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Introduction

The ticket cost was NT\$250, and I was one of fewer than a dozen people watching the film. The theater was relatively small, with about eight rows of seats, each with fifteen or so seats, and I could easily feel all the empty seats. When the lights dimmed, the two *chukou* (exit) signs glared conspicuously in green from above the doors flanking the screen. The soundtrack crackled as the volume was turned up to an almost unbearable level, which is characteristic of the theaters in this intimate outpost of Taipei City, known for its hurried replications of Taipei cosmopolitanism. Outside the theater were streets crowded with shops and cars, peddling a middle-brow cosmopolitan stew of survival and pleasure: imported goods, local food, sidewalk stalls, inexpensive thrills and services. If theaters in Taipei set the volume high to enhance the thrilling effect of the films, theaters in Chung-ho set it higher. Chung-ho theaters do not have the righteousness of Taipei theaters and cover up this lack by anxiously blaring at the theatergoers in exaggerated imi-

tation of the capital city proper, while competing with the hustle and bustle of the streets outside.

The poor sound quality unexpectedly crystallized to the ear the many different accents of the Mandarin spoken by the actors and actresses, breaking down the fourth wall of illusion even before the camera obscura of illusion had a chance to establish itself. It was a real challenge to be convinced by a love story in so many accents, accents that inevitably foreground the differences and tensions among those geopolitical spaces the accents come from—in this case, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Malaysia. It was also a challenge to be persuaded by the highly aestheticized and gravity-defying kung fu sequences that were already unrealistic in themselves but were then accompanied by the anachronistic tonalities and vocabularies in the lines delivered by the actors and actresses.

The so-called Chinese-language cinema in general, and the martial arts genre in particular, has largely been a story of standard Mandarin spoken with “perfect” pronunciation and enunciation.¹ Actors who speak with accents are usually dubbed over so that the illusion of a unified and coherent “Chinese” community is invented and sustained. Earlier Taiwanese-language cinema was very much a ghetto unto itself, and Cantonese-language cinema from Hong Kong was routinely dubbed in Mandarin when exported to other Chinese-speaking communities. It was therefore jarring to hear so many accents in this particular movie, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, to the extent that one was led to wonder whether the director, Ang Lee, had made a mistake or whether there was not enough money in the budget to dub the voices. More crucially, the accents break down the idea that the characters live in a coherent universe where relationships are inevitable, interfering with a compelling development of the diegetic narrative within the film, per the conventions of the genre. When the lead actor, Chow Yun-fat, mumbles his lofty ideals of love and loyalty in a heavy Hong Kong-style, Cantonese-saturated Mandarin, the classical lyricism of his words stands in stark contrast to what Mandarin speakers would see as an awkward delivery, not to mention that the diction of the presumed classical lyricism belongs to contemporary Taiwan-style melodrama and romance fiction.

The dissonance among the different accents seemed to parallel, in a strangely paradoxical way, the cacophony of the streets. So many voices, so many different kinds of noise; but amid the din, life lives and life continues, despite inauthenticity and incoherence. A copy of the metropolis it will never become, Chung-ho



1 Michelle Yeoh (from Malaysia).



2 Chang Chen (from Taiwan).



3 Zhang Ziyi (from China).



4 Chow Yun-fat (from Hong Kong).

does not seem to care one way or the other. Besides, the city's majority populace speaks Taiwanese, or more precisely Minnan, rather than Mandarin, and its political allegiance leans clearly toward Taiwan independence, again unlike the Mandarin-heavy Taipei.

Inauthenticity and incoherence aptly describe the film and the setting and expose the illusion that such martial arts films must necessarily reference an eternal China and an essential Chineseness. The martial arts genre in film is closely related to the literary genre of martial arts fiction, which is often pseudohistorical but usually classical in terms of diction and syntax, and both forms, ironically, have developed and were perfected in places outside China. The classics of the film genre were produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s and 1970s, when China was an isolated communist state, even though the origin of the genre dates back to the early twentieth century in China. In the context of the 1960s and 1970s, Taiwan and Hong Kong's relationship to the so-called classical Chinese culture

had paradoxically been less ambivalent than it became in the ensuing decades. “Classical Chinese culture” was one of the legitimizing mechanisms for the Guomindang government’s rule of Taiwan—the logic being that the Republic of China on Taiwan, not communist China, was the preserver of the authentic Chinese culture, and by that, the Chinese mainlanders in Taiwan were culturally superior to the local Taiwanese, the Hakkas, and the aboriginals. As for Hong Kong, British colonialism engendered nostalgia for China among Hong Kongers. With China safely tucked away behind the “iron curtain,” Hong Kong and Taiwan were free to claim their versions of authentic Chineseness through nostalgic reconstructions of classical Chinese culture in popular media. Even though a degree of ambivalence existed and contradictory implications of nostalgia, reinvention, and resistance to the continental center of China proper could be detected (especially the anticommunist variety), the politically motivated valorization of the nostalgic mode helped the martial arts genre to serve as a privileged form for the fantasy representation of classical Chinese culture. Against this genealogy of fantastic projections of authenticity, then, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* enters the scene with such scandalous disrespect that theatergoers in various communities that speak Sinitic languages were aghast with disbelief when the film first opened. There has been no other martial arts film brandishing so many accents and so daringly risking the displeasure of audiences whose cinematic expectations of the genre have not changed with the times. As can be expected, the film had poor box office showings across these communities, until it won the award for best foreign film at the Oscars and opened for a second time. The Hollywood validation of the film indicates a transpacific sphere of cultural politics within which the filmic negotiations and transactions among China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are played out in political economical terms.² For now, let me dwell on the important implications of the linguistic dissonance.

The linguistic dissonance of the film registers the heterogeneity of Sinitic languages as well as their speakers living in different locales. What it engenders and validates, ultimately, is the heteroglossia of what I call the Sinophone: a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries. What the film makes audible, hence also visible, is confirmation of the continuous existence of the Sinophone communities as significant sites of cultural production in a complex set of relations with such constructs as “China,” “Chinese,” and “Chineseness.”

To be more precise, the Chinese language spoken in the film is the Mandarin, or *putonghua*, also known as Hanyu, the language of the Han people, the majority ethnicity in China, where even by official count there are fifty-five other ethnicities (or what the Chinese government calls “nationalities”) other than the Han, but Hanyu is enforced as the standard language. We hear differently accented Hanyu on the screen through the voices of the four lead actors and actresses. Multiple accents for one standard language reveal a more powerful message in that they indicate living languages other than the standard one, whose hegemonic projection of uniformity is subverted through a straightforward representation that refuses to cover up dissonance with uniformity. If the film represents a certain temporally ambiguous “China” as the space of action and narrative, it is, like Chung-ho City, a copy, rendered with a fracturing of standardness and authenticity. Chineseness is here accented variously across geopolitical borders, and the film jolts the audience into a defamiliarized, alienated reception as jarring as the loud and uncomfortable sound blaring from the theater speakers in Chung-ho. The Sinophone may be a cruder or finer copy, and most importantly, difficult to consume, since successful consumption implies flawless suturing from the perspective of either monolingual *putonghua* (Beijing standard), monological Chineseness, or a monolithic China and Chinese culture. The Sinophone frustrates easy suturing, in this case, while foregrounding the value of difficulty, difference, and heterogeneity.

