the map ("There's no record of it [Rainsford] ever having existed.", *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> The superposition of the Chinese American father with an Indian, i.e. a true native to the American continent, is highly symbolical in the context of the novel's claiming of America.

And down in my father's canyon near Gold Run, where I made a journey out of the day, where I have found a stronghold, where I sang, prayed, and wrote: "We are old enough to haunt this land like an Indian who laid down to rest and his body became the outline of the horizon. This is my father's canyon. See his head reclining! That peak is his nose, that cliff his chin, and his folded arms are summits."<sup>37</sup>

Important though the changes in formulation may be – particularly in the way the Chinese American figure supersedes the Indian of the legend –, they should not make us overlook what is more than a detail of punctuation: the reference to the inscription of the father's body on the horizon line is given this time as the quotation of words previously written by the narrator, as if doubly to secure this symbolical act of fixing Chinese America's claim to the country. However, this underlying logic seems sapped by a number of elements. Although promoting one last image of fixity, the sentence thematizes movement, both through the spatial reference "down in my father's canyon" and the presence of the connective marker "and" which signals new momentum. Furthermore, while it carries on a pattern of non-verbal sentences set in the chapter<sup>38</sup>, the expression "And down to [...]" nonetheless brings imbalance to the very last lines of the novel, whose main clause proves syntactically unhinged.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the three-fold repetition of "where", though emphatically pointing to a clear spot, has been undermined in advance through the approximation "near Gold Run". The "stronghold" evoked remains shaky indeed.

And this is but one final occurrence of what definitely appears as a constant in the novel. Indeed, in direct contrast to its title, *Homebase* is all about blurred landmarks, shaky foundations, "shifty" grounds. The axial logic that underlies the attempt to restore America as Chinese Americans' legitimate home is systematically challenged by the text. While fighting against marginalization, *Homebase* incessantly stages disjunctive forces which question the immediate relevance of the title. The novel's most obvious feature in that regard is its obsessive foregrounding of movement: walking the streets, hiking on mountain trails, swimming, skiing, driving, speeding, riding trains, flying planes... characters are forever on the go in *Homebase*. And while living at home does not preclude traveling, the markedly emphatic presence of this motif in a narrative about securing one's roots becomes unsettling. Similarly, while touring a place can be synonymous with appropriating

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<sup>37</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 96.

<sup>38</sup> See the long quotation with place names.

<sup>39</sup> The incorrect form "laid", by breeding disequilibrium, also disturbs the expression of fixity. Beyond the punctual effect, it is part of a larger process of linguistic, and aesthetic, hybridization.



that place, endless movement – to the point of vertigo at times – cannot provide a sense of spatial belonging. The very first lines of the novel set the tone:

Back in the early fifties, when I was four, my father and mother drove from Berkeley to New York and back. [...] My sense of balance comes from lying asleep in the back seat of that car, my unsteady heartbeat comes from my father's night driving and my watching the chaos of passing headlights floating by on our car's ceiling and gleaming tail-lights reflected and distorted in the windows.<sup>40</sup>

The sense of balance initially asserted, and mimed by the parallel structures of the two opening clauses, irremediably dissolves: through the explicit appearance of the words “unsteady” or “chaos”, but also because the sudden flux of words (“and my watching the chaos [...] windows”) blurs the initial pattern of the sentence. This long gerund clause, with its repetitive use of –ing forms, triggers off a sense of dizziness, all the more so as the various –ing words, despite their apparent resemblance, do not have the same nature (gerund (“watching”), pure noun (“ceiling”), verbal adjective (“passing”, “gleaming”), present participle (“floating”) and thus introduce irregularity and off-beat rhythm. The smooth covering of the American space suggested by the incipit soon yields before the reality of troubled movement.

Tellingly, when the narrator recalls – or imagines – taking his American bride on a trip, one sentence reads: “We’re on the run through America”<sup>41</sup>; referring both to speedy movement and the illegal escapade of two under-eighteens, the expression also makes us hear another story: that of a young Chinese American citizen who cannot shake off the status of an unlawful, or at least undesired immigrant. Incessant movement in the novel thus seems intended to express that the struggle for Chinese Americans’ “at-homeness” in the United States has not been won yet, and is an ongoing process. “Out of all this I will see dreams, see myself fixed in place on the land, hear stories my father taught me”<sup>42</sup>, the narrator muses at one point; the very sentence deconstructs the sense of stable belonging it asserts: the place of fixity exists elsewhere (on another temporal plane), it has the shiftiness of dreams and stories, and it is symbolically belied by the inaugural words “out of”. There is probably no better expression of this tension between an aspiration for rootedness and a sense of thwarted belonging than in the juxtaposition of the two

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<sup>40</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

epigraphs to the novel. The first one is an entry on the Ailanthus tree taken from an American botanical book:

AILANTHUS altissima (*A. glandulosa*). Tree-of-Heaven. Deciduous tree. All Zones. Native to China. Planted a century ago in California's gold country where it now runs wild... Inconspicuous greenish flowers are usually followed by handsome clusters of red-brown, winged fruits in late summer and fall... Often condemned as a weed tree because it suckers profusely, but it must be praised for its ability to create beauty and shade under adverse conditions—drought, hot winds, and every type of difficult soil.

The metaphorical purport of this botanical entry is obvious, the fate of the Chinese plant in America obviously referring back to that of Chinese Americans. What is interesting, beyond, is the way the definition fuses the ostracizing stance and the counter-discourse, thus locating within an American text the Chinese American plea for acceptance, the very name of the botanical book (*Sunset Western Garden Book*) adding to the sense of a possible fusion between East and West. Finally, the very name of the plant suggests that the tree has extended its roots into Latin etymology, a promise of perfect blending. However, the next epigraph, a 24-line quotation from an English-Chinese phrase book compiled in 1875, stifles budding hope:

He was frozen to death in the snow.  
 He was going to drown himself in the bay.  
 [...]  
 He tried to kill me by assassination.  
 He is an assaulter.  
 He was smothered in his room.  
 He was suffocated in his room.  
 He was shot dead by his enemy.  
 He was poisoned to death by his friend.  
 [...]  
 I go home at night.  
 I went home.

I abide at home.

I abode at San Francisco.

I have lived in Oakland.

The litany of violence concretizes the “adverse conditions” hinted at in the first epigraph, whose ultimately optimistic contents are abruptly denied here by the opening line (“He was frozen to death in the snow”). And the last five sentences, despite their emphasis on “at-homeness” which might seem to counter the overwhelming sense of insecurity and alienation developed beforehand, actually further it. First because they punctually prolong the impression of awkward wording conveyed by some of these phrases given as models of the English language: “I abode at San Francisco” or even “I have lived in Oakland” – just like “He tried to kill me by assassination” – do not quite hold. More importantly yet, the lesson on conjugation seems to turn into an admission of the elusiveness of the notion of home: the declension irremediably disperses the concept, and the last example opens up a void, the *present* perfect form hardly masking the missing reference to the current place of residence.

On the threshold of his novel, Shawn Wong seems to alert us to the delusiveness of his title; and unsurprisingly, page after page he will indeed problematize the notion of “home”. The word first appears in the title of a song: “[My father] died too soon. He only taught me to sing ‘Home on the Range’”<sup>43</sup>; because the song is a staple of American Western folklore, this first reference irremediably associates home to America. However, when the narrator specifies: “In 1956 my father taught me to sing ‘Home on the Range’ on that island [Guam] in the Pacific Ocean”<sup>44</sup>, the sapping process is clear: the Pacific location is at odds with the Prairie of the song; Guam is an unincorporated territory of the United States, i.e. not an entirely American place; and finally, sung from Guam, one of the farthest margins of America, the tune – which is the state song of Kansas, probably America’s most central state – comes paradoxically to express inexorable displacement. Tellingly, Rainsford’s mother names the road in front of their house “Ocean Street”<sup>45</sup>, emphasizing the link between home and ocean, an improbable connection which will become one of the leitmotifs of the novel. Indeed, the childhood places that the narrator most often recalls are the Guam house on the beach and the house of his uncle and aunt who take him in when he becomes an orphan: “I came to live with my uncle and aunt at the age of fifteen in a small town near the ocean in

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

California"<sup>46</sup>, "Rainsford, I think you'll like living out near the ocean"<sup>47</sup>, "We enjoy being out here by the ocean"<sup>48</sup>, "This home by the ocean where I lived for three years."<sup>49</sup> Though idiomatic, the markedly recurrent juxtaposition of the words "home", "house" or "live" with the prepositions "by", "near" and "out"<sup>50</sup> defines a centrifugal movement, suggesting endless displacement. Furthermore, the systematic association of home with the ocean is more than a coincidence, the liquid element symbolically contradicting the possibility of building solid foundations or roots<sup>51</sup>; this dreamlike evocation of the grandfather comes, if need be, as a confirmation:

I saw you walk up to the water's edge where the tide left stones and small pieces of driftwood in the meadow grasses of the lagoon. You felt your spirit meeting the sliding roots of trees. [...] How many stones did you throw out into the sea when you decided that this was the place for roots?<sup>52</sup>

Each homebase thus appears symbolically threatened and fragile<sup>53</sup>, an impression reinforced by the endlessly shifting referent of the word "home" in the novel. It is the unstable and often allusive nature of the narrative<sup>54</sup> which makes the proliferation of possible referents – a normal feature as such – unsettling, associating as it does a paradoxical sense of dispersal to the notions of rootedness. The vagueness which sometimes persists as the reader cannot retrieve for sure the place that lies behind the word "home" contributes to the general impression of a dilution of this term in the novel. Finally, the narrator often opposes the Guam house to a place called "home" precisely<sup>55</sup>, an uncertain Californian place the family

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> See also pages 48-49 and 62.

<sup>51</sup> In baseball, the home plate is the only base to be made out of solid material, while the other bases are made of soft filling (traditionally sand and sawdust). In the novel, the homebase – a beach house – is linked to sand.

<sup>52</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> It is noteworthy that baseball is not one of the sports played by Rainsford in the novel. This contributes to sapping the symbolical meaning of the title, the title which, precisely, rests on no clear diegetic base.

<sup>54</sup> The text constantly has us move from one setting, one time thread, one voice to another, often without clear demarcation lines.

<sup>55</sup> See pages 4, 13, 65, 73. The first direct occurrence of the word home (just after its appearing in the song title) is disturbing: "The year before [my father's] death we moved from Berkeley to Guam. In 1956 my mother called the dirt road in front of our house on Guam 'Ocean Street,' and gave the only

left to go to Guam. Beyond the disruptive impact on the reader, “home” becomes a far-away and somewhat elusive referent, the paradoxical *point de fuite* of the novel, as more radically expressed here: “[The plane’s] dials and needles pointed to zero. They pointed their way home.”<sup>56</sup> When asked where he was from when he was in college, Rainsford would answer “Jackson Hole, Wyoming, when they were thinking Hong Kong”<sup>57</sup>: combining America (Jackson) and China (Wyoming), this name at the same time asserts the reality of Chinese America and claims its inscription on the map of the United States; yet, this answer also says the endlessly frustrated hopes of belonging, the hole in place of the base.

### “On the road to ruin”

*Homebase* can be defined as a discourse of retrieval, that of a received cultural tradition; it stands as a narrative of recollection – the recollection of repressed histories and lost speech –, of reconstruction – the reconstruction of a traceable origin and identity –, of reconquest – the reconquest of a territory and of a home. And when the novel acknowledges the frustrated attempt at fixation and the fragility of the base, this seems but a way of pointing at the continuing hardships faced by the Chinese American community. The narrator, in a gesture of self-empowerment, takes up the task of writing the story of Chinese America from his marginalized perspective, giving his counter-discourse center stage in an attempt to fill a void and displace the dominant Euro-American point of view. This oppositional stance rests on the certainty of boundaries, and upholds – although it reverses it – the binary paradigm “Center versus Periphery”, “Self versus Other”. Yet, if faithful to the novel’s intent, this reading seems to pay only partial justice to the text. Early on, the narrator asserts:

I am the son of my father, my grandfathers, and I have a story to tell about my history, about a moment in the Pacific when I heard myself saying “ever yours.” “Ever” is a word that moves like a song, exposing the heart in its tone, never hiding, never patronizing. The word speaks directly, creates form, and has its own voice.<sup>58</sup>

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house on that street the number ‘25.’ We began to receive mail there from home.” (4) Indeed, it is the Guam house which is at this stage understood to be the boy’s home by the reader, and the other referent of the word, when it appears, remains unclear and not immediately recoverable.

<sup>56</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Although the narrator claims traceable lineage, he exclusively emphasizes a link of the heart, the heart whose physiological – and symbolical – centrality is indeed an incontestable and universal fact; the claim here partly transcends oppositional politics. The passage, although it asserts faith in the possibility of a definite form and voice, relates them to a word which, despite its connotation of stability (“ever”), is here associated to movement (“‘Ever’ is a word that moves like a song”). Finally, the linear temporality is subordinated to a logic of the “moment”, and the “history” to be told is explicitly announced to be a “story”, i.e. one subjective tale among many others. The passage thus hints at a labile perspective.

The novel is elsewhere more explicit about the willful choice of in-betweenness and fluidity. The narrator first expresses his distrust of orderly systems of knowledge: “At first, when I started college, I wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to find the secret of things, to *learn*. But in the end, all those courses in chemistry and biology didn’t express the flux of my life. They weren’t my own voice.”<sup>59</sup> He is wary of achieved goals synonymous with arrested motion:

I do not like to linger on the summits of mountains. I do not take pride in standing on the summits of mountains, there is no dignity achieved by it. [...] once you’ve achieved that goal you have nothing to work for; it is a kind of disappointment to meet that goal.<sup>60</sup>

This passage, if remembered thirty pages later, invites us not to be content with the apparent fixity achieved at the very end of the novel, which precisely closes on the word “summits”. The novel’s final sentence also asserts: “I have found a stronghold”, an utterance set in perspective by these words which open the final chapter:

This chronicling of my life should be given the name of a place. A place for friends, family, and lovers. A place I can see all the way home. A clearing full of sun. A stronghold that doesn’t keep me in but pushes me away from it and makes me survive. And today, after 125 years of our life here, I do not want just a home that time allowed me to have. America must give me legends with spirit.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

The stronghold is clearly cherished only as the safe point it offers for deliberate departure<sup>62</sup>, the “true” home – in an uncanny opposition to “a place for friends, family, and lovers” – being assimilated here to an indefinite point on the horizon. Furthermore, the “place” that the narrator aspires to and claims appears of an itinerant kind (it seems to accompany the narrator as he moves) and is obviously of an intangible nature. Finally, as we know, it will become plural as this final chapter will see the exponential multiplication of place names, in an obvious dispersal of its opening assertion.

In “A place I can see all the way home”, one may wonder if “home” does not refer to one’s ultimate resting place, i.e. death. In this regard, the valorization of movement clearly appears as a celebration of life.<sup>63</sup> However, linked as it is to a sense of dispersal, and in the wider context of the novel’s insistent motif of uncertain grounds, it can be felt to express the narrator’s awareness of the irreducible contingency and instability of his condition. Rather than merely run after and lament the impossible securing of a firm homebase, the novel seems to opt for movement and liminality. And nowhere is the novel clearer in this claim than in its aesthetics: to borrow an expression French critic Yves-Charles Grandjeat uses in relation to the African American writer John Edgar Wideman, the novel “choisit de courir à sa perte”<sup>64</sup>, i.e. is “on a wilful road to ruin”, ultimately favoring uncertain grounds. Shawn Wong indeed makes the choice of incessant narrative disruption, multiplying often unannounced, and sometimes embedded shifts in chronology and voice. To this are added hallucinatory scenes (as in chapter two which stages a train “stopping at the edge of the ocean, the engine steaming into the waves that lapped against the iron wheels”<sup>65</sup>, uncertain shifts from reality to dream, punctual play on tense imbalance or/and occasionally opaque writing:

When I’m on the road at night I dream of places I’ve never been to before, I  
found places where my dreams joined like arteries out of the heart thick with

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<sup>62</sup> The parallel with the baseball metaphor is obvious: the home base is the plate the player leaves from and returns to in order to score, before being replaced by the next player who will repeat the pattern, etc.

<sup>63</sup> The tension – analyzed above – between fixity and movement in the very last lines of the novel can also be explained along the same line: it stands not only as an expression of the ongoing process of claiming America for Chinese Americans, but also as a celebration of the flux of life at the very moment of the evocation of the father’s lying still on the horizon.

<sup>64</sup> Yves-Charles Grandjeat, “Entre-deux: la place du mort dans la fiction de John Edgar Wideman,” in *Écritures contemporaines de la différence*, Paule Lévy (ed.), *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* n°96, mai 2003, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Shawn Wong, *Homebase*, p. 25.

blood, where my heart pulls at my breath.<sup>66</sup>

Often, the text suspends us half-way between reality and fantasy, prose and poetry, exploring an undecided generic zone: "When the nurse dropped my mother's thick green jade bracelet into my hands, the circle of green stone moved in my hands, turned red. I could not let go of it. It was the sound of her heart. She has no shape for me now, only my echo, and she kept my youth like cool green jade"<sup>67</sup>, or:

With my father's spirit I am driving at night. No music. No more dreams. There is only the blur of the white line, the white guard rail at the edges of my sight as I outrun the yellow glare of lights, an ache at the temples and a pulse in the whites of my palms, knowing what is in front of me. I am speaking to the road with the green lights of the car's instruments touching my face, no dreams, just talk, like an ocean's talk, constant, muted against sand, immediate, suffocating. My fingers moving from the steering wheel, through glass, to grab at the blurs of white at one hundred miles an hour. My hands lift me out of my seat to stoop over and grab the bleached bones of the road. I reach out to take the road in my hands, the blur of bones, no blood, someone speaks and I do not recognize the voice.<sup>68</sup>

Shawn Wong's unconventional prose writing is of course part of his strategy of resistance, an attempt to displace the existing canonical genres of the Bildungsroman, the historical novel, or even the road novel. *Homebase* stands as a Chinese American author's subversive interaction with a hegemonic white literary tradition. He, as it were, and to return to the metaphor of the title, enters a Euro-American "house of fiction" and makes himself at home in it, reappropriating its specific literary space, from which some would exclude him. Yet, does not Shawn Wong go further and question the very temptation to inhabit a locatable house of fiction? With its floating meaning, we are tempted to say that *Homebase*, if anything, is a house by the sea, a house whose foundations lie in liminal and sandy grounds.

## Conclusion

*Homebase*, a novel which is on the 1970s agenda of cultural nationalism, seems already to carry the intuition of the delusiveness of fixed boundaries, stable

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.



foundations and arrested paradigms. Constant motion and disjunction seem to be more than a celebration of the flux and disorder of life. Through its complex and sometimes opaque play on the motif of home, its aesthetic openness, its choice of movement and fluidity, this narrative of retrieval and assertion which performs a quest for identity and for a sense of belonging paradoxically acknowledges irreducible in-betweenness and de-centering. The novel thus surprisingly foregrounds notions which better relate to the postcolonial perspective – not yet dominant at the time of the novel's publication – with its insistence on liminality, provisionality and its dilution of all solid landmarks. Furthermore the novel, which in so many ways favors defamiliarization, invites us to inhabit an uncanny space which can be perceived as an indirect expression of the “unhomely” condition evoked by Homi Bhabha. In our turn choosing tension, we will conclude this analysis of *Homebase* by citing this theoretician of postcolonialism, with a passage from *The Location of Culture* which does give us a – tentative – point to hang on to as we tread on the quick sands of this beautiful and moving piece of fiction:

[Frantz] Fanon recognizes the crucial importance, for subordinated peoples, of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories. But he is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetichism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that ‘roots’ be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present. The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness<sup>69</sup> – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless [...].<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The study of the *Unheimliche* in *Homebase* would require an entire paper.

<sup>70</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994), London and New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 13.





# Filming Taiwan: From a Model Japanese Colony to an Ideal Republic of China? 1907-1976

WAFAGHERMANI

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This article focuses on the evolution of the representation of the Taiwanese territory from 1907 to the 1970, from the first documentary shot in Taiwan by the Japanese to the “Golden Age” of Taiwan cinema. Taiwan was first presented as an exemplary modern Japanese colony, during the first years of the KMT rule. The island was considered as a new frontier, a territory to conquer (though invisible on screen). Eventually, by the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s, Taiwan began to be integrated into the reality of the films as the landscape was used as a dramatic device (歸來/*Guilai/Regrets* by Zong You, 1958) and when the monuments built during the Japanese period became landmarks of the new country. At the same time, the Healthy Realist films (健康寫實 *jiankang xieshi*) aimed at shaping an ideal Republic of China on the way to a happy modernisation (蚵女/*Kenü/Oyster Girl* and 養鴨人家/*Yangya renjia/Beautiful Duckling* by both directed by Lee Hsing in 1964). But contradicting this vision of an enthusiastic developing society, the films in Taiwanese (台語片 *taiyupian*) gave a darker image of a quite destructive modernity: it was illustrated by the opposition between the South and Taipei as in *Unfinished Love* (舊情綿綿 *Jiuqing mianmian* by Shao Lo-Hui, 1962), whereas the urban melodramatic *santing* films (三廳電影 *santing dianying*), by eliminating the outside world, conveyed the impression of a superficial modernity in a claustrophobic space/society in films such as *Lonely Seventeen* (寂寞七十歲 *Jimo shiqisui*, Bai Jing-Rui, 1967) and *Posterity and Perplexity* (碧雲天 *Biyuntian*, by Lee Hsing, 1974). Thus, some very commercial movies, in spite of a strong censorship power, could, in a certain way still challenge the imposed representation of a perfect Republic of China, as the films in Taiwanese tended to assert a Taiwanese specificity against the Chinese dominant culture.

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## The Japanese Era: Showing Taiwan as an Exemplary Colony

The characteristic of Japanese representation is the divergent images given by documentary and fiction. It is also striking that Taiwan was not considered as interesting a setting for feature films in comparison with Manchuria and China. Michael Baskett underlines in his book *The Attractive Empire*, that Taiwan quickly lost its appeal because it was considered identical to Japan and, after two decades, as a part of the Empire.<sup>1</sup> In this context, Taiwan's portrayal as an exemplary colony was the subject of most documentaries.

There are some exceptions, such as one of the only remaining movies of this era; 1942's *Sayon's Bell* (サヨンの鐘 *Sayon no kane*, Shimizu Hiroshi), in which the Taiwanese territory is mainly rural and mountainous as the setting of a story in an Aboriginal tribe. In this particular case, the image of Taiwan is the one that can be found in the myth of the South, as in novels and manga of the time.<sup>2</sup> In this film, mainly performed by Japanese actors, the modern side of Taiwan is carefully avoided in order to focus on the exotic aspect of the island.

In opposition to this Romantic representation, documentaries aimed at imposing an image of Taiwan as a very modernised and effective colony. Indeed, the modernisation process seems to have been central since the first film shot in Taiwan in 1907, by a Japanese crew. This documentary was shot in more than 100 places and is clearly an attempt at describing the new colony. Even if the film is nowadays unavailable, the newspaper *Taiwan Daily* (台灣日日報/*Taiwan ri ri bao*) gives a precise account quoted by Lee Dao Ming.<sup>3</sup> When we compare the description of the contents of the film with the documentaries shot in the 1930s and 1940s, it appears the same landmarks are always repeated. This description is often structured in three parts:

- The infrastructure which defines Taipei and the cities; parks, the train station, the banks, the schools, the animated streets;
- Frameworks of activity between the cities; canals, train journeys, electrification lines, factories;

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<sup>1</sup> Baskett Michael, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete study of the mediatic representation of the Japanese colonial empire, refer to *The Attractive Empire*, Michael Baskett.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Dao-Ming 李道明 台灣電影史第一章 1900 1915 (*The First Chapter of Taiwan Film History : 1900-1915*), <http://techart.tnua.edu.tw/~dmlee/article6.html>, p. 14-16.

- The savage - but domesticated and harmless - side of Taiwan's Aborigines and the mountainous landscapes.

The representation of Taiwan evolves from a mere description of the new territory to a clear demonstration of the Japanese capacity to develop Asia. A strong example is the film *The Southward Advance* (南進臺灣 *Nanjin Taiwan*), in which the justification for the Japanese expansion to the South is given by demonstrating the complete success of Taiwan's assimilation and transformation into a loyal Japanese territory. A particular sign of this modernity and the mastering of the territory is the massive presence of the trains and the shots taken from a train. Because of the train's inherent travelling movement, the territory is shown from one end to the other. Furthermore, the train is the very image of modernity and conveys proof of a tamed territory where electrification and factories are numerous.

Another striking point is the very classical way the colony is feminised; the female body can be seen as a metaphor for the territory. The documentary *The Southward Advance* presents a clear dichotomy between male figures – always Japanese officials who are named and always shot in their occupation – and unnamed females wearing *qipao* (Chinese style dresses) or Aboriginal women in traditional attire that fill the shots. This dual representation personifies a colony which is, at the same time, very well administrated as well as full of charm.

### **The Chinese Nationalist Vision: An Ideal Republic of China? The Competing Representations of Taiwan's Landscape**

In many ways, this colonial vision inherited from Japan prevails until the middle of the 1950s and the Taiwanese territory in films hovers between oblivion and affirmation. There are many stages in the representation of Taiwan's landscape:

1945 to 1951 - Except for *Troubles in the Mount Ali* (阿里山風雲/*Alishan Fengyun*), no fictions were shot in Taiwan between 1948-1950; only newsreels that adopted the representation device used by the Japanese.

1951 to 1956 - Fictions shot in Taiwan were not supposed to be set in Taiwan, but rather largely in China.

From 1956 – Taiwan's landscape finds some legitimacy in feature films before disappearing again in the mid-1960s.

Thus the first newsreels show the reorganisation of the Taiwanese territory with recurrent scenes which are close to preceding Japanese propaganda: the cleaning of

the cities, the education of the people, sport competitions, the arrivals of officials, and military trainings.

When feature films were eventually produced in 1951, Taiwan is never shown on screen as itself; rather, it always represents another place, mostly the lost China. Contradictory to this, however, Taiwan is present in dialogues, and is mentioned as a new frontier and a virgin territory.

One striking film of this period is *Beautiful Treasure Island* (美麗寶島/*Meili Baodao*, 1953), which is supposed to take place in the Philippines – making us suppose that the film was intended for a diasporic audience – as it is an example of the ambiguous status of Taiwan in films. The film begins with a young couple watching pictures of Taiwan and then deciding to go there for their honeymoon. Cut. Next shot: the couple is back. This unique editing means that Taiwan does not exist in the continuity of the fiction. Taiwan is simply a memory; a place that people talk about, a territory that can be projected, as the young couple organises the screening of a documentary they shot there. More than a real territory, Taiwan is a discourse, a construction, even if the images are meant to offer a proof of its existence.

At the same time, a new kind of movie appears and this genre still exists: historical films set in a more or less ancient time and mainly shot in film studios. As a consequence, the settings used are always the same and the image of the lost China become even more fictional and artificial. Meanwhile for the shots on location, the Taiwanese landscape appears as a metonymy, an ersatz of China.

Then from 1956 onwards, the Taiwanese landscape gradually becomes part of the fiction's scenery and Taiwan thus really begins to represent the territory of the new Republic of China. This presence is apparent through the inclusion of Japanese-style houses or monuments built during the Japanese era. In these films however, official buildings such as Zhongshan bridge, the Taipei train station, or the President Palace have become the landmarks of the new country. Another aspect of the recognition of Taiwan's territory is its use of landscape as an active dramatic device. For example, in *A Journey to Guanshan* (關山行/*Guan Shan Xing*, 1956) the rain tempest and the fall of the rock are the starting point of the story. In *Regrets* (歸來/*Guilai*, 1959) the breaking the bridge leads directly to the happy conclusion of the story. Still this paper argues that there is a real difference in the way Taiwan landscape is shot by *waishengren* and *bendiren* directors in films such as the Mandarin language movie *Taiphooon* (颱風/*Tai feng*) and the Taiwanese language

film *Unfinished Love* (舊情綿綿/*Jiu qing mian mian*) directed by the Taiwan-born and Japan-educated Shao Luo-hui. Both films – shot in 1962 – are set in and use the landscape surrounding Mount Ali. In the Mandarin film, the landscape becomes an inner landscape that reflects the tormented soul of the hero running wild and is also shown as a prison and a hide-out for him. Contrastingly, in *Unfinished Love* (as in many films shot by Taiwanese people), the landscape exists for itself, outside any narrative effect – but is still set in opposition to the city. The landscape is just the natural environment of the characters and also defines their “Taiwanese-ness”.

The third type of presence of Taiwan’s territory in films could be called the “touristic point of view”. This tendency is very obvious in movies directed by *waishengren* directors who, in a way, perpetuate a colonial vision of Taiwan, which is seen as a foreign place. Strangely enough, two Taiwanese films illustrate this “touristic vision”: *The Descendants of the Yellow Emperor* (黃帝子孫/*Huang di zi sun*) of 1956, in which a group of Fujian and Taiwanese teachers tours Taiwan and sees a selection of very Chinese places and *Brother Wang and Brother Liu Tours Taiwan* (王哥劉哥遊台灣/*Wang Ge Liu Ge you Taiwan*) by Lee Hsing in 1962.

### **The Official Territory: The Healthy Realism Movement**

The main turn in the representation of Taiwan’s territory occurred with the launch of the Healthy Realism movement launched by Gong Hong of the CMPC (Central Motion Picture). The idea was to create films that represent common people rather than the Chinese bourgeoisie represented in earlier films. The new perspective was to be portrayed not in a pessimistic way as it was in the Italian neo-realism or in the Chinese realistic films of the 1930s. Its aim was to promote the bright side of the KMT’s modernisation policy.

The two most famous films of this movement are Lee Hsing 李行’s *Oyster Girl* (蚵女/*Kenü*, 1964) and *Beautiful Duckling* (樣鴨人家/*Yang ya ren jia*, 1965). In both films, the use of colours and cinemascope are meant to provide a wider image of the territory: the travelling shots on the seashore, the journey with the ducks. As in *The Road* (路/*lu*), the transformation of the territory takes place under our very eyes with the construction of the roads, of new houses, and of a better harvest.

While healthy realist films were the official films representing the Republic of China and its achievement in festivals, other non-official movies were giving another image of the new country. Indeed, as a tarnished mirror to this enthusiastic vision, Taiwanese-language films oppose a darker dichotomous vision of



modernisation. At the same moment as Healthy Realism, the Taiwanese-language film was in its second wave. These low budget films were shot on location and as a consequence allow the viewer to discover another reality that is less clean, a little miserable, and featured much Japanese architecture which was often avoided in Mandarin-language films.

Among these films, the ones dealing with contemporary society are not as enthusiastic as those belonging to Healthy Realism and their dichotomous representation of the countryside and the city can be understood as an opposition between Taipei and the real Taiwanese (innocent) South. The significant link between the two parts of the country is the train – the sign of modernisation.

In *First Train from Taipei* (台北發的早車/*Taipei fa de zao che*), before leaving her lover the girl meets him by the river, there is a slow movement from the bridge where they stand in front of the river with the sound of her lover's flute. But her arrival in the city is stressed by jazz music and violent descendant camera movements. In many Taiwanese films, the shots – zoom in, zoom out and travelling - tend to isolate the character in the city. These techniques express the loneliness of the characters and the fact that they always lose themselves in the big evil city. This feeling of loss is emphasised by the choice of locations; Mandarin films are shot in very modern parts of the city whereas Taiwanese-language films often take place in the outskirts, or in construction zones.

### **Claustrophobic Interiors – Claustrophobic Territory**

In the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s, a new film genre became successful: the *santing* films (three-rooms-films): living room, dining room and café (and in fact one should add, bedroom).

