



ERC Summer School 2018

DOES CULTURAL ANALYSIS NEED AREA STUDIES?

DOES AREA STUDIES NEED CULTURAL ANALYSIS?



UNIVERSITY
OF AMSTERDAM



UNIVERSITÉ
LIBRE
DE BRUXELLES



European Research Council
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AN INNOVATIVE

ERC Summer School

September 7–8, 2018

University of Amsterdam

“Does cultural analysis need area studies? And does area studies need cultural analysis?”

In this seminar, co-organised with Dr. Vanessa Frangville from Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Faculty of Letters, Translation and Communication, PhD students from the ULB and from ASCA working on issues related to “China” will engage with the convergences and tensions that arise when combining cultural analysis with approaches from area studies.

Whereas cultural analysis continues to be haunted by different modes of eurocentrism, area studies on the other hand often remains entrenched in models of cultural exceptionalism and essentialism. While our answer to the question posed in the title is a univocal “yes,” we also want to probe into the difficulties, tensions and conflicts that arise from such a combination of disciplinary approaches, both theoretically and methodologically.

The seminar is part of the ERC funded project ChinaCreative,

see: <http://chinacreative.humanities.uva.nl>

Organizers

Jeroen de Kloet and Vanessa Frangville

Assistant

Gordon So

Participants

Brussels (ULB)

1. Coraline Jortay
2. Virginie Arantes
3. Nolwenn Salmon
4. Leo Hua
5. Jin Sun
6. Camille Prouharam
7. Meng Chen

Amsterdam (UvA)

8. Siyu Chen
9. Laura Vermeeren
10. Zoénie Deng
11. Rowan Parry
12. Arjen Nauta
13. Shuaishuai Wang
14. Jian Lin
15. Zhongwei Li
16. Jori Snels

Format

Presentation of 20 minutes and discussion

Programme

Friday, September 7 (10:45 – 13:00 Bushuis F2.08b; 14:00-17:30 UB Belle van Zuylen)

10:40 – 11:20	Siyu Chen (UvA)
11:20 – 12:00	Coraline Jortay (ULB)
12:00 – 12:40	Laura Vermeeren (UvA)
12:40 – 13:40	<i>Lunch (1 hour)</i>
13:40 – 14:20	Zoénie Deng (UvA)
14:20 – 15:00	Virginie Arantes (ULB)
15:00 – 15:40	Zhongwei Li (UvA)
15:40 – 16:10	<i>Coffee break (30 mins)</i>
16:10 – 16:50	Nolwenn Salmon (ULB)
16:50 – 17:30	Rowan Parry (UvA)
17:30 – 19:30	<i>Drinks, check into hotel</i>
19:30	<i>Picnic if weather permits</i>

Saturday, September 8 (10:00-17:00 UB Belle van Zuylen)

10:00 – 10:40	Leo Hua (ULB)
10:40 – 11:20	Arjen Nauta (UvA)
11:20 – 11:40	<i>Short break (20 mins)</i>
11:40 – 12:20	Jin Sun (ULB)
12:20 – 13:00	Shuaishuai Wang (UvA)
13:00 – 14:00	<i>Lunch (1 hour)</i>
14:00 – 14:40	Camille Prouharam (ULB)
14:40 – 15:20	Jian Lin (UvA)
15:20 – 15:40	<i>Coffee break (20 mins)</i>
15:40 – 16:20	Meng Chen (ULB)
16:20 – 17:00	Jori Snels (UvA)
17:00 – 19:00	<i>Drinks</i>
19:00	<i>Dinner at 't IJ</i>

Friday, September 7

Aspirations Suspended between the Walls: An Ethnographic Study of Wall Painters in Dafen Oil Painting Village

Siyu Chen

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

In small alleys in Dafen oil painting village, galleries stand next to each other with a void between every three or four of them. With wooden boards and roller shutters attached to the walls, ceilings and lightings installed overhead, and in some cases PVC curtains put up at the entrance, these gaps become tunnel-like studios where many painters execute and display their works. Wall painters first emerged around 2008 when the global financial crisis struck Dafen, the world's largest handmade oil painting production centre which used to rely heavily on the foreign market. Due to a dramatically decreasing volume of overseas orders, many painters could not afford the rent of the studio/galleries, and the voids between galleries became viable solutions to shelter their painting careers from the global economic storm.