The important point here is that the copy is never the original, but a form of translation. It may desire to be the original, or to compete with the original, but this desire always already predetermines its distance from the original as a separate, translated entity. Translation is not an act of one-to-one equivalence, but an event that happens among multiple agents, among multiple local and hegemonic cultures, registering an uncertainty and a complexity that require historically specific decodings. At the conjuncture of the end of British colonialism in Hong Kong, the emergence and codification of independence consciousness in Taiwan, the rise of China as an economic and political behemoth, the ever-increasing intensity of U.S.-directed transpacific cultural traffic, and the gradually enhanced visibility of immigrant artists and filmmakers in the United States who reformulate their Chineseness, the spheres of cultural transaction and negotiation shift fluidly and the accents of Sinophone articulations have become more audible as well as visible.

If *Chung-ho* is a copy of a metropolis, the film presents a corrupted copy of an empire that breaks down the illusion of wholeness and coherence. Representation as copy—the old theory of mimesis—here becomes the literal description of Sinophone cultural production, hence perhaps more intensely metarepresentational, more able to confront the flows of inauthenticity in the new borderless world, which might explain why the film was so popular in the United States. The central tension therefore emerges: while the Sinophone traces linguistic boundaries, as I will show in greater detail later in this introduction, Sinophone film and art as visual work open themselves to the global while simultaneously taking a varied stance toward what is known as “Chinese culture.” This makes it imperative that Sinophone visual practice be situated both locally and globally.

This tension between the linguistic and the visual is dramatized by the way *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was received in the United States. For those American audiences without any linguistic ability in Mandarin, their comprehension of the film was limited exclusively to the glossy Hollywood filmic style and English subtitles, both of which project, more seamlessly, the illusion of a coherent linguistic and cultural universe. The differentiation between what is Sinophone as the destandardization of Chineseness and what is Chinese as the exotic and beautiful foreign culture is largely lost at this level of perception and reception. The visual without specificity of linguistic determination, then, necessarily opens itself up to the possibility of translanguistic and transcommunity consumption. It is no wonder that the visual has increasingly become the forum and the tool to articulate identity struggles, a desired medium with an expansive reach and a wide appeal. Ang Lee’s Sinophone to Chineseness, then, is what his Chineseness is to his Americanness: in different contexts, his identitarian struggle is divergent. In this film, Sinophonic dissonance can be positioned against uniform Chineseness; but in his struggle against uniform Americanness, his alternative appears constricted by stereotypical Chineseness, rather than challenging it, as shown in his other films such as *The Wedding Banquet*. Herein lies the transnational political economy of representation that often reduces complexity and multiplicity that appear only through multilayered differentiation by projecting a particular logic of power, subjecting a national subject (Taiwanese) to minoritization (becoming Taiwanese American).

In the act of representation and translation (from one medium to another, from the center to the margin, from China to the Sinophone, and the other way around), multiple contexts therefore come into play, which may easily be erased

by the global. The global asserts its preeminence as the largest and the most important context; thereby it can easily erase the geopolitical specificities of the Sinophone and its intra-area dynamics. To assert heterogeneity and multiplicity, as the reading of *Crouching Tiger* above requires, however, cannot be the end point of an analysis or an argument (as is the case for some contemporary theories). Heterogeneity as an abstract concept can itself be easily universalized to avoid the hard work of having to sort it through and become instead contained by a benign logic of global multiculturalism. To activate heterogeneity and multiplicity therefore means, above all, being historical and situated, because not all multiplicities are multiple in the same way, and not all heterogeneities are heterogeneous in the same way. The question is one of both content and structure, which are sensitive to multiangulated overdeterminations by such categories as history, politics, culture, and economy, both locally and globally.

To use the Freudian notion of overdetermination in this context is to suggest that just as the libido and the unconscious are a result of plural causes, cultural formations in Sinophone places are attributable to a multiplicity of factors, which “may be organized in different meaningful sequences, each having its own coherence at a particular level of interpretation.”³ As Arif Dirlik puts it, “Overdetermination is in fact nothing more than the sensible recognition that a variety of causes—a variety, not infinity—enters into the making of all historical events, and that each ingredient in historical experience can be counted on to have a variety—not infinity—of functions.”⁴

Raymond Williams has also defined overdetermination simply as “determination by multiple factors,” as opposed to the problematic economism of singular determination. As such, overdetermination can help better analyze “historically lived situations and the authentic complexities of practice.”⁵ Recognizing both continuous and discontinuous multiplicity, Simone de Beauvoir furthermore offered the following in a different context: “Without raising the question of historical comprehension and causality it is enough to recognize the presence of intelligible sequences within temporal forms so that forecasts and consequently action may be possible.”⁶ Beauvoir connects the possibility of historical understanding with subjectivity, which makes action possible. The coinage and recognition of the category called the Sinophone is itself then a form of practice and action, registering “intelligible sequences,” in this case, within both temporal and spatial forms.

The pull between different contexts in trying to analyze and comprehend a

visual work that is linguistically determined to be Sinophone is also where the challenge of the Sinophone lies in an increasingly globalizing world. The seduction of visual practice as an identity practice, as Ang Lee's film has shown, comes with its own pitfalls. It is because, more than any time before in human history, our contemporary moment marks the culmination, and perhaps final victory, of the continuous ascendance of the visual as the primary means of identification.