These very successful films were always set in very modern and fancy interiors. The exterior world was reduced to the minimum – a street, a garden, a school – and was also very modern. But in this kind of films, especially in tragic ones, this modernity is turned into a fake and deceptive setting from which the characters cannot escape.

This deceptive modernity and the claustrophobic feeling it causes is very obvious in a film such as *Lonely Seventeen* (*Jimo shiqisui* 寂寞七十歲) by Bai Jing Rui 白景瑞 (1967), which is not a real *santing* film but still announces this trend and *Posterity and Perplexity* (*Biyuntian* 碧雲天) by Lee Hsing (1974).

In the first case, modern life has destroyed the family life and care: the house, the hotel are just spaces of transit that are deserted or full of indifference, and the main character transfers her affective needs on objects. In the second case, modernity is fake and does not hide, but emphasise the painful tradition. The modern settings

trap the characters and destroy them. The house and the modern settings can be seen as metaphors of the territory which is isolated and oppressing. In these films this impression is conveyed by the recurrent use of *surcadrage* (a frame within the frame). And these films, which are often regarded as only entertaining films, in fact acquire a deeper meaning, that of a metaphor of the situation of the ROC at the time: modernised but conservative and isolated.

## **Conclusion**

The portrayal of Taiwan has always have been divided between demonstration (Japanese propaganda) and oblivion (Chinese propaganda, *santing* films), but all of these competitive representations, official or by the film in Taiwanese mirror the complexity of the island's status and demonstrate the fact that the official voice was defied. They allow us to have a new point of view on Taiwan's cinema history.



## My Making of Somewhere Over the Cloud

HSIAO MEI-LING

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In the making of this film I have had to take on the roles of director, videographer, mother, and wife. Moreover, the roles of mother and videographer often seemed to be in a state of direct opposition. From my standpoint as director, Elodie was the subject of my creative work. Of course, the creative artist must try to be detached from the subject of his/her art. At times, this detached, analytical, observational role that I played as director might have seemed apathetic. On the other hand, as a mother, standing on the frontlines observing Elodie, an extension of my own being, my natural instinct was to offer her my selfless love and protection. It was at those times that I, as videographer, was often caught in the trap of having to deal with subjective concerns and confusion. Furthermore, whenever I made an attempt to film this sort of motherly love, using it as a kind of creative force, the result was often the creation of conflict between, and deformation of, expectations and reality. This was especially true in that many of the people who viewed the finished product also ended up calling into question the parent/technology human-machine integrated role that I portrayed in the film. People who have seen the film also tend to wonder about the possible effects that the film/filming might have on my daughter. Near the end of the film, there is a scene in which my husband suggests that all such problems can be equated to the 'video camera'. In fact, in a sense, he is likening *me* to an emotionless video camera. Of course, I could have edited out this scene; however, since I felt that this particular image bore witness to a fundamental concern I was unable to escape dealing with it. Or, perhaps it is that this question is directed at me, directed at my work, directed at all of us, directed at the concept of roles within a marriage, or directed at the roles assumed by mothers and working women. This question goes beyond the domain of my own personal experience. It bears witness to a common concern present in today's society. *Somewhere over the Cloud* is an experimental-style documentary film. Critics have called the film a 'laboratory of life'. During the initial stages of filming my hope was that the burgeoning Internet technology of the time might be able to act as a solution for many of the relationship-related issues that most

people were unable to fully overcome, such as limitations and obstructions of time and space... My own long-distance marriage (each partner residing in a different country) made it so that our family, in particular our daughter's relationship with her father, had to face some difficult challenges, especially ones that related to time and space. With her mother and father living in separately because of work, Elodie, as a child of a mixed marriage, had to learn to float back and forth between races, nationalities, countries, languages, and cultures. However, as the filming of *Somewhere over the Cloud* neared the end, Elodie's rejection of her father became clear like a sharp blade forcing me to have to face certain issues relating to my previously held notions about technology. I had to reassess the overly optimistic expectations and delusions that I had toward the Internet at the beginning of shooting. I was forced to introspect. The necessary co-existence of "distance" and "family bonds" creates a dilemma in which one aspect is often taken care of at the expense of the other. The Internet can be seen as the quickest, most economical tool for keeping in touch, but I don't believe that it can replace physical interaction between human beings, things such as a real-world hug, real-world eye contact, or a real-world understanding smile... Cold, emotionless technology does not possess the warmth associated with human contact. In the back-and-forth world of familial affections technology has difficulty accommodating the important elements of human warmth and affection.

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### Synopsis of Story\*

Before Elodie's birth, her father had applied for a temporary leave from work in order to travel from his home in France to come to Taiwan to be with Elodie's mother. While in Taiwan Elodie's father divided his time between studying Chinese and spending time with Elodie's then expectant mother. Shortly after the birth, Elodie's father left Taiwan to return to his home in France. It was there that he read in a book on infant psychology that infants generally don't form a clear concept of their father until after about 15 months of age. He had already left for France well before his daughter Elodie had reached 15 months. Elodie's mother had wanted her daughter's native language to be Mandarin and for her to spend her childhood in Taiwan. This would leave Elodie's father to wonder dejectedly whether this meant that his little girl would have no true notion of her father. Since father and daughter were living so far apart, a web cam became the means by which Elodie would come to know her father. The Internet also became a means through which Elodie would develop language skills, and learn about the world. Elodie's first attempts at describing an abstract notion came when she would tap or play with the web camera and the image on the computer screen would suddenly

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\* The article is translated from Mandarin into English by Todd Klaiman and sponsored by the Research Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan.

disappear: Elodie would say, "Gone." On the other side of the globe, helpless, Elodie's father would always just look through the video monitor with loving eyes and say, "Elodie, qu' est ce que tu dis? (Elodie, what did you say?); "Je suis dans la boite (I'm in the box)...". Hoping to give rise to some sort of affection between father and daughter he would sing, "Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous...". However, the question remained: Would this 'virtual' affection continue to develop in step with Elodie's language skills and her knowledge of the world around her? Moreover, which language would father and daughter use to communicate with one another? French? Chinese? Or, perhaps they would be able to communicate directly, soul to soul?

### **Film's Main Idea**

After having traveled in France for eight years, I finally ended up studying at Le Fresnoy (National Studio of Contemporary Arts) in the northern French town of Roubaix. The atmosphere there was deeply inspiring: The low red brick houses, the abandoned factories, the large numbers of forgotten foreign workers.... Under the dim yellow glow of the streetlights the entire city seemed to be soaked in reddish syrup, and then the color would gradually fade.... It was at Le Fresnoy that I came to know, then resident artist, Robert Kramer.

Robert was a leading figure in the development of the social movement that took place in the US during the 1960s. He founded the Newsreel film group in 1967 as a way to oppose the American mainstream media that at the time tended toward dishonest, overly prettified representations of the news. He fought for basic human rights, did not support the Vietnam War, and seemed to have a strong attraction to the underground scene of many different places around the world. Unfortunately, Kramer was never able to win the support of the American public. He left America to move to Europe in the late 1970s.

Perhaps it was the fact that we were both foreigners traveling in France, or that we shared a spiritual connection, or perhaps it was the unique atmosphere at Le Fresnoy. Whatever it was, we would often discuss concepts of exile (both the State notion of exile and the spiritual self-exile), foreign lands, strange lands...homesickness...

Robert always had a warm, passionate attitude while offering up trenchant criticism of Western society and its politics. He lived in France for 20 years, choosing a life of self-imposed exile from the United States. Film was the medium through which he responded to the world around him. He used to say, "I still have a passport; I can go back anytime. I have merely moved from my home in America, to my home in Asia, and finally returned home to France. "It is a kind of self-

selection", he would say. He told me that if I was feeling homesick that perhaps I could make a film in order to shoot the feeling out. It was this advice that helped to sow the first seeds for the making of my first documentary film, *The Falling Kite*.

While I was shooting *The Falling Kite*, Robert was always there to offer me encouragement. When the semester was over, he said to me, "I am so happy that we have been able to work together. When I return, you can invite me over for some Oolong tea and show me the finished product." In fact, he never did return. Eventually, I too left France. Robert's sudden departure left a mark on my heart. However, to me, although Robert Kramer had left this space he still continued to exist in some other place. My conversations with him had never stopped. Or perhaps it is that my own dialogue with myself has continued...

Although Robert has already left this experiential world of the physical body, as far as I am concerned, his e-mail letterbox is a spiritual space in which he will always live on. While at Le Fresnoy, Robert was the person who opened up the road of documentary filmmaking to me. After he left, we continue our dialogue from *Somewhere over the Cloud*. In my previous work, *The Falling Kite*, I wanted to address issues of separation, homesickness, and exile. The birth of our biracial daughter Elodie caused me to reflect anew upon sociopolitical issues such as interpersonal relations, self-identification of status, cultural identity, and so on.

There is a section in his 1997 film *Ghosts of Electricity* in which Robert narrates the following passage: "And then one day there will be no here. There will be no body with which to define place. We will be everywhere at once. Eventually I will download the totality of my sensorium, I will download the totality of this specific consciousness and the rules of its functioning: my mind and its method, your mind, will be saved inside a vast memory for all time and throughout the galaxies, and this body this fallible frail, flimsy and dying thing, this meat which does less and less for us, this meat won't be necessary: we won't need it."

Based on the aforementioned background, I came up with the following idea: I would use the letters that I had written to Robert as a sort of skeleton that would run throughout the film; the content that I shot would become the life force lain atop the skeleton; and the message that I hoped to communicate would be the soul of the film, the site of the true spirit. The idea was to ascertain whether or not it is possible that the lives of the people of the 21st century would no longer be subject to the constraint of fences, borders, identities, or narrow-minded nationalism? I surmised that cyberspace is borderless. It can be visible or invisible; empirical or theoretical; physical or metaphysical; corporeal or spiritual... It can also be personal or public, real or virtual. It can be of homeland or of foreign land. Cyberspace is able to encompass the past, the present, and the future. A friendship existing in this unique space can continue on unimpeded, without beginning, without end. The

people of this cyberland are like clouds free to roam in all directions without restriction. For them, homesickness becomes a kind of ancient legend, one that is handed down, retold, and imagined... After awakening from a long silence, would homesickness again become a reality? Or, would it remain a dream that just skirts reality? Can Web technology truly rid the world of the emotional states associated with homesickness and nostalgia? Can the people of the 21st century really use technology to help them avoid the distress of homesickness? Or will it merely take on another form, another name, stealthily seizing the vulnerable spirit of those travelers residing in foreign lands? Perhaps in the future my daughter Elodie will be able to answer these questions for me.

### **Distinguishing Features of the Film**

This is an autobiographical-style documentary in which time and space shift back and forth between Taiwan and France. The e-mails that I wrote to Robert Kramer penetrate throughout the entire story. Each e-mail frames one section of the storyline and conveys a particular message. These e-mails written to the late filmmaker Robert Kramer ensure that although he has already left this experiential world of the physical body, his e-mail address, will remain a spiritual space within which he will always live on. It is through this autobiographical-style documentary that I come to re-evaluate notions of life, space, language, status, national boundaries, and the like.

In contrast to the traditional narrative-style documentary film, *Somewhere over the Cloud* does not attempt to present a purely objective point of view, but rather makes use of video diaries and e-mails in order to make observations inward. The birth of my child, the extension of my being, has produced in me the passion to re-examine the world around me. It has also caused me to probe more deeply into questions of what is real and what is virtual. Moreover, I am interested in investigating the possibilities of being able to experience emotions within the virtual realm.

Thanks to the development of Web technology, travelers living in foreign lands are now able to roam unimpeded throughout the space between the real and the virtual. They are able to find some relief in the virtual world for the distresses of homesickness in the real world. That which cannot be provided by the real world can be satisfactorily found within the virtual world. The soul tormented by the stresses of homesickness in the real world can retreat to the virtual world to be healed. Within the virtual world the road leading home is just around the corner; the distance between homeland and foreign land is no longer so distinct.

It is also owing to the existence of Web technology that Robert and I were able to wander freely back and forth between the real and the virtual. Death within the



realm of the real can become rebirth within the space of the virtual. The real world becomes more unreal as the virtual world becomes more real. The boundaries between real and virtual are increasingly blurred. At times real, at times unreal, just as "Zhuangzi dreaming he was a butterfly". Was it the butterfly that appeared in Zhuangzi's dream? Or, was it Zhuangzi who appeared in the butterfly's dream?

Finally, it was also by virtue of Web technology that my little Elodie was able to move unimpeded between the real world and the virtual world. She had the freedom to get to know this novel world and to learn all sorts of new things, including the virtual-world persona of her real-world father.

Although Web technology has brought about all of the aforementioned benefits the technology itself also has its disadvantages. For example, any time that communication is slowed by cyberspace traffic, the once present moment can easily become a moment of the past. Moreover, image and sound are often not fully synchronized; and a difference of time zones can still cause problems. These are just a few of the obstacles facing the virtual realm that Web technology has been unable to overcome. In fact, these shortcomings of Web technology have left a precious space within which imagination and remembrance can survive. Anytime that there is an image lag or a freezing of the image on the screen, one's thoughts are forced into temporary abstraction, either returning once again to the non-virtual world, recalling something from the past, or just spacing out: imagination swinging back and forth between the real and the virtual....

During the filming of *Somewhere over the Cloud*, I allowed my imagination to shuttle back and forth between France and Taiwan...between languages...between real space and virtual space...between the multifaceted identifications of self. Within the spaces of intricate overlaps of time and space, this film makes use of the lens within the lens (the lens of the video camera and the lens of the Web cam) and the screen within the screen (the computer screen and the movie screen) in order to narrate threads of thought.

Under the insistence of her mother, Elodie spent her childhood in Taiwan while her father, living in France at the time, became the 'virtual daddy' displayed on the computer screen. Once Elodie is old enough to go to France to visit her father's hometown, and father is finally able to step out from behind the computer screen into the real world, I wonder whether there will be a gap between the real-life image of her father and the virtual image that she is used to seeing on the computer screen, thus, causing her feelings of homesickness or nostalgia. Elodie's real-world father hidden inside that little computer screen.... I have often contemplated these sorts of life changes. I look forward to the emergence of some sort of clarity. I gaze into the future and wonder which place Elodie will take as her homeland and which she will come to refer to as foreign land. Or perhaps, the people of the 21st

century, living in the nationless, borderless on-line world, will be able to free themselves of the distresses of homesickness and nostalgia.

Cyberspace is a place of freedom, a place that can belong to personal space or to public space; it can be real or virtual, exist in a homeland or a foreign land; and it can encompass past, present, and future. However, the question still remains: Will cyberspace actually be enough to supplement the modern family's lack of personal interaction. Will it be able to build a virtual realm for experiences and feelings? Is it possible that the people of the 21st century will never again feel the restriction of fences, borders, patriarchal nationalisms, or status self-identifications? Will technology be enough to steer them clear of the stresses of homesickness and nostalgia? As videographer and mother my role has become similar to that of video camera quietly observing and waiting for an answer.

### **Will Nostalgia and Homesickness Exist in Cyberspace?**

My interest in both Tech-Art and the Web began in 1995. At that time I was still studying at the Nancy Academy Art College in France. In those days, the Internet was still in its infancy. Although transmission speeds were only about 2000 bps, and users often had to wait a long time for the next window to load, the nationless, borderless, regionless nature of cyberspace still attracted me. There was so much room for the imagination within that instantaneous, virtual global village. To me, the windows of the Internet browser were, in fact, just like magical windows into a new world.

In their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari allude to the concept of openness as it relates to notions of creativity. They call this system of openness a 'rhizome'. This particular concept has also been used as an allusion to the hyperlinks of cyberspace: Just like a cloud, cyberspace is without self-nature, without substance, it grows, shrinks, and is constantly ramifying. A minute, an hour, the potential to become perpetual is there. My film *Somewhere over the Cloud* aims to highlight the speed-related conditions of disorder, lag, and idleness that are created as a result of this on-going circulation of information in cyberspace.

As Canadian scholar Herbert Marshall McLuhan once explained, the world we live in is one that has been processed and cooked. Along these same lines, French sociologist Jean Baudrillard also surmised that digitized information, or electronic media, would one day come to replace the human experience of reality. Reality would be replaced by a kind of hyper-reality. The contemporary world has become more or less surrounded, and infiltrated, by technology. The Internet has become a major part of contemporary society. This phenomenon has changed the way in

which we interact with one another and the way in which we define the world around us. Our changing notion of 'actual distance' is one example of the effects of this phenomenon. In *Somewhere over the Cloud*, Elodie's own experience more or less verifies Baudrillard's prediction. As far as Elodie is concerned, father is computer; father is the image that results from a collection of operations; father is the 'teddy bear within the image'; father is '?'. In cyberspace, the concept of 'distance' is disrupted. In fact, 'actual distance' is drawn further away, creating a kind of hyper-reality.

## Theoretical Basis

My film *Somewhere over the Cloud* was strongly influenced by Deleuze's concept the "crystals of time". A focus on video art as medium in my earlier works helped me to express my own notions of Deleuze's time-image. The editing process used in video art allows it to present a kind of subjective time, changing the essence of time itself, materializing time. By way of time reproduction techniques such as lag, drop frame, overlap, displacement, relativity, freeze-frame, and intermittence, video art is able to transform physical time into a kind of time that is of the inner spirit. It is the re-creation of this kind of time.

According to Deleuze, art, science, and philosophy are all events that possess a certain temporality. These events are not only able to reveal a different notion of 'time' but they also encompass it. Such temporal events are not simply a linear continuity of time, but are, in fact, representations of the co-existence of different times, or the simultaneous co-existence of multiple time flows. Time is a *duree* (duration). The past is preserved within the present. At the time that the present comes into existence, the past hasn't yet disappeared. This 'duration' is called memory. Deleuze understands memory as a kind of entirety; all of time co-exists in the memory.

In my films I have always tried to present this sort of notion of time. For example, my film *The Falling Kite* presents the storyline of three characters at the same time, namely my grandmother, the French-Chinese biracial Mr Zhang, and myself. The three characters co-exist simultaneously within the spaces interwoven by the remembered and the present, and the real and the imagined, making use of the skylight in the film to create a convolution of time. Likewise, in my film *Somewhere over the Cloud*, the story of my daughter Elodie's development does not follow a linear model of time, but instead, it makes use of individual thematic units in order to explore images that shuttle back and forth within real space and virtual space, real memory and virtual memory, as well as within the present moment. However, memory here does not entirely imply those recollections that belong to Elodie, but,

in fact, also refers to my own subjective commentary on my daughter's memories. This layer-upon-layer-style approach is used to frame Elodie's self-identification with her environment and with her culture, as well as her relationship with her father.

According to Deleuze, the real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is 'coalescence' between the two. There is a formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture<sup>1</sup>.

My two films *The Falling Kite* and *Somewhere over the Cloud* both present a symbolic mirror-image world. In *The Falling Kite*, this world is represented by a skylight upon which is seen the director's own reflection. The reflective surface of the skylight creates a space in which events transpire simultaneously within the space of the actual and the remembered; the real and the virtual; the historical imagination and the collective memory... It is the whisperings of personal memory and of self-exile. Throughout the film, the sound of rain penetrates the recollections of time and of emotions. The first frame of the film shows rain falling upon the skylight along side my own reflection in the glass of the skylight. The final frame of the film slowly zooms out from the image on the glass surface of the skylight. It isn't until this final frame that the audience becomes aware of the fact that everything they saw throughout the film was merely a reflection from the skylight. It was all just a type of 'mirror-image', the subjective imaginings of the director.

In my film *Somewhere over the Cloud* I use a computer screen as the reflective surface. The images recorded by the web cam are the two aspects of this one reflective surface. This surface acts as a means to toggle back and forth between different spaces, different nations, and different regions. The web cam enables the circulation of images and sounds. The two web cams create a similar effect to that produced when two mirrors are placed facing each other. Elodie's own reflection appears within the image produced by the web cam that is simultaneously broadcasting her father's voice and image. Father's persona is yet another form of loop: at the same time he is both 'father' and 'teddy bear'.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, UK, Athlone, 2005, pp. 66-67.

## Techniques and Devices Used in the Creation of the Film

### Materials and Methods: Filming

Most of the filming for *Somewhere over the Cloud* simultaneously employed the following three cameras:

1. Logitech Web Cam: filmed Elodie's movements as well as her father's video conference calls from France
2. Sony DV Cam: filmed close-up shots of MSN video conference calls on the computer screen
3. Sony HDV: filmed the setting as a whole

Since *Somewhere over the Cloud* is a self-produced film, I was faced with the inevitable challenge of having to deal with the problem of insufficient funding. However, owing to the fact that filming took place within our family's private domain and the subject matter was the burgeoning Internet itself, in view of certain privacy considerations, it seemed that having a professional videographer come in to help with filming might have changed the natural atmosphere of the filming environment. Therefore, having myself work as both director and videographer afforded me the added advantage of being able to communicate my ideas directly without having to rely on anyone else. Unfortunately, having to control three different video cameras at the same time turned out to be a major challenge. I began filming in 2003 and didn't finish until 2007. In total I used more than 300 cassette tapes. Over the course of the filming, my habits of regularly reviewing tapes and of creating a video diary both became important traces of my work.

Although there are a lot of 'following shots' in *Somewhere over the Cloud*, there are times that these shots are taken from Elodie's vantage point, times that they are taken from a mother's vantage point (me as videographer), and times that they are filmed from a third-person perspective (filmed from a fixed position). Since my undergraduate training was in the Faculty of Fine Arts, frame organization and visual considerations are both important aspects of my film creations. I hope that this film will be similar to experimental video art films in the regard that it will allow the images to speak for themselves. In this film I often make use of background sound, dealing with it as a kind of image, and using it to strengthen the local flavor and feeling of the two different shooting locales, namely Taiwan and France.

In editing this film I tried to place the emphasis on the recollection of emotions rather than trying to produce a purely objective record of the events. For example, I use quite a lot of footage documenting Elodie sleeping. In an attempt to create some sort of remembrance of emotion I used this footage to link up different segments of

the storyline. For example, immediately following a frame showing Elodie sleeping, I would often have the story cut to a scene of another activity, and then follow that up by returning to another frame of Elodie sleeping. In this way, I was able to produce a context that resembles a dream as well as a kind of recollection, conveying Elodie's subjective memories of her own emotions.

Within cyberspace there exists a machinery of collective activity. This collective activity greatly affects the experience of using the web cam. For example, if there are a large number of users online at the same time it will affect the smoothness of video processing as well as frame rates. This in turn will affect the way in which Elodie perceives her father's image on the web cam. Thus, using the video camera to directly duplicate the images on the computer screen can be seen as a form of image translation. In other words, since *Somewhere over the Cloud* juxtaposes on-site footage with images recorded at times when the computer screen happened to be overexposed, out of focus, frozen, or out of sync with the audio, we could say that to a certain degree the film was completed along with the help of a bunch of strangers who happened to be using the Internet from different places all around the world.

### **Material and Methods: Editing**

I feel that the key factor that determines the success of a film is the editing. Editing is a process that involves the re-creation of the deeper meaning that exists latently in the recorded images. Therefore, I usually spend a great deal of time reviewing the tapes in order to find the most precise images to be used in the creation of correlation or dialogue between images. The form of my film *Somewhere over the Cloud* is such that I used a large number of jump cuts to build contrast between the real and the virtual. However, with regard to subject matter of the film, my approach was similar to slowly peeling back the layers of an onion in order to reach the center. On the surface the film looks just like any other video about family relations, however, in fact, on a deeper level the film tries to address a multitude of different issues.

Both of my films, *The Falling Kite* and *Somewhere over the Cloud*, make ample use of techniques such as flashback, analogy, contrast, and metaphor in order to escape the restrictions of traditionally linear time. The employment of these techniques also helps to reintegrate past, present, and future into a new form of existence. Both films make an effort to break away from a traditionally linear form of narrative, attempting to view smaller details from a larger perspective and to take a more detailed perspective to observe larger phenomena. The stories presented in the two films take place in the space between the real and the virtual; the individual and the

collective; and the private and the public. In turn, the editing process is carried out through the use of jump cuts, contrast, and juxtaposition. In both of these films I employ the first-person perspective in a somewhat stealthy, hidden fashion; I allow sound to intervene so as to rupture the phenomenon of objective reality, initiating a direct dialogue with the audience. In this way, the audience slowly moves toward the director's private realm and enters into the director's subjective reality. Since my films often portray conditions of travel, relocation, and roving, I use images of airplanes, trains, ships, tunnels, ports, subways, airports, and railway stations in order to symbolize that life is merely a kind of connection between a series of transfer points.

*Somewhere over the Cloud* shuttles back and forth between reality and virtuality making liberal use of foreshadowing and image contrasting. For example, the film's first frame shows the image of an airport and the final frame shows an image of a plane soaring off into the distance. This creates a cyclic effect that can be likened to a kind of recollection of the relationship between father and daughter. Another example can be seen in one of the earlier scenes in which Elodie's Taiwanese grandmother complains that Elodie doesn't even know the Taiwanese word for grandfather. Grandmother subsequently asserts that Elodie should definitely learn this word. Grandmother's words act to foreshadow a scene later in the film in which Elodie, in a moment full of contrast-driven linguo-cultural humor, uses the Taiwanese word for grandfather to refer to her French-speaking grandfather. Another way in which the images in this film are placed in contrast is in the comparison of Eastern and Western cultures. The customs of these two cultures are brought into clear contrast when the celebration of Christmas is set against the Taiwanese funeral rituals observed at the passing of Elodie's grandmother. Yet another instance of contrast can be observed when the image of Nakasi, a Taiwanese traditional popular marketplace musical performance, is juxtaposed with the Mediterranean-style holiday bazaars of the south of France. The film also repeatedly presents images of train stations and airports in order to allude to the to-and-fro lifestyle that awaits our little biracial daughter. However, the question still remains: Which place will be the true homeland of her little spirit?

## Dilemma: Artist Versus Mother

During the filming of *Somewhere over the Cloud*, one of the biggest challenges that I faced was related to concern over the privacy rights of my child, my family, and myself. The question of trying to establish a clear boundary between private and public domain was something that often caused me inner struggle and hesitation.

In the making of this film I have had to take on the roles of director, videographer, mother, and wife. Moreover, the roles of mother and videographer often seemed to be in a state of direct opposition. From my standpoint as director, Elodie was the subject of my creative work. Of course, the creative artist must try to be detached from the subject of his/her art. At times, this detached, analytical, observational role that I played as director might have seemed apathetic. On the other hand, as a mother, standing on the frontlines observing Elodie, an extension of my own being, my natural instinct was to offer her my selfless love and protection. It was at those times that I, as videographer, was often caught in the trap of having to deal with subjective concerns and confusion. Furthermore, whenever I made an attempt to film this sort of motherly love, using it as a kind of creative force, the result was often the creation of conflict between, and deformation of, expectations and reality. This was especially true in that many of the people who viewed the finished product also ended up calling into question the parent/technology human-machine integrated role that I portrayed in the film. People who have seen the film also tend to wonder about the possible effects that the film/filming might have on my daughter.

Near the end of the film, there is a scene in which my husband suggests that all such problems can be equated to the 'video camera'. In fact, in a sense, he is likening me to an emotionless video camera. Of course, I could have edited out this scene; however, since I felt that this particular image bore witness to a fundamental concern I was unable to escape dealing with it. Or, perhaps it is that this question is directed at me, directed at my work, directed at all of us, directed at the concept of roles within a marriage, or directed at the roles assumed by mothers and working women. This question goes beyond the domain of my own personal experience. It bears witness to a common concern present in today's society.

The family structure found in modern society is one in which mixed marriages and long-distance family relationships are common. Presently there are 3 million Taiwanese citizens working abroad in Mainland China; there are 500 thousand foreign brides that have come to Taiwan from countries such as Mainland China, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia; and one in every six newborn babies in Taiwan is born into a first-generation immigrant family. Elodie's story is merely a symbolic portrait of the stories of many children living in the 21st century.



Becoming a mother has not only caused me to investigate different parts of my own life but it has also allowed me the opportunity to be in awe of every aspect of my daughter's development. My artistic vision has been enhanced by my assumption of this role. Moreover, it is my role as artist that has caused me to want take the results of this self-reflection, as well as my observations about the world, and transform them into works of art. It is true that for me, the roles of 'mother' and 'artist' must co-exist; however, this co-existence still creates a state of dilemma.

## Conclusion

I travelled overseas for ten years before finally returning to Taiwan to live. During the final stages of my travels, I would often leave my home at Le Frenoy near the French-Belgian border in order to travel to my in-laws' home near the French-Spanish border, only to leave again for my husband's home near his place of work in Indonesia, and then finally travelling to my parent's home in Taiwan. Each time, originally distinct notions of 'leaving home' and 'returning home' would become more and more unclear. It seems that concepts of race, nationality, culture, status, self-identity, sense of belonging, and even issues relating to notions of real versus virtual, are all derived from our yearning, and our search, for 'home'.

The birth of my daughter Elodie brought a sense of stability to my life. Her birth also became the subject of my creative thought process, causing me to reflect upon the notion of 'roles'. I often wonder what the future will hold for Elodie: Will she want to be French? Taiwanese? Chinese? How will she identity herself? Where will her borders lie?

*Somewhere over the Cloud* is an experimental-style documentary film. Critics have called the film a 'laboratory of life'. During the initial stages of filming my hope was that the burgeoning Internet technology of the time might be able to act as a solution for many of the relationship-related issues that most people were unable to fully overcome, such as limitations and obstructions of time and space... My own long-distance marriage (each partner residing in a different country) made it so that our family, in particular our daughter's relationship with her father, had to face some difficult challenges, especially ones that related to time and space. With her mother and father living in separately because of work, Elodie, as a child of a mixed marriage, had to learn to float back and forth between races, nationalities, countries, languages, and cultures. However, as the filming of *Somewhere over the Cloud* neared the end, Elodie's rejection of her father became clear like a sharp blade forcing me to have to face certain issues relating to my previously held notions about technology. I had to reassess the overly optimistic expectations and delusions that I had toward the Internet at the beginning of shooting. I was forced to introspect.

The necessary co-existence of "distance" and "family bonds" creates a dilemma in which one aspect is often taken care of at the expense of the other. The Internet can be seen as the quickest, most economical tool for keeping in touch, but I don't believe that it can replace physical interaction between human beings, things such as a real-world hug, real-world eye contact, or a real-world understanding smile... Cold, emotionless technology does not possess the warmth associated with human contact. In the back-and-forth world of familial affections technology has difficulty accommodating the important elements of human warmth and affection.

## **Documentary as Bridge to the World**

*Somewhere over the Cloud* explores the concept of 'father' as it exists somewhere between the real world and the virtual world; the issue of Robert's existence between the realms of life and death; and the desire of the spirit as it exists within the dialogue between self and the creation of art. The film attempts to ask whether or not it is possible that beyond the clouds where our line of vision is unable to penetrate directly there exists the possibility of going beyond the opposition of real and virtual, life and death, self and art? Is it possible that real and virtual, life and death, self and art would no longer have to exist as polarized extremes. This is also the hope that I had held so strongly to throughout the initial stages of filming; however, as things transpired, and certain results began to become clear from the gradual development of the film's plot as well as from somewhere beyond my expectations, even more follow-up issues began to unfold.

The airing of the finished product as well as the audience's reception of the film have given rise to many creative sparks, and have uncovered many new topics worth discussion. For example, questions of paternal authority; the woman's role in relation to the family unit; concerns over the child's welfare; the question of image ownership rights as they pertain to children; issues of psychoanalysis and the Oedipus Complex; the question of whether or not emotions can be defined through technology; and questions about the human-machine integration as it relates to the mother's role. In accordance with the opinions and personal life experience of the audience, the film projects and develops its own independent life. A documentary is meant to film the ongoing process of development of a person or thing. Both the development and the outcome of a given process are phenomena that often evade prediction or diverge from expectations; they even often differ greatly from original presuppositions. This is the charm of a documentary film.