At present, these wall studios have persisted and grown to over five hundred. Based on a three-month ethnographic study in Dafen, this study delves into the diverse, fluctuating, and at times intrinsically contradictory life aspirations of wall painters. Drawing on Xiang Biao's concept of "Suspension," this study argues that the liminality of their workspaces, as an epitome of wall painters' lives as migrants in the city of Shenzhen, entails both autonomy and precarity, which greatly informs their subjectivities as creative workers and leads to the suspension of their life aspirations in China's post-industrial turn.

Bio

Siyu Chen is a postdoc researcher at the Department of Media Studies at University of Amsterdam. As a member of the ERC project ChinaCreative, she works on creative city and conducts her field study in Shenzhen. Her research interests include gender, culture, and creative industries in China.

Friday, September 7

Boundaries, Blurring, and Otherness: Reported Speech and Interior Monologue as Viewpoint Tools in Xiao Hong's Fiction

Coraline Jortay

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

Few Chinese women writers' works have received more scrutiny than Xiao Hong's 萧红, deemed at times patriotic prophet of the advent of the Second Sino-Japanese war and at times feminist manifesto against women's living conditions in occupied Manchuria. However, while scholarship has so far been mostly focused on a thematic and descriptive approach to unravel Xiao Hong's treatment of women experiences at war, this chapter will attempt to engage with the text at a deeper level, drawing on recent research in Chinese narratology and stylistics to highlight how reported speech in Chinese often permit "blends" in narrative structure that can intertwine the voices of the narrator and characters. In analyzing Xiao Hong's *Market Street* (《商市街》 1937) and various short stories she wrote in the late 1930s, this chapter will attempt to uncover how Xiao Hong's use of these narrative techniques was key in manipulating the viewpoint of the narrator and argue how this narrative treatment effectively enabled her to render a wide spectrum of women's experiences by providing glimpses into repressed memories and inner voices that work as a subtext to deconstruct prevalent discourse on roles of women in 1930s Manchukuo.

Bio

Coraline Jortay is a F.R.S.-FNRS Research Fellow and PhD Candidate in literature at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB, Belgium). Her research focuses on gender representations and practices of resistance in the works of sinophone women writers, drawing from narrative, gender studies, and discourse analysis.

She has published on the gendered dimensions of Chinese-French literary translation in *Revue de sémiolinguistique des textes et discours* (Volume 44, spring 2018) and on the impact of pronouns and classifiers on queer thematization in Chi Ta-wei's *The Membranes in Monde chinois – Nouvelle Asie* (Volume 51, 2017).

Hoping to contribute to fostering academic networks of solidarities for early career researchers working on gender and China, she has co-founded the China Academic Network on Gender (CHANGE – <https://change.hypotheses.org>) in partnership with SOAS and King's College London.

Friday, September 7

Different Shades of Ink: Contemporary Calligraphy

Laura Vermeeren

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

In this presentation, I would like to introduce my chapter: “Criticality in ink: Contemporary calligraphy.” As a still rather undefined phenomenon, contemporary calligraphy is located either within the calligraphy scene or outside of it, using and employing calligraphic methods and aesthetics to create something that is calligraphy—*but not quite*, artistically exploring the fringes and intersections between word, image, writing, and art. This chapter asks how—both in theoretical conception and execution—contemporary calligraphers/ artists working with calligraphy are indebted to traditional calligraphy, and how do they talk back to, interact, and view each other. Drawing on fieldwork data, in particular interviews with the contemporary artists Wang Dongling, Xu Bing, and Zeng Xiang, this chapter probes the predicaments or openings they might have to offer to the calligraphy scene, and what kinds of critiques are enabled through their works. What does their creativity say about the practice of calligraphy as a whole? Are they sites of experimentation or can we categorize them as part of a longer lineage of creatively executed calligraphy? And is its aesthetic alteration inherently meant as a (political) critique? Or is contemporary calligraphy art actually not the locus of criticality that it is often made out to be by historians and art scholarship?