VISUALITY IN GLOBAL CAPITALISM

To be historical in the study of visual culture means history on different scales, global, local, regional, interregional, and all other possible intermediaries in between and betwixt. But no matter how large or small the scale, particular manifestations of global capitalism at the contemporary historical juncture constitute the temporal matrix in which visual culture is situated. The specific temporal marking of this phase of global capitalism is in broad step with new developments in the formation of culture in its culminating turn to visibility. Stuart Hall has remarked how global mass culture is dominated by the image which can cross and recross linguistic frontiers effortlessly and rapidly.⁷ For Fredric Jameson, the "cultural turn" is the turn to images, where the image itself has become the commodity, and where the video is the contemporary art form par excellence.⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell has coined a different term, the "pictorial turn," to describe the rule of mass media in the contemporary world, emphasizing that the turn is "not a return to naïve mimesis, copy of correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial 'presence,' but rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality."⁹ In regards to non-Western cultural products, the turn to visibility has augured an unprecedented degree of translatability and transmissivity, as translinguistic visual works and dubbed or subtitled films seem to cross national markets with greater facility than ever. The rise and popularity of Asian cinema in the global scene and the success of Asian-inspired cinema in Hollywood are testimony to the notion that visual work seems to have a lower linguistic threshold and hence is more easily decipherable and consumable across geocultural spaces. Some have even claimed that film has become the lingua franca of our time.¹⁰

But the recognition of the visual turn has been at best a begrudging one. The general enthusiasm for new technologies of visual representation such as photog-

raphy and film since the early twentieth century provoked great anxiety on the part of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, whose critique of the sovereign subject was correlated to a critique of what he called the “pictorialization of the world.” Pictorialization of the world involves distancing of the world but at the same time a manipulation, control, and conquest of the world through representation.¹¹ Jacques Derrida’s critique of the ontology of presence can also be seen as an expression of anxiety toward the visual. Even though Jacques Lacan frequently utilized visual metaphors and discussed the importance of vision in the mirror stage for constituting the self, he also gave it a largely negative interpretation (as opposed to Freud), emphasizing its blind spots rather than sight and clarity. Arguing that the specular identity constituted during the mirror stage is presocial, illusory, narcissistic, pre-symbolic, and has aggressive potential, Lacan stressed the notion of *méconnaissance* (misrecognition, misprision) to foreground the limits of vision.¹² From Heidegger to Lacan to Derrida, the linguistic turn in European philosophy is solidified, and this linguistic turn was linked to a denigration of vision, befitting their opposition to Enlightenment humanism, and a clear valorization of writing as the best medium for knowledge and representation. In the passage quoted earlier, Mitchell was clearly trying to construct a picture theory *after* poststructuralist linguistic turn (hence his insistence that “presence” cannot be recuperated), and his theory is that which works with, rather than against, poststructuralism.

Many contemporary Western thinkers share the suspicion of the visual and take different notions from poststructuralism to elaborate a contemporary visual theory. If the modern society was the society of spectacle for Guy Debord and a society of surveillance for Michel Foucault, the postmodern has, according to Jonathan Crary, merged surveillance with spectacle to the point that they can no longer be distinguished from each other.¹³ What comes with the pictorial turn is not only a more effectively sutured and disciplined society, but also the fear that visual images may eventually destroy their creators and manipulators.¹⁴ The profound distrust of the centrality of vision—coined as *ocularcentrism*—by earlier thinkers continues to this day in different permutations.¹⁵ In postmodernity, the society of spectacle has given way not only to surveillance but, more pertinently, to a society of simulacra (Jean-François Lyotard); rational perspectivalism has given way to abstract expressionism; and mechanical reproduction (Walter Benjamin) to electronic reproduction to the extent that the body disappears, and even labor has become electronic and digitized (Paul Virilio).¹⁶

These anxieties culminate in Virilio's alarming notion of the "vision machine," which, with its computerized digital power, automatizes perception and industrializes vision, leading not only to the complete displacement of the human eye but also to a scenario akin to the one in George Orwell's *1984* where the seeing screen functions as an all-pervasive surveillance apparatus.¹⁷ Images can be embodied and disembodied; they project not a reality but operate within simulacra; they dissolve recognizable perspectives and, by implication, subjectivities; they reproduce infinitely, rapidly, and travel beyond boundaries; and in the end, they may destroy even us. Confronted with the almighty image that oppresses us in so many ways, Euro-American intellectuals and scholars have more or less articulated a culture of lament. Barbara Maria Stafford has criticized this lament as a different kind of logocentrism, where the cultural bias of the superiority of writing has devalued visual forms of communication.¹⁸ For Martin Jay to write a six-hundred-page book, *Downcast Eyes*, critiquing the critique of occularcentrism is surely also a symptom of contemporary reevaluation of visuality.

Whereas Euro-American intellectuals have largely dwelled on the function of the image within global capitalist ideology—which is usually its subtext—as its latest spokesperson or deputy, a different visual literacy and understanding of the visual is palpable in various "minor" sites across the world, if "minor" is simply defined to suggest resistant practices and noncanonical perspectives. Deborah Poole has noted, for instance, the coexistence of two different regimes of visuality: visuality as the ideological and discursive instrument of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism and visuality as an open semiotic field capable of coding, recoding, and decoding for resistant purposes.¹⁹ A frequently referenced theory in the second vein is Roland Barthes's notion of the punctum: that accidental, poignant detail or mark that "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow," and "pierces," "pricks," and "bruises" the viewer.²⁰ Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock similarly argued that visual images are situated at the point "where the will to know and the resultant relations of power are furrowed by the more unpredictable . . . plays of fascination, curiosity, dread, desire, and horror."²¹ Visual images, in specific practices, can exceed the containment of ideology as well as global capitalism. Alternatively, we can draw on David Harvey from a different context to suggest that hope can be located in the way visual culture can appropriate forces of capital rather than the other way around.²² Finally, a generalist theory of the virtue of images and visuality by Barbara Stafford would claim, via cognitive sci-

ence, that visibility is the metaphor par excellence for intelligence, and visual perception is the constitutive form of knowledge in the present.”²³

These familiar dichotomies about vision and visibility cut across class, gender, and race positions in predictable ways. The dominant philosophical and intellectual discourses disparage the hegemony of visibility, and the resistant perspectives see potential in visibility as a medium for representing counterdiscourses as well as projecting desires and fantasies of the oppressed.²⁴ Similar dichotomous views have been expressed about most all representational media, as well as different practices of everyday life. For instance, literature can embody hegemonic views or literature can be counterhegemonic; consumption is sutured by capitalism and reinforces the relations of production or consumption is an exercise of agency, however small, and so forth. What is clear from these predictable dichotomies is that they cannot rest on any essentialism of a certain medium (writing or visibility) or a certain practice (consumption or production) as inherently hegemonic or resistant, but the specific and contextual usage of the medium and practice of everyday life determine where in the spectrum of hegemony and resistance it lies. As the particular practice and usage of a medium relies heavily on local and other contexts for its signifying function, the geopolitical, spatial, as well as historical contexts of a given articulation become necessary knowledge to understand, not the infinite but the necessary, elements to different overdeterminations in visual representation. The problem is not that visibility is inherently bad or good, but that there are different functions and practices of visibility with different political, ideological, and cultural meanings, which also shift in different contexts.