For me, the creation of images is a process that can be seen as a kind of link to the outside world, a bridge if you will. It always entails self-reflection. Whether it is photography, video art, video installation, or documentary filmmaking, these forms

of interdisciplinary image creation are all just different forms of 'written text', each arising from the spirit's deepest level of summoning. Perhaps it is another form of self-healing. I hope to take the personal experience of emotions in my own life as a jumping-off point, to evoke life memories that are able to connect with collective memories. For example, my film *The Falling Kite* is a documentary that allowed me to take advantage of the creative process in order to ascertain the nature of the connections between self and the outside world. The film tells the story of my grandmother's family in such a way that allows for self-projection onto history. Passing down through the generations the story moves from my grandmother to me, and from me to my daughter, offering reflections upon my relationship with history, and with the world. Holding my daughter's tiny hand as we walk alongside Rueifang's Keelung River on the way to school I am able to see the river disappearing into the mountains.... The river is like an artery passing unimpeded into the outside world, connecting with the world beyond the individual.





*Somewhere over the Cloud*

*Photo credit : Hsiao Mei-ling*



# **Anthropomorphism or Becoming-animal? Ka-shiang Liu's *Hill of Stray Dogs* as a Case in Point**

HUANG TSUNG-HUEI

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In this paper, I will use Ka-shiang Liu's *Hill of Stray Dogs* as case in point to examine how he presents stray dogs' behaviors, their language, and even their unconscious. I will engage with the questions as follows: is Liu's animal writing in tune with the concept of becoming-animal which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari advocate? If for Deleuze and Guattari animals operate "more as a device of writing" than as living beings whose conditions of life are of direct concern to the writers,<sup>1</sup> does Liu go beyond their limitation and succeed in "giving visible form to what is animal in the animal"?<sup>2</sup> To put it another way, does Liu's animal writing pave the way for human beings to see animals as what Jacques Derrida calls "the seeing other"? In short, this paper would seek to deal with the question concerning whether we human beings can ever let the animal-other speak without running the risk of anthropocentric ventriloquism.

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## **Introduction**

Seeking to challenge anthropocentrism, animal writers often manage to interpret the language of animals or endow them with a voice of their own, so as to deepen

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Baker, « What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like? », in Nigel Rothfels, ed., *Representing Animals*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Baker, pp. 95-96.

our understanding of non-human animals.<sup>3</sup> However, since it is debatable whether non-human animals have languages, we may wonder if their efforts of interpretation/representation are ultimately to no avail. Actually, even when we admit that animals can engage in cognitive or communicative activities, there is still the risk that the verbalization is “for the speaker’s own benefit in that it is central to constructing a dialogue like exchange with the animal.”<sup>4</sup> Under such circumstances, it stands to reason that we should thoroughly examine the writer’s mode of “speaking for” so as to determine whether he is just rendering “a discourse of man,” which remains “an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication.”<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I will use Ka-shiang Liu’s 劉克襄 *Hill of Stray Dogs* as a case in point to investigate how Liu gives voice to what he understands to be the perspective of the strays.<sup>6</sup> With a view to address the relations between humans and animals, this paper proposes to bring Liu’s animal concern in dialogue with contemporary theorists’ dealings of animals.

In his novella, Liu not only describes stray dogs’ behaviors like an ethologist, he also enables them to express their thoughts and even unearths their unconscious. Does this kind of animal writing realize the possibility of “becoming animal” that Deleuze and Guattari advocate, in which “it is no longer the subject of the statement who is a dog, with the subject of the enunciation remaining ‘like’ a man”, but “a circuit of states that forms a mutual becoming” – the becoming-dog of the man and the becoming-man of the dog?<sup>7</sup> To answer the question, I will explore Liu’s animal writing as well as the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of becoming-animal to see if they can shed light on each other. Notwithstanding that becoming-animal is “freed from the human organism’s interested and organizing perception”,<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s main concern is not so much animals’ conditions of life as the human’s own desire for freedom.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in addition to identifying the correspondences between Liu’s writing and the concept of becoming-animal, I will discuss how Liu’s treatment and representation of stray dogs reveal that the idea in question is limited in scope.

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<sup>3</sup> This paper was funded by a grant from National Science Council of Taiwan (NSC 96-2628-H-002-074-MY3); the project title is “Seeing Animal Others through/beyond the Psychoanalytic Speculum.”

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders, *Regarding Animals*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1996, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, tr. David Wills, « The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow) », *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, winter 2002, p. 405.

<sup>6</sup> Ka-shiang Liu, *Hill of Stray Dogs* 野狗之丘, Taipei, Yuanliou Publishing Co., Ltd., 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, tr. Dana Polan, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Baker, p. 95.

Thirteen years ago, Taipei City Government implemented a new garbage disposal policy, which required all residents to place out their trash on the scheduled pickup time. Under the impact of this policy, the food sources of stray dogs were largely reduced, and it became harder and harder for them to survive in the harsh environment. In the same year, the City resorted to the methodology of high volume killing to control populations of stray dogs. While these policies seem prerequisites for the modernization of the city, in an article against the culling program, Liu maintains that stray dogs are also citizens. He does not go so far as to claim that stray dogs control is unnecessary; what Liu disapproves is the anthropocentric ideology which underlies the culling program: "valorizing safety and hygiene of the city, we ignore the fact that the city does not exclusively belong to human beings; what is more, we fail to reflect on the historical determinants that bring strays into existence."<sup>10</sup> Basically, *Hill of Stray Dogs* retains his concern for stray dogs. As Liu states in the epigraph, the book is executed in memory of the strays that were killed at that time. Yet unlike the article "Strays Dogs Have Been out of Sight for Twelve Years," which is a straightforward outcry against strays eradication, *Hill of Stray Dogs* is multi-faceted, revealing the writer's perspective as well as the dogs'. The setting of the novella is a hill in the neighborhood of Liu's dwelling, where a number of stray dogs inhabit. Liu focuses on twelve of them to recount the story of their life. With the aid of the monocular telescope, Liu had been watching them from afar for 655 days and incessantly writing in his journal the observations of them. The novella in its present form is mainly based on extracts from Liu's journal.<sup>11</sup> Although "anthropomorphophobia"<sup>12</sup> is a common occurrence among animal writers and artists, Liu does not shy away from depicting dialogues between dogs, and he even deliberately compares their behaviors to those of human beings.<sup>13</sup> Yet it is not to say that Liu's writing is tantamount to an

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<sup>10</sup> Ka-shiang Liu, « Strays Dogs Have Been out of Sight for Twelve Years » 野狗消失十二年, *China Times*, 28 Jan 2006, A19.

<sup>11</sup> Though Liu makes some modifications of the dogs' fates, he claims in the afterword that almost ninety percent of the novella is based on facts. See Liu, *Hill of Stray Dogs*, p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Baker coins the word to refer to philosophers and postmodern artists' fear of sentimentality: "a fear that they may be accused of uncritical sentimentality in their depiction or discussion of animals." See Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, London, Reaktion Books, 2000, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Liu makes an analogy between pet dogs and upper-class ladies. Much as the ladies occupy themselves with shopping to squander time and money, pet dogs stroll around the streets to while time away simply because they don't have to forage for food as laboriously as the strays. See Liu, p. 18. Besides, Liu compares the relationship between the male dog Crazy Black Hair and the female dog Protein to that of an intimate couple and constantly translates their "body language" into human speech.



endorsement of anthropomorphism.<sup>14</sup> Rather, as I am going to argue, he is attempting to “write like a dog,” namely, to “become animal.”

Before bearing out my argument that Liu’s animal writing is in consonant with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, I will elaborate their idea of becoming-animal and account for how it may serve to open up the possibility for disrupting anthropocentrism. According to Deleuze, to write like an animal “does not mean writing about one’s dog, one’s cat, one’s horse or one’s favorite animal,” nor does it mean “making animal speak.” Rather, it means “writing as a rat traces a line, or as it twists its tail, as a bird sends out a sound, as a cat moves or else sleeps heavily.”<sup>15</sup> However, this is not to say that the writer is supposed to imitate the animals’ movements. It is not through imitation that the writer is able to enter the “relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness” of the animal.<sup>16</sup> Only when the writer is affected by the affecting animal can he become animal “in an original assemblage proceeding neither by resemblance nor by analogy.”<sup>17</sup> Notably, Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of the term “affect” is different from its original meaning in psychoanalytic terminology. By *L’affect* they mean “a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another.”<sup>18</sup> As the affects are “*puissances*, powers of affecting and being affected”,<sup>19</sup> they are essential for charting the encounter between different beings.<sup>20</sup> And when one allows one’s original identity to be swept away by the intensities of the other, one may thereby deterritorialize into the other. The famous Deleuzo-Guattarian wasp-orchid assemblage is exactly an exemplar of the mutual deterritorialization.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> However, I would not object to construing Liu’s animal writing as in tune with “critical anthropomorphism.” The distinction between anthropomorphism and critical anthropomorphism will be addressed later.

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, *Dialogues*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, tr. Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 260.

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, xvi.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, New York, Routledge, 2003, p.171.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of “being” sharply diverges from that of humanists; for them “there ‘is’ nothing other than the flow of becoming. All ‘beings’ are just relatively stable moments in a flow of becoming-life.” See Colebrook, pp. 125-126. The related concepts such as flow of becoming, fluxes, or the body “*defined only by a longitude and a latitude*”, will be clarified later. See Deleuze and Guattari, p. 260.

<sup>21</sup> To explain the becoming as a conjunction rather than an imitation, Deleuze uses the “double capture” of “the wasp AND the orchid.” See Deleuze and Parnet, p. 7, for illustration: while the orchid seems to reproduce an image of the bee, in a deeper way it deterritorializes into the bee, and “the bee in turn deterritorializes by joining with the orchid.” That is, their resemblance is not so much a matter of

Similarly, when the human is fascinated by what Deleuze and Guattari call “pack or affect animals”,<sup>22</sup> having liberated himself from the limited perception, he will be able to undo his identity to join with the animal:

Who has not known the violence of these animal sequences, which uproot one from humanity, if only for an instant, making one scrape at one’s bread like a rodent or giving one the yellow eyes of a feline? A fearsome involution calling us toward unheard-of becomings.<sup>23</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari also apply their concept of becoming-animal to reinterpret Freud’s cases such as Wolf-Man or little Hans. While Freud sees Wolf-Man’s fear of wolves as triggered by the traumatic primal scene, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that actually he is “fascinated by several wolves watching him.”<sup>24</sup> It is the “wolfing”,<sup>25</sup> or, “the non-familial, non-individual (or pack-like) wandering of the wolves which attracts the wolf-man.”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, defying Freud’s analysis that the horse with blinders represents Hans’s father and the heavily loaded horse, the pregnant mother,<sup>27</sup> Deleuze and Guattari see in Hans the reality of a becoming-animal that “is affect in itself, the drive in person, and represents nothing.”<sup>28</sup> Being drawn to “what a horse ‘can do’”, little Hans mounts an assemblage with the horse “in order to solve a problem from which all exits are barred him.”<sup>29</sup> In this light,

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imitation as a result of being deterritorialized by each other’s forces. See Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 241. Deleuze and Guattari have distinguished three kinds of animals, namely, Oedipal animals, State animals, and “more demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale...” In their opinion, the last one largely outweighs the other two in terms of its ability to effectuate becomings. What must be added is that “the animal as band or pack” cannot be understood literally as animals living in pack. By pack animal they refer to the animal that contains heterogeneous elements to connect with other beings, namely, the animal whose multiplicity fascinates us because it is “related to a multiplicity dwelling within us.” For detailed definitions of the three kinds of animals, see Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 239-243.

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 239.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 239.

<sup>26</sup> Colebrook, p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Interpreting the symbol of the horse in this way, Freud fulfills his purpose of relating Hans’s phobia to the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, Hans’s fear of the falling horse reveals two layers of meanings: he is afraid that his father might fall down because of his hostility toward him; on the other hand, given that the falling of the heavily loaded horse symbolizes a childbirth, a delivery, he is also afraid of the mother in childbirth. See Sigmund Freud, tr. and ed. James Strachey, *Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: Two Case Histories*, vol. X, London, Hogarth Press, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 259.

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 257-260.

when Freud reads Hans's phobia as "phantasies or subjective reveries",<sup>30</sup> he ignores it is the positivity of desire that enables Hans to "participate in movement" of the horse and "to stake out the path of escape."<sup>31</sup>

Following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, we will find that the established view of the body is also challenged, for the reason why one can be affected by the other is because every organ "is exactly what its elements make it according to their relation of movement and rest, and the way in which this relation combines with or splits off from that of neighboring element."<sup>32</sup> A body is no longer defined by "Species or Genus characteristics"; rather, it is determined by what it can do, by "what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body."<sup>33</sup> To be more specific, a body is defined only by "the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude)" and "the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude)."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it is not merely the living organism that can make its conjunction with others. Even "[c]limate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them."<sup>35</sup> Take the statement "the animal stalks at five o'clock" for example. When we parse this statement, we tend to bring the subject, "the animal," to the forefront. But for Deleuze and Guattari, "the animal-stalks-at-five-o'clock" "should be read without a pause": "Five o'clock is this animal! This animal is this place!"<sup>36</sup> In other words, each being is inseparable from its milieu.<sup>37</sup> Like a rhizome made of intersecting lines, a being is a concrete individuation traversed by

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<sup>30</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 258.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 256.

<sup>33</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 257.

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 260. For Deleuze and Guattari, longitude and latitude correspond to the extensive and the intensive respectively. For example, "a body that is cold here and hot there" depends on its longitude; that is, it is determined by how it is mapped spatially. See Deleuze and Guattari, p. 261. As for the intensive latitude, it is "not objectifiable and quantifiable as a thing that we then perceive or of which we are conscious" but pre-personal perception or presupposed intention that "happens to us, across us." See Colerook, p. 39. For example, in the case of "certain white skies of a hot summer", we find a degree of heat combining "in latitude with an intensity of white." See Deleuze and Guattari, p. 261.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 263.

<sup>36</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 263.

<sup>37</sup> Take little Hans's case as an example again: in his becoming horse, Hans is not just forming a block with the horse; he enters the spatiotemporal relations as well. The family rooms, the streets, the warehouse across the street, the street-boys, the furniture-vans, etc., all these components of the milieu are combined with little Hans's qualities and affects. See Bogue, p.171; Deleuze and Guattari, p. 263.

the spatiotemporal components, a mode of life that is determined “by haecceity than by subjectivity or substantiality.”<sup>38</sup> Under such circumstances, we are no longer distinguished “from all of the becomings running through us”,<sup>39</sup> and the privileged standpoint of human being, accordingly, will be destabilized:

...there is no present life outside of its connections. We only have representations, images or thoughts *because* there have been “machinic” connections....Life is not about one privileged point—the self-contained mind of “man”—representing some inert outside world. Life is a proliferation of machinic connections, with the mind or brain being one (sophisticated) machine among others.<sup>40</sup>

However, man is not always willing to develop the creative potentialities of becoming. In fact, since the power of the affecting other “throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel”,<sup>41</sup> if we are not ready to be deterritorialized by these forces, the experience of encountering the other may arouse our anxiety or even fear of annihilation. But the Deleuzo-Guattarian writer, as the “sorcerer,” “has a very particular relation to the animal,” and thus may “enter the privileged ‘experimental’ state of identity-suspension which they call becoming-animal.”<sup>42</sup> To put it succinctly, the Deleuzo-Guattarian writer’s concern with creative invention and his ability to undo his identity allow him to enact the becoming, to “emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 261. “Haecceity” is a term coined by Duns Scotus to refer to the distinctive qualities of the thing that make it particular. As Deleuze and Guattari explains, haecceity is “sometimes written ‘ecceity,’ deriving the word from *ecce*, ‘here is.’” Given that this word is created “from *haec*, ‘this thing’”, it is obviously an error to interchange haecceity with ecceity. However, Deleuze and Guattari call it a “fruitful error because it suggests a mode of individuation that is distinct from that of a thing or a subject”. See Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 540-541. In other words, “here is” is closer to Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of haecceity. For them, all beings are actually haecceities “in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected.” To put it another way, all beings are “unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects” before they are stabilized temporarily within a certain space. See Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 260-262.

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 240.

<sup>40</sup> Colebrook, p.56.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 240.

<sup>42</sup> Baker, « What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like? », pp. 67-68. Actually, for Deleuze and Guattari, writing itself is a becoming “traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf, etc.” See Deleuze and Guattari, p. 240.

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 274-275.

Liu Ka-shiang's animal writing, to a great extent, verifies the Deleuzo-Guattarian thesis that "becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation" but a conversation, or, a matter of conjunction.<sup>44</sup> Liu enters into the movement of becoming animal by commencing a conversation with stray dogs, which enables him to probe into their behavior as well as their mental states. As I have suggested, the Deleuzo-Guattarian writer is responsive to the fascinating multiplicity of pack animals. What must be added is that it is "always with the Anomalous" that one "enters into alliance to become-animal."<sup>45</sup> The anomalous is "the borderline" that enables the writer "to understand the various positions it occupies in relation to the pack or the multiplicity it borders."<sup>46</sup> Being fascinated by the affects of the anomalous, the writer is able to tie his writing to the new becoming. In *Hill of Stray Dogs*, the protagonist Little Winter Melon functions as the anomalous that leads Liu into his becoming-dog. As Liu states in the afterword, the way this pregnant dog shuttles between the hill and the scrap yard at the foot of the hill attracts Liu's attention, and her movements, her relations with other stray dogs thus constitute the centerpiece of this novella. The first part of the novella is mainly about how Little Winter Melon nurtures her progeny, Potato and Teeny, and coaches them to survive in a harsh environment. The whole book, as a matter of fact, centers around her breeding behavior and ends with her giving birth to the fifth litter of pups. Notably, Liu does not attempt to grace Little Winter Melon by depicting her as a mother dog that would fight to the death to keep her offspring alive. Sometimes she nurses the pups without crouching over them, shortening the breastfeeding time as much as she can; sometimes she even deliberately refuses her breast to them.<sup>47</sup> And when Little Winter Melon leads her young to embark on their search for food, she walks fast without paying attention to Teeny, the weaker one that straggles behind.<sup>48</sup> Liu then explains the maternal indifference he witnesses from an ethological perspective: the aloofness of the mother makes sense because the pups must adapt themselves to the uncertain environment as early as possible if they want to make their way in the rocky world on their own.<sup>49</sup>

This is not to say that Liu's book is little more than a record of his observations of stray dogs. Nor does he seek to analyze all their behaviors as if he could explicate every action pattern the strays display. As Liu affectively inhabits the strays' milieu

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<sup>44</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, p. 2 and p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 244.

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 245.

<sup>47</sup> Liu, *Hill of Stray Dogs*, p. 39 and p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Liu, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> Liu, p. 31 and p. 39.

by integrating the spatiotemporal relations, which “are not predicates of the thing but dimensions of multiplicities”,<sup>50</sup> much multiplicity is lent to his objective account of their routine activities such as foraging, eating, seeking refuge, etc. Liu affectionately depicts the strays’ differences in terms of their movements and shows in detail how each stray, as an assemblage that is “inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air”,<sup>51</sup> is traversed by the spatiotemporal components. The pup plays with its sibling in the morning, the dog rests in the shade at noon and searching for food in the scrap yard after midnight,<sup>52</sup> the mother dog shelters in the shrubs with her pups during rainy days and buries her young when they freeze to death in winter, etc.<sup>53</sup> The narrative of this kind is not so much a litany of behavior observations as a description of the becoming-noon, becoming-night, or becoming-winter of the strays. It is not too much of a distortion to argue that the concrete individuation that Deleuze and Guattari champion finds a loud echo in Liu’s writing.

Moreover, Liu does not confine his descriptions of strays to the “movements in extension,” namely, their trajectories. He captures as well their “movements in ‘intension,’” the intensive forces that subtend the trajectories.<sup>54</sup> Without involving himself in the philosophical debate about “whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, technics, clothing, lie, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughter, tears, respect, and so on”<sup>55</sup>, Liu directly affirms the strays’ ability to

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<sup>50</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 263.

<sup>51</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 262.

<sup>52</sup> Liu, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> Liu, p. 45 and p. 130.

<sup>54</sup> Bogue, p. 171.

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Derrida, tr. David Wills, « And Say the Animal Responded? », in Cary Wolfe, ed., *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 137. Lacan proposes that while man, the subject of signifier, can pretend to pretend, the animal is only capable of the first degree of pretense: “an animal does not feign feigning. It does not make tracks whose deceptiveness lies in getting them to be taken as false, when in fact they are true—that is, tracks that indicate the right trail.” See Jacques Lacan, tr. Bruce Fink, *Écrits*, New York, W. W. Norton Company, 2006, p. 683. Taking the contrary position, Derrida argues that as long as it is impossible to distinguish between a feint and a feint of a feint in animals’ sexual parade or mating game, “every pretense of pretense remains a simple pretense, or else, on the contrary, and just as likely, that every pretense, however simple it may be, gets repeated and repositied undecidably, in its possibility, as pretense of pretense.” See Derrida, p. 135. Derrida also refutes the “naïve philosophy of the animal world” which asserts that “animals are incapable of keeping or even having a secret.” See Jacques Derrida, « How to Avoid Speaking: Denials », in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1992, pp. 86-87. According to Derrida, be it an animal or a man, “the self is essentially constituted by an endless detour on its way back to itself.” Therefore, we have no reasons to believe that the animal “cannot return to itself” because it lacks “the power to reflect or to pose the

mourn and to experience death by depicting how Protein laments the death of her pup. When Protein's pup is run over by a car and finally died, she holds its dead body in her mouth and drops it in front of a grocery store, hoping that the shopkeeper who used to feed them may bury her puppy. But since the accident happens in the early morning, the store is not yet open. Then a passer-by finds the dead puppy disgusting and throws it into a trash can. This very act leaves the mother dog in despair; all she can do is staying around the trash can and sniffing it unceasingly.<sup>56</sup> Taking up Protein's position to express grief on her behalf, Liu calls attention to the animal's capability of mourning by representing its movement in intension.

The temptation to charge Liu with anthropocentric ventriloquism seems irresistible when we find Liu attempts to surmise how Protein laments the death of her pup. However, as Deleuze contends,

In writing one always gives writing to those who do not have it, but the latter give writing a becoming without which it would not exist. . . . That the writer is minoritarian . . . means that writing always encounters a minority which does not write, and it does not undertake to write for this minority, in its place or at its bidding, but there is an encounter in which each pushes the other, draws it on to its line of flight in a combined deterritorialization. Writing always combines with something else...This is not a matter of imitation, but of conjunction.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, if the writer maintains a stance that is “[n]either identification nor distance, neither proximity nor remoteness,” he will be able to “speak *with*, write *with*” the minority without silencing it.<sup>58</sup> Since Liu's “objective” accounts and

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question of Being.” See Henry Staten, « Derrida and the Affect of Self », *Western Humanities Review*, vol. 50, n°4-vol. 51, n°1, p. 348. However, Derrida's insistence on reconsidering all the boundaries between man and animal is also questioned by other theorists. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy asks, “When you decide not to limit a potential ‘subjectivity’ to man, why do you then limit yourself simply to the animal?” See Jacques Derrida, « ‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida », in Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 106. Likewise, while Derrida contends that the capacity to mourn is not exclusively the essential characteristic of the human subject, Henry Staten wonders, “wouldn't there still be an essential distinction, if not between human and animal, at least between animals that mourn (such as chimpanzees, and perhaps dogs) and animals that do not, or that we suppose do not?” See Staten, p. 351.

<sup>56</sup> Liu, p. 166.

<sup>57</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, p. 52, original emphasis.

“subjective” descriptions are always already interpenetrated,<sup>59</sup> he steers clear of “the two traps of distance and identification,” namely, “the one which offers us the mirror of contamination and identifications, and the one which points out to us the observation of the understanding.”<sup>60</sup> Sometimes Liu reports on a series of mishaps that befall on the strays like a journalist, but what underlies the ostensibly objective descriptions is the writer’s deep concern and sympathy for the strays.<sup>61</sup> In other cases, while the writer seems to be reading the stray’s mind arbitrarily, it turns out that the interpretation is based on his long-lasting observation.<sup>62</sup> It is next to impossible to separate his objective descriptions from subjective interpretations, for Liu, to put it in Deleuzian terms, is “neither simulator of identifications nor the frigid doctor of distance.”<sup>63</sup> As Deleuze cautions the writer, when writing *with* the other, “you do not need to mistake yourself for him. But you may perhaps put yourself in his shoes, you have something to assemble with him.”<sup>64</sup> Fascinated by the multiplicity of the strays without thereby identifying himself with them, Liu writes *with* the strays by becoming animal.

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<sup>59</sup> Liu himself concedes in the afterword that he has no idea whether this work should be classified as a novella or reportage literature. He would like to leave the question for scholars to answer. See Liu, p. 191.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, pp. 52-53.

<sup>61</sup> Even though Liu manages to speak in a neutral tone, it grieves the writer to see the strays being violently killed by human beings. See Liu, p. 167, for example.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Liu once found the stray he names Beansprout behaved weirdly—she rushed to and forth in the alley, wandering restlessly in the rain without trying to find a shelter. Even though he cannot possibly give voice to the dog’s genuine subjective experience, he convinces the reader that the abnormal behavior results from the dog’s sense of frustration and the anxiety in her unconscious. See Liu, p. 47. It is his observation of her behavior that enables him to provide such a plausible explanation: According to Liu, Beansprout appears unsettled because another pet dog’s delivery completely occupies her owner. Unlike the pet dog pampered by her owner, Beansprout is a stray adopted later; as a latecomer, she is anxious that she will be ignored or even chased away since from now on her owner has to take care of the new born puppies. It is evident that for Liu, to imagine the animal’s desire or unconscious is by no means ridiculous.

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, pp. 53-54.

<sup>64</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, p. 53.



## II

Deleuze and Guattari claim that becoming-minoritarian “is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power, an active micropolitics.”<sup>65</sup> Its political aim, to put it simply, is to subvert the “binary machines” such as “question-answer, masculine-feminine, man-animal, etc.”<sup>66</sup> As the concept of becoming-animal binds the writer and the animal with each other, its political efficacy lies “in the unthinking or undoing of the conventionally human.”<sup>67</sup> Revealing of Liu’s efforts to undo anthropocentric binarism are the analogies he constantly draws between human beings and strays. Mating behavior of the strays is likened to courtship between men and women at parties.<sup>68</sup> The way Crazy Black Hair guards Protein and their pups is so civilized and moving that Liu believes the male dog can be compared to a human father.<sup>69</sup> While antianthropomorphic thinkers may find these descriptions misleading, I contend that if anthropomorphic statements are derived from “introspection, reasoning by analogy, interpretive analysis, and intuition”,<sup>70</sup> or, if the mental predicates are assigned to an animal “on the basis of the situation and behavior of the animal”,<sup>71</sup> they may even further our understanding of animals. As John Andrew Fisher rightly observes, anthropomorphism, referring to “thinking in human terms about an object that is not human,” is almost used in a negative sense. The charge of anthropomorphism is not unconditionally justifiable, however. If we ascribe to animals the characteristics only humans have or even project onto them cultural stereotypes, such anthropomorphic identifications indeed smack of anthropocentrism.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, “if we assign to nonhumans human properties that those nonhumans also have, we have not made a mistake.”<sup>73</sup> Some ethologists even suggest that “critical anthropomorphism” may serve as a useful

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<sup>65</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 292.

<sup>66</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, p. 104.

<sup>68</sup> Liu, p. 98 and pp. 158-159.

<sup>69</sup> Liu, p. 151.

<sup>70</sup> Arluke and Sanders, p. 80.

<sup>71</sup> John Andrew Fisher, « Anthropomorphism », in Marc Bekoff and Carron A. Meaney, eds., *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1998, pp. 70-71.

<sup>72</sup> Disneyfication, for example, represents the negative version of anthropomorphism. In Disney movies, animal characters are often deformed to resemble humans and thereby to entertain the audience: “This is achieved by showing them with humanlike facial features (eyebrows, expressive lips) and altered forelimbs to resemble human hands.” See Slavoljub Milekic, « Disneyfication », *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare*, p. 133.

<sup>73</sup> Fisher, p. 70.

heuristic device for us to understand animal behavior.<sup>74</sup> Gordon M. Burghardt, for example, claims that critical anthropomorphism enables us “to pose and formulate questions and hypotheses about animal behavior” even though we can never experience directly what the animal thinks or feels.<sup>75</sup> In this sense, we may say that Liu’s critical anthropomorphism is not so much the outcome of his subjective projection as the product of deterritorialization. Being deterritorialized by the force of stray dogs, Liu situates the boundaries human beings and the strays without deliberately shunning anthropomorphism.

Liu does not simply undo the human/nonhuman animal dichotomy by anthropomorphic inferences. His concern for the welfare of animals drives him to radically challenge our biases against stray dogs and further, to question if it is justified to assume them as intruders in the city. While a raft of people believe stray dogs would pose direct threat to passers-by, Liu notes that the dogs involved in incidents of attacks are usually pet dogs, especially the large and powerful breeds such as pit bulls and Rottweilers.<sup>76</sup> While the authorities claim that stray dogs must be eliminated for the well-being of city residents, Liu finds dog culling to be a perpetual and futile cycle since culled areas are quickly repopulated by unsterilized and newly abandoned strays.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, unlike those who allege that stray dogs disrupt the quality of life, Liu does not assume the menace of stray dogs to citizens as a hard-wired affair. On the contrary, in his narration, sometimes it is the human that catches the strays off guard by intruding into their dwelling places.<sup>78</sup> Witnessing how strays manage to adapt themselves to human society, he poignantly questions why they are not entitled to citizenship and why they have to undergo such merciless culling.<sup>79</sup> If for Deleuze and Guattari there is a much higher concern in writing than animal concern<sup>80</sup> and thus “what becoming-animal does is close to what art does”,<sup>81</sup> Liu’s becoming-animal, more than a mere rhetoric, moves toward the animal more closely by touching on the subject of animal rights.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Arluke and Sanders, p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon M. Burghardt, « Critical Anthropomorphism », *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare*, p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Liu, p. 184.

<sup>77</sup> Liu, p. 147.

<sup>78</sup> Liu, p. 112 and p. 127.

<sup>79</sup> Liu, p. 72, p. 152, and p. 172.

<sup>80</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Baker, « What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like? », p. 74.

<sup>82</sup> Liu does not commit himself to animal rights campaign and has some reservations about the way the volunteer caregivers handle the problems of stray dogs. However, as he states in the afterword, the owners’ merciless abandonment of their pets and the barbaric act of stray culling make the following questions occupy the forefront of his mind: What are stray dogs thinking about? Don’t they have rights?

In fact, for Deleuze and Guattari, the immanent end of writing is not becoming-animal but becoming-imperceptible.<sup>83</sup> To become imperceptible, that is, to “go unnoticed”,<sup>84</sup> anticipates the possibility of communicating and assembling with others:

By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract....To reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait, in order to find one’s zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator. One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/everything, into a becoming, because one has made a necessarily communicating world, because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things.<sup>85</sup>

Given that becoming-imperceptible presupposes the elimination of “‘all that is waste, death, and superfluity,’ complaint and grievance, unsatisfied desire, defense of pleading, everything that roots each of us (everybody) in ourselves”,<sup>86</sup> we have reasons to believe that somehow it will bring forth the disruption of anthropocentrism. In other words, since becoming’s movement away from the Oedipal human self “unhumans the human,” to a certain extent it suggests a moving toward the animal.<sup>87</sup> However, what Deleuze and Guattari seek to highlight in becoming-animal is not so much the animal *per se* as “the power of literature”,<sup>88</sup> for they contend that the writer “can be thrown into a becoming by *anything at all*, by the most unexpected, most insignificant things.”<sup>89</sup> To be more specific, as long as “the unexpected” can prompt one to find “a creative line of escape”,<sup>90</sup> it doesn’t matter what kind of animal it is:

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, . . . to find of world

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How does a city treat its strays? See Liu, p.190.