Bio

Laura Vermeeren is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Amsterdam. Her research is concerned with how Chinese calligraphy as a living daily practice is entangled with technologies of the self, government, and society in contemporary China. Previously she completed a Bachelor and Master in Chinese studies at Leiden University. She published *Chinese Calligraphy in the Digital Realm: Aesthetic Perfection and Remediation of the Authentic* (2017, Concentric), and “*We are not like the calligraphers of ancient times*” – *A study of young calligraphy practitioners in contemporary China* (forthcoming with Professor de Kloet).

Friday, September 7

Critical Publicness in Urban Spaces: Social Practices Growing or Roaming in the City

Zoénie Deng

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

In this presentation, I ask: how socially engaged art can be critical in creating public spaces in the city of Guangzhou? This will be articulated in the analysis of two projects. The first is “Sunset Haircut Booth,” which is part of the self-organised social practice project *Residents* that started in August 2016 in Pearl River Delta. “Sunset Haircut Booth” is a project by artist Yu Xudong’s team, named after the free haircut booth in an urban village—Xisan Village, which was constructed and run by a senior resident Liang Guangnian. Through the discussion of the aesthetic, material, and relational aspects of the activities in this project, I will show how art and aesthetics could apply and negotiate publicness of the space. The second case is 44 Theatre’s first performance in urban space: *Nomading/Minstreling*, a project that aimed at “regaining and stimulating the potential of roaming and poetic reading/performing/improvising while wandering in the city.” By analysing two night walks-performances in different public venues in the city including the interactions with audiences, aesthetics, and affects, I argue how art can create nomadic, temporal, and affective publicness in the urban space.

Bio

DENG Liwen (Zoénie) is a PhD candidate in Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam. Working as a researcher for the ERC funded project *ChinaCreative*, her PhD dissertation is provisionally entitled “The Criticalities of Socially Engaged Art Concerning Urbanisation in Contemporary China.” Her research and artistic interests cover social practices, feminism, the postcolonial, art and activism, and critical ways of living together. She worked as a project coordinator in Shanghai Biennale in 2012. She is also a contributor to art media such as *Leap* and *Artforum China*.

Friday, September 7

The *Verdurization* Process of an “Excellent Global City”

Virginie Arantes

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

At the start of 2018, the Shanghai Master Plan (2017-2035) was unveiled by the State Council. It lays the groundwork for a “global city” within 15-ish years. The goals are ambitious, with promises about air quality and an inspiring narrative about Shanghai becoming a world centre for “finance, trade and technological innovation.” The unique “East meets West” speech-making is used in the envisioning of an admirable city of innovation, humanity, and sustainability as well as a modern socialist international metropolis with world influence. The sustainable development narrative is at the centre of the plan. In fact, throughout history, the Chinese state used various *verdurization* campaigns as a way to exercise ideological control. This presentation assesses how environmental organizations use both globalisation and the greening of the state as an instrument in order to advance their goals. As environment protection has turned into a significantly uncontested desire among society, there is a broad political commitment to take it seriously. However, by dispersing their goals into an increasingly pluralistic, multicultural, complex and transnational identity, it is more difficult to focus on highly political issues and influence policy-making.

Bio

Virginie ARANTES is a PhD candidate and FNRS research fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Her research interests broadly focus on environmental NGO's, social enterprises, and the emerging third sector in China. Virginie's academic background is rooted in Chinese studies, Environmental Management, and Sustainability Sciences. For the last 3 years, her research has been focused on bottom-up environmental networks and social innovation practices in Shanghai. She has spent 13 months interacting with a diversity of third sector organizations over a long-term field research in Shanghai, analyzing how contemporary actors outside the state and the market reshape Chinese political and social sphere. She is also an affiliated researcher at the Centre for the Study of Politics and the Centre for East Asian Studies at the Free University of Brussels. Last year, she was a visiting researcher for a period of 10 months at the Global Institute for Urban and Regional Sustainability in Shanghai (East China Normal University). Since the beginning of 2018, Virginie is a board member of the Young Researchers French Network for Asian Studies.