What detractors of theories of globalization have often neglected is precisely the different levels or scales of contexts other than the romanticized local or the demonized global, as if globalization still predominantly happens at the level of the nation-state as its boundary marker so that it has something recognizable to destroy. What makes contemporary capitalism truly global, however, is not that nation-states are becoming decentered (after all, nation-states are a relatively new invention), but that capitalism itself has become decentered. Contemporary capitalism is largely abstracted from Eurocentrism and the nation, and has spread to all corners of the world, where the units that matter are no longer just nations but also those “regions below the nation,” as well as whatever units of place that are “on the pathways of capital.”²⁵ Diaspora has thus predictably become prevalent, while intranational, nonnational, and other transnational units have become vis-

ible as important spaces for the movement of capital. It is not that this fragmentation of contexts did not exist prior to the contemporary phase of capitalism, but that the degree and intensity of the scattering of capitalism is unprecedented in global capitalism. With this scattering, we are in need of different scales of analyses and attentiveness, far from the kind of universalist, cognitive mapping on the one hand and the particularistic rhetoric of area studies on the other. It is a truism that between the global and the local, the universal and the particular, there are many more layers, scales, and contexts below, between, within, and outside of geographical and cultural units than we have allowed ourselves to recognize. In the *longue durée* of history, certain background factors may structure events without necessarily causing them;²⁶ but these factors constitute, along with those that can be traced as more direct causes for specific events, the overdeterminations of history.

To situate visuality within this unprecedented scattering of capitalism is, first of all, to emphasize that images and other visual products travel and scatter with ever greater intensity and speed, and travel to a large extent alongside and with capital. From the Taiwan-Hong Kong-China region, they travel back and forth across the Taiwan Strait following specific routes of capital's travel, and they travel around the world, crossing oceans, especially the Pacific, to reach the immigrant communities in the United States and elsewhere. The speed and intensity of image travel exemplify the compression of space and time characterizing contemporary global capitalism in the most concentrated and representative fashion. Satellite television and the Internet transmit local broadcasting to Sinophone communities in real time, and, whether one is a frequent flyer or not, it is possible to live virtually in multiple social contexts at the same time. In the mean time, capital, transported either as hard currency or through electronic and virtual means, forms, re-forms, and de-forms communities from the aboriginal villages in Taiwan, to "flexible citizens" carrying multiple passports in the Bay Area, to those living in "monster houses" in Vancouver.²⁷ A Taiwan artist may at the same time be a Taiwanese American (Ang Lee); a Hong Kong filmmaker may be simultaneously British, Chinese, and Hong Konger (if not Vietnamese at some point, such as Tsui Hark); an immigrant Chinese artist (Hung Liu) claims to be both Chinese and Chinese American, appropriating both sets of histories and cultures freely and with ease. Taiwanese business expatriates in southern China waver between their business interests (required to be on good terms with the Chinese govern-

ment and strategically to comply with the “One China” ideology) and their Taiwanese nationalism (against the Chinese government) and are forced to be flexible in order to accommodate both. They live and work in China and watch satellite television programs beamed from Taiwan to quench their longings for home, and their demands for convenient travel between Taiwan and China propelled both sides to temporally open up the skies for direct flights during Chinese New Year’s holiday season.

Second, as I have suggested above, visibility situated in global capitalism also means that contexts are multiple and that crucial contexts often reside in unexpected places, because images and other visual products go places and signify different things in different places, and thus literally exercise what I would call “signification in action” as well as “signification in transit.” In Mitchell’s words, “images have legs.” They go somewhere, they are living things in the social, and they often go on to unforeseen places leading to unforeseen associations and connections. As they travel with or without their legs, they may acquire and lose some aspects, and their meanings inevitably “refunction” in new contexts to engender place-specific associations.²⁸ They produce, in other words, not just difference, but also similarity; not just incommensurability, but also new combinations and connections. If vision is an analogical form of cognition, then traveling images would trigger imaginative leaps to engender new affinities as well as new discords between two terms previously not related to each other, thus making possible multiple fields of meaning.²⁹ Effectively, terms of relationship exceed binarisms and dichotomies.

Third, to situate images in global capitalism is to recognize the paradox that images are easy targets for commodification and commodity fetishism, as they produce surplus value facily and effortlessly. But in trading on “values of authenticity, locality, history, culture, collective memories and tradition” in what I have called “global multiculturalism” elsewhere,³⁰ commodified visual culture can unwittingly serve as the site of alternative imaginations beyond metropolitan ideologies. The logic of this paradox works in two ways: (1) Culturalism can be the object of commodification par excellence, but politically productive appropriations of commodified culture are sometimes necessary survival tactics for marginalized peoples. Capitalist appropriation and artistic political creativity can occur simultaneously in different combinations. Not to recognize as much but to hold up an ideal of class-based, noninstrumentalizable art is to risk the danger of purism

as well as elitism. (2) It is not that commodified visual culture is the prime medium for producing authenticities, but that the commodified production of authenticities puts the notion of authenticity under erasure, so that narrowly identitarian, ethnocentric, and culturalist assertions of authenticity are exposed to be problematic. For marginalized peoples, challenges to authenticity to continental and metropolitan cultural hegemonies are often articulated precisely in the commercial arena through commercial means. Films such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, even though they work largely through and within Hollywood commercialism and the political economy that underlies it, nonetheless allow for noncentrist and non-standardized articulations of “Chineseness” against China-centrism. The balance sheet of a visual work’s meaning, function, and value needs to be calibrated carefully, and it must include multiple contexts across, within, below, and beyond the nation. The visual work, in this sense, may signify completely contradictory or even oppositional meanings when it refunctions in different contexts.

Fourth, it is not far-fetched to recognize that there are new locations of value in global capitalism due to the intensity of the visual mode of production and consumption. On the one hand, production of visual media is continuously on the rise, from film, television, art, the Internet, and so forth, and an unusually large number of people are involved in such lines of work. Hong Kong cinema practically functions as a national cinema in quantity, quality, and stylistic distinctiveness, for instance, to rival Bollywood and Hollywood. But Bombay and Hollywood are cities in large nation-states, while Hong Kong, until and even after 1997, was very much a city unto itself. On the other hand, the unprecedented saturation of visual media in our daily lives has fundamentally altered our relationship with time. If, as the capitalist truism goes, time equals value, we are spending more time than ever on consuming visual work and are thus bestowing it with more value. Ludwig Wittgenstein has put it very simply: “The human gaze has a power of conferring value on things; but it makes them cost more too.”³¹

The value of visual media is assessed by the quantity of its viewers, and so time spent watching a soap opera equals advertising dollars for the makers of the soap opera and so forth. Jonathan Beller, for instance, has even argued for an attention theory of value, by which he means that human attention is productive of value. As cinema colonizes the unconscious further, those films that enthrall the spectators’ attention acquire more value as well as more social, ideological, and even political viability.³² Spectatorship, to put it in a different light, is a form of

affective labor that in turn influences performances of subjectivity. Other than economic value, surplus values of sociality, ideological consensus, and (de)politicization are manufactured in the process and need to be calculated. If the final form of commodity fetishism is the image as spectacle, and the accumulation of capital has now given way to the accumulation of images and spectacles,³³ then we need to register the new object in Marx's classic notion of commodity fetishism that obscures relations of labor by projecting an illusory value-relation between things.³⁴ Within global capitalism, the image commodity has itself become an object of value, its fragmentary propensity translating seamlessly into the synecdochic nature of the fetish, and thus the illusory value-relation between things is no longer illusory but actual. The *human* relations of labor remain displaced and obscured in this process; it is the manner in which and the medium through which the displacement occurs that have changed in the global culture of images.