<sup>83</sup> As Deleuze claims, “[T]he aim, the finality of writing? Still way beyond a woman-becoming, a Negro-becoming, an animal-becoming, etc., beyond a minority-becoming, there is the final enterprise of the becoming-imperceptible.” See Deleuze and Parnet, p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 279.

<sup>85</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 280.

<sup>86</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 279.

<sup>87</sup> Baker, p. 80 and p. 86.

<sup>88</sup> Colebrook, p. 136.

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 292, emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 36.

of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. There is no longer anything but movements, vibrations, thresholds in a deserted matter: *animals, mice, dogs, apes, cockroaches are distinguished only by this or that threshold, this or that vibration*, by the particular underground tunnel in the rhizome or the burrow.<sup>91</sup>

It goes without saying that for Deleuze and Guattari becoming-animal is simply one of the means the writer adopts to cope with the rigid Oedipal structure. In fact, they rarely advocate the concept of becoming-animal without qualifications. For example, they do not rest content with Kafka's "Metamorphosis," commenting disapprovingly that Gregor's becoming-animal ends up in "a becoming-dead" when his deterritorialization is blocked by the urge to be re-Oedipalized.<sup>92</sup> Further, they imply that Gregor's deterritorialization fails through no fault of his own:

Isn't it rather that the acts of becoming-animal cannot follow their principle all the way through—that they maintain a certain ambiguity that leads to their insufficiency and condemns them to defeat? Aren't the animals still too formed, too significative, too territorialized? Doesn't the whole of becoming-animal oscillate between a schizo escape and an Oedipal impasse?<sup>93</sup>

As I have said, Deleuze and Guattari classify the animal world into three categories, and prefer demonic animals, i.e., pack animal, on the ground that they give the writer's imagination the freest scope. Given that the primary aim of becoming is to divert from the Oedipal trajectory and to undo the conventional significations, the animal that is "too formed, too significative, too territorialized" simply will not do. Little wonder that they would rather construe the animal as "animal molecule"<sup>94</sup>; be it a rat, a horse, a bird or a cat, the animal in question has to become "something else, bloc, line, sound, colour of sand—an abstract line" so as to combine with other molecules.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, as Baker rightly observes, in "putting the animal to work against the forces of Oedipalization, Deleuze and Guattari's writing reserves

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<sup>91</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 13, emphasis added.

<sup>92</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 15 and p. 36.

<sup>93</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 15.

<sup>94</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 275.

<sup>95</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, p. 75. Deleuze uses the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* as an example to reassert his contention that "man only becomes animal if the animal, for its part, becomes sound, colour, or line": as Lewis Carroll indicates, "it is when the smile is without a cat that man can effectively become cat as soon as he similes." See Deleuze and Parnet, p. 73.

particular contempt for those upsetting aberrations," namely, the "animal which is too much like a human."<sup>96</sup> On the question of the animal, Liu sharply differs from Deleuze and Guattari in the aforementioned aspects. To sum up, in Liu's writing, how the writer may trace a creative line of escape through the animal molecule matters little; what is at stake is how the animal itself can find an escape in the human society. Further, while Deleuze and Guattari, in favor of the demonic, wild animals, disparage domestic animals for their lack of multiplicity,<sup>97</sup> Liu aligns them with creative possibilities.<sup>98</sup> In my conclusion, I will draw on Steve Baker's modification of becoming-animal to show how Liu displays the multiplicity of stray dogs through both written and visual representations.

## Conclusion

*The Hill of Stray Dogs* includes about fifty pictures taken by Liu, and each picture is properly captioned to illustrate the variegated activities of the strays. Much in the line of the artists who feel slightly apprehensive about Deleuze and Guattari's "seductive but elusive ideas" of becoming-animal, Liu attends to the animals' "existence . . . their dignity and their beauty" by recording "the animal's reality."<sup>99</sup> As Baker notices, "becomings-animal are increasingly evident in contemporary art."<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, some postmodern artists' use of animal imagery, instead of foregrounding their animal concern, is merely to serve the aesthetic purpose. In this way, they follow the Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-animal without challenging it. Among those who seriously engage with the question of the animal and prove themselves able to add a new dimension to the practice of becoming-animal, Baker finds Olly and Suzi particularly impressive, for they deliberately allow animal-made marks a vital role to play in their oeuvre: "wherever it is possible without too much manipulation of the situation, they allow the animals depicted in their work to 'interact' with the work and mark it further themselves."<sup>101</sup> What is more important is that their work intends "above all to bring home the truth and immediacy of these animals' precarious existence to a Western audience which has

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<sup>96</sup> Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, p. 119 and p. 125.

<sup>97</sup> Deleuze and Guattari label domestic animals as "family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, 'my' cat, 'my dog'" and fault them for inviting us to regress and drawing us "into a narcissistic contemplation." See Deleuze and Guattari, p. 240.

<sup>98</sup> Liu, p. 149.

<sup>99</sup> Baker, « What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like? », p. 68, p. 89, and p. 95.

<sup>100</sup> Baker, p. 68.

<sup>101</sup> Baker, p. 88. The animal-made mark, to name but a few, "may take the form of prints or urine stains left on an image by a bear or an elephant, or of chunks bitten of by a wolf or a shark, or may simply be the muddy trace of an anaconda that has moved across a painting." See Baker, p. 88.

grown largely indifferent to the question of the endangered species.”<sup>102</sup> As his like-minded artists, Liu aims at “giving visible form to what is animal in the animal”<sup>103</sup> and proposes to direct our attention to stray dogs’ precarious existence in the city. Liu’s work is “marked by the animal” in the sense that the abundant photographs of the strays operate in the visual domain to supplement his narrative, and even to prick readers in the manner of the *punctum*. Observing the photograph in which two little girls look at a primitive airplane above their village, Ronald Barthes ponders, “[t]hey have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then *already* dead (yesterday).”<sup>104</sup> The “*catastrophe which has already occurred*” is what Barthes calls the *punctum* of intensity, the “lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (“*that-has-been*”). In Liu’s work, the vivid images of the strays display the same intensity: no sooner had we readers exclaimed “how alive the strays are!” than we shuddered at the thought of their “death in the future.”<sup>105</sup> Literally speaking, the strays fail to make any mark upon Liu’s work. However, as the insertion of photographs not only witnesses the strays’ presence but reminds us of “that-has-been,” each stray in the story leaves a singular trace that cannot possibly be erased.

Notably, to represent “what is animal in the animal” does not mean to capture every aspects of the animal in question as if the author were omniscient. On the contrary, it is only when “the idea of human completeness disappears” that the artist may “enable the viewer to glimpse and perhaps even to be swept up in something of the animal’s difference and distance from the human.”<sup>106</sup> To put it simply, humility is the major requisite for the artist to create a work that sloughs off anthropocentric understanding of the animal. In Baker’s opinion, Britta Jaschinski is one of those who excel in “discouraging anthropomorphic identifications.”<sup>107</sup> The images of animals in her photographs are often obscure or even unrecognizable; her gibbon photograph, *Hylobates lar*, for example, is sometimes mistaken for a frog. While the unfocused images in her photographs are prone to disorient the viewer, somehow they “show the animals keeping knowledge of their bodies to themselves, and refusing to be easily drawn out about what it is that they are.”<sup>108</sup> Much in the similar vein, Liu constantly reminds us how dogs’ behaviors are beyond

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<sup>102</sup> Baker, p. 88.

<sup>103</sup> Baker, pp. 95-96.

<sup>104</sup> Ronald Barthes, tr. Richard Howard, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London, Vintage Books, 2000, p. 96.

<sup>105</sup> Barthes, p. 96.

<sup>106</sup> Baker, p. 86 and p. 96.

<sup>107</sup> Baker, p. 95.

<sup>108</sup> Baker, p. 95.

comprehension of human beings.<sup>109</sup> It has to be recognized, according to Liu, that we human beings can never correctly decipher the communications among dogs.<sup>110</sup> In order to awaken readers to “the animal’s unavailability to the human”,<sup>111</sup> whenever the dialogues between the strays find their way into the narrative, Liu lays great store on the fictionality of the constructed scenes.<sup>112</sup> Having neither a conscious interest in the philosophical concept of become-animal nor a zest for postmodern art, Liu charts the animal’s line of flight from the human in a less tortuous, but not less effective way. *The Hill of Stray Dogs*, therefore, exemplifies how “interpreting for the animal or explaining his or her experiences and feelings” can be “intended to promote the interests of the animal”,<sup>113</sup> and how animal writers can let the animal-other speak without necessarily running the risk of anthropocentric ventriloquism.

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<sup>109</sup> See particularly Liu, pp.81-82 and p. 173.

<sup>110</sup> Liu, p. 29.

<sup>111</sup> Baker, p. 95.

<sup>112</sup> Liu, pp. 78-79 and p. 89.

<sup>113</sup> Arluke and Sanders, p. 67.

# Outside in the Imperial Machine: Satō Haruo's Exotic Writing of Taiwan

LEE YU-LIN AND HSU SHAN-HUI

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This paper examines Satō Haruo's (1892-1964) exotic writing of colonial Taiwan in the Japanese imperial framework. Recognized as primary work of *gaichi bungaku*, which literally means "literature of the outside territory" or "colonial literature," Satō's writing of Taiwan is characterized by his exotic description of the island colony during Japanese occupation (1895-1945). The representation of the outside territory as an exotic space is regarded in this paper as an essential part of the imperial discourse that reveals a unique conception of Japanese imperialism. The purpose of this paper is thus twofold: it attempts to demonstrate the operation of Japanese imperial discursive practice (the imperial discursive machine) through exotic literature of the colony, while revealing a threshold represented by the outside that goes beyond the imperial machine while it actually mobilizes the operation of the entire discursive machine.

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## Gaichi and the Imperial Discourse

This paper examines Satō Haruo's (1892-1964) exotic writing of colonial Taiwan in the Japanese imperial framework. Recognized as primary work of *gaichi bungaku*, which literally means "literature of the outside territory" or "colonial literature," Satō's writing of Taiwan is characterized by his exotic description of the island colony during Japanese occupation (1895-1945). The representation of the outside territory as an exotic space is regarded in this paper as an essential part of the imperial discourse that reveals a unique conception of Japanese imperialism. That is



to say, colonial literature of Taiwan becomes part of Japanese imperial discourse in which Taiwan is recognized as a foreign territory “outside” the empire and an “otherness” that opposes to metropolitan Japan.

The term *gaichi bungaku* was firstly coined by a Japanese comparatist Shimada Kinji (1901-1993), a lecturer at Taipei Imperial University during the colonial period, who borrowed from the French concept of *littérature coloniale* (colonial literature) for the exotic writing of Taiwan. The term “*gaichi bungaku*” as a translation of *littérature coloniale* accordingly means literature of the colonies. The use of “*gaichi*” (outside territory) is at once literal and metaphorical. As the first overseas colony that Japanese obtained after Meiji restoration, Taiwan first of all means a foreign land to be exploited and an uncivilized territory to be cultivated. Thus the term *gaichi* indicates a “foreign terrain” in a cultural-geographical sense, an alien territory filled with exotic landscape and bizarre customs; in addition, it suggests a “virgin territory” in terms of sensation or sensibility characterized by mystery and fantasy. No wonder that the discourse of “Japanese Orientalism” has tended to describe *gaichi* as a remote and fantastic terrain, albeit “absent” and “displaced,” whose representation has established itself as an object of the colonial desire and an otherness for the construction of Japanese colonial subjectivity.

As the term indicates, *gaichi* as a geographical term (the outside) distinguishes itself from metropolitan Japan (the inside). This distinction is of course not simply geographical and territorial, but it is also political, cultural, and ideological.<sup>1</sup> This also explains why the comprehension of *gaichi* (as a political, cultural, and geographical term) is always collective and has often imbued with ethnic, social, cultural, and political implications. In short, the discourse on *gaichi* actually involves an imperial discursive operation, which is to be termed “the imperial machine”<sup>2</sup> in later discussion. See in this light, Satō’s travel writing of colonial Taiwan should not simply be regarded as a personal account of the foreign space, but it is also a discourse of the other that reveals the rhetoric of Japanese imperialism. In other words, Satō’s travel writing becomes the literary series that record the individual/collective conception and appropriation of the outside land, rhetoric that cuts across the external space with its own rhythm and pace. Significantly, in Satō’s writings, impressions of the external landscape are

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<sup>1</sup> This can be best illustrated in Oguma Eiji’s well known book titled *The Boundaries of the Japanese* in which various discourses on the Japanese boundaries are deployed. See Oguma Eiji, *Nihonjin no kyōka* [The Boundaries of the Japanese], Tokyo, Shinyōsha, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of “machine” draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s conception of the term, especially in their collaborated work *Anti-Oedipus*, in which the social is considered as a complex machine composed of various machines. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

constantly transformed into internal images that reflect the author's inner feelings, an interiority that Satō describes as "inner landscape."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the comprehension and organization of the outside space becomes an act of distinction between inside and outside, past and present, the untamed and civilized, among others. Therefore, Satō's writing of the foreign land becomes not only an act that involves his personal aesthetic judgment and self-pursuit, but also a composition that concerns such collective values as race, nation, empire, and history.

In what follows, the discussion will be divided into three parts. Firstly, it will investigate Satō's representation of outside space as a space of the exotic, which also characterizes Satō's writing as exoticism. The representation here is recognized as a system of semiotics that functions as aesthetic principles and ideological conceptions. Secondly, the paper will analyze the narrative of Satō's celebrated work "Tale of the Fan," whose paradoxical narrative as a hermeneutic of the other reveals a "diagram" of colonial desire and power. Thirdly, the paper will regard such representation as colonial translation in which the untranslatable is highlighted. The purpose of this paper is thus twofold: one the one hand, it attempts to demonstrate the operation of Japanese imperial discursive practice (the imperial discursive machine) through exotic literature of the colony; on the other hand, it reveals a threshold represented by the outside that goes beyond the imperial machine while it actually mobilizes the operation of the entire discursive machine.

## Outside as the Exotic Space

The pre-war Japanese critic Shimada, in his criticism of Satō, has characterized his literature as exoticism and praised his celebrated work "Tale of the Fan" as a masterpiece of Japanese colonial literature of Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Satō's exotic writing style, imitated by younger generations during the colonial period, has dominated the literary production on the island. Furthermore, critics such as Fujii Shōzō have recognized exoticism as essential part of local administrative propaganda during Japanese occupation.<sup>5</sup> As a representative Japanese travel literature during the colonial time, Satō's writing witnesses tropical landscape, strange people, and bizarre customs of the foreign colony. Not surprisingly, the half-civilized people and their bizarre customs have become the primary motifs in Japanese travel

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<sup>3</sup> "A Strange Tale of the 'Precepts for Women' Fan" ["Jokaisen kidan," hereafter referred to as "Tale of the Fan"] in Satō Haruo, *Musha*, Edited by Kawahara Isao, Nihon shokuminchi bungaku seisenshū: Taiwan hen, Tokyo, Yumani Shobō, 2000, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Shimada Kinji, *Kareitō bungakuhsi: Nihno shijin no Taiwan taiken* [Literature of the Beautiful Island], Tokyo, Meiji Shoin, 1995, pp. 382-85.

<sup>5</sup> Fujii Shōzō, *Taiwan bungaku kono hyakunen* [One Hundred Years of Taiwan Literature], Tokyo, Tōhō Shoten, 1998, pp. 79-103.

writing, as it tends to characterize itself as exotic literature. However, in a piece entitled "Musha," Satō's description of the aborigines deserves more attention.<sup>6</sup> Having been bored by the tired scenes of the mountains, aborigines, and their customs, the narrator's eyes are caught by two young aboriginal girls, who, as the narrator later finds out, are actually "mixes" with a Japanese father. The narrator is invited by the two young girls into their village and even their house where the narrative reaches a climax. Despite the fear due to alien and uncanny surroundings, the narrator finds himself seduced by the two girls. Eroticism combined with a threat of terror permeates the description, which creates a typical, yet intriguing quality of Satō's exoticism.

The two girls are imagined by the narrator as local prostitutes, in spite of no evidence. It seems to have been a cliché in colonial literature that the colony is imagined as a female body and eroticized with sexual seduction. For example, Edward Said describes "erotic sensibility" as representative of a recurring motif in Western view of the Orient: "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (the threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies."<sup>7</sup> Giving the fact that Satō constantly depicts woman figures (both Japanese and local) in his writings, one may argue that Satō views the colony in a similar way as the Western colonizers. Following Said, David Spurr elaborates the devices of literary strategies as the rhetoric of imperial discourse and points out two of them in particular: first, the "unveiling" of the female body and second, "serialization or repetition."<sup>8</sup> It's evident that in Satō's writing, the representation of the foreign is always and repeatedly embodied through local woman figures that recall his unsatisfactory love affairs in Japan. Furthermore, in "Musha," his palpable description of the two seductive young girls suggests the close relationship between eroticism and the exotic literature of Taiwan.

Interestingly enough, instead of having a sexual relationship with the girl, the narrator escapes from such an awkward situation by running away from the house. The narrator's encounter with the aboriginal girls does not simply indicate a cultural confrontation between the colonizer and colonized, civilized and uncivilized, it in fact signals a ambiguous boundary separating inside and outside, the known and unknown world. More significantly, the narrator's escape suggests an intriguing solution to such an encounter. One may observe that a curious rift occurs in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and in the

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<sup>6</sup> Satō, *Musha*, pp. 133-78.

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979, p 188; quoted in David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 1993, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 174.

narrative as well. After the encounter, the narrator turns inward reflecting on himself, as the narrative ponders over civilization in the face of barbarism.

Satō's concept of exoticism is a complex one. For Satō, exotic sentiment emerges from a sense of alienation and suddenly transforms itself into an inner image. His idea of exoticism can be best embodied by the celebrated short story "Tale of the Fan," in which exoticism is rendered as "beauty of the ruins." According to Satō, the beauty of the ruins is less something directly related to historical events or archeological knowledge than an atmosphere or sentiment invoked by mixed images of tropical climate, landscape, collapsed house, deserted harbor, devastated wildness, etc. The author states that such sentiment is inexplicable, beyond the domains of language as well as sensation, "terror" that is immediately transformed into "inner landscapes, symbols, like nightmare, so terrifying."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the boundary separating inside and outside, the author tends to depict the counterpoint where various contrasting elements meet or different domains overlap; for example, material/non-material, conscious/unconscious, awaked/sleep, reality/dream, sound/silence, etc. From this perspective, exoticism seems to emerge in an "in-between" state, or more precisely, an "incommensurable" state of two conflicting affairs. In the short story "Tale of the Fan," for example, exoticism is illustrated through a ghost story in which the incommensurable state between the ghostly world and reality leads the story to a literary ambiguity of the fantastic mode. As the author tells us, such a literary strategy can be recognized as a typical Chinese literary tradition of the strange, a spectral narrative that strangely combines elements of "beauty and ugliness, civilized and barbarian, day and night."<sup>10</sup>

One may observe that two distinct worlds intertwine in the narrative as the story develops. In the very beginning, the decayed, spectral atmosphere permeates the descriptions and creates a dreamlike world that makes the two contrasting realms no longer distinguishable. Not until does the travelers hear the "voice" of the ghost, the two intertwined worlds split apart. The narrator, who relies on the power of reason, analyzes the world of the specter, seeking the truth. Like a detector who unravels he details of a crime scene, the narrator discloses the secret of the ghost and gives an explanation for the mysterious phenomenon. Despite the fact that he never "sees" the appearance of the ghost, the narrator proves the "falseness" of the spectral world, and once again redeems the victory of reason.

And yet, the distinction (or division) of the two contrasting worlds however is not always articulate and obvious. As Shimada has argued, Satō's skillful craft of art is not to distinguish the two worlds but rather their combination and mutual

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<sup>9</sup> Satō, *Musha* p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Satō, *Musha* p. 59.

communication.<sup>11</sup> In other words, for Shimada, Satō expresses both his confidence in the power of modern reason and his praise for the vital life often repressed by reason, as he appreciates the obsessive love embodied by the woman ghost. This also explains why the narrative becomes a mixture of the genre of detective story and that of the Japanese *kaidan* (the strange). Therefore, based on Shimada's reading, Satō's narrative serves not simply an imperial discourse that attempts to expel the uncivilized from the domain of modern reason or to bury the pre-modern in the ground of modern history, but it also sings a lament for the ever-lost past while praising the vital life, albeit untamed.

### The Imperial Discursive Machine

As addressed above, Satō's account of colonial Taiwan should be considered in the Japanese imperial framework. By analyzing the narrative structure of the story "Tale of the Fan," this section will regard the story as an emblematic pattern of Japanese imperial discourse, a part of what I term "the imperial machine". In *Heterologies*, Michel de Certeau addresses two aspects of topography in relation to the writing of foreignness: the space of the other and the space of the text.<sup>12</sup> According to Certeau, topography serves as not only "a representation of the other" but also "the fabrication and accreditation of the text as witness of the other."<sup>13</sup> Such observation can be evidenced by Satō's representation of colonial Taiwan in which the land of *gaichi* is rendered as a geographical and an epistemological other characterized by exoticism, eroticism, terror, ruin, and the strange, etc. More importantly, the representation as "witness" to the other involves the production of the text, which can be regarded as an operation of the imperial discursive machine. The story begins with the traveler's visit to An-ping, a by-now deserted harbor in Tainan. Being guided by a local journalist, the traveler tours around this dilapidated historical town, and in his description of the ruined landscape, Satō develops his idea of exoticism and creates the so-called *gaichi* (exotic) literature of Taiwan. In terms of narrative structure, the story is composed of six sections plus a postscript. The first section describes surroundings of the deserted harbor in which the landscape is depicted as exotic in contrast to the familiar landscape of the inner land of the empire. The description also reflects inner sorrow as the author expresses these unfamiliar images as symbols of interiority. The second section turns its focus on a deserted house, which serves as a turning point and informs a

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<sup>11</sup> Shimada, *Kareitō bungakuhsi*, pp. 365-68.

<sup>12</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, Trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

ghostly world. The protagonist hears the “voice” of the ghost, and the undecipherable sound leads the story to a world of the unknown. Thus the distinction between inside/outside is complicated by or transformed into the intertwined contrasting words of present/past, reality/fantastic, and consequently, the travel account turns into a narrative of detective story. The traveler-detective seeks the “truth” by disclosing secrets covered by layers of historical events, traditional customs, legends, love affairs, false reasoning, etc. The journey becomes a process of seeking the truth until the riddle is resolved in section six. By the end, the traveler-detective is able to claim the victory of reason, asserting that the ghost does not actually exist.

The particular narrative structure of “Tale of the Fan” has been the focal point of criticisms on Satō. The pre-war critic Shimada, for example, has drawn our attention to its combined narrative of the detective story and the strange. Similarly, Fay Kleeman highlights its “Chinese/Russian box” narrative structure and recognizes the figure of the ghost as a “textual aporia” that gestures to the historical past.<sup>14</sup> Following Certeau, Satō’s text can be regarded as a travel account of the island colony, not simply representation of the other but also “witness” of the other. If seen in this light, the development of the story presents a dialectical process. The “alterity” of the foreign is “displaced” by elements of the strange or the fantastic, and whereby “synthesized” in the dialect of the same. Through such displacement, the foreign landscape, customs, and history are made visible and recognizable in the eyes of the traveler as well as the colonizers. However, what is intriguing here is that the travel account is transformed into a combined narrative of detective story and the strange, in which an intricate operation endorsed by colonial desire continues to delimit a boundary separating the inside and outside, practically and ideologically.

It is in the same vein that the travel account can be seen as a hermeneutics of the other. As Certeau has stated, travel account is also a “fabrication and accreditation of the *text as witness of the other*.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the narrative structure of the story becomes an interpretative framework by which the foreign landscape, customs, language, and history becomes explicable and credible. In other words, they are re-organized and weaved into the imperial framework of reason and knowledge. It is also from this perspective that Satō’s account of the outside land as a hermeneutics of the other can be seen as a discursive practice of the imperial machine. We recall

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<sup>14</sup> Kleeman, Fay Yuan, “Bendi wenhua yu zhimin xiangxiang” [Local Culture and Colonial Imagination], *Hou zhimin de dongya zaidehua cikao* [A Postcolonial Perspective of the Localization of East Asia], ed. Chiu Kuei-fen and Liu Shu-chin, Tainan, National Museum of Taiwan Literature, 2006, pp. 165-91.

<sup>15</sup> De Certeau, *Heterologies*, p. 68.

Shimada's famous rhetoric of *gaichi* literature, that is, in the name of exoticism, literature of the foreign colony can be included in the same system of Japanese imperial literature.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, Shimada's theory of *gaichi* literature that builds mostly on Satō's writing can be recognized as a particular expression of the Japanese imperial machine.

### The Lure of the Untranslatable

The hermeneutics of the other is also an activity of translation, whose function is twofold: first, to translate the foreign landscape into the Japanese language, i.e. Japanese exotic literature; second, to translate such exotic literature into Japanese imperial discourse. The two aspects intertwine and support each other. In order to take control over the colony, matters on the foreign island have to be translated into the system of imperial knowledge. That is to say, foreign landscape and customs become objects to be translated, and the alien voice to be transcribed. To put it differently, translation makes the invisible visible, the unheard heard through the imperial language. Translation thus becomes an action that intervenes in the outside space, appropriates it, and replaces it with a textual space written in the imperial language, and whereby the colonial power structure is deployed. In this regard, the act of translation on the one hand sutures subject and object, self and other, inside and outside; on the other hand, it maps a "diagram" of colonial desire and its discursive power relations.

As a result, Satō's travel account becomes rhetoric of cultural translation, in which the foreign landscape becomes aesthetic objects. For both the traveler-translator and the readers, the "untranslatable" paradoxically becomes the most fascinating part. This also explains why exoticism as difference constitutes the fundamental feature of *gaichi* literature of Taiwan. And yet, the untranslatable does not indicate things unfamiliar, but rather, it signals something beyond language, feelings, and sensations. In other words, it points to a realm inscrutable. The untranslatable, however, is transcribed or "translated" in the text in an intriguing way, which can be best exemplified by the portrait of the ghost's "voice" in the short story "Tale of the Fan." The ghost's voice combined with decaying images of deserted house, suffocating air, luxury decorations, etc. undoubtedly invokes exotic imaginations. But it functions more in the story. The voice is unreadable: it sounds faint, yet crystal, like "bird chirps";<sup>17</sup> moreover, it is spoken in a foreign language,

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<sup>16</sup> For Shimada's theory of *gaichi* literature, see his essay collection, *Literature of the Beautiful Island*, especially his criticism of Satō in Chapter 9.

<sup>17</sup> Satō, *Musha*, p. 43.

inexplicable. What is at stake here is that the meaning of these words not longer matters, the voice heralds a void that invokes terror and turns the travel account into a story of the strange.

The inexplicable ghost's voice is beyond knowledge as the terror it would invoke exists beyond the realm of sensation. The enigmatic voice can be considered as the "excess" of subjective language and knowledge, which in turn arouses the travel's curiosity and pleasure. The ghost's voice has become a motor of the story that makes the narrative progress; furthermore, the ghostly world continues to dominate the narrative until the riddle is resolved by the end of the story. However, the ghost's voice as the translational "remainder" cannot be fully assimilated in the imperial language and consequently becomes a floating sign that continues to lurk beneath the text.

## Conclusion

Satō, in his travel writing of Taiwan, has represented *gaichi* as a space of the exotic through the encounter with the aborigines and the description of the ruins. However, it would be a mistake to consider *gaichi* as a place "outside" the imperial territory or a realm totally beyond. *Gaichi*, which means "outside territory," in fact indicates no external land, but a "contact zone"<sup>18</sup> that connects Japan and its colony as well as a "threshold" that reflects the mutual interdiction between inside and outside.<sup>19</sup> As in the previous discussion, the encounter with the aboriginal girls depicts more the confrontations between the colonizers and colonized, civilized and uncivilized than the boundaries between them. Likewise, the combined genres of the detective story and the strange do not suggest distinguishing the two kinds, but rather their mutual communication. If Satō's exotic literature of colonial Taiwan can be regarded as a part of the Japanese imperial discursive machine, then this machine is characterized by its double movements. As stated, Satō's narrative reflects two contrasting worlds and domains, one of the strange, and the other governed by reason; one contradicts and yet supplements the other. Therefore, double movement operates in Satō's exotic machine: one that attempts to integrate the foreign space into the imperial space of control, and the other undermines it and forces the organized space to dissolve by introducing the space of "outside." The two contrasting forces express themselves as two domains that contradict each

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<sup>18</sup> The term "contact zone" is taken from Mary Louise Pratt's idea develop in her book *Imperial Eyes*. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London, routledge, 1992, pp. 1-11.

<sup>19</sup> The idea of "threshold" here is borrowed from Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the logic of sovereignty. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 19.



other, that is, inside/outside, present/past, reason/the strange, etc. And it seems that the narrative follows the “rupture” between the two domains and keeps “distance” from them. It is in the same vein that one may observe in the narrative the “contact zone” between the two domains, and more significantly, their mutual interdiction. Therefore, the travel account as cultural translation on the one hand exemplifies the transformation of the foreign into imperial discourse; on other hand, it specifies the untranslatable that reminds of the unwritten. As a result, the text manifests itself not simply as a travel account of the oversea colony, but rather a “diagram” of space, desire, and power, composed of both the translatable and untranslatable.

# Attention Paid to the World in the Poetry of Hung Hung and Hsia Yu

SANDRINE MARCHAND

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Hung Hung and Hsia Yu are two contemporary Taiwanese poets, similar in their attention not only to themselves, but also to the world. The world as language, society, East and West, metissage and contemporary issues of globalization and politics: all these themes are scrutinized in Hung hung's and Hsia Yu's poems. This paper analyzes these writings without frontiers that play with the idea of a common world.

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The works of the two Taiwanese poets Hung Hung 鴻鴻 and Hsia Yu 夏宇 are linked by the fact that they are not only reflections on the self or poetry for the sake of poetry but are focused on the world.

In his poetry, and especially in his latest collection *Tuzhi zhadan* 土製炸彈 [Artisanal Bomb]<sup>1</sup>, Hung Hung pays a feverish attention to other parts of the world and he is also preoccupied with the questioning of language (Chinese language and poetic language). It is not *à la lettre* a socially engaged poetry but he echoes his experience of the world and inscribes his poetry inside the criss-crossed relationships between the self and others.

The poetry of Hsia Yu is much more focused on solipsism, however it is mixed with references borrowed from different cultures all over the world. In her last collection

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<sup>1</sup> Hung Hung 鴻鴻, *Tuzhi zhadan* 土製炸彈 [Artisanal Bomb], Taipei, Hei yanqing wenhua, 2006.

Salsa Hsia Yu used a mixed language characterized by a rapid rhythm that is much like modern dance with breaks and continuations.<sup>2</sup>

I would like to analyze how these writings without frontiers pay attention to the world through an intersubjectivity composed of listening and interrogation.