Friday, September 7

Social Life of the Cut-out Cassette Tape: Music, Materiality, and Regimes of Value

Zhongwei Li

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

The cut-out (dakou) music products, including cut-out cassettes and CDs, are overproduced copies of music albums dumped by the Western major labels. They were smuggled as plastic waste or industrial raw materials into China, and ended up being sold cheaply on local black/grey market in almost every Chinese city. From the early-1990s to the mid-2000s, the importation, circulation, and consumption of cut-out music products in mainland China had developed into a huge underground business which introduced new discourses on rock/alternative music to the 70s-born generation of local youth. The “cut-out generation,” as it became known, was arguably the first wave of underground music subculture in modern Chinese history. Living in 1990s Chinese cities, this generation of youth were confronted by and strived to make sense of, on the one hand, the bizarre and mysterious sound and images brought, from out of nowhere, by the cut-out cassettes and CDs and, on the other hand, the shifting sociocultural circumstances of 1990s post-Tiananmen Chinese society, which was caught between its socialist past and capitalist future.

In the workshop, I will present materials for the first empirical chapter of my PhD dissertation on the “cut-out generation” and focus mainly on what I regard as the infrastructure of the cut-out subculture. I will try to theorize the cut-out cassette tape as a ‘thing’ with unique materiality and trace its trajectory through various “regimes of value” where its thing status was shifted and conditioned. The questions to be addressed include: how was the cut-out cassette tape turned from industrial raw material into a kind of cultural commodity? Should we see the cut-out cassette tape as primarily music or its material medium? Is the cut-out subculture primarily a material culture or a music culture? And in what sense is music, as a cultural form, “woven into” (Bødker, 2004, 3) its material extensions?

Bio

Li Zhongwei is a PhD researcher in Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He holds an Mphil in Sociology from the University of Cambridge and a BA in Education from Beijing Normal University. Studying the Chinese “cut-out (dakou) generation” as his doctoral project, his research explores the relationship between rock music, subcultural formations, and the structure of feeling of 1990s urban Chinese society.

Friday, September 7

Chinese Youth and the Search for Meaning: Agro-Ecology and Alternative Rural Communities as a New Social Model and Worldview?

Nolwenn Salmon

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

I will expose my postdoctoral research project. This project is included in a more overall research on the place of citizens in the ecological transition in China and the evolution of social norms generated by the environmental crisis. It questions the diffusion of new values and models of society emerging in response to the environmental crisis. This project focuses on a recent trend of young urban people who have decided to settle down in countryside to undertake alternative agricultural project. I am planning to spend one month in an eco-village close to Fuzhou. This community without any leader has been founded by a couple (born in 1989 and 1984) who have already done a self-sufficient experiment close to Qingdao during 5 years. They now want to expand the project to more people.

Bio

Nolwenn Salmon is a post-doc at Free University of Brussels (ULB). Her research topics are related to the place of citizens in the ecological transition in China and the evolution of social norms generated by the environmental crisis. It questions the diffusion of new values and models of society emerging in response to the environmental crisis. She taught Chinese language and civilization at INALCO (Paris) and Rennes 2 University and received at INALCO in 2016 her PhD entitled “Committed Journalists in China: Environmental Critics Balancing Acceptance and Refusal of Politics.” Her actual project focuses on a recent trend of young urban people who have decided to settle down in countryside to undertake alternative agricultural project and develop eco-friendly intentional community.