This brings us to the question of political economy of visibility in global capitalism that insists on the power differentials in the production, consumption, and accumulation of images. Who has the capital to produce, who has the leisure to consume, and who has the ability to accumulate—these are inevitable questions of political economy, particularly since global capitalism has deepened and expanded the colonial process through neocolonial practices that seemingly appear less threatening than old colonialisms. Fracturing and complicating the West/non-West neocolonial relationship are various regional subcolonialisms that operate through such lofty claims as shared culture and history (China to Taiwan), or sheer capitalist expansionism (Taiwan to Southeast Asia or Hong Kong to China) within this Sinophone region. Poole's proposal for a "visual economy" is very useful in this regard. She notes four important points as constituting the field of visual economy: (1) Visual images are part of a comprehensive organization of people, ideas, and objects. (2) The organization of the field of vision has much to do with social relationships, inequality, and power. (3) The organization bears relationship to the political and class structure of society as well as the production and exchange of the material goods as commodities. (4) Visual images are globally trafficked objects.³⁵ To insist on visual economy in global capitalism, then, is not only to continue to critique old forms of power wearing new disguises, but also to critique new forms of power produced by new values manufactured by the hypervisuality of our time.

Sinophone visual culture partakes of multiple visual economies in different

contexts within, between, and beyond the nation, tracing the footsteps of histories of migration and movement of Sinitic-language-speaking peoples across the seas to various parts of the world. It contests existing values and imaginations while producing new ones; it struggles with layered complicities as well as resistances. With its visual form, it travels more readily across boundaries; with its linguistic particularities, it remains local in important ways. This dialectic between the visual and the linguistic spells out the tension among the global and the local as well as their intermediaries, making it necessary to situate each Sinophone visual cultural expression historically and contextually to avoid both a facile dismissal and a naive celebration of the visual.

IDENTITY IN GLOBAL CAPITALISM

The primacy of the visual in global capitalism also suggests that the means of constructing and representing identities are more and more predominantly visual. In the broadest sense, identity is the way in which we perceive ourselves, and others perceive us, and is constituted by a dialectics of seeing and being seen. At the core, identity is therefore a question of representation and occurs in and through representation. At a time when various visual media have inundated our lives, visual mediation of identity may have acquired a fundamental status in the study of representation. Arguably, the historical nature of the resources with which identities are constructed and negotiated today lies in their heavily visual character. As print medium continues to lose ground, the visual turn marks the transition of a writing-based imagination to image-based imagination not only for such collective identities as national identity but also for individual identities. The medium, manner, and style in which national and other identities are imagined, in short, have undergone a profound transformation. Martin Jay correlates, for instance, Renaissance perspectivalism in art with the rational, Cartesian subject, the description-oriented, impressionist and Dutch oil paintings with the bourgeois subject in market economy, and the baroque vision that foregrounds “opacity, unreadability, and the indecipherability of the reality it depicts” with contemporary subjectivity.³⁶ Even though Jay’s identification of these three scopic regimes may be overly schematic, what is useful here is the historical impulse of theorizing that sees conjunctures between the mode of vision, the mode of subjectivity, and the mode of production. In this vein, vision’s historical character in the contempo-

rary moment will have to factor in technological advances in visual apparatuses (the camera, film, video, etc.) as well as developments in artistic genres such as installation and video art.

It is no wonder that the relationship between the eye and the “I,” and increasingly between the camera and the “I,” has emerged as one of the major theoretical issues in studies of visuality, using various combinations of psychoanalytic, Marxist, and poststructuralist approaches. Cases in point are Wendy Everett, who cites Benjamin’s notion of the optical unconscious opened up by the camera as heralding a new way of perception, R. Burnett’s argument that the camera eye increasingly stands for or stands in for the eye, Virilio’s “vision machine” mentioned above, as well as John Berger’s more general notion that seeing establishes one’s place in the world.³⁷ All that eyes can do, cannot do, and are usurped from doing—the gaze and the gazed-at (Freud’s can of sardines that looks back at the fisherman), the look, the glance, surveillance (from panopticon to artificial vision), seeing, observation, and visual pleasure—have thus become central, and perhaps even fetishized, topics of analysis.

To illustrate, among cultural studies, postcolonial studies, film studies, and psychoanalysis, one of the overlapping points of analysis is the structure of the gaze as a positional relationship of power in the constitution of one’s identity.³⁸ This structure is thoroughly infiltrated by desire, which Lacan has called the scopic drive. While the subject’s looking is limited, the gaze of the other is pervasive: “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.”³⁹ Tellingly, in Lacan’s schema, in the middle of the scopic field is the image or the screen, mediating the relationship between the gazer and the gazed-at.⁴⁰ The screen’s mediation brings a dialectics of recognition and misrecognition into play and can serve as an apt metaphor for the mediation of identities by what we see and how we are seen through the screens of various identity images and visual narratives in a visually saturated world. More pervasively, Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage in the imaginary, where the look into the mirror helps the child constitute its ego through (mis)recognition, has been appropriated and expropriated for the study of film and other visual technologies when it comes to the question of identity and subjectivity.

French film semiologist Christian Metz, for instance, applied Lacanian schema to the analysis of film to define film as “the scientific imaginary wishing to be symbolized,” simultaneously replicating imaginary ego-formation during the mirror

stage and transcending the imaginary stage to the symbolic stage (through the Oedipal structure of the gaze). What the cinema projects is a figure of lack, since the object seen is physically absent. This keeps desire in play, never fully fulfilled, but deferred. But the lack also shows that cinematic scopophilia is “unauthorized,” much like a child’s seeing the parents’ amorous play in an Oedipal triangulation of desire.⁴¹ Film spectatorship is hence analogical to the Oedipal process through which one becomes a social being in the symbolic. The spectator, in the process, engages in multiple levels of identification: identification with his own look (primary identification), with the characters (secondary identification), and with the camera (which is interactive with the second screen, the retina of the eye). In this scheme, cinema serves as the passage where the transition between the imaginary and the symbolic takes place within a changing structure of gaze and through different forms of identification in the process of identity formation.