Defining poetry through its relationship to the world is a way to confront oneself with the wide-ranging issue of the opposition between subject and object, and to put it into question. If this relationship is the basis (and no longer the subject) we will not stress one element to the other's detriment, but always keep in mind the two elements existing only through a particular relationship. Moreover, if we refer to the philosopher Maine de Biran, the self is defined as "relationship", or a movement beginning with the subject and finishing with the object, without separation.<sup>3</sup>

In poetry, the relationship is mostly felt between the self and the world. The poet does not isolate him/herself with his/her Muse, nor is the experience put between brackets. If we follow the French contemporary poet Antoine Emaz, the poet is like a skin between the outside and the inside:

Entre le dehors, disons la réalité, la société , les autres... et le dedans (le corps, la mémoire, la pensée, les émotions...), il n'y a qu'une peau fine comme une page, une peu de tambour, plus ou moins tendue, mais incessamment frappée.<sup>4</sup>

Between the Outside, which we can say includes reality, society and others... and the Inside (the body, memory, thinking processes and emotions...) there is only a thin skin the width of a page, a drum's skin, more or less tight, but constantly being beat.

Not only is the poet emotion, he is also consciousness. If I did not choose emotion as a means of analysis, it is because emotion is always suspected of being passionate, irrational and subjective. Even if Michel Collot has already paved the way for this kind of analysis with his reflection on "Matter-Emotion"<sup>5</sup>, he is still bound to the domination of the subject as is proved by the quotation he gives from the poet Senghor: "Contrary to the dominant tendency of Western lyrics which casts the feelings of the self on the world, for the negro-African poet it is more a

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<sup>2</sup> Hsia Yu, *Salsa*, Taipei, Xia Yu chuban, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Devarieux, *Maine de Biran, L'individualité persévérante*, Paris, Jérôme Millon, 2004, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> [http://poezibao.typepad.com/poezibao/notes\\_sur\\_la\\_posie\\_anthologie\\_en\\_devenir/avril2010](http://poezibao.typepad.com/poezibao/notes_sur_la_posie_anthologie_en_devenir/avril2010).

<sup>5</sup> Michel Collot, *La matière émotion* [Matter-Emotion], Paris, P.U.F, 1997.

question of how to identify with the object.”<sup>6</sup> Identifying oneself with the object is still a figuration of the self and not yet an emphasis of the relationship between the two. For Michel Collot, emotion is not a mood of the soul but rather a mood of the body.<sup>7</sup> This recognition of the body's value is important in a field dominated by the thinking subject but it is perhaps insufficient in revealing what exactly happens between the inside and the outside.

It is in this manner that I qualify the relationship between the poet and the world, as “attention”. Attention implies that the consciousness is turned towards something that interests it, requiring an effort. However, it is also because something draws someone's attention, that you answer this call. Contrary to emotion, attention is a kind of relationship with the world, which consists in being conscious of one's involvement in it. This implies that we are a part of it, at the same level as all other beings, without any anthropocentric point of view.

The self is not opposed to the other, the process of becoming the other, a transformation that equally implies the two elements of the relationship, replaces identification.

In the poetry we will now read, and especially in the poetry of Hung Hung, the outside is not a pretext for focusing on the emotion flowing from the self. The outside is what the subject pays attention to; it is the most important element of the relationship. In the work of both poets it appears as a mixed world, multicultural and multilingual, where interchange is the most common type of relationship.

### **Involvement in the World.**

The title of Hung Hung's collection *Artisanal Bomb* reveals a poetic intention linked to action. The explosion expresses the moment when the poet becomes conscious of the fact that he used to have a naive relationship with the world, for he thought that poetry was capable of transforming it. After a trip to the Middle East in 1998 Hung Hung wrote in the epilogue of his book that he realized that the world is a place of conflicts, and full of the claims of people deprived of their rights and territories through acts of terrorism —such as the Kurds or the Chechens— and that he himself is a part of this world. His world view has opened up and he realized that the political conflicts in Taiwan and between Taiwan and China are at the same level as the others conflicts, one not being more important than the other : “Taiwan is a complete circle but inseparable from other political, economical, cultural and

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

ethnic global conflicts” (台灣實為世界族群，文化，經濟，政治衝突之具體而微的一環)<sup>8</sup>

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are not only characteristics of Taiwan's identity, as in the case of some poems by Chen Li 陳黎, but this point of view concerns all countries and all languages. Hung Hung refers to Edward Saïd for whom no one is outside or beyond the map.<sup>9</sup>

This realization transforms the poem “Youth Hotel” (青年旅館)<sup>10</sup> into “a world village *diquicun*” (地球村) opposed to “capitalist globalization” (資本主義的全球化). In this “world village” all kinds of nationalities, Scots, Ukrainians, Koreans, the Taiwanese, Americans— live together in harmony without discrimination. The different nationalities are mixed together in a cosmopolitanism which not only reflects the meeting of East and West but also in-between countries of the East. For example, the Korean reads Nietzsche and the Ukrainian who studies in Germany is dreaming of a Nepalese girl. These different countries are neighbours and the West as an imperial power is put on the margins; only the American is described through stereotypes such as “he likes to promote justice and freedom”(喜歡推銷自由正義的美國人) and drinks Coca-cola (echoing the next section of the collection “Against America” (反美詩)).<sup>11</sup>

This village which could be anywhere welcomes young people from everywhere, who are travellers without boundaries. However, they live in rhythm with the rest of the world. What gathers all these differences are common world phenomena: global warming, the SARS epidemic, etc. These travellers with blurred identities share transitory existences, they are there one moment and gone the next, as one traveller in the poem who does not return and who has left all his stuff on his bed —passport, train ticket, dictionary— “as if he had been arrested or as if he had fled”(像是剛剛被捕或已倉卒逃亡).<sup>12</sup>

The poem “Peace Hotel” (和平飯店) is written in the same vein : two Pakistanis and two Israelis, all musicians, are sharing their breakfast.<sup>13</sup> Peace is the main theme of the poem : it appears in the title, in music which is able to bring peace and also in the symbol of the boiled egg which everybody “eats in peace” (和平地吃著水煮蛋). The egg can also symbolize unity and completeness. At the same time, the same image appears in the poem with the theme of war. Everyone remembers an

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<sup>8</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p. 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Saïd, *op.cit.* p. 103

<sup>10</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

important event concerning eggs in their childhoods. They first laughed: "I broke eggs and my mother beat me" (賣蛋跌倒被母親痛打).<sup>14</sup> But childhood is also linked with death, suffering and war.

Following this, ethnic conflict takes place within a sentence which while denying it, ultimately implies the conflict by being repeated several times: "it is not an ethnic issue that causes this or that incident" (並不是因為種族的緣故).<sup>15</sup> Finally "fighting could not resolve the problem nor could peace." (既然打架不能解決問題／和平也不能)<sup>16</sup>. Whether one fights or plays music, conflicts still exist and could not be erased nor forgotten. The world is made of intricate relationships, and conflicts that individuals cannot resolve by themselves but to which they are submitted. As Saïd states, we need to consider all histories as interdependent.<sup>17</sup>

Paying attention to individual situations reveals that we can meet the other, the foreigner without prejudice or stereotype and, in this case, the relationship is easy. What is important are these individual relationships between equals. Most of the poems from the section "Islamic Scarf" (伊斯蘭花頭巾) reveal a social affinity (the "same joy, same suffering") felt between people even if Hung Hung attributes this feeling to the poems he wrote during his youth, before his enlightening trip to the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> However, he also faces conflicts that lead to the loss of one's identity. We realize that the philosophical issue in these poems sometimes depends on immanent laws, and again we must refer to Edward Saïd for whom nobody has the privilege of evaluating the world without being engaged in it.<sup>19</sup>

The poem "Wandering" (流亡) explores a kind of relationship between the self and the other which is not harmonious. It is a kind of interference or intrusion of the other in one's life: "I live in the other's home" (我住在別人家裡).<sup>20</sup> Until it reaches a complete interchange between the other and the self: "I am rightly the other, otherwise everybody is me" (我就是別人／不然／每個人都是我). The possibility of becoming the other is very important in the poetry of both Hsia Yu and Hung Hung: here it leads to the loss of one's identity: "Obviously it is the other's brain that ponders my own problems" (用分明是別人的腦袋／思素著自己的問題). This issue is not abstract, since from the title of the poem we can understand that the relationship between the speaker and the other is a relationship between a foreigner and an indigenous person. The foreigner would have to adapt himself

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Saïd, p.57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Saïd, p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

and assimilate indigenous culture, language and habits. Another poem named “Every Morning When I Wake Up” (每一個醒來的早晨) is also a question of the loss of oneself in becoming the other.<sup>21</sup> This time, it is “The flock of sheep I have lost/ grazes the grass on the other's field” (我失去的羊群／在別人的土地上吃草). After the flock, the question of the rain which is lost is mentioned, as well as the child and the wife. And then Allah, and the frontier... Here, the relationship between the self and the other is conflicting since the speaker has lost everything whereas the other possesses what he has lost. It is not the self that dominates here but the other who takes the self's place in refusing identity recognition and intersubjectivity.

From my point of view, what Hung Hung must have realized during his trip to the Middle East was the duality of the self, as the French philosopher Maine de Biran said: we are able to go outside of our consciousness because we already have “an outside inside”<sup>22</sup>. This is manifested in the poem “The Cat of Van” (凡城的貓) (a town at the frontier between Armenia and Turkey).<sup>23</sup> The cat symbolizes the duality of the self which is required to apprehend the world as it is. Thanks to the particularity of having one blue eye and one green eye, the cat is able to look quietly at everything, even conflicts, because he can “smile and suffer at the same time” (才能同時微笑並悲傷).<sup>24</sup> The poet must also look at the world with two different eyes, simultaneously concerned and disinterested.

If an animal represents the paradigm of the relationship to the world, this means that these poems do not reflect an anthropocentric point of view, and that human beings are not superior to other beings. On the contrary, animals seem to be superior to human beings since they are able to appreciate the world with the right detachment.

In the poem “The Fish of the Vietnamese Restaurant” (越南餐廳的魚), the metamorphosis of the self into a fish reveals that if human beings tend to attribute their feelings and qualities to animals, the fish also sees the world of human beings as his own.<sup>25</sup> First, the restaurant is decorated just like the inside of the aquarium: “The people who created this decoration/ were inspired by my multicolored aquarium” (這些人造風景／一如我缸裡的彩色石頭). Then, to the fish, human beings also live in an aquarium, they eat in the restaurant behind a window and

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Anne Devarieux, *Maine de Biran*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

they wear glasses. It is for this very reason that fish and human beings share the same world perspective: "They also have a wall made of glass" (他們也又一道玻璃牆). Here the wall is not the "paroi" of the poet Guillevic which is an impassable limit. Instead the wall represents our common world with the fish.<sup>26</sup>

Gradually, we begin to feel that there is a very small difference between the self and the fish, especially when the speaker (the fish) says: "I do not remember the ocean/ I perhaps never saw the sea/ it is only my imagination" (我已不記得海洋。／或許我從沒見過海，那只是／想像).<sup>27</sup> We enter the realm of possibility, if the world of the fish is strange to us, its imagination could cross our own, since a fish that has never seen the sea is perhaps no longer a fish. He is a domesticated animal just like human beings. Their own dismissal of savage life for civilization could also be called domestication.

With this foreground of sympathy, the speaker questions the nature of the reader and presupposes a possible identity:

如果你也跟我一樣  
 張著眼睛遊走，張著眼睛睡覺  
 你也會看見許多真假難分的景  
 If by chance you are like me  
 Who swims with open eyes  
 Who sleeps with open eyes  
 You must also see many things  
 For which right and wrong are difficult to distinguish.<sup>28</sup>

This stanza reveals a spiritual community and an equal level of intelligence and consequently the form in which one appears (the body of a fish or a human being) is incidental, or in any case, interchangeable.

The identity of the self is necessarily blurred and flickering. For instance, the two Vietnamese women of the restaurant feed both the fish and the guests.<sup>29</sup> But humor disappears when the scraps of fish on a plate are described.

<sup>26</sup> Eugène Guillevic, *Art poétique*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Poésie, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p.25.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



The transition from the fish's consciousness to the human being's is imperceptible, until we no longer know whose consciousness we are in. It is this uncertainty, this absence of transition that makes becoming a fish possible, like in the story of the philosopher Zhuangzi, who can understand the happiness of the fish. In this way, we must renounce the opposition between the subject and the object, but also maintain the relationship and avoid the fusion or dissolution of one element into the other (as we will see next in the work of Hsia Yu).

The "I" must renounce the limits of its determined identity, and in fact, the self does not know itself either: "They must also be like me/ I can't help jumping in fear when I see my reflection" (他們也應該跟我一樣／不會突然對反影中的自己感到驚恐).<sup>30</sup> Before the "mirror phase" it is possible to become the other without losing oneself. Transformation is only a superposition of different existences.

### The Walker-Through-Walls

Interchange is one of the modes of relationship. If the other becomes the self and vice versa, it puts into question the opposition between identity and difference as the poem "Someone Else's Life" (另一個人生) shows.<sup>31</sup> In this poem, the speaker is not "I" but "You". The "You" wishes to be the other with the other's wife, the other's children, the other's life. Finally he realizes that he is still the same. In this poem we find again the hesitation in recognizing ourselves as if we could always be a possible other.

In the poem "A Tree" (樹), the speaker ("I") identifies with a tree: "I am a tree" (我是樹).<sup>32</sup> He sees himself in all the parts of the tree and in all the possible transformations of its wood, which results in a kind of list. It is not a scientific one, but rather a traditional Chinese list that holds some surprise, since at the end the speaker identifies with "an umbrella under the rain" (我是雨中的傘) or with "love under an umbrella" (我是傘下的戀情).<sup>33</sup> However, at this time, the poet has not yet realized what the world really is, and what this implies for poetic creation. And yet he is already receptive to the world, permeable to reality as an interpenetration of the world and of the consciousness.

The sympathy pervading from the poem "I am the sap and the tears which flow out from an injury" (我是傷口流滲的漿汁淚水) which makes the "I" the first body in

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p. 203.

<sup>32</sup> Hung Hung, *Mengyoude men* 夢遊的門 [The Door of the Dream's Travel], Tainan, Nanxianfu, 2007, pp. 33-35

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

the world, concerns all beings. The 'com-motion' as Senghor<sup>34</sup> says, becomes compassion for the world for Hung Hung: "How not to be touched by the things we like? How to Save The Child with His Parents in The Photograph?" (如何不被自己所愛的事物影響)[如何拯救／相框裡站在父母跟前的小孩] he asks in the poem "My Dear Ones" (所愛).<sup>35</sup>

All subjectivities cross the world and are crossed by the world. The image of the walker-through-walls is present in the poems of both Hsia Yu and Hung Hung.

In his poem "The Walker-Through-Walls" (穿牆人) to be a walker-through-walls allows the possibility of crossing the past, the future and to go to another world but also to use fantasy and imagination.<sup>36</sup>

With Hsia Yu the walker-through-walls is a power that keeps the integrity of the self through all the metamorphoses of life. She writes in "I understand the mystery of being capable of it". "Myself only with my body and my sixth sense I played the walker-through-walls".<sup>37</sup> It is also a means to go through time as in the poem "Ventriloquy" (腹語術).<sup>38</sup> Through a hole in the wall, the speaker can see a wedding which must have been his own:

我走錯房間 / 錯過了自已的婚禮。 / 在牆壁唯一的隙縫中，我看見 / 一切行進之完好。<sup>39</sup>

I walk into the wrong room/and miss my own wedding/ through the only hole in the wall I see/ All proceeding perfectly.

All the poetry of Hsia Yu reflects the desire to cross the world and to traverse a number of experiences and loves.

When Hsia Yu evokes love, as in "Taking Her a Basket of Fruit" (帶一籃水果去看她).<sup>40</sup> it is the difference that is called in question: all lovers are identical and interchangeable. Love affairs are considered monotonous and without true feelings. They all must be crossed but they are still obsessed with the following questions: who loves whom, nobody loves nobody, everybody would like to be loved.

Even absolute love, which is the paradigm of all relationships for Hsia Yu, is crossed by others in the poem "Written for Others" (寫給別人):

<sup>34</sup> Michel Collot, *La matière émotion*, p. 231.

<sup>35</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup> *Anthologie de la poésie contemporaine de Taïwan, De l'infidélité*, Paris, Buchet-Chastel, 2008, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup> Hsia Yu, *Fusion Kitsch*, 2001, Michigan, Zephyr Press, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Hsia Yu, *Salsa*, p. 90.

我愛你 / 我們變成了自己的陌生人 / 為了看人以為 / 他們已經把我們看穿.<sup>41</sup>

I love you/ until we come to be stranger to ourselves/ so that others will come  
to imagine/ They have seen through us.<sup>42</sup>

Love, in this way, is also a crossing. It is a means to become the other so much so that others know us as well as themselves. Love is a relationship that implies fusion.

Fusion appears in many poems of Hsia Yu in which the relationship to the world is always mediated by rationality and abstraction in a lack of confidence into sensitiveness. They additionally treat the desire to give a wide berth to all kinds of lyricism suspected of being too feminine.

In her collection of poems *Salsa*, one sentence from the poem "Fusion Kitsch"<sup>43</sup> describes the beginning of the world as a chaotic fusion of human beings and animals all together, all belonging to the same family in a "bucolic and pan-incestuous atmosphere" (這牧歌式的泛亂倫氣氛). Fusion represents the original confusion that makes possible all other kinds of relationships between beings possible.

Some poems reveal interchange, as in Hung Hung's poems, however they do not only concern living beings. In the poem "Salsa" the "I" has "[t]his secret yearning to be that sand dune/swept away one evening by a desert storm/only to return the following morning in another form" (我還是願意偷偷自己是那沙丘 / 被某個晚上的狂風捲走).<sup>44</sup>

The yearned metamorphosis is a constant renewal of the self, the loss of identity is no longer a question in the multiplicity of becoming. The "I" of the poem becomes then the "Ché Guevara in the mirror of this morning" (我是切格瓦拉今天早上在鏡子裡) after having slept in a T-shirt with his face printed on it. The print of the other is sufficient, enough to become the other. But if love or deep admiration enables this trans-fusion, the phenomenon of interchange leaves the field of individual relationships capable, as in the poem "Salsa", of becoming widespread and reaching poetic creation. The reference to Borges also makes interchange possible: "When, like something out of Borges/ I am him and he is unaware that I

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>42</sup> English translation, cf Hsia Yu, *Fusion Kitsch*, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Hsia Yu, *Salsa*, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> English translation, cf. Hsia Yu, *Fusion Kitsch*, p. 38.

am him/Nor is anyone aware.”(我是那人而那人並不知道／別人也不知道／這些要問波赫士).<sup>45</sup>

Thus, in the poem “Dreaming Beuys”(夢見波依斯), the “I” visits one of Joseph Beuys's exhibitions:

遲來的我參觀你的作品

走過那些安靜的物

被迫參加你的裝置變成你的材料。<sup>46</sup>

I missed your age but I arrive at your retrospective

And stroll by these tranquil objects until I find

Myself a willy-nilly conscript of your ensemble.

The wrapping here is more than a metaphor, it means the interchange of all existences and of all artistic creations through the becoming of time:

如果最後無非就是

誰把誰包起來的問題 我想

我佔了優勢。我用夢包裹你。

然後用詩包裹夢。(…)

把印有你照片的

明信片寄掉。把微你寫的詩印出來

什麼人即要讀到。我隔著讀

讀他的讀——<sup>47</sup>

It is just a question in the end of who wraps who

I think I have the upper hand here for I can wrap you in a dream

And wrap that in a poem (…)

I print out the poem I have made for you someone

Somewhere will one day read and then somewhere

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Somehow I will one day read their reading.

Borges is not far in the superposition of existences too. We no longer know who is who nor if it has any importance.

The subject is not only interchangeable but it is also multifold. In this way the relationship is so intricate that it is about to disappear, like in a dream. It is perhaps for this reason that love relationships, taking place in the poems of Hsia Yu are often doomed, as the poem titles "Gradually Diluted With Every Parting I" (一些一些地遲疑地稀釋著的我).<sup>48</sup> or "Written for Others" (寫給別人)<sup>49</sup> suggest. Love begins with a Chinese character written in the palm of the hand, but "I write it wrong, so I can rub / It out" (而且寫錯了 / 又擦掉). This first disappearance leads to a complete dissolution: "I love you as we slowly/Dissolve into grains of light I love you" (我愛你漫漫 / 分解粒子變粗我愛你).<sup>50</sup>

Love relationships lead to crumbling and dissolution. However the relationship with the world leads to the same situation. As the limits of the self are not asserted, the danger is to be swallowed by the world, to blend oneself with it. It is obvious in the poem "Don't You Feel the Morning Becomes Her?" (你不覺得她很適合早上嗎?)<sup>51</sup> because in the relationship of empathy between the speaker ("she") and reality, she finally seems to be erased: "Don't you feel that/ rubbing becomes her?" (你不認為她 / 她就是很適合摩擦嗎?).<sup>52</sup>

Relationships lead to the loss of the self as Hsia Yu considers that relationships are based on boredom, in contrast to Hung Hung for whom the relationship to the world implies a struggle.

Boredom is a main theme in Hsia Yu's poetry. In "Dreaming Beuys" the works of Beuys represent the summit of boredom. Boredom is the link that enables beings to interchange their positions, questioning who bores whom, and who is the most boring. The previous question of "who wraps whom" finally has become the problem of "each one more fed up than the last", or "who bores whom?"<sup>53</sup> Substitutions and interchanges finally lead to emptiness and nonsense. However the poems "You Are So Very Very Bored I Am So Very Beautiful" (你正百無聊賴我正

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> Hsia Yu, *Salsa*, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> English translation, cf. Hsia Yu, *Fusion Kitsch*, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Hsia Yu, *Salsa*, p. 44. Asking for her autobiography in an anthology of poetry Hsia Yu answered with this poem.

<sup>52</sup> English translation, cf. Hsia Yu, *Fusion Kitsch*, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Hsia Yu, *Salsa*, p. 14.

美麗)<sup>54</sup> and “Continuing Our Discussion of Boredom and Ennui” (繼續討論厭煩)<sup>55</sup> show that boredom and the lack of feelings which form the foreground of all relationships to reality are a kind of spring-board that make the relationships rebound. On this pale backdrop, manifold sensations appear more vivid. Thus, the question about the taste of boredom leads, through contrasted and abstract images, to ecstasy, to the point that these two contrary feelings, boredom and ecstasy, become indistinct.

In fact, the only remedy to boredom in Hsia Yu's poetry must be found in the use of language as poetry's main issue.

## Language

For Hung Hung all languages are equal and serve a harmonious exchange between different people of the world. In the poem “A Shower at Pompidou” (龐畢度陣)<sup>56</sup> bilingualism appears in the situation of immigrants, the Tamil seller who has lived in France for fifteen years, still speaks to his son in Tamil “as if in a secret code” while his son speaks “French to his girlfriend and English with tourists”.<sup>57</sup>

Although many languages traverse Hung Hung's poems, he dedicates two poems to his mother-tongue. In the poem “I Also Know How to Speak My Own Language” (我也會說我的語言)<sup>58</sup> language is first defined as a sensation, as a means to know:

我也會說我的語言  
 並任引導我傳入這個世界  
 認識饑餓  
 和媽媽，寒冷  
 和襪子，以及唇  
 和吻的關聯。<sup>59</sup>

I also know how to speak my own language

It leads me to penetrate this world

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>56</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Hung Hung, *Mengyou de men.*, p. 75-76.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

To know hunger  
And mother, coldness  
And socks and also lips  
And kiss.

But if language is a means to know the world and to give words to sensations, new communication techniques (phone, internet, etc.) cut people from experience, dehumanize relationships and make you become a "smiling robot". What is important for the poet here is to maintain a direct link with the world and to understand that the self is not separable from it. Language is a means to have access to the world, but it is also a part of it. Language is a "walker-through-walls". Language engages itself in all life experiences through relationships, especially in love relationships. In the second part of the poem, Hung Hung questions the Chinese language in the strained relation between China and Taiwan:

我也會說我的語言  
但是你說得更好。  
在電視上在廣場上，在洶激盪的海峽  
此岸彼岸，數不清的任共同說著  
啊，令人暈眩，這熟悉的語言。  
I also know how to speak my own language  
You speak it better than me  
On T.V at the square, among roaring waves of the Strait  
At each side of the two banks  
An incalculable number of persons  
So many  
Commonly speak this familiar language.<sup>60</sup>

A distance is taken with the Chinese language which perhaps is not the real mother-tongue as is seen in the poem "Mother-Tongue Lesson" (母語課)<sup>61</sup> when a

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p. 132.

child asks himself why he cannot understand his mother's language, which is different from official Mandarin.

If language is “de vivre en aller retour du coeur entre le monde et les mots” [to live in the heart's crossing between the world and the words] as the contemporary French poet James Sacré<sup>62</sup> said, for Hsia Yu language is completely linked not only with the world or with others, but also with the body and language, and is first represented as the tongue, “this warm aquatic creature”.<sup>63</sup>

The poem “Translation” (翻譯) reveals that the translation of one language to another relies on a carnal link with the world.<sup>64</sup>

This poem is about a monk who is translating a sacred text but because he has no life experience, he is not able to find the words he needs: “In search of those ministering words and phrases/ he calls to mind the bodies/he never had the chance to touch”(找出對應的狀態；／那些身體，他想／只要撫摸過一次－).<sup>65</sup> In this relationship between the body and words, translation is an erotic work. A good translation is not the result of a strong knowledge of words and language but of a deep life experience. Untranslated words are only un-experienced events:

翻不出來的  
 只好自行創作  
 但最好看起來像翻譯一樣  
 如果他曾撫摸過  
 Words he cannot translate  
 He must now invent  
 But better they give the appearance of translation  
 If only he had touched them.<sup>66</sup>

Translation seems to be linked more to reality than to creation, because creation depends on imagination. In other words, all poems are true poems when they are

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<sup>62</sup> James Sacré, *Viens, dit quelqu'un*, Marseille, André Dimanche, 1996, p. 22, cf Michel Collot, « Paysage avec » in *James Sacré*, Tarabuste Editions, 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Hsia Yu, *Fusion Kitsch*, p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.



translations. This means that translation rather than being an indirect mode of expression is actually the most direct one.

This reversal between translation and creation inscribes language inside the world. For Hsia Yu language and the world are the same thing, whereas for Hung Hung language enables him "to penetrate the world", it is still a means "to fight against the world as it is" as the poet Reverdy said.

## Conclusion

In the poetry of Hsia Yu interchange is a way to criticize the world as it is under the domination of the subject over the object, because this kind of relationship leads to boredom. But language, and especially poetic language, obliges the spirit to mix with the body and the world, and to recognize the richness of experiences. However, her poetry does not offer another way to envision the world.

Contrary to that position, for Hung Hung, "the poet is not important in himself. What is important is to know if words are able to reverse the tendency of the world (詩人是誰並不重要，重要的是他所說出的話語，能否和這傾斜的世界相抗衡).<sup>67</sup> Before his enlightening trip to the Middle East, Hung Hung referred to the poet Ya Hsian 痾弦 for whom "poetry is a way of life" (詩是一種生活方式), but now he denies this presupposition.<sup>68</sup> Poetry is not only an aesthetic pleasure which leads to individual satisfaction. It has a role to play in the world; it is the only means through which the poet can fight not only for the freedom of a few readers but also for everybody.

Neither can poetry reject the world because it is imperfect, for we cannot reject it without wishing its destruction. Quoting a poem by Erich Fried, Hung Hung thinks that poetry must "encourage readers to continue to penetrate deeper into the world" (也只鼓勵讀者繼續沈湎在世界的一致性當中)<sup>69</sup>

However for both Hung Hung and Hsia Yu, poetry, as a relationship with the world or others is an interchange which multiplies itself in all directions. Poetry cannot change the world, both poets accept this:

這是詩與世界正面相對的一刻。我等著看誰會被誰改變。<sup>70</sup>

It is the moment of confrontation with the world but we must wait and see which one will change the other.

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<sup>67</sup> Hung Hung, *Tuzhi zhadan*, p. 221.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 224.

ATTENTION PAID TO THE WORLD IN THE POETRY OF HUNG HUNG AND HSIA YU  
*SANDRINE MARCHAND*

# **“Lost territories” of France and China: Nationalist Narratives, Connected Histories and Colonial Difference**

FLORENT VILLARD

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This paper investigates the intertwined nationalist narratives on the so-called “lost territories” of France and China. Using the Chinese famous patriotic poem by Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946) *Qizi zhi ge* 七子之歌, or “Song for Seven Children - Macao”, and its paratext as main corpus, this essay aims at questioning a schizophrenic reference to France in the poem and to develop an argumentation around the intertextual relation between nationalist texts produced from different local histories within the global context of modernity, and the colonial dimension which is intimately linked to it. A close look at the text of Wen Yiduo reveals France as the figure of Janus, by representing two faces of the same coin: the reference about the French experience of patriotism as a *colonized* nation after the Prussian war (1871) and, in the same text, the patriotic claim of the poet against the colonial expansion of Euro-American and Japanese powers, including France as a *colonizer*. Through this case study, my goal is to emphasize the structural asymmetry of the relation of power between the West and the Others and to show the essential imbrications of the colonial enterprise with the cultural, ideological and economic aspects of the initially western project of modernity. In pointing out the intertwined network between French and Chinese political and intellectual history, this paper aims at illustrating the irrelevant dimension of the comparative approach and emphasizing the possibilities of giving visibility to the “connected histories” and conceiving thematic histories in a coeval modernity.

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In 1998, the Chinese contemporary popular song *Qizi zhi ge* 七子之歌, or “Song for Seven Children - Macao” was massively broadcast by the Chinese official media.<sup>1</sup> Performed by students in many public schools, this song was also chosen as one of the thirty songs played in the first Chinese satellite *Chang'e*.<sup>2</sup> It was initially (re)written to become the generic song of a documentary series on Macao’s history called *Aomen suiyue* 澳门岁月, or “Macao’s Years”, which was broadcast in order to celebrate the “return” of Macao to China in 1999.<sup>3</sup> Its lyrics were not written ex nihilo by some official songwriter as a propaganda text going along with the patriotic event of Macao’s return. The organizers of the mass patriotic campaign for this historical event decided to bring back to light a famous poem by Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), one of the great modernist poets of the “New Culture” movement in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese authorities hijacked this non-communist poet and transformed his poem into a popular MTV song, which was both a propaganda discourse and a commodity diffused in the mass media industry, making the most of a cultural and political practice which perfectly fits in with what Guy Debord has described as the “integrated spectacular” in advanced capitalists societies.<sup>5</sup>

This paper analyzes from an intertextual, transnational and transhistorical perspective this famous patriotic poem which was written by Wen Yiduo in 1925.<sup>6</sup> We wish to emphasize the location in this literary text of the colonial dimension of modernity and the asymmetric relation, while always synchronous, between the West and the rest. Wen Yiduo’s poem depicts the ambivalent imaginary of France in China: the author took as an example of patriotism the French long struggle for the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine, but he also narrates the wrongdoing of France as an imperialist state in China.

From a theoretical viewpoint, this reference to Alsace-Lorraine in the poem tends to

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<sup>1</sup> The lyrics and song are based here on the VCD series *Taohua dao xilie* 桃花島系列, or “Peach Blossom Island Series”, issued in 1997 by the Audiovisual Office of the Fujian Province Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 2007, “Chang’e yi hao weixing tazai 32 shou gequ benxiang yueliang 嫦娥一號衛星搭載首歌曲奔向月亮” [Chang’e Satellite 1 takes 32 songs on board to the moon], [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/24/content\\_6934011.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/24/content_6934011.htm). Accessed 11/12/2008.