Friday, September 7

On Creating Independent Chinese Cinema

Rowan Parry

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

As part of a broader study which explores independent documentary filmmaking as a form of parrhesia, understood as speaking truth to power, this chapter analyzes the interpretive repertoires (cf. Potter and Wetherell 1988) used by filmmakers. Based on formal interviews with 24 independent filmmakers and others actively involved in independent Chinese cinema, and by following the later stages of the production of the film *Hills and Mountains* (2018, Zhao Xu), this chapter particularly focuses on the discourses surrounding independent filmmaking as used by filmmakers. By letting filmmakers speak about why and how their films are made, this chapter analyzes the interpretive repertoires which inform both the filmmaking process and the understanding of what it means to speak truth to power through independent cinema. The chapter does so by exploring the following issues: first, why do they engage in this practice and what are its anticipated effects? By analyzing the personal backstories filmmakers present this section seeks to show a recurring set of discourses which independent filmmakers use to present themselves as, and to be considered as, truth tellers. Second, about which topics it is important to speak the truth. How did they decide on the topics of their films, what kind of motivational tropes reoccur? Finally I will look at the narratives surrounding obstacles, risks encountered and strategically dealt with during the production process, what is said to have played pivotal roles in shaping the final product?

Bio

Rowan Parry is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam. His current research focuses on independent filmmaking cultures in China.

Saturday, September 8

From Homes to Parks, Shopping Malls and Theatres: Trajectory of Spatial Shift in Chinese *Erciyuan* Cosplay Practices Before and After Golden Mask Cosplay Contest (2005-2015)

Leo Hua

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

In 1990s, globalized Japanese manga, anime, and games nurtured the Chinese millennials. The circulation and consumption of these contents resulted in the birth of Chinese *Erciyuan* (二次元, Second Dimension) culture, and later, *Erciyuan* millennials became the actors and audience of cosplay, which now has thrived into the most popular cultural practice in less than two decades within the umbrella of Chinese cultural industry. Along with the development of cosplay, a spatial shift can be observed in this particular culture on display: from home to parks, from parks to shopping malls and theatres. And the varied spaces reshaped the ways of cosplay practice, forms of cosplay performance and utilities, and strategies of these spaces. Based on fieldworks initiated in 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014 in Beijing, this paper intends to explore what caused the transitions of spaces and how did it effect practices of cosplay in terms of the choice, utilization, and negotiation of spaces as well as the creation of cosplay practices.

Bio

Bin HUA, ARC fellow (GENEsYs – EAST), is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Letters, Translation and Communication at Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). Amazed by the Japanese ‘Empire of Signs,’ Bin HUA took his academic adventure to Tokyo and obtained his MA in Educational Science and Cultural Anthropology from the University of Tokyo. Realizing that Cosplay has been growing into the most celebrated and practiced youth culture in Mainland China, Bin HUA centred his master’s research on the implantation and development of Cosplay from Japan to Mainland China. In order to explore Cosplay Culture in a more international context, he is currently working on his PhD thesis entitled “*Doing and Becoming Scene: Identity, Performance and Consumption in Chinese Cosplay Scenes.*” This research seeks to highlight, through an ethnographic analysis, the significance of spaces to perform, consume and disseminate cosplay practices.

Saturday, September 8

Fatherhood Mediated Through the Unfamiliar: Reception Tactics of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*

Arjen Nauta

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

In 2013, Hunan Television (HSTV) debuted the reality show *Where are we going, dad*, featuring five celebrity dads and their children who go to several countryside locations to experience rural life and jointly complete assignments. The second and third season alone have received over 3.3 billion hits on HSTV's website. The underlying motive for the program is the alienation between Chinese fathers and sons in contemporary life. As the fathers are busy and have little time for their children, this show stimulates these fathers to be better dads. Simultaneously, as the show's director told me in an interview, *WAWGD* intently seeks to expose its audiences to unfamiliar influences, such as foreign conceptions of fatherhood, for example by including foreign fathers in the show.

So, what does it mean to be a good father in contemporary China? What do audiences do with these televised parenting techniques? In this presentation, I focus on the audience reception of this show. Having conducted focus groups with *WAWGD*-audiences during a 2-year fieldwork stay in China, I analyze how parents discuss, judge, and appropriate these mediated parenting strategies. How do they reflect on fatherhood as mediated through the unfamiliar? I show how their bottom-up tactics of navigating the highly governmentalized public discourses on parenting, and creatively rendering them relevant for their own lives, results in highly syncretic conceptions of fatherhood, between local, national, and global influences.