Feminist film scholars would challenge such a universalist theory and argue that filmic identification is inherently gendered and causes the institution of the male as the normative, since identification always involves recognition (of something known) before misrecognition sets in.⁴² The female spectator’s subjectivity is thereby set in a tortuous relationship within the structure of the gaze. Other feminist theorists utilized and critiqued not only cinema’s appropriation of Lacan, but also Lacan’s deployment of the images of visuality for its patriarchal biases. Luce Irigaray’s trenchant critique of the representation of women as the negative mirror reflection of men, and the need for women to burn those mirrors and despecularize themselves, is one famous example.⁴³ A perspective more sensitive to the questions of ethnic and cultural difference, such as that of Trinh T. Minh-ha, would critique the same mirror structure to show that an infinite play of empty mirrors defers the notion of the original “I” and dissolves the illusionary relationship between subject and subject, and subject and object.⁴⁴

Enter ideology, always already gendered. If Ideology is “the imaginary representation of the world” and its structure is specular (Louis Althusser), and film is a “technique of the imaginary” (Metz),⁴⁵ then film can be seen as a perfect medium for ideological interpellation. In this formulation, the spectator is produced by the filmic ideological apparatus as an interpellated, sutured subject. The film designates a spectator, assigns the spectator a place, and sets the spectator upon a certain journey, according to one formalist theory.⁴⁶ To put it differently, the spectator is the Althusserian “actor” in the *mise-en-scène* of ideological inter-

pellation.⁴⁷ From Althusser to Metz, and especially Jean-Louis Baudry, who sees the cinema as ideological apparatus par excellence, this specific Lacan-influenced line of thinking has been called the “apparatus theory” for its critical look at cinema as an ideological apparatus. An art historical version of this theory would be Mitchell’s synthesis of Erwin Panofsky’s iconology and Althusser’s ideology as mutually constitutive: iconology is itself an ideology, while ideological critique needs to be iconologically aware.⁴⁸ The apparatus theory relates back to Marx, of course, who used the analogy of the camera obscura to emphasize the function of inversion in ideology. Just as the camera obscura works through inversion, so is ideology the inversion of the real: “The camera obscura of ideology simultaneously maintains a relationship to the real (which it reflects in an inverted form) and occludes, obscures it.” Both being dark chambers, ideology and the camera obscura do not illuminate but obscure the real and hide the historical character of the ruling class’s domination.⁴⁹ Understandably, the apparatus theory has been criticized for being universalistic and ahistorical, replicating a patriarchal bias, and foreclosing the radical potential of the film medium.⁵⁰

This returns us full circle to the social nature of visual images, and thus an analysis of the relationship between visibility and identity must be historically informed. Universalist theories such as psychoanalysis and the apparatus theory therefore need to be thoroughly historicized and contextualized for them to be able to speak beyond Eurocentric terrains. I would posit that film as a product of *industrial* capitalism helped project a temporally more fluid notion of subjectivity (through the use of montage and other time-manipulating formal techniques), and that contemporary film and other visual media as a product of *global* capitalism take on a much more spatially fluid structure of transnationality, as temporal compression equally increases in intensity and speed. Such transnationality is produced in part by the intensity of migration of peoples and in part by advancements in the techniques of communication and our enhanced global awareness of interconnectedness, all of which are the result of human colonization of the globe becoming more and more thorough. The repertoire of images available to different peoples today, qualitatively and quantitatively of greater diversity, is overall much more multicultural and transnational, making it possible to talk about a global image culture scattering alongside the scattering of global capitalism.

In lockstep with the development of visual culture in global capitalism, the historical character of identity today lies in its predominantly visual mediation.

If earlier formations of identities are primarily determined by nationality and ethnicity in the course of struggles to dominate colonized peoples or resist colonial and imperialist powers, contemporary identities are much more nuanced, fragmented, and multiple. It is increasingly the case that linguistic and cultural boundaries do not coincide with national boundaries (not that they ever have entirely), and increasing balkanization delineates national and subnational boundaries with finer and finer criteria of difference to the extent that differences can be overinvested. Such overinvestment in identity as difference on the subnational level is what has been criticized as identity politics. The fact that religious fundamentalisms have not been explicitly charged as playing identity politics on a global scale, while subnational race-based identity struggles have, indicates that the fear of the other within one's community is what triggers the accusations of identity politics.⁵¹ Although identity politics, a politics based on inflexible definition of identities, may be a manifestation of the misuse of identity-based struggles, the critique of identity politics has had the unintended consequence of throwing out the baby (identity) with the bathwater (identity politics), effectively shutting down the possibility of difference-based politics that have been and continue to be socially transformative.

What is necessary, then, as Satya Mohanty and others have argued, is making distinctions between good and bad identities, good and bad politics of difference, rather than a blanket endorsement or repudiation, which are both universalistic gestures. Since in global capitalism the political does not necessarily travel according to one's intention or translate across different geopolitical boundaries the same way, identity-based struggles acquire different valences and produce different promises or limitations in divergent contexts. However, according to Mohanty, the epistemic status of identity should first be recognized:

Identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways. It is in this sense that they are valuable, and their epistemic status should be taken very seriously. In them, and through them, we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, we give texture and form to our collective futures. Both the essentialism of identity politics and the skepticism of the postmodernist position seriously underread the real epistemic and political complexities of our social and cultural identities.⁵²

Identities are not arbitrary, but are theories that help us make sense of experiences and turn them into knowledge, as we simultaneously draw from experiences as

resources for the construction of identities. Most importantly, identities are theoretical claims that are evaluatable: some are empowering, others are oppressive, some are self-produced, and some are imposed.⁵³ Identities can be socially productive, as Sartrean *négalités*, allowing for the capacity “to negate, to destroy, to change, and to imagine what is not,” and to resist those identities imposed by dominant narratives.⁵⁴ In this sense, the oppressed may have “epistemic privilege” in producing socially transformative identities,⁵⁵ and it also becomes possible to recognize identities as historical constructs as new identities are constantly being formed.⁵⁶ With this so-called realist theory of identity, then, one can evaluate different representations of identities as more or less transformative or regressive, and allow for the political potential or entrenchment of a visual work to be highlighted for analysis. For those identities in the process of being constructed for antihegemonic struggles, such as that of Taiwan, it is not that these identities did not exist in the past in a different form for similar or different purposes, but that they have acquired a heavily historical as well as resistant character due to the particular geopolitical situation in the contemporary moment.