<sup>3</sup> The first episode was broadcast by CCTV (China Central Television Center) on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory Lee points out that many poets, such as Huang Zunxian (1848-1905) and even Qu Yuan (BC 340-278), have been recuperated as patriotic poets and integrated within the “regime’s cultural and ideological canon”, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and its Others*, Durham, Duke University Press, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Wen Yiduo, “*Qizi zhi ge*”, *Dajiang Likan*, Volume 1, n°2, November 1925. In this text, we refer to the *Wen Yiduo Shi Quanbian* 聞一多詩全編 [Wen Yiduo Complete Poems Editions], Hangzhou, Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1995, pp. 196-199.

weaken any comparative or world history perspective by showing the connectivity and synchronicity of different local histories, and emphasizing a constellation of nationalist discourse, the different stars being related to each other.<sup>7</sup> We will try to emphasize here the complex relationship within the “constellation” of nationalism in modernity, particularly the French patriotic discourse reference mentioned in Wen Yiduo’s poem.

## Wen Yiduo, the Unequal Treaty System and Alsace-Lorraine

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the first clearly nationalist claims in the modern sense of the term against the “unequal treaty” system, to the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which witnessed a reactivation of the nationalist discourse by the Chinese Communist authorities, the question of the return of the “lost territories” to the heart of the motherland has always been brought up in the literary and political texts of both Chinese writers and intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> Following Euro-American and Japanese domination from the first Opium War, the anti-imperialist discourse of sovereignty based on the “unequal treaty” system was dominant in the Chinese Intellectual world from the very beginning of the theoretical and political construction of the Chinese modern Nation-State, needless to say that it was also one of the main ideological supports of the Communists’ political project. As Christina Cheng Miu Bing points out:

The 1984 Sino-British and the 1987 Sino-Portuguese Joint Declarations are, therefore, of paramount symbolic significance in the history of twentieth-century China, because they mark the official demise of foreign imperialism and colonial domination of the Chinese soil, yet only at the expense of China’s having reinvented itself as a modern nation-state.<sup>9</sup>

And yet the notion of “lost territories” had not been openly or extensively brought to the fore in the state propaganda until the official return under the Chinese sovereignty of first Hong-Kong and secondly Macao. The ideology of nationalism, which works today as a substitute to the no longer valid imaginary of communist

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<sup>7</sup> The metaphor of constellations to represent nationalisms is borrowed from Benedict Anderson in the introduction to *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anticolonial Imagination*, London, Verso, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The expression “*bu pingdeng tiaoyue* 不平等條約”, or « unequal treaty », was first coined by a Nationalist Party document, in 1923, see Michel Bonnin, “Les zigzags de Pékin”, in Jean-Philippe Beja (dir.), *Hong Kong 1997 : fin de siècle, fin d’un monde*, Paris, Editions Complexe, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Christina Cheng Miu Bing, *Macao: A Cultural Janus*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1999, p. 215.

revolution, constantly alimented by that kind of spectacular events like the “return” of both Macao and Hong-Kong at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is now deeply inscribed in the collective imaginary of the Chinese people and constantly maintained by the State.<sup>10</sup>

On the contrary, in 1925, when Wen Yiduo first published his poem in the journal *Dajiang likan*, national consciousness and mass patriotism was only a work in process. China as a modern state was extremely weak, fragmented and partially colonized while mass media technology was of course limited compared to today. Wen never witnessed the return of the “lost territories” and its poetry had the very political function of encouraging patriotic feelings within the population and mobilizing the (becoming) Chinese to fight against imperialist domination and for the revival of China.

Again revealed by Cheng Miu Bing, the irony in comparing the two periods, textually linked by the contemporary MTV reinvention of the “Song of seven children”, lies in the “unwillingness, if not fear of the ‘returning’ to the mother country” by people living in Macao, and also Hong-Kong during the years preceding the return. The lack of anti-colonial nationalistic sentiments of the “kidnapped children” during this patriotic fever in China shows us the extent of the historical gap between Wen Yiduo’s poem’s first publication and its re-inscription in the social and cultural landscape of the People’s Republic of China at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

The construction of a Chinese modern nationalist discourse and the simultaneous spreading of a national consciousness through the ideology of nationalism beginning from the decline of the Qing Dynasty at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were of course a historical consequence of the imperialist expansion of the Euro-American and Japanese powers. Although long term structural, economic, social and demographic imbalance deeply weakened the Qing government, one of the main explanations for the fall of the Imperial Regime is to be found in the extraordinary military, economic and, lastly, cultural pressure exerted by Western powers from the Opium war onwards.

Nevertheless there were also, at the same time and as another consequence of the imperialist process, direct intertextualities between the political theories, and

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<sup>10</sup> The academic literature on Chinese contemporary nationalism is extensive. Let us only mention some recent works here: Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity under Reform*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2004; He Baogang, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratization in China*, Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 2000; Liu Xiaoyuan (dir.), *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective : Historical and Recent Cases*, Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Cheng, *Macao: A Cultural Janus*, p. 216.

noticeably the nationalist texts, of the so-called Western powers, Japan being a linguistic and geographic go-between, and their Chinese counterpart. China negotiates its modern cultural identity both against and with the foreign domination.

The so-called “new culture movement” during the 1910s was represented by a new generation of intellectuals who embraced without reserve the literary culture and intellectual epistemologies derived from western texts. That period is also usually referred to as the “May Fourth movement” defined both as a cultural and political event. First of all, it was a political movement since May 4th 1919 was the day when massive demonstrations took place in urban China to protest against the post World War One peace treaty, the Treaty of Versailles, which was extremely humiliating for China although the country was on the winning side. Imperial China had been under the colonial domination of foreign powers since the first Opium war in 1842 and, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the extremely weak Empire of the Qing dynasty was split into territories which were subjected to the economic domination of several countries: for instance, part of South-East China was dominated by France, Central China by England, the North-East by Germany, and Manchuria by Japan. In 1919, while the treaty was discussed, China was led by a frail and illegitimate warlord government. The territories occupied by Germany in northern China were claimed by China but given to Japan. As soon as the news of the treaty’s terms spread over most urban cities in China, students and urban petty bourgeoisie demonstrated aggressively. This uprising was the first popular awakening of a modern nationalist feeling in China and was directed both against the imperialist forces and against the corrupt Chinese government.

Therefore what is nowadays called the May Fourth movement was not only political; it was cultural too and can be considered the birth date of Chinese modern literature and culture. As the end of the Empire as a political institution was linked to the decline of the culture of the mandarin class, not only did it imply a change in regime but a cultural and social change too, and that, especially in the fields of knowledge and literary culture. The May Fourth movement was the time when this change took place with the utmost radicality.<sup>12</sup> Young Chinese intellectuals belonging to the first generation of modern intellectuals adopted Western culture and thinking and rejected with violence Confucian cultural norms and behaviors as feudal, reactionary, and incompatible with modern values and a modern society. Traditional culture was held responsible for China’s weakness compared to the West. It is important to point out that modern culture was for these Chinese intellectuals mostly synonymous with European culture.

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<sup>12</sup> Kirk A. Denton (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 114.

Therein lies the contradiction of Chinese early political nationalism: defending China against the West implied becoming Western. Most of the progressive writers and intellectuals of the time studied abroad, mainly in Japan, Europe or the United States. Such was the case of Wen Yiduo, who wrote many of his patriotic poems when he was living in the United States. His experience of the discrimination of Chinese in the U.S. and his position as external to the motherland, which were common to all exiled writers, gave a new intensity to his patriotic feelings.

The famous patriotic poem is divided into seven parts, each being dedicated to an annexed territory of a putative Chinese national space, including Macao, Hong-Kong, Kowloon, Taiwan, the bay of Guangzhou, Weihaiwei and Lushun/Dalian. In a short preface to the first publication of his poem, Wen Yiduo briefly narrated the long history of China's subjugation, which started, according to him, with the Treaty of Nerchinsk between the Qing and Russia in 1689.<sup>13</sup> He also mentioned the fundamental political sense and object of such patriotic lyrics and finally made a reference to French history:

国疆崩丧，积日既久，国人视之漠然。不见夫法兰西之 Alsace-Lorraine? “精诚所至，金石能开”。诚如斯，中华“七子”之归来其在旦夕乎？

The frontiers of the nation have been broken up for a long time now and people have witnessed this situation with indifference. Couldn't *the French case of Alsace-Lorraine* be taken as an example? “If our determination is sincere, anything can be within our reach”. In this case, the return of the seven children to China could be extremely quick, couldn't it?<sup>14</sup>

Using the poem and its paratext as main corpus, this essay aims at questioning the explicit reference to French history and developing a line of argument around the intertextual relationship between nationalist texts produced from different local histories within the global context of modernity and the colonial dimension which is intimately linked to it.

By mentioning a colonial/imperial modernity from a postcolonial theoretical position and under the influence of theoreticians such as Walter Dignolo, my aim is

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, « The K'ang-Hsi Reign » in Willard J. Peterson, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 9, The Ch'ing Empire to 1800, Part 1*, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> Italics added.



to emphasize the structural asymmetry of the relation of power between the West and the Others and to show the essential interweaving of the colonial enterprise with the cultural, ideological and economic aspects of the Western project of modernity which began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> In pointing out the intertwined network between French and Chinese political and intellectual histories, this paper aims at illustrating the irrelevant dimension of the comparative approach and emphasizing the possibility of conceiving thematic histories in a coeval modernity.

The French Republic lost the so-called territories of “Alsace-Lorraine” in the preliminary peace treaty signed at Versailles on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1871 after being defeated by the Prussians who then annexed two German-speaking provinces located in the north-east of France, that is to say most of Alsace, the north of Lorraine.<sup>16</sup> The Treaty of Frankfurt signed on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1871, which confirmed the Versailles agreement, also includes a most favoured nation clause on trade and navigation for Germany. Here is another common point between the French and Chinese historical situations, the most favoured nation clause imposed by UK, France and other dominant nations was familiar to the Chinese from the beginning of the Unequal Treaty series following the first Opium War.

The French political and intellectual elites never accepted this new situation, using the rhetoric of the revolutionary patriotism and invoking the will of the people as opposed to the organic German nationalist discourse, which claimed its legitimacy on these territories on the basis of their cultural and linguistic situation. As soon as the treaty was signed, protests and strong nationalist feelings echoed in the French political and literary fields denouncing this annexation.<sup>17</sup> The Third Republic, following the Second Empire, institutionalized and massified the patriotic discourse of the return and of the revenge through the founding of a universal public school system, its major “Ideological State Apparatus”.<sup>18</sup> The historian Jean-François Sirinelli noticed that before 1914, in French textbooks, the “lost provinces” were a cut on the geographic map and a scar on the side of national consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Needless to say that China experienced the loss of many parts of its territory over

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<sup>15</sup> See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000 and *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Jérôme Grondeux, *La France entre en République 1870-1893*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 2000, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> For an outline of these nationalist texts and speeches, read Raoul Girardet, *Le nationalisme français : Anthologie 1871-1914*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1983.

<sup>18</sup> On the French Third Republic school system, see Mona Ozouf, *L'Ecole, l'Eglise et la République (1871-1914)*, Paris, Editions Cana/Jean Offredo, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> Alain Corbin (dir.), *1515 et les grandes dates de l'histoire de France : revisitées par les grands historiens d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 474.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This event, then perceived as a historical tragedy, became a full part of the Chinese national narrative when the modern conceptions of nation and history came to be known and used by a number of Chinese intellectuals at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as in Liang Qichao’s writings.<sup>20</sup>

There is no surprise in the fact that the historical experience of the loss of a territory by another nation, and the narration of such experience, retained the attention of some Chinese writers and such was the case of Wen Yiduo, among others. Let’s also mention here « The last Class » by Alphonse Daudet, a famous patriotic novel of the French Third Republic, in which the author imagined the last French lesson in a school which has just become the annexed province of Alsace-Lorraine. This text had a great destiny in China, since it was first translated in 1912 by the Chinese liberal and modernist intellectual Hu Shi and became a classic of Chinese children textbooks during both the Republican and the People’s Republic periods.<sup>21</sup>

From the poet Paul Deroulède to Alphonse Daudet, we can witness as part of the collective imagination of the nationalist literature of the French Third Republic a common sense of humiliation following the defeat, the resentment of the losses and the patriotic feeling of revenge, all these themes being irremediably linked to a specific and unique geo-historical context. This uniqueness is not only due to the various historical situations and the different forms of nationalism (such as a narrow nationalism, an imperialist form of nationalism, an anti-colonial nationalism, an ethnic, cultural or political nationalism, a state and non-state nationalism and so on), but has to do with the nation in itself, the object of the nationalist discourse which, essentially, must always be unique, particular and radically different from any other nation.

However, there has always been a paradox between the global dissemination of nationalist imaginaries and patriotic feelings since the nationality movement in Europe which followed the French Revolution and the always locally-centered dimension, linguistic and cultural, as well as political, of this nationalist discourse and of its object. Benedict Anderson includes this idea as one of the three paradoxes of national phenomena:

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<sup>20</sup> Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Alphonse Daudet, « La dernière classe. Récit d’un petit Alsacien » [The Last Class. Story of a Young Alsatian] in *Contes du Lundi*, Editions A. Lemerre, 1873. The first Chinese translation by Hu Shi 胡適 as “Gedi 割地” [Annexed Territory] in the *Dagonghe Ribao*, Shanghai, December 1912. A new translation was published in the College Textbook of the Commercial Press in 1920 under the title “Zuihou yi ke 最後一課” [The Last Class].

The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept – in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender – vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, ‘Greek’ nationality is *sui generis*.<sup>22</sup>

This alleged uniqueness of the nation is, from a historical point of view, intimately linked to the global dimension of colonial modernity and to the dissemination, through the Euro-American colonial enterprise, of the political form of the modern nation-state and of the texts and discourses which have always followed and sustained a nation-building. As Balibar points out, “in a certain sense, every modern ‘nation’ is a product of colonization: at different levels, it has always been a colonizer or a colonized, sometimes both.”<sup>23</sup>

A close look at the text of Wen Yiduo reveals France as the figure of Janus, by representing two sides of the same coin: the dissemination of references about the French experience of colonization as a “colonized”, and its reaction through discursive manifestation of patriotism on the one hand, and, in the same text, the patriotic claim of the poet against the colonial expansion of Euro-American and Japanese powers, including France as a colonizer on the other hand.

## **Intertextualities and Comparative Perspective in Nationalist Narratives**

As just pointed out, it is obvious that there are direct intertextualities (either translations or quotations) between the Chinese and French patriotic texts on the issue of the “lost territories”. The indirect links between the French experience of a defensive patriotism against Prussian invasion and the Chinese confrontation with the “semi-colonized” situation have to be mentioned too. When working on a comparative study involving the nationalist discourses on the “lost territories” of both the French Third Republic and the Chinese Nanjing Republic, the similarities between the images and tropes used as well as the common institutional and political dispositions which are at stake, such as the school system, can be fascinating.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> “En un sens, toute ‘nation’ moderne est un produit de la colonisation : elle a toujours été à quelque degré colonisatrice ou colonisée, parfois l’un et l’autre.”, Etienne Balibar, “La nation: forme et idéologie”, in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, classe: les identités ambiguës*, Paris, Editions la Découverte, 1998, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> On national identity discourse in Republican China’s textbooks, I’m indebted to Robert Culp’s

In the textbooks of both Republican China and the French Third Republic, the same kind of maps emphasizing the “lost territories” is to be found. During the Nanjing Republican Period, the so-called “*Zhongguo guochi ditu* 中國國恥地圖”, or “Map of China’s national humiliation”, ostensibly mentioned the colonized part of the national territory, while the French Third Republic textbooks contained maps of the national territory showing the students the black parts of the country, the so-called “lost territories”, that had to be recovered.<sup>25</sup> In both cases, the national community was represented as a geo-body entity. The typology of these territories as Wen Yiduo names them and which correspond to specific Chinese maps involving a sovereign territory and fixing boundaries belongs to a strictly modern approach. It must not be confused with the dynastic representation of the imperial space and of its tributary system. Before the Republican Period, as Robert Culp has stated:

Pictorial maps with plentiful text [...] focusing on characterizing and establishing relations among political and physical places, [and] situating China as the cultural center predominate rather than marking out clear boundaries that would constitute fixed territorial units.<sup>26</sup>

The nationalist perspective which projects into the past a view of the old Qing imperial space as the bounded and cohesive territory of a “nation” as a whole is of course an anachronistic translation of the dynastic community’s political and cultural order into the modern language of the nation-state.<sup>27</sup> This statement is also true as regards French national history. The point here is not to deal with the question of legitimacy which is of course is not a positive and scientific issue (historical, cultural or legal) but a political one, even if historical, cultural and legal arguments were put forward by nationalists of both sides to legitimize their territory. Even though, as in all nationalist narratives, this (hi)story functions as a fiction, the discourse that sustains the invention of fixed boundaries between China and the outer world (not only political and state boundaries but also cultural, linguistic and ethnic ones) is nowadays deeply inscribed in the Chinese collective

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conference entitled “Learning to be Han: Construction of Ethnicity in Early Republican Geography Textbooks”, Critical Han Studies Symposium, Stanford University, April 24-27, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940*, London, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 81 ; See Sirinelli in Alain Corbin (dir.), *1515 et les grandes dates de l’histoire de France*, p. 474.

<sup>26</sup> Culp, *Articulating Citizenship*, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 19.

imagination.

Representing the nation as a natural phenomenon is a recurrent strategy of the nationalist discourse. In this regard, the national space is viewed as historically-rooted, bounded and representing a cohesive national community.<sup>28</sup> Emphasizing the natural dimension of the community and partially concealing the fact that the nation is a socially constructed historical institution allow for an unquestionable legitimate identity of the nation.

However, concerning the “lost territories” issue, the discourse of the natural order has to face and to overcome a contradiction imbedded in its historical reality. How was it possible for this natural reality of the national space, its territorial integrity and its boundaries, to be subjected to change?

Let us specifically mention here the question of the representation and the images used to talk about these separate territories and their relation to the imagined nation as a geo-body or a cohesive territorial space. In his poem, Wen Yiduo imagines the “lost territories” as seven children having lost their mother which is of course the personification of the nation. This image follows the classic metaphor of the nation as a mother and, broadly speaking, as a familial community.<sup>29</sup> In the quotation below, the “Macao-child” narrator implores his mother:

你可知“妈港”不是我的真名姓？

我离开你的襁褓太久了，母亲！

但是他们掳去的是我的肉体，

你依然保管着我内心的灵魂。<sup>30</sup>

Do you know “magang” is not my real name ?

I have left your tutelage for too long already, mother!

But what they kidnapped is only my body,

The soul of my heart is still under your self keeping.

Each part of the poem ends with the same desperate exclamation from the

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<sup>28</sup> In his work on the textbooks of the Republican period, Culp insists on the discursive construction of a natural Chinese geographic territory. *Articulating Citizenship*, p. 73, p. 76.

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to notice here that the metaphor of the mother is not integrated in the signifiers of the nation in Chinese as it is in French or in English. The usual translation for expressions such as “la mère-patrie” or “the motherland” in Chinese would be “zuguo”, which literally means “ancestor (male)-land”.

<sup>30</sup> *Wen Yiduo Shi Quanbian*, op. cit., pp. 196-199.

successive children:

母亲！我要回来，母亲！<sup>31</sup>

Mother, I want to go home, mother !

This relationship between the child and his mother naturalizes the link between the lost territory and the nation as a whole as the image of the mother and the son represents a temporary, and accidental, state of separation which continues to imply an essential union and which tries to preserve the original link between the separated territory and its alleged affiliation. It works as a way to explain and to invalidate the contradiction between the separating of the territory, that is to say the reality of history which is war, violence and, in the end, change, and the mythical story of the nation as a unique, cohesive continuous and eternal entity. By mentioning the “soul of my heart”, the poet refers to something eternal that cannot be kidnapped, as opposed to the concrete body territory victim of the foreign cannibals representing the English and the German invaders.

The personification of the nation through the metaphor of the territory as a body as well as the natural development of this trope with the identification of the invaders as cannibals can be found both in French Third Republic literature and in Chinese patriotic texts like Wen Yiduo’s poem. I quote here first of all the complaint of the Hong Kong child, devoured by the English sea lion, and secondly a patriotic novel by Erckmann-Chatrian which takes place in the now German Alsace:

如今狞恶的海狮扑在我身上，

啖着我的骨肉，咽着我的脂膏；<sup>32</sup>

Today the savage sea lion falls on my body

Devouring my flesh, stewing my grease.

Nous sommes depuis dix ans dans l’estomac teuton. Les prussiens nous broient, nous écrasent, ils font des efforts désespérés pour nous digérer, (...)

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

(L)'ogre a besoin de la paix pour digérer tranquillement, pour se refaire de l'appétit!...<sup>33</sup>

We have been living in the Teuton stomach for ten years now. Prussians are crushing us, squashing us, and trying desperately to digest us, (...)

(T)he ogre needs peace to quietly digest us and reconstruct his appetite!...

Just as the “savage sea lion” devouring the “flesh” of the body of the Hong Kong child echoes the “ogre” who “quietly digests” Alsace, a stylistic analogy between both patriotic discursive traditions is to be found in the paternalist well-known reference to a child in order to represent the voice of the “lost territory”. Like the identification of the territory with a child in the Chinese poem, the narrator in “The Last Class” is a young Alsatian who describes his last day in a French-speaking school.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, one of the most popular patriotic textbooks of the Third Republic, called “The Tour de France by Two Children”, involved two Lorraine orphans who decide to go on a long trip around several provinces in France.<sup>35</sup> This long journey across the French territory functions as a pedagogical pretext for the author to introduce the diverse geography, culture and population of the motherland. In displacing the locus of enunciation from the political center to the supposed lost territories, these voices of children reinforce the legitimacy of the political claim of the return.

As opposed to German organic nationalism, the will of the people of these territories to be linked to France has always been put forward under the Third Republic.<sup>36</sup> Patriotism was based upon the subjective desire of the children, that is to say the people of these territories, to be attached to France.

As the French historian Fustel de Coulanges wrote in 1870 as part of a famous correspondence with a German fellow historian Mommsen: “The motherland is what you love [...]. If Alsace is French, it is only because she/it wants to be French.”<sup>37</sup> Wen Yiduo uses a similar argument when he mentions the subjective desire of the children and makes them say what sounds like a declaration of love: “I

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<sup>33</sup> Erckmann-Chatrian, *Le Banni*, 1882 in Raoul Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 46-48.

<sup>34</sup> Alphonse Daudet, « La dernière classe. Récit d'un petit Alsacien » in *Contes du Lundi*, Editions A. Lemerre, 1873.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine Fouillée [dite Giordano Bruno], *Le tour de France par deux enfants*, Livre de lecture courante, Cours moyen, Paris, Belin, 1877.

<sup>36</sup> Grondeux, *La France entre en République 1870-1893*, p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 63.

want to go back, mother”. This *énoncé* echoes the statement of the Third Republic archetypical patriotic thinker Ernest Renan, who maintains that national identity depends on a “daily plebiscite”.<sup>38</sup> In both discursive traditions, this subjective element is associated with objective arguments of legitimization like race, common descent, language, and so on.<sup>39</sup>

We witness here a similar mobilization of the two discourses emphasized by Ricoeur in the work on personal identity: ipseity (*ipséité*) and idomity (*mêmeté*). The latter focuses on common characteristics of the community members that distinguish them from others, while the former stresses the subjective consciousness which emerges when belonging to a community, due to the sharing of common experiences.<sup>40</sup>

The language issue is also a recurrent element in the nationalist discourse to distinguish between ‘we’ and ‘them’ and to insist on an identity criterion, either real or fictional, which could not be totally erased by any annexation. Since the French Revolution and the Abbe Gregoire thesis on the state linguistic homogenization, language has played a central role in the process of constructing a French national identity.<sup>41</sup> In Alphonse Daudet’s work “The Last Class”, it is important to notice that the so-called “last lesson” is a French lesson. Language here is something which can be learnt/taught and which cannot be “raped” by the invaders. Being French does not mean being a native French speaker but having the will to learn French.<sup>42</sup> Language becomes the locus of the nation, as the teacher said to the students:

(Q)uand un peuple tombe esclave, tant qu’il tient bien sa langue, c’est comme

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<sup>38</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation*, Paris, Mille et Une Nuits, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 17, p. 184. Indeed, the organic vision of the nation as a body was not as predominant in the French nationalist discourse of the Third Republic period as in the ideological Republican and universalistic tradition of nationalism. The fact that the Alsace-Lorraine provinces were closer to Germany in terms of culture and language did not contribute to the development of an ethnically- and culturally-oriented nationalism, even though the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century corresponds to a turning point as regards the nature of the French nationalism with the emergence, for the first time, of a conservative, right-wing, past-oriented nationalist discourse insisting on the soil and the ancestors.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990. On national identity and Ricoeur’s concepts, see Gérard Noiriel, *A quoi sert « l’identité nationale »*, Marseilles, Agone, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> On this subject, see Michel De Certeau, Dominique Julia, Jacques Revel, *Une politique de la langue, la révolution française et les patois : L’enquête de Grégoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975.

<sup>42</sup> Daudet, « La dernière classe », in Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 42.



s'il tenait la clé de sa prison...<sup>43</sup>

When a people fall down into slavery, as long as it protects its mother tongue,  
it is as if it were holding the key to its jail...

In China, from Liang Qichao to Hu Shi, the association of the question of language to the construction of a Chinese national consciousness has also been strongly emphasized by nationalist thinkers.<sup>44</sup> The political project of “invention” of a Chinese national language based on *guanhua* 官话, literally the language of the imperial bureaucracy, dates back to the early days of the Republican Period. It is not surprising that the first verse of Wen Yiduo's poem deals with the issue of the naming of the territory. The Macao child says:

你可知“妈港”不是我的真名姓？  
我离开你的襁褓太久了，母亲！<sup>45</sup>

Do you know “magang” is not my real name? [...]

Please call me by my pet name, call me “Aomen”!

Here again with the reference to “pet name” and the implicit opposition of the “wrong name” of Macao, we are faced with a discourse of anteriority which focuses on the natural blood tie set against political history. The mention of a “pet” name reinforces the idea of an existing biological community.

As it goes back to a time previous to the colonization of Macao by the Portuguese, the nationalist discourse reclaims an anachronistic continuity with a time anterior to the national construction of the modern Chinese state. We can witness here the classic nationalist projection onto the past of the modern vision of an organic blood-tie community. The Cantonese name “Ou Mun” was commonly used to refer to Macao since the Ming dynasty (1368-1628). “It is said that the Portuguese used A-Ma-Gau as a reference point to rename Ou Mun as ‘Amacau’ or ‘Amagao’, and afterwards shortened to ‘Macau’.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.44.

<sup>44</sup> See : « Langue commune contre langue nationale », chapter VI of Florent Villard, *Le Gramsci chinois : Qu Qiubai, penseur de la modernité culturelle*, Lyon, Editions Tigre de Papier, 2009, pp. 241-309.

<sup>45</sup> Wen Yiduo *Shi Quanbian*, pp. 196-199.

<sup>46</sup> “ The name ‘Macau’ is believed to have derived from A-Ma-Gau, or the bay of A-Ma. It is where the famous Chinese temple, Ma Kok Miu, is situated and where the Portuguese first landed. ” Cheng, *Macau: A Cultural Janus*, p. 47

Wen Yiduo refuses to use *Majiao*, the mandarin transliteration of Macau, but writes *Magang* 妈港 the vernacular version for “Bay of A-Ma” (Goddess of the sea) instead. The choice of a vernacular word reinforces the idea of a local (Macanese) resistance to the colonizer. Cheng notices that “Wen’s yearning for Macau’s pet name ‘Ou Mun’ stems from a desire of repossession and control, and above all, decolonization.”<sup>47</sup>

It is fascinating to notice that in the last MTV version of the poem the Chinese word “magang” has been replaced by the Portuguese word “Macao” in alphabetic language, which implies not only a change in the naming of the territory but also a difference between the original language and the writing used by the colonizer and the colonized. The struggle for the naming of the territory has been displaced on a language and writing level. The use of “Macao” in Roman alphabet stresses here the cultural difference between the Chinese national community and the former colonizer.

### **Connected Histories and Schizophrenic Representation of France**

We could continue this textual comparative approach and go on pointing out the similarities and differences, the direct and indirect intertextualities between the French and Chinese nationalist discourses regarding the “lost territories”, among which we could mention the obsession with time, both the time since the territories have been lost and the time to wait before the “return” of the lost children, the description of the invaders as violent and barbaric, or the hygienic trope of the contamination and the idea that the territory has been spoilt by the colonizer.

However, we would miss the crucial historical point of this analysis if pursuing the imagining dichotomy of two distinct “cultural texts” and two different historical and geo-cultural contexts without connecting them to the global, transcultural and historical reality inherent to the imperial/colonial modernity. When involved in such a comparative study, one must adopt, at the same time, a critical perspective regarding this comparative approach so as to avoid a double historiographic trap. The first mistake would be to work within the classical, and initially Euro-American, framework of Hegelian history interpreted in its linearity and universality where China and its modern national history would be set on a secondary level compared to Euro-American nations. This time trap would be a “denial of coevalness”, as Johannes Fabian puts it, and would tend to erase the

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<sup>47</sup> Cheng, *Macau: A Cultural Janus*, p. 34.

simultaneity of local histories within the global framework of modernity.<sup>48</sup> As Naoki Sakai has stated: “The condition for the possibility of conceiving history as a linear and evolutionary series of incidents lays in its not as yet thematized relation to other histories, other coexisting temporalities.”<sup>49</sup> Avoiding the Hegelian narrative of transition, progress and development goes with a spatialization of time as a way to set up a synchronicity between different socio-historical situations.

Questioning universal history partially concealing the European locus of enunciation of this history, but also, secondly, excluding the perspective of an independent and unique Chinese history. The idea of the uniqueness of China should not be taken into consideration since it would imply an incommensurable cultural gap between China and the rest of the world, while decreasing the inscription of China as a socio-historical entity within the global imperial/colonial modernity.

Rebecca Karl who studied Chinese nationalism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and showed the establishment in China of a worldwide “imaginary” which involved several nations, especially colonized nations, brilliantly repudiated both a locally-centered historical perspective and a “universalist hegemony”. She insisted on the fact that “repudiating universalist hegemony must be done through an effort to recuperate interconnectedness in a global historical context.”<sup>50</sup> This statement follows the French historian Roger Chartier’s suggestion which is to give visibility to the “connected histories” of populations, cultures, economies and power and, this way, overcome both universal and comparative history.<sup>51</sup>

Following this stance, the direct and indirect intertextualities between the experience of the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and Wen Yiduo’s text have to be reinscribed in the global historical context of colonial/imperial modernity. Rereading Wen Yiduo’s poem and its reference to Alsace-Lorraine in a contextualized perspective then involves the recuperation of the “interconnectedness”, as Rebecca Karl puts it, between these two different local histories, while conceiving them as simultaneous and thematized.

The signing of the post-World War One Treaty of Versailles in 1919 is not only a historic event, but a text too and essentially the discursive place where the patriotic

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<sup>48</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983.

<sup>49</sup> Naoki Sakai, « Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism », *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 87, N°3, Summer 1988, 475-504.

<sup>50</sup> Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> See Roger Chartier, *Au bord de la falaise : l'histoire entre certitudes et inquiétude*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2009, p. 365.

contents of the texts of Wen Yiduo and Alsace-Lorraine as archetypical examples of “lost territories” meet and clash. The Treaty gave rise to diverging readings in China and in France: for the French, it meant the official confirmation of the victory and the “return”, after nearly fifty years, of Alsace-Lorraine under its sovereignty. The injustice, as it was regarded by the French political class, was finally erased.