Bio

Arjen Nauta is a doctoral researcher at the Department of Media Studies, University of Amsterdam. His project on Hunan Satellite Television is part of the ERC-funded "China Creative"-project, led by Prof. Jeroen de Kloet. He obtained a research master's degree in Religion and Culture and two bachelor degrees (history and anthropology of religion) at the University of Groningen. In addition, he received a master's degree in China and Asia-Pacific Studies from National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan. From August 2015 to July 2017, Arjen resided for two years in Changsha, Hunan, to do his fieldwork at HSTV.

Saturday, September 8

China's Cultural Deployment: the Entanglement of Three Goals

Jin Sun

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

In October 2005, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee initiated a cultural “going out” strategy (文化“走出去”战略). Various actors, enthused by government policies, borrowing, using or manipulating Chinese culture on various occasions, through various channels, launched different forms of cultural activities. Because of its important position on the political map of Europe, Brussels is a crucial part of this strategy. As the first part of my thesis entitled “Les stratégies de déploiement culturel de la République Populaire de Chine: le cas de Bruxelles,” taking the city of Brussels as a research field, premised on empirical research on diverse cultural promotion activities, the study tries to reveal China's three goals of cultural deployment: the pursuit of economic power, soft power and sharp power. As part of China's overall development strategy, the research tries to understand how these three objectives are superimposed and intertwined, and how the various deployment strategies around these three objectives stimulate each other. I also ask to what extent the entanglement of these three goals causes significant dilemmas.

Bio

Sun Jin, PhD candidate in ULB, graduated from Wuhan University in Chinese Literature and in Education Science from Central China Normal University. Interested in literature and arts, and also political science, his cross-cutting research focuses on contemporary China, its diplomatic strategies and cultural promotion in Europe, as well as intercultural dialogue, particularly in Brussels.

Saturday, September 8

Visible Gay Apps, Invisible Same-Sex Desires: Homosexuality as a Measure of Obscenity in China's Internet Censorship

Shuaishuai Wang

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

Although existing studies have analyzed how censorship restricts the digital visibility of Chinese sexual minorities, they tend to approach censorship as a given context, an inert structure, and an essentialized mechanism that can be creatively evaded. As a result, contradictory conclusions often conjure up as they see sometimes relaxed control as progress yet sometimes retightened control as deterioration. Using a case study of ZANK, a gay dating app that has been shut down by the authority for “ineffective self-censorship,” this paper argues that existing studies on China's Internet censorship obscure a fundamental problem in the fickle censorship toward homosexuality—the sexual shame. In both official policies and censorship guidelines made by government-affiliated industrial associations, homosexuality is lumped together with incest and sexual deviants under the rubric of obscenity. As a result, not only is obscenity skilfully integrated into the identity of homosexuality, it also makes a sexual identity, instead of sexual acts, a measure of obscenity. However, this paper finds that ZANK was unintentionally aligned with the authority on this stigmatized same-sex identity. In its live streaming guidelines, ZANK had a much broader definition of obscenity in which “sexual imitations” and “flirtatious comments” were both within the scope. Moreover, ZANK live streaming prohibited comments implicating hooking up. This paper concludes that, by denying the display of same-sex desires, ZANK not only reinforced the stigma of obscenity by fighting against it, but also deepened the sexual shame—the foundation of censorship toward homosexuality—into same-sex identities.

Bio

Shuaishuai Wang is a PhD candidate in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His PhD project focuses on Chinese gay dating apps, which investigates China's digital pink economy in the aspects of same-sex sociality, digital labor, and gay male subjectivities. His previous research has appeared in *Information, Communication & Society*. He has presented papers on conferences including Queer Asia (SOAS, London, 2016); Postgraduate Conference on Gender and Digital Cultures (Cardiff University, 2016); The National Research Day of The Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies (Utrecht University, 2017); The Platformization of Chinese Society Workshop (Hong Kong Baptist University, 2018); Chinese Internet Research Conference (Leiden University, 2018); European Network for Cinema and Media Studies Conference (University of Amsterdam, 2018); Biennial Conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies (panel organizer and chair, University of Glasgow, 2018).