It is clear from the above summary that the realist theory of identity positions itself against the postmodernist celebration of the infinite deferral of identities and subjectivities. Similarly, critics such as Dirlik have voiced concern over the political price paid by the postmodernist notion of flexible subjects, which conforms to the flexible logic of global capitalism. The pronouncement that the subject is dead parallels, in this case, the death of the worker, as flexible production demands flexible workers to constantly retool while working multiple jobs without medical and other benefits. The dead subjects, in other words, tend to be working-class subjects, minorities, and women, just when they are clamoring for more representation and subjectivity and constructing identities that can serve their resistant causes. Dirlik concludes forcefully that the postmodern argument for fluid subject positions is ultimately “the fetishization of alienation.”⁵⁷ In historical hindsight, high modernist fetishization of alienation seems to have continued to the present day, albeit with a very different theoretical vocabulary and with a greater pretense to self-reflexivity. Class, gender, and race determinants operate invisibly but integrally in both cases. Samir Amin would argue, more simply, that multiple and polyglot identities were the condition of existence prior to the imposed homogenization of unified subjects by Western humanism and individualism. It is syllogistic, if not disingenuous, first to declare multiple identities to be a prob-

lem in order to institute and valorize unified subjects only later to disclaim unified subjects to reinaugurate multiple identities.⁵⁸ This was evidenced by the post-structuralist enterprise, which, as we know, hinged on the critique of the unified subject. Recall that Heidegger's suspicion about the pictorialization of the world through cinema and photography, mentioned in the previous section, is precisely based on the contention that such objectifying representation exemplifies human conquest of the world and helps constitute the human as the universal, founding subject.⁵⁹

The critique against the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity is then twofold: (1) by universalizing a class-determined experience of alienation, it has made the notions of subjectivity and identity unusable for those who need them; (2) its project has been an "in-house" struggle against another fantastic construction, that of unified subjectivity in Western philosophy. The game has been played out on class-specific and Western-centric terrains, but it has pulled along those outside the West eager to keep step with the developments of so-called high theory and philosophy. The urgent task, then, is to distinguish between usable and unusable, resistant and hegemonic, and recalcitrant and transformative identities. Departing from apparatus theory and psychoanalytic theory, both of which posit subjection as inevitable for subjectivization (recent celebration of melancholia as a universal psychological condition of subjectivity is also a case in point)⁶⁰ and can have the unintended danger of explaining away oppression, the implicit assumption here is that identities are productive of subjectivities, especially when they are resistant in character.⁶¹ Transformative identity is a form of affirmation of subjectivity, as opposed to the poststructuralist subject mired in fragmentation and rendered powerless in the face of transnational corporations serving new empires. Manuel Castells therefore aptly titled the second volume of his trilogy, *The Information Age*, as *The Power of Identity* to emphasize that cultural identity "was one of the main anchors of that opposition to the values and interests that had programmed the global networks of wealth, information, and power."⁶² Powerful expressions of collective identity have challenged globalization and Eurocentric cosmopolitanism and have facilitated such proactive movements as feminism and environmentalism, as well as such reactive movements as various resistance movements on behalf of ethnicity, locality, and nation.⁶³

Incorporating the insights from above, especially those of Castells, it may be possible, then, to distinguish six main kinds of identities in global capitalism: (1)

fundamentalist identities such as those that undergird religious fundamentalisms, which need to be recognized as identity politics on a global scale; (2) commercialized identities that transact profitably with the market by appropriating domestic and global multiculturalisms; (3) legitimizing identities that operate through ideological interpellation by the state and the neocolonial apparatuses to legitimize themselves and to maintain the status quo of power distribution; (4) epistemic identities that are based on experience and function as means of understanding the world; (5) resistant identities developed out of cognition and knowledge to react against forces of domination and oppression; and (6) transformative identities that aid the emergence of new communities and bring about change.⁶⁴ These identities are of course interconnected and they bleed into each other, but the distinctions serve as heuristic devices to refine discussions of identity in global capitalism as a nexus of complex relationships that cannot be uniformly dismissed as playing into identity politics. The charge of this book is to analyze those visually mediated identities that will or will not make a difference locally, regionally, or globally, in the context of global capitalism as well as the scattering of peoples in select sites across the Sinophone Pacific.

SINOPHONE ARTICULATIONS

The scattering of peoples from China across the globe over a millennium has long been an object of study as a subfield in Chinese studies, Southeast Asian studies, and Asian American studies, and also has a small presence in African studies and Latin American studies in the United States. This subfield, whose parameters are set by wherever the peoples from China have gone, has been called the study of the Chinese diaspora. The Chinese diaspora, understood as the dispersion of “ethnic Chinese” persons around the globe, stands as a universalizing category founded on a unified ethnicity, culture, language, as well as place of origin or homeland. Such a notion is highly problematic, despite its wide adoption and circulation. A Uigur from Xinjiang province or a Tibetan from Xizang province/Tibet who has emigrated from China is not normally considered part of the Chinese diaspora, for instance, while the Manchus and the Mongolians from Inner Mongolia may or may not be considered part of the Chinese diaspora. The measure of inclusion appears to be the degree of sinicization of these ethnicities, which discloses a Han-centrism of a long-distance variety, because what often gets completely elided is

the fact that the Chinese diaspora refers mainly to the diaspora of the Han people. “Chinese,” in other words, is a national marker passing as an ethnic, cultural, and linguistic marker, since there are altogether fifty-six official ethnicities in China and there are far more diverse languages and dialects spoken across the nation. The Chinese language, as it is generally assumed and understood, is nothing but the standardized language imposed by the state, that is, the language of the Han, the Hanyu; the Chinese, as we know them, are largely limited to the Han, and Chinese culture refers mainly to the culture of the Han. In short, “Chinese” functions as a category of ethnicity only to the extent that it designates the Han, excluding all the other ethnicities, languages, and cultures. The term *ethnic Chinese* is therefore a serious misnomer, since Chineseness is not an ethnicity but many ethnicities. By this procedure of ethnicized reductionism, the Han-centric construction of Chineseness is not unlike the gross misrecognition of Americans as white Anglo Saxons.

The conflation of the word *Chinese* with everything from China has been co-produced by agents inside and outside China. It may be partly traced back to a racialized ideology of the Western powers since the nineteenth century that presented Chineseness along the color line, which disregarded the many diversities and differences within China. This has paradoxically worked well with the unifying intent of the Chinese state, especially since the end of Manchu rule in 1911, which eagerly presented a unified and racialized China and Chineseness to emphasize its cultural and political autonomy from the West. Only in this context can we understand why since the turn of the nineteenth century the notion of “Chinese national characteristics” propounded by Western missionaries became popular among Westerners and Chinese alike, inside and outside China, and why it would continue to be a compelling idea in China in the present.⁶⁵ There is no better way to understand this desire to universalize Chineseness as a racialized boundary marker than that, for the Western powers, it legitimated the semicolonization of the Chinese in earlier times and the management of their Chinese minorities within their own nation-states today. For China and the Han Chinese, the racialized concept correlates with three purposes: the racialized nation’s resistance against imperialism and semicolonialism in the early twentieth century; a practice of self-examination that internalized Western categories of the self; and, finally and most importantly, the suppression of its ethnic minorities for their claims on and contributions to the nation.