At the same time, Versailles did not modify the “unequal treaty” system which was at stake in Wen Yiduo’s patriotic poem and gave Japan the German colonies of Shandong province. China was indeed on the winners’ side and “thousands of Chinese coolies, enrolled in the Chinese Labour Corps, had contributed to the war effort by digging trenches and providing other support on the battlefields of Europe.”<sup>52</sup> As a consequence this Treaty abruptly revealed to the Chinese urban educated society of 1910 the inequality and hypocrisy of the international world order, the weakness of Western values such as democracy and people’s freedom, and therefore generated a strong and deep nationalist feeling.

As Gregory Lee has pointed out, “the hypocrisy of the Versailles peace settlement made clear to China’s intellectuals the intention of foreign powers to tighten their colonialist grip on the country.”<sup>53</sup> Wen Yiduo, as many other Chinese writers and intellectuals at the time, believed composing patriotic content literature and poetry was necessary in order to contribute to strengthening national consciousness.

In Wen Yiduo’s poem, which was published seven years after the famous Treaty, the name of one of the lost children is *Guangzhouwan* 广州湾, or the bay of Guangzhou, which is another reference to France, not as explicit as in the expression “Alsace-Lorraine in France” but directly linked to the contemporary situation of China as a semi-colonized country in 1925:

广州湾

东海和广州是我的一双管钥，

我是神州后门上的一把铁锁。

你为什么把我借给一个盗贼？

母亲呀，你千万不该抛弃了我！<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gregory Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and its Others*, Durham, Duke University Press, p. 68.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> *Wen Yiduo Shi Quanbian*, op. cit., pp. 196-199.

Guangzhouwan

Donghai and Naozhou are my two keys,  
 I'm the keyhole of Shenzhou's backdoor,  
 Why did you give me away to this bandit?  
 Mummy, you should never have abandoned me!

During the end of the nineteenth century, Euro-American and Japanese imperialist politics increased considerably in China. This change in the degree of the colonization was materialized by the splitting up of China into “spheres of influence” and by the “open door policy”, put forward by the United States in 1898 declaring the economic opening for all the Euro-American and Japanese powers of the spheres of influence controlled by different nations in China. In this context, in May 1898, the general governor of French Indochina representing France in China imposed the Treaty of the bay of Guangzhou to the Qing government.<sup>55</sup> The Treaty officially gave to France as a “lease” territory the city of Zhanjiang and its surroundings in Guangdong which then became the *Territoire de Kouang-Tchéou-Wan* while the town of Zhanjiang was renamed *Fort Bayard* by the French.<sup>59</sup>

Analyzing this historic event nowadays, we can conclude that when the poem says “Why did you give me away to this bandit?”, the word *daozei* 盜賊, or “bandit, thief”, refers to the French Republic, just as the expression “France of Alsace-Lorraine” in the preface of the poem. The signified is in both cases France as a political power, but the connotations differ: “France” is the-patriotic-nation-fighting-to-recover-the-“lost territories”-of-Alsace-Lorraine on the one hand, and is the-occupant-of-the-territory-of-Guangzhouwan on the other hand.

The intertextuality between Wen Yiduo's poem and the “cultural text” of French patriotism can be read as a relationship of solidarity between entities who experience the same humiliating situation as colonized nations. Nevertheless, in a nutshell, this common understanding of the colonized revealed here through the reference to “France of Alsace-Lorraine” is immediately deconstructed within the same text by another reference to France not as the colonized but as the colonizer of one of seven children.

There is a clear distinction in this poem between what I would call ‘France-in-the-

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<sup>55</sup> See Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, « Late Ch'ing foreign relations, 1866-1905 » in John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 11, Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, pp. 70-142.

west’ and ‘France-with-the-rest’. The first one is the country which called for the return of its “lost territories” during the Third Republic and until the Peace Treaty of Versailles, the country which talked about people’s will as a sacred criterion to decide what state a territory belonged to and, according to this philosophy, criticized the legitimacy of the treaties of the West, and especially the Franco-Prussian Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871 which established the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. On the contrary, the second one is a country deeply involved in an imperialist policy, signing the so-called “unequal treaties” and annexing foreign territories such as the bay of Guangzhou.

In Wen’s poem, a schizophrenic representation of “France” is given, since the apparent contradiction revealed through the poem is nothing but an obvious demonstration of the reign of colonial differences within the representation of the global world order of the modern era.

Although there is nothing new in mentioning this political history which is a well-known story, it is inspiring to read Wen Yiduo’s poem as a way to lighten the interconnectedness of different national histories in modernity. This proves that Chinese nationalism did not just follow French nationalism in the linear temporal order of the historical scale just as if the colonized nations’ histories were to be the belated reproductions and imitations of the Euro-American nations’ histories.

In enacting the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, Wen Yiduo read French historical experience from a perspective of *jetztzeit*, the “here-and-now” of Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History”, giving rise to “a specific epoch out of the homogenous course of history” and breaking the historical continuity.<sup>56</sup>

Within the context of 1925s China, the memory of Alsace-Lorraine meets and clashes with Western, and French, imperialism, revealing the spectre of the unequal and hypocrite Treaty of Versailles which soars over Wen Yiduo’s text.

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<sup>56</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ceuvres, tome III*, Paris, Gallimard, 2000, pp. 427-443.



# Reshaping Northern Irish Drama after the GFA. Brechtian Epic Elements in *The Force of Change* (2000) by Gary Mitchell

VIRGINIE PRIVAS-BRÉAUTÉ

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In *Dramatis Personae*, Belfast playwright Stewart Parker thanked Bertolt Brecht for bequeathing to Northern Irish playwrights “a sense of drama as a potentially dynamic force in society, as a medium political by its very nature, as a forum in which many ideas may thrive and be communicated.” The context in which Brecht wrote his plays – i.e. 1920s Germany - indeed shares similarities with the 1970s Troubles in Ulster. Therefore, the fact that Brechtian drama is one of the means of expression that is resorted to in reaction against a given political system has led me to study the Brechtian borrowings in Northern Irish drama. Bearing in mind that Brechtian drama can be considered as a theatrical genre is meaningful. So it is more than the influence of the playwright Brecht that we must talk about today, for one of the objectives of Brecht’s was that his dramatic theory became an institution, created a trend and new aesthetics linked to that trend. These were above all meant to be transmitted. This trend, these new aesthetics seem to have been exported to Northern Ireland. In this article I shall demonstrate that *The Force of Change* by Gary Mitchell, written after the Good Friday Agreement (signed in April 1998), borrows Brechtian techniques and has epic undertones. The study of many of the devices in the text which enable me to assert that this play carries Brechtian characteristics also shows the will of the author to move beyond a naturalistic vision of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In other words, it is an attempt to reshape the contours of Northern Irish drama, a change which echoes the evolution in mentalities of the inhabitants

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In *Dramatis Personae*, a tribute for John Malone, one of his former English – and drama –teachers, Belfast playwright Stewart Parker thanked Bertolt Brecht for



bequeathing to Northern Irish playwrights “a sense of drama as a potentially dynamic force in society, as a medium political by its very nature, as a forum in which many ideas may thrive and be communicated.”<sup>1</sup> The context in which Brecht wrote his plays – i.e. 1920s Germany – indeed shares similarities with the 1970s Troubles in Ulster. Therefore, the fact that Brechtian drama is one of the means of expression that is resorted to in reaction against a given political system has led me to study the Brechtian borrowings in Northern Irish drama. Bearing in mind that Brechtian drama can be considered as a theatrical genre is meaningful. So it is more than the influence of the playwright Brecht that we must talk about, for one of the objectives of Brecht’s was that his dramatic theory became an institution, created a trend and new aesthetics linked to that trend. These were above all meant to be transmitted.<sup>2</sup> I shall demonstrate that this trend, these new aesthetics have been exported to Northern Ireland. In this article I intend to show that such Northern Irish play as *The Force of Change* by Gary Mitchell, written after the Good Friday Agreement (signed in April 1998), borrow Brechtian techniques and become somehow epic. The study of many of the devices in the text which enable me to assert that this play carries Brechtian characteristics also shows the will of the author to go beyond a naturalistic vision of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In other words, it is an attempt to reshape the contours of Northern Irish drama, a change which echoes the evolution in mentalities of the inhabitants. Indeed, there is a need to voice the suffering and the trauma differently today.

The key notion arising to understand Brechtian Epic drama stems from the German word *Verfremdungseffekt* translated by “V-effect” or “distanciation”. Elin Diamond, in her article entitled “Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory”, defines this concept as “the technique of de-familiarizing a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh.”<sup>3</sup> There is not only one element creating this feeling of de-familiarisation, there are many, and I will outline a few of them, and show to what extent they can be found in this play by Gary Mitchell.

## **Alienation**

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart Parker, *Dramatis Personae. A John Malone Memorial Lecture*. The Queen’s University, Belfast, 1986, p. 11

<sup>2</sup> « L’un des objectifs de Brecht était de devenir une institution, créer un courant d’idées et une esthétique liée à ce courant et le transmettre ». Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne : de Brecht à John Arden et Edward Bond », Université de Paris 4 Sorbonne, 1993, p.96.

<sup>3</sup> Elin Diamond, “Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory”, *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 32 Issue 1, Spring 1988, pp. 84.

In Brecht's own words, the effect of distanciation is first created by alienation, which he determines as follows "a representation that alienates is one that allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it unfamiliar".<sup>4</sup> Exploring the means of alienation is thus essential to create this de-familiarizing effect in *The Force of Change*. If we look at the core motivation of Gary Mitchell when he writes his plays, we find that this word has much importance for him. Indeed, Billy Gray, in a study entitled "'The Fragments they shore up against their Ruins': Loyalism, Alienation and Fear of Change in Gary Mitchell's *As the Beast Sleeps* and *The Force Of Change*", explains "the sense of impotence and suspicion [Mitchell] gives voice to [in his plays] is symptomatic of the widespread alienation many loyalists feel towards the on-going peace process".<sup>5</sup> Alienation from the State is thus a key dynamic in Mitchell's plays.<sup>6</sup> In *The Force of Change* in particular, the author puts forward the idea that this feeling of alienation from the State has directly led to the splintering of the unity of the loyalist community in Northern Ireland. One of Mitchell's characters, Bill, a Protestant officer for the then Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), which has now become the Police Service of Northern Ireland, PSNI, explains that since the Good Friday Agreement the situation of Northern Ireland has "fallen apart" from his viewpoint (38). He asks to a member of the loyalist terrorist group UDA that he is interrogating: "Can I ask you something Stanley? Are you happy with the way this peace process is going?" And then he answers "I don't think you are. I'm not. Do you want me to tell you why? [...] I don't think it is a peace process for a start." (49) Previously, Bill had explained that he had joined the RUC in the 1960s to fight against the IRA while now Catholics are hired by this same organisation. Mitchell thus also highlights how national organisms such as the police forces have been drifting. Bill further moans "I have watched my organisation crumble. We even have Catholics involved these days. And the government wants more and more of them brought in. If they had their way, the IRA would take over the police force." (49). This sheds light to the persistent problem of discrimination against Catholics, even in the PSNI. Protestant policemen like Bill, or David and Mark, two other Protestant police officers in the play, complain that more and more Catholics have got hired in the RUC since the GFA. From Gray's viewpoint, "*The Force of Change* examines how structural reforms

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<sup>4</sup> Brecht quoted in Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory", p. 84

<sup>5</sup> Billy Gray, "'The Fragments they shore up against their Ruins': Loyalism, Alienation and Fear of Change in Gary Mitchell's *As the Beast Sleeps* and *The Force of Change*", *Etudes irlandaises*, vol. 32, n°1, 2007, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland. Through and Beyond the Troubles*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 2006, p. 138.

contained in the Good Friday agreement have affected the Protestant-dominated RUC"<sup>7</sup>. These recruitments are highly alienating to Bill, Mark and David as to Mitchell, who, through this play, points out how Protestant police officers now feel threatened within their own organism.

This play further exemplifies alienation through characterization. The main plot (but there are many plots as I shall highlight) revolves around the double interrogation of a member of the UDA and of a Northern Irish joy rider by Northern Irish policemen. The intrigue focuses on the ways the police interrogates these outlaws, on the cold attitude of police officers towards UDA members and their own colleagues, and ultimately on the need to create distance between one's private and public life on the work place. The main character in *The Force of Change* is Caroline Patterson, a young female police officer who has just been promoted and who thus inspires jealousy from her male counterparts on the ground she is a woman. To show that she has deserved this promotion, she is both emotionless in interrogating the suspects and, in her own words, remains highly "professional" (14) with her colleagues. To my mind, the alienation her colleagues have made her feel at work has led to a deep alienation from herself as well. Aware of that, she asks her colleagues if she has been given a nickname. As a matter of fact, to highlight how they may become others, the members of the UDA, as well as some of the officers in the play, are given – or give themselves – nicknames such as Mr Lover Boy, Mr Muteman, or, for example, the joy rider who wants to be called Rabbit.

Alienation is also to be found at another level, that of the actors embodying characters on stage. Elin Diamond points out that, « in [Brechtian] performance, the actor alienates rather than impersonates the character, [he] quotes or demonstrates the character's behaviours instead of identifying with it."<sup>8</sup>. When he plays his character, the actor must not identify with him, he must take some distance from him, his style must be devoid of any sentimentality. On the contrary, it must be tough, concrete and direct. In Mitchell's play, the actors are well aware they are playing roles. Many a time do questions like "which of you is playing the good cop?" – in which the word play has a double meaning – arise. Yet, examining the performance rather than reading the text of the play would have supported this argument in a more telling way.

## Fragmentation

Berg Jeske, in his book *Bertolt Brecht, L'homme et son œuvre*, writes that:

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<sup>7</sup> Gray, "The Fragments they shore up against their Ruins", p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory", p. 84.

As soon as 1926, Brecht proclaimed the idea of a dramatic piece as a construction of narrated elements, texts, music and scenes, independent the ones of the others but which act upon one another, complete, or disturb one another conscientiously, preventing the action from flowing, being homogeneous, breaking the dramatic illusion.<sup>9</sup>

To further create distance in epic drama, to prevent identification with reality, the play must be built on fragmentation. An epic play should be cut in parts independent the ones of the others<sup>10</sup> but they must constitute a unity in the end<sup>11</sup>. Gary Mitchell's style is indeed not linear, it is split as if it echoed the fragmented situation of Northern Ireland after the GFA.

The action occurs in three places within a Belfast police station: two interrogation rooms and a corridor which may all substitute for the scenes for there are two acts but no scenes in *The Force of Change*. If the corridor can be figured out as a place where mainly private matters emerge between the police officers, the two interview rooms draw a parallel between the stories of two Protestant outlaws. This way of juxtaposing the scenes might be seen as neo-Brechtian since in interview room A, Caroline and Bill interrogate Stanley Brown, accused of killing people for the UDA, while in interview room B, David and Mark interrogate Richard Rabbit Montgomery, the joy rider supposed to work for the UDA. If at the beginning of the play, private and public matters do not interfere, as the play unfolds, private matters become public and vice versa. Indeed, the play does not focus on one story but on many stories which are independent as the play starts. Caroline seems to lead a satisfying private life outside of work but inspires jealousy from her colleagues at work, especially Bill, an old police officer still waiting to get

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<sup>9</sup> « Dès 1926, Brecht proclame l'idée d'une œuvre scénique comme construction d'éléments narratifs, texte, musique et tableau, qui sont indépendants les uns des autres mais agissent les uns sur les autres, se complètent, ou se perturbent sciemment grâce à la mise en scène, empêchant dans tous les cas une action fluide, homogène et donc un effet d'illusion sur le spectateur. », Berg Jeske, *Bertolt Brecht, L'homme et son œuvre*, éditions L'Arche, Paris, 1999, p.107.

<sup>10</sup> « Le théâtre épique se laisse découper, comme avec des ciseaux, en parties capables de continuer à vivre de leur vie propre », Jean Marie Valentin (ed.), *Ecrits sur le Théâtre, Brecht*, éditions Gallimard, Paris, 2000, p.214.

<sup>11</sup> « Pas un centre mais une multitude de centres indépendants les uns des autres et qui constituent une unité en soi », Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne : de Brecht à John Arden et Edward Bond », Université de Paris 4 Sorbonne, p. 54.

promoted. He progressively tries to use Caroline's private life to break her public career. In interview room A the story is about Stanley Brown having threatened and killed people for the UDA. The story in interview room B is about joyriding. This second interrogation is also meant to make Rabbit confess he works for the UDA and more precisely for Stanley Brown. Ultimately the police's goal is to try to make Rabbit accuse Stanley Brown of commanding him to kill people and throw the latter to jail for a very long time. At the play's end, all the different stories are intertwined, make up one, even that about Caroline's private life. She effectively becomes the focus of UDA members because of Bill's giving information about her to the UDA.

In epic plays, there must be several centres of action within the same scene to enhance fragmentation. Brecht advocated rejecting the unique perspective so as to break the illusion of reality. As a matter of fact, in *The Force of Change*, there are many embedded stories within the same scene such as Caroline's polemical promotion, the tense atmosphere created by her colleagues at work, the accusation of Stanley Brown, Rabbit's joyriding, discrimination against women and Catholics in the PSNI. The perspective about these stories often changes as we can remark from the use of the pronouns "You", "I", "They" "We". To give an example, at the very beginning of act 1, Bill explains Caroline why he has come in early and within the same sentence, the change of pronouns stands out: "I'm in early because I thought you would have appreciated an early start... We<sup>12</sup> have to let Stanley Brown go."(3). Mitchell does not seem to be only concerned by the ancestral opposition between "them" and "us" echoing the dual division of the population between Catholics and Protestants. On the contrary, here, he tries to empower the individual to the detriment of the community, which is a goal many new Northern Irish plays put to the fore.

Fragmentation in *The Force of Change* is also conveyed through the dialogues. To give an example, in act 2, when Caroline happens to discover how corrupted Bill can be, their conversation is very jerky to enhance the dramatic tension. The numerous short sentences, which are sometimes only words uttered on their own, create an impression of general incongruence:

Corridor

*Caroline walks towards Interview Room B followed by Mark and David.*

Mark. What are you?

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<sup>12</sup> My emphasis.

Caroline. Get him out of there.

Mark. David?

David (*opens door Interview Room A*). Detective Byrne?

*Bill follows him out.* (53)

The endless silences of Stanley Brown while he is being interrogated by Caroline and Bill as well as the various suspension marks throughout the text, showing the hesitation and moments of reflexion on the characters' part, mirror the fragmented dimension of the play. The numerous monologues punctuating *The Force of Change* also fragment it and strengthen the creation of the dramatic awareness advocated by Brecht.

Fragmentation in Mitchell's play is finally formed by meta-theatrical effects. If the characters sometimes pretend they are not who they are, for instance Mark acts a UDA leader (11), or pretends to die (29), meta-theatre especially emerges at the moment of the interrogation of Rabbit by David and Mark. In fact, the way in which David and Mark interrogate the joy rider can be assimilated to a sort of play-within-the play. Indeed, David answers Mark's questions about Rabbit's past of joyriding, and this is very funny since Rabbit watches the scene:

David: February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1996- Rabbit stole his first car.

Mark: where?

David. In town.

Mark: Where did he take it?

David: nowhere, he just drove round and round and round until he crashed.

Mark: so he wasn't actually going anywhere.

David. No.

Mark: how many people were in the car?

David. Including himself, four (33)

Rabbit had even previously commented "You're the fucking comedy duo, you two" (*TFC*, 27). This effect is particularly telling in a Brechtian context since Francine

Maier-Schaeffer, in her book *Bertolt Brecht*, notices that “epic drama is about playing and vindicates it” (75).<sup>13</sup> Within this particular example, in becoming a “spect-actor” of his own story recalled out loud by the two officers in the manner of a question-answer like interrogation, Rabbit is made to stand at a distance from his own deeds and actions. He seems to be in the audience’s position. This eventually creates intimacy between the actors and the spectators. In fact, in Brechtian drama, the direct address to the audience, also known as the “abolition of the fourth wall”, is very much present throughout this play. It is notably relevant at the end of the play, when Officer Mark asks Stanley Brown, who cannot be prosecuted and kept for lack of evidence and denunciation but who will be closely followed by the police: “How safe do you feel now?” (81). Mark, on this occasion, also seems to be directly addressing the audience, who might come across this criminal as he is free now.

## Contradictions and Oppositions

Mark and David’s way of interrogating the joy rider throughout the play sharply contrasts with the cold manner Caroline leads her interrogation in the other room, room A, with the doubtful and nonetheless unhelpful support of Bill. Besides, after the production directed by Robert Delamere on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2000 at the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court, London, Lizzie Loveridge reported in her review of the play: “The body language of the twitching teenager Rabbit contrasts beautifully with Stanley Brown’s stolid refusal to speak”<sup>14</sup>. For Jacques Poulet, who has written an article on Brechtian theatre in the French *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, contradictions and oppositions constitute key elements in Brechtian drama in so far as they show the possible transformations of the world, which is a crucial aspect for Brecht.

To further exemplify how the play concentrates notions of contradictions, we can quote Billy Gray who writes that: “In texts such as *The Force of Change* [...], the notion of cultural and physical resistance, not only against a hostile and encroaching world, but also towards the concept of change itself, is portrayed as being at the very centre of the contemporary loyalist vision.” (Gray: 128) No matter how the play shows resistance to changes, it is about changes (women in the RUC, Catholics in the RUC etc). These transformations are done to the detriment of Bill who sadly explains to Stanley: “You’re in a similar situation to me. Your

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<sup>13</sup> « Le théâtre épique est un théâtre de jeu, qui se montre comme tel », Francine Maier-Schaeffer, *Bertolt Brecht*, Editions Belin, Paris, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Lizzie Loveridge, Review on *The Force of Change*. On “A Curtain Up London” website. <http://www.curtainup.com/forceofchange.html>. Read on November 19, 2009

organisation is changing too". (49) In fact, men in the RUC do not accept these changes; Gray even adds to that "their reluctance to endorse [Caroline's] promotion is symbolic of a resistance to accept change itself." (Gray: 138) In patriarchal societies such as Northern Ireland, men tend not to have much trust in women. David, who embodies this patriarchal society, explains he had better interrogate Brown: "Why not just think of a good reason for us to go in and have a go at Stanley Brown. You know we could break him in five minutes" and he adds, talking about Caroline, "She's fucking it up. Brown's going to walk" (13).

## Historicisation

Those changes are occurring "at an accelerating rate"<sup>15</sup> in Ulster, and cannot be accepted by everyone yet. In Mitchell's play, Bill is the character who is the least likely to accept those changes. He points this out in a monologue as the play draws to a close. This dramatic device can be identified as being part of historicisation, which is a fundamental means of distancing in Brechtian theory.<sup>16</sup> In her PhD thesis, Safaa Fathy explains that historicisation in Brechtian drama must show the evolution of history, its movement, its transformation.<sup>17</sup> That is what Bill does here, when he talks to Stanley. He says:

Your organisation is changing too and there's nothing you can do to stop it, or is there? See I know like you know that there are other more important people out there, causing all those changes. Changes that affect you and me both. Changes that affect our culture, our identity, our country. (*TFC*, 47).

What worries Bill particularly is the loss of the Protestant identity, the Britishness of the Northern Irish, being subsumed in this peace process which is giving so much power to the Catholic nationalists. Gary Mitchell, being from a working-class loyalist background, is particularly worried about this loss of identity. He explains that there is a "fundamental crisis in Protestant culture. We have been going through an extremely depressing loss of identity, loss of culture and, worst of all,

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<sup>15</sup> Gray, "The Fragments they shore up against their Ruins", p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> « L'historicisation est un moyen de distanciation fondamentale ». Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> « Montrer le mouvement de l'histoire, son évolution, sa transformation ». Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p. 365.



loss of a future".<sup>18</sup> He therefore focuses on the social roles of the human beings who can have an impact on the course of history. This point finally corroborates the goal of Brechtian realism which is ultimately to determine the place, the role and the function of the individual within the social structure to enable him to understand it<sup>19</sup> and to transform it. Brechtian theory relies on the hypothesis that all the social relationships between the individuals are historically determined and some of these relations are historically determining.<sup>20</sup> This is exemplified through the social evolution of the police officers in *The Force of Change*, who are worried about the mistakes they can make, as Caroline warns them: "you can still go down the ladder" (*TFC*, 15). They also fear their hierarchy as the various references to the Inspector, with a capital "I", highlight. According to Bernard Dort in *Lectures de Brecht*, a Brechtian character is always threatened, and must face the world. Therefore he has to transform himself. He cannot remain the same from beginning to end.<sup>21</sup> This transformation affects many of the characters in *The Force of Change*, and more particularly David, who could not even think one of his colleagues might help an illegal organisation one day be he Protestant like him. This particularly enhances the idea that history can be changed. In Mitchell's play, the characters try to have control over the situations; they are ready to resort to any illegal means to get to their goals, to change the course of history. For instance, to break Stanley Brown and Rabbit, Mark and David decide to use certain files and pretend others, which could well exonerate the UDA members, have disappeared (36). The importance of what Brecht calls "gestus" here arises. By gestus, we hint at a series of gestures borrowed from reality, socially signifying and having dialectic relationship with the action. Being premeditated, gestus creates distancing; it becomes the theatrical visual means which dramatises the socio-political analysis of the text.<sup>22</sup> I do not only refer to kinesics (gestures) and proxemics (movements through space), but also to objects, actions, attitudes, and speeches which are manifestations of social gestus within the play. In *The Force of Change*, Bill's social and professional future situation only comes to depend upon a brand new technological device: a mobile phone. After lending Stanley Brown his mobile

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<sup>18</sup> Martine Pelletier, « Marie Jones et Gary Mitchell : deux Belfastois à Londres », *Cycnos* 18.1, 19 Septembre 2008. <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/document.html?id=1689>. Read on January 12, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> « Déterminer la place, le rôle et le fonctionnement de l'individu dans la structure sociale pour la lui rendre praticable et intelligible, est le but du réalisme brechtien ». Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p.48.

<sup>20</sup> « Elle se base sur l'hypothèse de départ selon laquelle tous les rapports humains sont historiquement déterminés et une partie de ces rapports sont historiquement déterminants ». Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Dort, *Lectures de Brecht*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1960, p.129.

<sup>22</sup> Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p. 382.

phone so that he calls his UDA counterparts and arm Caroline's family, Bill is caught. Caroline hears the phone ring, finds it in Brown's pocket, and realises it belongs to Bill. It outrages her to see how corrupted his colleague is and how far he can go.

For Brecht, the social determinations of classes define the behaviours of the individuals.<sup>23</sup> If Bernard Dort explains that the first material for epic plays is the relationship of people, the stress being on their social and historical attitudes and behaviours<sup>24</sup>, Gary Mitchell confesses in "Balancing act", an interview he gave for *The Guardian*, that the centre of his plays is not really Northern Ireland and its political question but rather people generally speaking. He admits: "Another question I am asked is: will I always write about Northern Ireland? My answer remains the same. I don't write about Northern Ireland. I write about people". According to Safaa Fathy, Brecht sought to found a proletarian counter-culture<sup>25</sup>, while Mitchell's goal seems to try to belong to a movement of artists redefining the aesthetics of Northern Irish drama.

## New aesthetics

Irish artists in general and Northern Irish artists in particular have started to adopt new perspectives as far as their past and their identity, shaped onto their past, are concerned. In this, Margaret Llewellyn Jones asserts that *The Force of Change* belongs to this trend, since it highlights "new attitudes to the past and to issues of cultural identity including gender and political perspectives in relation to the peace process". Resorting to Brechtian theory is thus particularly telling, since Jeske writes that Brechtian drama was meant to try and find new aesthetical means of communication. To break the dramatic illusion, Brecht resorted to narration, a review of reality, the montage of theatrical scenes, direct addresses to the public, simultaneous scenes, projection of films<sup>26</sup>. The idea was to represent the real lives of people and their relationship. It was not meant to imitate reality nor to give a truthful image of reality. Brecht's ambition, as says Maier-Schaeffer, was to make people see reality differently, not as habits or dominating ideologies make people see it<sup>27</sup>. Maier-Schaeffer further explains that Brechtian drama is opposed to

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<sup>23</sup> Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Dort, *Lectures de Brecht*, p. 194.

<sup>25</sup> Safaa Fathy, « Le Nouveau théâtre épique en Grande-Bretagne », p.483.

<sup>26</sup> Berg Jeske, *Bertolt Brecht, L'homme et son œuvre*, p.116.

<sup>27</sup> « Le théâtre de Brecht est réaliste dans la mesure où il représente les problèmes réels de la vie des hommes entre eux. Mais pas imiter la réalité, pas en donner une image fidèle. L'ambition de Brecht est de donner à voir la réalité telle qu'elle est réellement et non telle qu'on la voit, telle que l'habitude ou

naturalism, it is a constructed artistic representation and therefore it is deliberately artificial, and fragmented. This is why parable is the form which is best adapted to the function that Brecht assigns to drama.<sup>28</sup>

As a matter of fact, in Mitchell's play, we find a parable, not a religious one, but rather a secular prosaic – and humorous – parable with Chinese food for its subject. Officer Mark explains that he never eats Chinese food because “when [he] order[s] chicken, tasting like chicken is a minimum requirement for [him]” (*TFC*, 39). Instead, he always orders cheeseburgers in Chinese restaurants since “they do great burgers” (40). If we interpret this remark, we may say that reality is not always what it seems, it is sometimes altered for some. Yet, Mark wants to have some control over it. In addition to this parable, we cannot but be stricken by the numerous references to the Asian world in *The Force of Change*. Caroline talks about Chinese movies, Mark mentions Chinese food. If it is true that Brecht was highly influenced by Asian drama when he elaborated his epic theory, we cannot assert for sure that Mitchell had this in mind when he wrote his play. Yet we can infer, from these references, a desire on Mitchell's part not to remain confined to Northern Ireland, but rather to open his play to another territory, to show it can reach all populations. This opening to the world contrasts with the claustrophobic impression conveyed throughout the play. Mitchell definitely tries to empower his characters and he resorts to drama as an artistic device because, according to Maier-Schaeffer “art is a weapon in the struggle to free the working class”.<sup>29</sup>

Safaa Fathy believes that distancing is the aesthetic means which enables the didactic element and the artistic pleasure to merge.<sup>30</sup> As a matter of fact, *The Force of Change* borrows more than epic elements; in many respects, it is a didactic play, this form being “the most perfect realisation of epic plays.”<sup>31</sup> If Bill summarises the deplorable changes the RUC has gone through in the following sentence, “seriously, education today, security tomorrow” (*TFC*: 51), can we not assert that Mitchell's goal is to educate the spectator? Effectively, as we put forward earlier, the spectator, through the abolition of the fourth wall, is called to react. In an article about Mitchell's plays, Martine Pelletier comments that “the realistic, or even documentary, style Mitchell favours play after play, shows his desire to stage truth

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l'idéologie dominante la donnent à voir ». Francine Maier-Schaeffer, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.74.

<sup>28</sup> « La parabole s'affirme comme la forme étant la mieux adaptée à la fonction que Brecht assigne au théâtre ». Francine Maier-Schaeffer, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> « L'art est une arme dans la lutte à la libération du prolétariat (Frédéric Wolf) ». Francine Maier-Schaeffer, p.18.

<sup>30</sup> « La distanciation est le moyen esthétique qui permet de fusionner l'élément didactique et la jouissance artistique ». Safaa Fathy, p.52.

<sup>31</sup> « Les pièces didactiques sont la réalisation la plus parfaite du théâtre épique ». Francine Maier-Schaeffer, p. 115.

more than fiction, to directly address the spectator and to make him think.”<sup>32</sup> That is why *The Force of Change* is qualified to be a “thought-provoking play” by Terry Morgan in his review of the play for the on-line journal *Variety* and is appreciated for “subverting our moral certainties” according to *The Guardian* journalist, Michael Billington.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, being an experimental play, *The Force of Change* is not really meant to instruct the audience, it is rather meant to inspire them.