Saturday, September 8

How can Film Festivals in China be a Platform of Negotiation for Expression of Identity?

Camille Prouharam

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

Through the analysis of 5 film festivals in the PRC, I will explain how film festivals can have an impact on censorship itself, audience's needs, and on Chinese film diffusion in film festivals overseas. Independent film festivals do not exist officially in China, but some of these claims to be so, when others such as the Beijing International Film Festival, or the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flower's Film Festival are government initiatives.

Through investigations made at the Beijing International Film Festival, Shanghai International Film Festival, Golden Rooster and Hundred Flower's Film Festival, FIRST International Film Festival, and Inner-Mongolian Youth Film Week, I will explain the different possibilities and strategies adopted by the government and the filmmakers to express Mongolian Identity.

Bio

Camille Prouharam is currently a PhD candidate under joint-supervision between the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB, Belgium) and Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE, Paris). She received two Master's degrees: one in Chinese language, literature and civilization (Université Michel-Montaigne-Bordeaux 3, France); and one in Religions and societies (EPHE). She also learned Mongolian language and civilization at the INALCO (Paris) for two years and at the National University of Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) for one semester. Her research mainly focuses on Mongolian identity and representations in Chinese literature and cinema. She is currently working on processes of negotiation of Mongolian Identity in Chinese cinema, under the supervision of Dr Vanessa Frangville (ULB) and Isabelle Charleux (EPHE), with EAST (ULB) and the Groupe des Sociétés, Religions et Laïcité (GSRL-CNRS). Previously, Camille worked in the Beijing Film Academy (China) as Film history teacher.

Saturday, September 8

(Un-)Becoming Chinese Creatives: Transnational Mobility of Creative Labour in a “Global” Beijing

Jian Lin

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

Drawing on qualitative research conducted on transnational creative workers/labour in Beijing, this article locates creative labour studies into a transnational context by showing how the vibrant interaction between the global creative industries and the local geopolitical economy propels the transnational labour mobility and affects the subjectification of the diverse creative individuals. While imagining China as career, these transnational creative professionals have been incorporated into part of the Chinese creative workforce, contributing to the Party State’s aspiration to creativity as growth engine of economy and as soft power. In everyday experience, however, China’s aspiration to “foreign creativity” does not necessarily guarantee a non-precarious state of life and work. The state’s restrictions on migration and the insecure working circumstance of Chinese creative workplace discourage these transnationals from becoming migrants or Chinese citizens. Yet such precarious life is also productive and fertilizes the conditions for a situated cosmopolitanism among the transnational creative workers, which fuels interaction and mutual understanding between the local and the global. Such cosmopolitanism in practice has the potential to enable the transformation of “Chinese creative labour” into a fluid assemblage that allows the co-existence of heterogeneity and the continuous unfolding of difference embodied by various subjects.

Bio

Jian Lin is a PhD researcher at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam and Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University (joint-award). His research interests include creative labour studies, cinema and cultural policy studies. His PhD project is part of the ERC (European Research Council) consolidator project “From Made in China to Created in China—A Comparative Study of Creative Practice and Production in Contemporary China (ChinaCreative).”

Saturday, September 8

Filming Chinese Adolescents in Test-prep Schools: Cinematic Representation of Bitterness and Its Historical Consciousness

Meng Chen

Université libre de Bruxelles

Abstract

A burgeoning of documentary films featuring the bitterness of Chinese adolescents in schools have been produced in the recent decade. A thematic collection of the independent docufilms includes: *Senior Year* (GaoSan, dir. Zhou Hao 2005); *China Gate* (ZhongGuoMen, dir. Wang Yang 2010); *Ninth Grade* (ChuSan, dir. Jiang Nengjie 2014); a list of broadcast documentaries based on the same theme includes: *China Prep* (dir. Marije Meerman, PBS 2008); *Chinese School: Olympic Fever* (BBC 2008); *Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Chinese School* (BBC 2015); *Wandering Age of Eighteen on the Huangtu Plateau* (NHK 2009); *Confucius Weaving Chinese Dream: Struggling out of Poverty in the Mountain Village* (NHK 2015); *Gaokao, an Exam for All* (CCTV 2015). These docufilms feature the bitterness among Chinese adolescents in test-prep schools, especially those in the final year of the public junior and senior high schools nationwide.

