

MEMORY AND THE WITNESS IN CHINESE LANGUAGE CINEMA

Gilmorehill Centre, University of Glasgow

Saturday 28th January 2012, 9.30am – 6.15pm

With the release of films such as Hu Jie's *Though I Am Gone* (2007), Wang Bing's *Fengming: A Chinese Memoir* (2007) and Jia Zhangke's *24 City* (2008), there seems to have been a growth of interest in recent years in the relationship between film, memory and the notion of witnessing in Chinese Language Cinema. The aim of this symposium is to explore this trend in relation to work produced in the People's Republic, Hong Kong, Taiwan and diasporic China through documentary filmmaking, fiction film and video art.

This symposium has been jointly organised by the Department of Theatre, Film and Television at the University of Glasgow and Ricefield Chinese Arts and Cultural Centre as part of Takeaway China 速视中国, a festival of film and photography from China held annually in Glasgow.



PROGRAMME

9.30am – 10am	Registration and Coffee/Tea
10am – 10.10am	Welcome address: Professor Jane Duckett, Director of the Confucius Institute (University of Glasgow)
10.10am – 11.30am	Keynote presentation: Professor Chris Berry (Goldsmiths) Film, Memory and Agency: Everyday Life and Fashion during China's Cultural Revolution (followed by Q&A)
11.30am – 12.30pm	Wang Xiaolu (Beijing Film Academy) Cinema, Democracy and Self-Authorization: 20 years of Independent Cinema in China (followed by Q&A)
12.30pm – 1.30pm	Lunch
1.30pm – 2pm	Introduction by filmmaker Lee Ming-Yu (University of Glasgow) and screening of his short film: Time Variations (2006) (followed by Q&A)
2pm – 4pm	Panel Discussion (followed by Q&A) - Dr Felicia Chan (University of Manchester) Memory and Witness in 24 City: Jia Zhangke's Cosmopolitan Cinema - Dr Ming-Yeh Rawnsley (University of Leeds) Memory of Coloniality or Witness of Modernity: Taiwan Cinema's Japanese Connection - Dr Julian Ward (University of Edinburgh) Memories of a More Innocent Age: The Nostalgic Style of Zhang Yimou's Under the Hawthorn Tree
4.00pm	Coffee/Tea Break
4.15pm	Closing Remarks: Dr Dimitris Eleftheriotis, Head of Theatre, Film and Television (University of Glasgow)
5pm	Film Screening (Andrew Stewart Cinema) Though I am Gone (dir. Hu Jie, 2007, 68 mins)



INVITED SPEAKERS

Professor Chris Berry is Professor of Film and Television Studies at Goldsmiths. He has published widely on Chinese cinema – most recently *The New Chinese Documentary Movement: For the Public Record* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), which he co-edited with Lu Xinyu and Lisa Rofel. His work centres on Chinese cinema in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and diasporic China, as well as Chinese television, independent video documentary, new media and queer Asian cinema; he is primarily interested in cinema's role in the production of national, transnational, and local cultures and identities.

Wang Xiaolu is an independent critic and writer based in Beijing. His articles have been published in China's influential newspapers and magazines including *Beijing Daily*, *The Economic Observer* and *Film Art*. His book *Film and Syndrome of Times* on independent Chinese film was published by Flower City Publishing House in 2009. Wang is currently a PhD candidate at the Beijing Film Academy researching Chinese film history and is also an independent curator and the founder of Beijing New Youth Film Festival. Recent projects include curating the China Independent Film Festival (Nanjing) in 2010 and 2011.

Lee Ming-Yu graduated from the Graduate Institute for Radio, Television, and Film, Shih Hsin University (Taipei, Taiwan) in 2008. He is an independent filmmaker, photographer and editor having directed several experimental shorts including *001-ing*, *Time Variations*, and the biographical diary film *Going Home* and his work deals with the relationship between home movies, experimental film and questions of identity. Lee has recently begun a PhD on amateur film the Department of Theatre, Film and Television at the University of Glasgow.
(<http://leemingyu.myweb.hinet.net>)

Dr Felicia Chan is RCUK Fellow in Film, Media and Transnational Cultures, Manchester University and co-founder of UK Chinese Film Forum. She recently co-edited *Genre in Asian Film and Television* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) with Angelina Karpovich and Xin Zhang. Her main area of research is in transnational and transcultural cinema, and cosmopolitanism. Her current research focuses on cultural translatability and literacy, and the role of international film festivals.

Dr Ming-Yeh Rawnsley is Research Fellow at the University of Leeds. Her research interests include the media and democratisation in Greater China, identity issues in Taiwan and media representations of history, culture and politics in East Asia. Her monograph *Culture and Democratization in Taiwan: Cinema, Theatre and Social Change* is due to be published by Routledge in 2012.

Dr Julian Ward is Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies attached to the Asian Studies department of the University of Edinburgh. He is Associate Editor of the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, co-editor of *The Chinese Cinema Book* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan and BFI: London, 2011) with Song Hwee Lim and author of *Xu Xiake (1587–1641): The Art of Travel Writing* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), a study of China's foremost travel writer of the imperial period.