As Rankin underlines it in “‘Loyal to the Truth’: Gary Mitchell’s Aesthetic Loyalism in *As the Beast Sleeps* and *The Force of Change*”, Mitchell “successfully puts his audience and readers through intensely conflicted situations that reflect the deep complexity of contractual personal and political loyalties endemic to these communities, enabling them to enter that confusing world”.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, in having *The Force of Change* become a Brechtian play, or rather neo-Brechtian since it does not bear all the characteristics of a Brechtian play (there are limits, such as the absence of songs and of a narrator), the playwright gives it a new dimension. It is no more naturalism about the Troubles, or rather the peace process. It has more to do with studying people’s social relationship, and letting know how he feels concerned by his play becoming European. My analysis might come as a relief for the author, who has suffered a lot personally from the subjects of his plays. Indeed, the topic of *The Force of Change* and *As the Beast Sleeps*, enraged people from his community. Gary Mitchell was forced out of his house in 2005 as Terry Morgan reports in an article in *The Guardian* “The playwright and his family were forced into hiding due to threats issued by the UDA, the play’s subject”. Ophelia Byrne adds to that “the paramilitaries [...] sought to silence him. Mitchell now lives in a secret location”<sup>35</sup>. Yet, he has not stopped writing plays. His latest play, *Remnants of Fear*, written in 2006, “is a chilling indictment of how paramilitaries are manipulating and corrupting protestant communities” according to a member of Ti

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<sup>32</sup> « A cet égard, le mode réaliste, voire documentaire, qu’il privilégie d’œuvre en œuvre atteste de son désir de porter à la scène une vérité plus qu’une fiction, d’interpeler le spectateur et de le faire réfléchir ». Martine Pelletier, « Marie Jones et Gary Mitchell : deux Belfastois à Londres », *Cycnos* 18.1, 19 Septembre 2008, p.9.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Billington, “*The Force of Change* by Gary Mitchell”, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2000. Read on <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/reviews/forceofchange.html>, on November 15, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Russell Rankin, “‘Loyal to the Truth’: Gary Mitchell’s Aesthetic Loyalism in *As the Beast Sleeps* and *The Force of Change*”, *Modern Drama*, 48:1, Spring 2005, p. 200.

<sup>35</sup> Ophelia Byrne, “Gary Mitchell, Playwright who highlights working-class Protestant Perspectives”, review of the performance at the Rock theatre, BIFHE, Whiterock Road, Belfast. [http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article.aspx?art\\_id=749](http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article.aspx?art_id=749), read on November 25, 2009.

Chucullain cultural activity center<sup>36</sup> where the play was performed in 2007.

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.tichulainn.com/arch\\_news.php?arch=2007-3&group=0](http://www.tichulainn.com/arch_news.php?arch=2007-3&group=0). Read on 12/03/2010.

RESHAPING NORTHERN IRISH DRAMA AFTER THE GFA. BRECHTIAN EPIC ELEMENTS IN *THE FORCE OF CHANGE* (2000) BY GARY MITCHELL

*VIRGINIE PRIVAS-BRÉAUTÉ*

# Young China: Chinese Opera and the Production of New Cultural Chinese Imagination

ZHAN MINXU

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This study investigates how Chinese opera provides resources for the production of a new cultural Chinese imagination. This case study examines *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* (*Qingchun ban mudan ting* 青春版牡丹亭) (2004), which was adapted by the prominent diasporic Chinese writer, Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇, and had great market success. My study shows that, compared with Pai's 1960s work haunted by death images, the 2004 *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* celebrates cultural China's rebirth and the roles of both traditional Chinese culture and Western cultural resources in shaping a new cultural China imagination. To analyze the tremendous success of *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition*, this paper explores the discourses of the cultural renaissance in the larger context of the rapid rise of China, the steady growth of the Sinophone and diasporic Chinese communities, and the formation of a global Chinese imagination.

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## Introduction

In Taiwanese literature, the history of drama studies is not long. During the Japanese colonial period, there were only a few literatures attempts as local theatrical performances. It was not until the KMT government retreated to Taiwan in 1949 that, under the support of cultural policies, certain universities started to provide courses in drama studies, and set up a professional school to train younger artists for performances. With the publication of continued and related secondary scholarship, drama studies in Taiwan were gradually divided into three different categories: Traditional Chinese opera, traditional Taiwanese opera, and modern

drama.<sup>1</sup> Although drama has never been regarded seriously as a dominant genre over the past few decades, it has found its own value in recent years. With the blooming of visual entertainments, it is the visual forms of cultural productions rather than their written forms that are widely accepted by modern audiences. As a result, more and more Taiwanese literary works are now being adapted for stage performances, a circumstance that helps give literature a second life and attract the attention of young audiences' to new trends in a visually dominant cultural environment. To name a few of these adaptations, there is *The Road to the Mountain* (Chen yinzhen. fengjing 陳映真. 風景) (2004, directed by Lin Hwai-min 林懷民); *Castrated Chicken* (Yanji 闖雞) (2008, directed by Lu Bo-shen 呂柏伸); and *Mazu's Bodyguard* (Haishen jiazu 海神家族) (2009, directed by Jade Y. Chen 陳玉慧).

However, what should be noticed is that these adaptations from literature to drama expose several unexpected issues, particularly those dealing with a formation of the complex network of power relations. Unlike the literature that is more likely to become a small-scaled labor event, stage performances are a larger industry, which need a huge amount of economic supports and complicated collaboration mechanisms. The outcome are that theatrical performance groups need to look continually for external help, becoming involved in the entanglement of economic, political, and cultural forces. After the concept of 'Cultural Creative Industry' was raised in Taiwan in 2002, and even after Cultural Creative Industry Policy was passed in 2010, the policy-driven theatrical performance industry in Taiwan has raised various interesting issues regarding the autonomy of artistic works, commercialized cultural productions, and the overall effectiveness of the new policy. Consequently, it is worthy to call serious attention to contemporary drama, in which both political and economic forces are largely embedded.

My intention in this paper is to examine the entanglement of Chinese opera and cultural Chinese imagination in terms of identity politics. Among the scholarship done on drama studies in Taiwan, both traditional Taiwanese opera and modern drama have kept enriching their own objects of study by borrowing insights from other disciplines that include anthropology, folk studies, and postcolonial theories. Comparatively, Chinese opera research seems not to show that same vitality and still limits its methodology to a traditional textual analysis. However, as suggested here, the potential sociopolitical influences of Chinese opera should not be

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<sup>1</sup> Lin Heyi 林鶴宜, 《Tixi yu shiye: wushinian lai (1949-2002) taiwan xuezhе dui chuantong xiquxue de jiangou》體系與視野：五十年來（1949-2002）台灣學者對傳統戲曲學的建構 [Systems and Visions: Taiwan Scholars' Construction of Traditional Chinese Opera Studies over the Fifty Years (1949-2002)], *Xiju yanjiu* 戲劇研究, 2009(3), 2-4; Cai Xinxin 蔡欣欣, *Taiwan Xiqu yanjiuchengguo shugai (1945-2001)* 台灣戲曲研究成果述論（1945-2001）[Overview of Chinese Opera Studies in Taiwan], Taipei, Kuo Chia Publishing, 2005, 25.



neglected, especially in terms of its impact on the production of the cultural Chinese imagination. An artistic performance blends different genres, such as drama, music, painting, literature, and calligraphy, Chinese opera addresses the responsibility of an inherited Chinese culture to reveal the new birth of Chinese culture in a new age. In the following discussion, I offer a brief literature review of Chinese opera studies, and then examine the turn of contemporary cultural Chinese imagination in Chinese opera, via a case study of *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* (*Qingchun ban mudan ting* 青春版牡丹亭), produced by a diasporic Chinese writer, Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇. From this discussion, a different methodology is suggested for Chinese opera studies in the new age of the policy-driven cultural industry.

### Chinese Opera Studies in Taiwan

Traditional Chinese opera studies in Taiwan are a small, but well-established, discipline, and have undergone different developing phases, which include its initial period in the 1950s and 1960s, a nourishing period in the 1970s, a developing period in the 1980s, and a prosperous period in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> According to Lin's concept, there are five methodologies in this field: (1) the history and development of Chinese opera; (2) Chinese opera literature; (3) Chinese opera theories; (4) theatrical aesthetics and culture; and (5) the different genres of Chinese opera.<sup>3</sup>

It is worthy of note as well that although there are diverse methodologies in Chinese opera studies, traditional textual analysis remains influential. On the one hand, after reviewing contemporary theses and dissertations on Chinese opera studies, Tsai points out that even if some researchers did begin to borrow new approaches, such as comparative studies, Western theories, and cross-disciplinary methodology in 1970s, most of the research efforts still preferred traditional textual analysis.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the emergence of the new methodology of theatrical aesthetics and culture, which signaled the transition from literary written work to visual work, does not change the situation, because for a number of Chinese opera researchers, theatrical aesthetics simply refers to the four performing techniques of actors in Chinese opera, namely, singing, speaking, acting, and acrobatic fighting.

Chinese opera studies usually fail to take into consideration the comprehensive understating of theatrical organization and its interaction with the social context. Let's take Kuo Chia Publishing as an example. One of the most weighty scholars, Zen Yongyi 曾永義, helped this publisher to arrange a book series titled, "National

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<sup>2</sup> Cai Xinxin, *Taiwan Xiqu yanyouchengguo shugai*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Lin Heyi, *Tixi yu shiye*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Cai Xinxin, *Taiwan Xiqu yanyouchengguo shugai*, p. 23.

Chinese Opera Studies Series”(Guojia xiquyanjiu congshu 國家戲曲研究叢書). This series (54 volumes then already published) precisely reflected the condition of the contemporary Chinese Opera studies.<sup>5</sup> Some of the books from this series, such as Wong Anqi’s 王安祈 *Voices of Peking Opera* (*Wei jinju biaoyantixi fasheng* 為京劇表演體系發聲)(2006), and Li Huimian’s 李惠綿 *The Theories and Appreciation of Chinese Opera Performance* (*Xiqubiaoyan zhi lilun yu jianshang* 戲曲表演之理論與鑑賞)(2006), illustrate the unique characteristics of Chinese opera aesthetics with both their rich academic knowledge and fieldwork observation. Still, their research frameworks mostly, although not completely, are confined to the discussion of artistic skills. What is also interesting in this series is Li Xianglin’s 李祥林 book entitled *Gender Analysis and Archetypes Perspective in Chinese Opera Culture* (*Xiqu wenhuazhong de xinbieyanjiu yu yuanyangfenxi* 戲曲文化中的性別研究與原型分析)(2006), which reevaluates traditional Chinese opera in terms of gender issues, thus reflecting the combination of Chinese opera studies and gender politics. In sum, contemporary Chinese opera studies in Taiwan often tends to adopt textual analysis and consider Chinese opera as a pure, naïve, and innocent social production without noticing the sociopolitical effects in which Chinese opera does become involved.

Does Chinese opera then not become involved in the concrete social context? Perhaps not. No matter that in Taiwan or China— two places where Chinese opera is well-developed— there is much evidence to indicate how Chinese opera serves the ruling power as propaganda. The model play in China is a case in point. Today, the entanglement of Chinese opera and power relations has not declined, but is an even more delicate and complex operation of discourse constructions. One of the leading Chinese opera scholarly journals, *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝, released a special issue in 2009 titled “Politics and Chinese Opera”. This issue particularly examines how the political discourse intervenes in the development and production of Chinese opera. The issue signals an urgency to escape from the trap of textual analysis and place Chinese opera in concrete social circumstances in an intersection where artistic work does encounter ideology. It is quite appropriate then to call our attention to this circumstance and evaluate Chinese opera’s ongoing position within the contemporary sociopolitical structure.

In a sense, Chou’s research on actress and performance culture in China is very insightful in terms of any reconsidering of the social discourse embedded in the staging of Chinese opera, especially as she adopts the performance theory proposed by Victor Witter Turner and Richard Schechner as her methodological framework. She argues that artistic actors on the stage are also social actors, and all they

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<sup>5</sup> Please see: <http://kuochia.104vip.com.tw/chuansheng/front/bin/cglist.phtml?Category=108615>

perform, all they identify, and all they produce on stage is not simply for art's sake, but definitely intended to influence the social condition. What is on stage is exact and precisely intended to be a social drama or cultural performance.<sup>6</sup> Traditional Chinese opera also needs to be taken as a kind of social and cultural performance. Following this logic, I believe that traditional Chinese opera performers switch their identity from artistic actors to social actors simply because their pronounced Chineseness pinpoints the highly cultural nationalist performance style of Chinese opera.

As with classical Chinese poetry, Chinese opera is an artistic genre with highly restricted formulas, particular formulas for scripts, singing, facial patterns, costumes, gestures, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Formularization is used precisely in order to construct an unrealistic, virtual stage atmosphere. There are few props on stage. We can only see "one table and two chairs", a formula for the stage props. Audiences must rely on sophisticated and delicate formulas, developed through the age-old development of Chinese opera, to comprehend the changes in plots and settings. Such formulas provide a unique sign system that is deeply embedded in Chinese culture and is a bridge between actors and their audiences, as well as a connector between the past and the present.<sup>8</sup> All of these sophisticated Chinese opera formulas are passed down orally rather than textually. If the younger generation does not learn the formulas from older actors, Chinese opera may die.<sup>9</sup> As far as this unique sign system is concerned, Chinese opera formulas should not simply be taken to be a set of only artistic skills. The system and its formulas should be considered as the core of Chinese culture.

Actually, these formulas cause Chinese opera to form a self-contained system. I mentioned above that Chinese opera formulas are not a realistic performative method, but rather a symbolic one using organized sign systems. In other words, the Chinese opera formula signification process requires that "a specific type of character follows the same or similar rules of action in the same situation again and again."<sup>10</sup> Learning these formulas requires reciting or acting the exact rules hundreds, or even thousands, of times to carve all of the formulas into the mind

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<sup>6</sup> Zhou Huilin 周慧玲, *Biaoyan zhongguo: numingxing baiyanyanwuhu shijuezhengzhi (1910-1945)* 表演中國：女明星表演文化視覺政治，1910-1945 [Performing China: Actress, Performance Culture, Visual Politics, 1910-1945], Taipei, Maitain, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Zheng Chuanying 鄭傳寅, *Chuantongwenhua yu gudianwenhua* 傳統文化與古典戲曲 [Traditional Culture and Classical Chinese Opera], Taipei: Yangzhi, 1995, p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> Fu Jing 傅謹, *Ershishiji zhongguoxiju de xiandaihua yu bentuhua* 二十世紀中國戲劇的現代性與本土化 [The Modernization and Localization of Chinese Opera in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century], Taipei, Guojia, 2005, pp. 377-378.

<sup>9</sup> Wu Xinlei 吳新雷, *Wu Xinlei kunqu lunji* 吳新雷崑曲論集 [Wu Xinlei's Essay Collection on Kun Opera], Taipei, Guojia, 2009, pp. 382-383.

<sup>10</sup> Fu Jing, *The Modernization and Localization of Chinese Opera in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, pp. 377-378.

and let the actors perform them unconsciously. Audiences are also required to be familiar with the rules. Formularization, in a sense, is in a dedicated way to internalize disciplines or the Chinese culture. Chinese opera formulas are also entangled with related concepts, such as repetition, immobility, and discipline.

Ironically, it is the stable, repetitive, and immobile characteristics of the formulas that make Chinese opera a most distinctive genre and one that condenses Chineseness and helps restore Chinese identities for the diasporic Chinese. Daphne Pi-Wei Lei examines the development of Chinese opera in the diasporic Chinese communities on the west coast of America in her case study. She claims that living in the contact zone, as diasporic Chinese on the west coast of America, causes one to suffer from the threat of hybridity and assimilation. Chinese opera, with its stable Chinese sign system, thus serves to rescue Chinese diaspora by consolidating their unsettled cultural identities: "Chinese opera is often figured as a lotus flower resisting hybridity and assimilation and used to represent a unique, intrinsic, pure, and stable Chinese identity."<sup>11</sup> However, the function of Chinese opera differs from other identity symbols. Chinese opera is not a daily life practice. Yet once the viewer enters a Chinese theatre, the performance suddenly conjures up a delicate and seemingly unchanging Chinese sign system for the audiences, binding all viewers, Chinese and non-Chinese, to Chineseness. Arguably, Chinese opera is an identity performance and helpful in making transnational, diasporic Chinese communities.<sup>12</sup>

Since Chinese opera is so closely related to Chineseness, in what follows, I examine and illustrate how the identity performance of *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* can be explored in terms of the imagination of cultural China and how the different imaginations of cultural China are indicated in Pai's adaptations in different periods. In truth, Chinese opera is a collective noun, which encompasses hundreds of local kinds of Chinese opera including Kun opera, Peking opera, Cantonese opera, Taiwanese opera, and others. Among them, Kun opera, one of the most organized local operas with the longest history (over 600 years), blends the various genres of literature, music, dance, and drama and is thus praised as "the mother of all Chinese operas." As to the symbolic origin of Chinese opera, Pai produced *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* in 2004 in the name of inheritance and to honor the glory of Chinese culture. Pai chooses *Peony Pavilion I* believe because, on the one hand, the play is a masterpiece, and on the other hand, the text of *Peony Pavilion*, and its theme of resurrection in particular, implies the rise of Chinese power in a new age.

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<sup>11</sup> Daphne Pi-Wei Lei, *Operatic China: Staging Chinese Identity across the Pacific*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

## Rhetorical Transition Found in Pai's Adaptations

In the past few years, Pai has committed to the promotion of Kun opera, and *Peony Pavilion* is his favorite because he has adapted this play several times, especially the 2004 version which gained great success on a global scale. In the original version, written by Ming dynasty playwright, Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, the story is very simple. *Peony Pavilion* can be divided into three parts. In the first part, Du Linian 杜麗娘 meets and falls in love with her dream lover, Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅, and Du dies of a broken heart. In the second part, Du's ghost looks for Liu and is then resurrected with Liu's help. In the final part, the story emphasizes how the two young lovers' struggle to persuade Du's family to accept her resurrection and their immoral relationship. In a word, *Peony Pavilion* is a legend of love concerning how worldly love offers one the life-affirming power to transcend social norms and even death. Nevertheless, Pai's *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* cannot simply be examined in terms of textual analysis without considering its sociopolitical context and where the performance is situated. Advertised through commercial, reports, campus speeches, interviews, conferences, and a series volume of related publications, the *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* has been performed as more than 100 musicals in Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, America, Greece, Britain, and Japan and especially has gained in popularity among the young generations in China. The cultural phenomenon that the play gives rise to a case in point for the cultural industry, and its claim of inheriting traditional Chinese culture enhances the complexity of Pai's *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* as an important transnational cultural Chinese production in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is part of the change seeks to turn our focus to the forging of new cultural Chinese imagination in Chinese opera performance.

Before adapting *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition*, Pai Hsien-yung had also used *Peony Pavilion* as inspiration for the short story, "Wandering in the Garden, Awakening from a Dream" (*Youyuan jingmeng* 遊園驚夢) (1966). The story was later included as part of his groundbreaking work, *Taipei People* (*Taipeiren* 台北人). "Wandering in the Garden, Awakening from a Dream" is a story about female melancholy based on aging and the fleetness of time. In this story, Pai borrows the first part of *Peony Pavilion* to highlight repressed female sexuality and illustrate a sense of death-driven temporal anxiety. The death drive rhetoric comes from Pai's cultural Chinese imagination of the 1960s. He states in an interview that when studying in America, he knew about the influential Cultural Revolution, which focused on abolishing all traditional culture, values, and ideas. The cultural and historical damage caused by the Cultural Revolution inspired him to write *Taipei*

People to mourn the aging and dying China.<sup>13</sup> The last short story in *Taipei People* was titled "State Funeral" (*Guozang* 國葬) and depicts the funeral of a KMT general, metaphorically pointing to the tragedy of China.

Nevertheless, the 2004 *Peony Pavilion* was given a conspicuous title, *A Youth Dream*, to focus on the theme of resurrection. That is to say, the death image still plays a vital role, but it more properly situates death as "a means" rather than "an end". It is through death that Linian Du can escape the social norms set up for traditional women and look for her dream lover as a ghost. In other words, *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* is a reconciliation with death. Death is no longer negative and simply foreshadows the resurrection-to-come. When Du dies, she puts on a red cape and holds a plum stick in her hand. In Chinese tradition, white symbolizes death, and red symbolizes happiness. The long red cape, that nearly covers half of the stage, purposefully foreshadows Du's resurrection. Unlike "Wandering in the Garden, Wakening from a Dream", which is haunted by death images, *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* disposes of death anxiety and focuses on the resurrection to celebrate the life-affirming power of love to transcend death.

If *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* undertakes the responsibility of inheriting the traditional Chinese culture, the resurrection of the female protagonist definitely symbolizes a metaphor for the resurrection of China. So then, what makes the rhetorical transition from death to resurrection effective in Pai's adaptations? This issue can be addressed from the perspective of how Chinese culture has been moving toward a new global position since the 1970s.

With the economic success of Japan in the 1960s, the economic miracle of the Asian economic tigers, namely, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, in the 1970s, and China's entrance into the international market in the 1980s, these newly industrialized Asian countries, while maintaining high growth rates and rapid industrialization, have posed challenges to the European/North American-centered authority and effectively remapped global power relations.<sup>14</sup> The newly emerging transnational capitalists in the Pacific Rim, who are different from the Asian migrant laborers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, are recognized as having flexible citizenships and multiple passports and helped shape the new face of Chineseness.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Zeng Xiuping 曾秀萍, *Guchen. niezi. taibeiren: Pai Hsien-yung tongzhi xiaoshuo lun* 孤臣. 孽子. 臺北人: 白先勇同志小說論 [Solitary Minister. Crystal Boys. Taipei people: On Pai Hsien-yung's Gay Novel], Taipei, *Urya*, 2003, p. 485.

<sup>14</sup> Arif Dirlik, "Introduction: Pacific Contradictions," in Arif Dirlik (ed.), *What is in a Rim?: Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea.*, Lamham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1999, p. 7.

The concept of “Cultural China” was first raised in the 1990s, and that concept celebrates those signs that the Chinese are getting rid of their old-fashioned, weak, castrated image. It also attempts to break a China-centered hierarchy, encouraging diasporic Chinese communities all over the world to voice their peripheral positions.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the discourses of cultural China in the 1990s illustrated an impulse for Chinese to regain, recover, and revive Chineseness as a shared identity label.<sup>17</sup>

Signs of Chinese imagination from the late years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have offered a vigorous energy. A rhetorical transition from “Wandering in the Garden, Wakening from a Dream” in 1966 to *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers’ Edition* in 2004 signals the distinct imaginations of Chinese culture. Pai shows clearly that he would like to reawake Chinese culture and save a dying Chinese culture from death in the metaphor of Du’s resurrection.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, choosing *Peony Pavilion* parallels the rise of Greater China. *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers’ Edition*, a masterpiece of Chinese culture, is the metaphor of young China, the product of transnational Chinese intellectuals in cooperation with numerous Chinese media and businesses. It creates a new brand called “Chinese.” Discourses about the modernization of Chinese opera, a cultural renaissance and cultural nationalism also underlie the tremendous success of the play. The *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers’ Edition* phenomenon clearly implies that Chinese culture is indeed already revived!

### **Moving from ‘Actor-Centered’ to ‘Director/Producer-Centered’**

In the production of Chineseness in the new age, Pai Hsien-yung, a diasporic Chinese writer, plays an important role, and Pai’s indispensable efforts and unique position for the re-staging of *Peony Pavilion* also mark a transformation in the theatrical organization of Chinese opera. Traditionally Chinese opera is an actor-centered performance (see Figure 1), and Chinese opera formulas are passed down from generation to generation. An actor-centered performance means that the theatrical actors with a rich knowledge of formulas interpret the scripts based on their own performance style. Hence, it is the actors’ personal artistic skills and interpretations of their play that attract audiences.

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<sup>16</sup> Wei-ming Tu, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center” in Tu Wei-ming (ed.), *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Pan Xinghua 潘星華, *Chunse ru xu: qingchunban mudanting renwu fangtanlu* 春色如許：青春版《牡丹亭》人物訪談錄 [Spring: Interviews on staffs in *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers Edition* ], Singapore, *Bafang Wenhua*, 2007, p. 2.

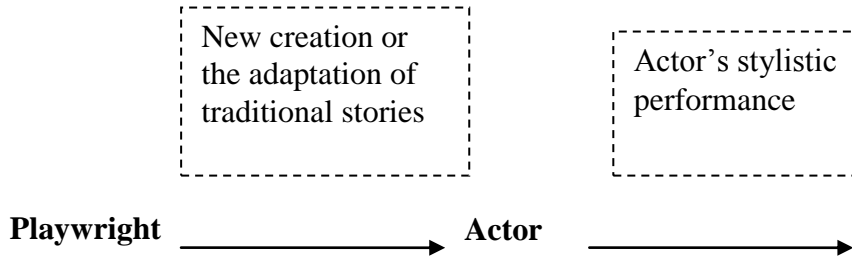
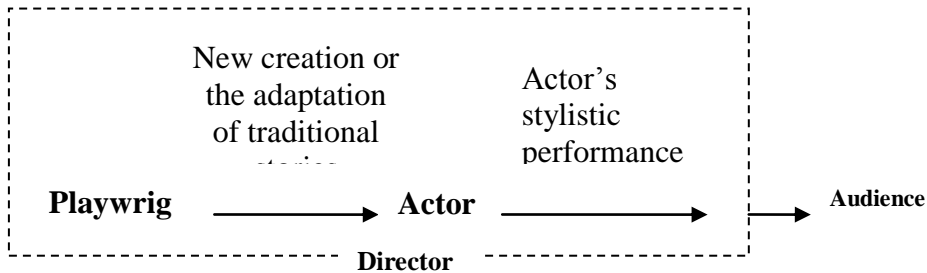


Figure 1: Actor-Centered Performance (Adapted from Hsieh)<sup>19</sup>

There is no concept of the term “director” in the early history of Chinese opera. It was not until the 1930s when the notable Chinese opera actor, Mei Lanlang 梅蘭芳, invited Zhang Pengchun 張彭春 to be a theatrical director that the concept of director was adopted in a Chinese opera theatrical organization.<sup>20</sup> Actually, the concept of director is an important element in the modernization of Chinese opera. Young audiences are more deeply influenced than ever by Western theatrical values—not only with regard to the personal artistic skills of the actors, but also scripts, costumes, light arrangements, music, and all of the stage designs, so a theatrical professional who is able to deal with these performance details is then required. It goes without saying that today actor-centered performances have gradually been replaced by director-centered performances. With regard to the changes in the theatrical organization, the director now takes on the dominant role in the creation of audience interpretations (see Figure 2).



<sup>19</sup> Xie Changyi 謝昌益, 《Shilun xinbianxiqu yanchu duiyu xiqu shenmeiguan de yingxiang》試論新編戲曲演出對於戲曲審美觀的影響[Analysis on the Influence of Newly-adapted Performances on Chinese Opera Aesthetics], *Yishulunwen jikan*, 3 (2004.12), pp. 249-262.

<sup>20</sup> Lin Xianyuan 林顯源, 《You xifang daoyanlilun kan taiwan gezaixi de xixiansheng yu daoyan》由西方導演理論看台灣歌仔戲的「戲先生」與「導演」[Exploring Xixiansheng and Directors in Taiwanese Opera from the perspective of Western Director Theory], *Fuxing juyi xuekan*, 1998, p. 22, p. 57.



### Figure 2: Director-Centered Performance (by author)

Although Pai is not a director, he takes the position of producer, which is not simply a title, but rather a person responsible for refining the script, training the actors, assembling back stage crews, collecting financial support, arranging for performance location, and so on. He also mobilized his circle of theatre friends, most of them renowned social elites and celebrities, to help turn his production into a hallmark of Chinese opera. It can perhaps be said that all financial and cultural support for this play were offered simply because of Pai's name and efforts. Undoubtedly, Pai played an influential in the meaningful production process for *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition*. The success of this play can definitely be attributed to Pai's efforts.

Pai occupies a crucial position in the ongoing adaptation of traditional Chinese opera. Indeed, in terms of the modernization of Chinese culture, Pai's diasporic Chinese identity is seen as a bridge between traditional Chinese culture and modern western culture. The Chinese diaspora has always led the way to the modernization of Chinese culture and the reshaping of Chineseness.<sup>21</sup> Having grown up and been educated in Taiwan, but having lived and taught in an American university for a long time, Pai is recognized today as a cosmopolitan citizen. Meanwhile, his rich knowledge of traditional Chinese culture shows that he is not completely Western. An fascinating interplay between modern elements and traditional culture exists in Pai. Hence, when Pai produces *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition*, on the one hand, he is asking to inherit the glory of tradition and, on the other hand, he also borrows from Western theatrical artistic theory to suit the demand of his contemporary audiences. One might think of Pai as a cultural translator. His translation task is twofold: First, to translate Western theatrical ideas into Chinese opera, and, second, to translate traditional Chinese opera into a modern context. Achieving that cross-cultural theatrical practice, *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* displays an integration of tradition and modernity, made possible by diasporic Chinese translation efforts. By focusing on the issue of inheritance, the primary task for Pai is not to go back to the past, but rather to open up a space in the present and the future for tradition to be revived and survive and another prosper.

### Chinese Opera Studies in the New Age

Kun opera was awarded a "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO in 2001. Such confirmation from an international

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<sup>21</sup> Wei-ming Tu, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," p. 34.

organization was exciting for the Chinese opera circle. The issue of the preservation of intangible and oral culture is worthy of attention because intangible and oral culture is closely connected to ordinary life and thus provides a sense of cultural identity and respect for cultural diversity. Once intangible and oral culture is more valued, the importance of Chinese opera will be noticed. In a Confucianism-centered culture, written culture is more respected than oral culture, which is generally regarded as popular, vulgar, and inferior. Nevertheless, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the position of Chinese opera has changed because of theaterization and visualization, newly development being helpful for transmitting and attracting new audiences, including Chinese and non-Chinese, diasporic Chinese and Chinese in Sinophone areas. Compared with writing text, the versatile Chinese opera blends drama, music, words, and painting to highlight the visual impact that the resurrection of traditional Chinese culture brings to the audiences.

However, it should also be noticed precisely how Chinese opera is entangled with the issue of identity performance. This paper takes *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition*, as adapted by diasporic Chinese writer Pai Hsien-yung, as a case study to explore the cultural meaning that Chinese opera can produce for transnational Chinese community. *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition*, a masterpiece in Chinese culture, is the product of transnational Chinese intellectuals and their cooperation with numerous Chinese media and businesses. It creates a new artistic/cultural brand called "Chinese." I think, arguably that the major theme of *Peony Pavilion* and resurrection parallels the rise of Greater China. Discourses on the modernization of Chinese opera, cultural renaissance, and cultural nationalism, also underlie the tremendous success of this play. The *Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers' Edition* phenomenon implies that Chinese culture has already been revived. The implications of Chinese opera for scholarly criticism cannot be dismissed. Chinese opera should not be examined only in terms of the inheritance of artistic skills. It must also be considered in terms of the entanglement of cultural nationalism, identity performance, and cross-cultural flow. The cultural industry has become a popular topic in recent years, and this new trend certainly places Chinese opera within the power relations of politics and economics. Taking Chinese opera to be simply an innocent, pure, and naïve art is insufficient. Chinese opera constructs a sign system that embodies the interplay of traditional cultural Chinese imagination and the newly emerging, reviving, young cultural Chinese imagination. Hence, Chinese opera studies should include more insights from cultural studies and examines in detail how director-centered performances are today engaged in the production of Chinese sign systems that are mold a new cultural China for Chinese worldwide.



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