These documentaries are significant in their successful attempts to represent the bitterness in ritualized scenes that reflect on parent – adolescent – school relations. In these docufilms, common filmic practices featuring parent – adolescent relations are: Conversation with the child about unrealistic parental expectations of academic achievements; Buddhist and ancestral worshipping rituals for best luck for the exam; delivering home-made meals to their child in test-prep schools to indicate parental care; escorting them to the exam centre and gazing outside the campus. Common filmic practices featuring school – adolescent relations are: mandatory collective radio calisthenics; mandatory “class meetings”; militarized control of time allocation represented by daily curfew and cutting off power supply in night hours; oath-taking rallies; manipulated textbook contents for language, history and “political science.”

However, the essence of the mentality of bitterness in adolescents has been considerably diluted by the lack of historical consciousness in these cinematic representations. I will present how the notions of “keju” (imperial civil service examinations) and “gaokao” (college entrance examinations) are jumbled together in public agenda and thus influencing filming practices of bitterness; I will then revisit the bitterness of adolescents in face of the element of militarization in test-prep schools: Militarising adolescents in test-prep classrooms does not belong to China's indigenous characteristics, but is rather an imported element of Prussian militarism since the beginning of the 20th century; I will especially discuss the forming of adolescent bitterness as the outcome of power shift in the triangular relations since 1950: parents relinquish the time and rights to educate the adolescents, and transfer such time and rights to the public schools, as compared with those practices in imperial China. Such relinquishment of parental power intensified since 1977, the year of the recovery of the national college entrance exam during the Deng Xiaoping reign.

Saturday, September 8

Agency in Chinese Digital Art: An Analysis of How Lin Ke Gives a Voice to Digital Technology

Jori Snels

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

In China digital technology plays a central role in the everyday life of most Chinese citizens, who are becoming what Katherine Hayles (1999) has called 'post-human'. Human identities and practices have become integrated with the digital technologies that objects like smartphones provide. This development occurs globally, but is also culturally specific. However, although interaction with digital technologies has become ubiquitous, the digital objects often remain mute. In China, several digital artists are now exploring ways to give back agency to digital media in their art.

In this article I will analyze the work of Lin Ke (b. 1984), one of China's most notable digital artists who creates work in interaction with his computer. This interaction is characterized by what Timothy Morton (2013) has called a 'tuning' towards each other. In his artistic process, Lin Ke acknowledges the agency of his medium and lets the mutual affecting between them become the key topic of the artwork. Thus, the medium is allowed to be an equal conversation partner, rather than a passive tool. Through this practice, the artist explores the ontology of the blurring boundary between the virtual and the physical world and asks: what does it mean for an artwork to be or become digital?

In Lin Ke's art, digital media becomes a cultural technique (Siegert 2015) that constructs a new concept of the digital as an object, person, or space which is both virtual and physical at the same time. This strategy of re-constructing the digital through object agency is typical for the current practice of several Chinese digital artists. Using object-oriented ontology (Harman 2011; Morton 2013) as a theoretical framework, this article studies the practice and work of Lin Ke as a case study.

Bio

Jori Snels is a graduate of the Art Studies research master (MPhil) at the University of Amsterdam and a research-assistant at Amsterdam Center for Globalisation Studies (ACGS). She wrote a Master's thesis about digital art in China and is currently working on a research project about the imagination and construction of the future in Chinese science fiction film and digital art. In the past, she has published on Cao Fei's artwork *Same Old, Brand New* in the peer-reviewed journal *Art and the Public Sphere* and on alternative art practices in the GDR in the peer-reviewed journal *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*.