ABSTRACTS

Film, Memory and Agency: Everyday Life and Fashion during China's Cultural Revolution - Professor Chris Berry

As leading public intellectual and Tsinghua University Professor Wang Hui has pointed out, the legitimacy of market socialism in today's China is built on the repudiation of the Cultural Revolution "decade of chaos" (1966-1976). Documentary films like Hu Jie's *Though I Am Gone* have been building a vital civil archive of testimonials about some of the more traumatic events of the Mao era. But what about everyday life? This talk presents research I conducted with Zhang Shujuan in Summer of 2011 into film and fashion during the Cultural Revolution. Using film clips to trigger memories and group interviews, we found a complex picture emerged of how people used clothing to differentiate themselves from others in an era when anything as "bourgeois" as fashion supposedly did not exist, and how they used cinema as a source of ideas and inspirations. From this, a more complex picture of agency and everyday life fears and pleasures amidst the constraints and passionate excitement of the era emerges.

Cinema, Democracy and Self-Authorization: 20 years of Independent Cinema in China - Wang Xiaolu

The writing of Chinese ancient history used to be specifically authorised by the emperor, as a result it was often falsified and distorted. As Lu Xun once said, true history only exists in anecdotes written by independent individuals. Prior to 1990, images as a medium of history were under strict control by the government, however, over the last two decades, independent cinema in China has steadily grown. While in the early 1990s, filmmakers working outside of the system found it difficult to promote and distribute the films they made, after 2000, the situation began to change as more private screening spaces such as bars became more widely used, and the increased availability of digital technology gave filmmakers greater access to equipment. This allowed a true democratic and independent cinema to emerge which records a history of the Chinese people's spiritual world and social development. Personal memories and writings are an important resource in understanding China's cultural patterns and political forms. While in the last twenty years, the pursuit of truth has become the most important claim for independent cinema, today, people have become less interested and unsatisfied with this claim and are hoping that cinema can be more than just a medium that objectively records; they want a more abundant form of cinematic expression.

Memory and Witness in 24 City: Jia Zhangke's Cosmopolitan Cinema - Dr. Felicia Chan

Jia Zhangke's *24 City* is structured around the fictional narrativisation of the memories of several generations of workers in the wake of the decommissioning of their factory as it makes way for a new condominium development. As their stories unfold, these memories of individual lives coalesce into national histories, fragmenting and dissolving while recombining anew through the mediation of the camera-witness. This paper explores the film's mediation of individual and national memories through the form of cinema as witness, the ambivalence of which I argue takes us beyond the notion of 'cosmopolitan memory', a concept Levy and Sznajder define as the body of collective memories emerging from events so traumatic they



transcend national memories into global dimensions. I argue that Jia's cinema holds in tension, through the presence of the camera-witness, a multiplicity of perspectives that simultaneously resist fragmentation (into endless proliferations of difference) and coalescence (eradicating difference altogether) that puts cinema squarely in dialogue with some of the key debates in studies of cosmopolitanism.

Memory of Coloniality or Witness of Modernity: Taiwan Cinema's Japanese Connection - Dr. Ming-Yeh Rawnsley

This paper will discuss how the representation of Japanese colonialism has changed in Taiwan cinema in the past seven decades. Prior to the 1980s, Taiwan cinema often portrayed Japanese aggression towards Mainland China during the Sino-Japanese War but rarely dealt with the Japanese colonial rule on Taiwan in depth. During the era of democratization in the 1980s and especially after the lifting of martial law in 1987, local filmmakers began to reflect on what Japanese colonialism meant to Taiwan and the islanders. However, Taiwan's attempts to either disassociate with or to reclaim the Japanese colonial heritage is often relevant to its identity politics. In the martial law period, many Taiwanese had to negate their association with Japanese culture in order to validate their Chineseness. Yet while the People's Republic of China continues to threaten Taiwan with military forces, others on Taiwan are moving to reaffirm the island's Japanese past in order to distinguish the Taiwanese identity from the Chinese identity. By using *Strawman* (Daocao ren, 1987, dir. Wang Tong), *Viva Tonal* (Tiaowu shidai, 2003, dir. Guo Zhen-di and Jian Wei-si) and *Cape No.7* (Hai jiao qi hao, 2008, Wei De-sheng) as case-studies, this paper argues that the changing discourse of colonialism onscreen may bear little relevance to colonial memory. Rather, what it represents may be the younger generation's eagerness to embrace modernity.

Memories of a More Innocent Age: The Nostalgic Style of Zhang Yimou's *Under the Hawthorn Tree* - Dr. Julian Ward

Even after the outpouring of films in the late 1970s, which presented the officially approved verdict of the Cultural Revolution, the traumas of the period continued to attract the attention of leading Chinese filmmakers. In the 1990s Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang and Chen Kaige all courted controversy with their respective takes on the impact of the years of turmoil on individual citizens. More recently, Zhang Yimou returned to the still contentious topic with *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, which was released in Mainland China in 2010. However, rather than presenting an account of the political and social upheavals of the time, Zhang's offering is a pointedly simple tale of the romance between two high school students sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants. This paper will show how the film's style consciously evoked the style of Chinese films of the late 1970s, notably the 1979 melodrama *Xiao Hua*, which featured the hugely popular female stars Liu Xiaoqing and Joan Chen, thus stirring nostalgia for the days before Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms changed China so dramatically.



REGISTRATION INFORMATION

This symposium is free of charge, but as places are limited all delegates must register by Friday, 20th January. For further information and to reserve a place please contact Philippa Lovatt at p.lovatt.1@research.gla.ac.uk

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