What is abundantly clear from this very short exposition of the problems of such umbrella terms as *the Chinese* and *Chineseness* is that the terms were activated through contacts with other peoples outside China as well as confrontations with their internal others. These terms dwell not only on the most general level for their signification, but also on the most exclusive; thus they are universal and particular at the same time. More precisely, they are dominant particulars masquerading as the universal, which is complicit with the simplifying generalizations imposed on China, the Chinese, and Chineseness by the West, and to a certain extent, other Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, where resistances to the Chinese sphere of cultural and political influence have been prominent since the nineteenth century, if not earlier. *The Chinese* and *Chineseness*, then, are terms of conflation and manipulation that have carried various stigmas or purchases for those who are passively designed as such or who actively claim to be such.

As much as the study of the Chinese diaspora has tried to broaden the question of Chinese and Chineseness by emphasizing the localizing tendencies of those peoples who have migrated out of China in their countries of sojourn and settlement, such as in various countries in Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore), somehow Chineseness remains a category of ethnicity except in cases where ethnic or racial mixture is absolutely undeniable. It is important to question, for instance, the unifying category of the Chinese diaspora, at once complicit with China's nationalist rhetoric of the "overseas Chinese" who are supposed to long to return to China as their homeland, and the Western racialized construction of Chineseness as perpetually foreign. In postcolonial nation-states across Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America, the Sinophone peoples there are historically constitutive of the local. After all, some of them have been in Southeast Asia since as early as the sixth century, long before nation-states ever existed, and surely long enough to last many identity labels tied to nationality.⁶⁶ The question is then who is preventing them from being just a Thai, a Filipino, a Malaysian, an Indonesian, or a Singaporean who happens to have ancestors from China and who can be, like his and her fellow citizens, multilingual and multicultural.⁶⁷ Similarly, who is preventing the Sinophone peoples in the United States from simply being or becoming Chinese Americans with emphasis on the latter part of the compound term, American? We can consider the various racialized acts of exclusion such as the Chinese Exclusion Acts in the United States, the expulsion of the Hoa (local construction of the Chinese)

by the Vietnamese government, ethnic riots against the Chinese in Indonesia, the kidnapping of Chinese children in the Philippines, and many other such examples. The externalized, reified category of the Chinese as a racial and ethnic marker readily serves the above purposes of exclusion, scapegoating, and persecution.

Scholarship on the Chinese diaspora provides ample evidence of the desire of these immigrants to localize within their lands of settlement. In Singapore, even before it became an independent city-state, intellectuals who migrated from China saw that their culture was centered in the land of their settlement. They coined the category *Nanyang* (the South Seas) for themselves, and many rejected the claim that their culture was an overseas Chinese culture.⁶⁸ The locally born *peranakans* in Indonesia and mixed-race *babas* in Malaysia developed their own particular cultures of hybridity and rejected the “resinicization” pressures from China.⁶⁹ Chinese Americans have long considered themselves to be the children of the civil rights movement and resisted the “dual domination” and manipulation by both the Chinese state and the U.S. state.⁷⁰ The Sino-Thais have localized their surnames and have more or less completely integrated into the fabric of Thai society. The Malaysian Communist Party, established in 1930, was one of the most active anticolonial units against the British, and its membership was mainly Chinese.⁷¹ The racially or ethnically mixed populations with some traceable ancestry in China such as the *Lukjins* of Siam, *Metis* of Cambodia and Indochina, the *Injerto* and *Chinocholos* of Peru, the *Creoles* in Trinidad and Mauritius, and the *Mestizos* of the Philippines pose the question of whether it makes any sense to continue to register these categories at all and for what purposes and for whose benefit such registration serves.⁷² We continue to see a certain ideology of racial and ethnic purity mandating the tracing of origins even after centuries have passed. Whether racialized pressure from the outside, or internalized racialization, the basis of such an ideology is not unlike the one-drop-of-blood rule for African Americans in the United States.

The sentiments of Sinophone settlers in different parts of the world of course are various, and there was a strong sojourner mentality in the earlier phases of the dispersion since many were traders and even coolies. Their different intentions for staying or leaving provide different measuring mechanisms for their desire to integrate or not. But the fact of the Sinophone peoples’ dispersion through all continents and over such a long historical span leads one to question the viability of the umbrella concept of the Chinese diaspora where the criteria of determination

is Chineseness, or, to put it more precisely, different degrees of Chineseness. In this scheme, for instance, one can be *more* Chinese, and another can be *less* Chinese, and Chineseness effectively becomes evaluatable, measurable, and quantifiable. Wang Gungwu, the renowned scholar of the Chinese diaspora, therefore posited the idea of the “cultural spectrum of Chineseness.” As an illustration, he notes that the Chinese in Hong Kong are “historically” more Chinese, even though they are “not as yet fully Chinese as their compatriots in Shanghai,” but the Chinese in San Francisco and Singapore have more “complex non-Chinese variables.”⁷³

Another renowned scholar of Chinese diaspora, Lynn Pan, states that the Chinese in the United States have lost their cultural grounding and are therefore “lost to Chineseness.” Pan further charges that the Chinese Americans’ involvement in the civil rights movement was nothing short of “opportunism.”⁷⁴ Here we hear echoes of the accusation by immigrant parents in the early twentieth century in San Francisco Chinatown, that their American children were less than satisfactorily Chinese by calling them empty bamboo hearts (*juksing*), or the nationalist Chinese from China claiming their Chineseness to be the most authentic in comparison to those living outside China. If one Chinese American can be complimented for speaking good English in the United States due to the racist equation of whiteness and authenticity, he or she can be equally complimented for speaking good Chinese in China for someone who is not authentically Chinese enough. The equation for the latter is that between territory and authenticity.

Two major points of blindness in the study of the Chinese diaspora lie in the inability to see beyond Chineseness as an organizing principle and the lack of communication with the other scholarly paradigms such as ethnic studies in the United States (where ethnic identities and nationality of origin can be disaggregated), Southeast Asian studies (where the Sinophone peoples are seen more and more as Southeast Asians), and various language-based postcolonial studies such as Francophone studies (where the French-speaking Chinese are French per the ideology of French Republicanism).⁷⁵ In most of the scholarship on the Chinese diaspora, the “Chinese American” is a missing person, and even the Hong Konger or Taiwanese are missing persons who are recognized only as Hong Kong Chinese or Chinese in Taiwan.⁷⁶ This is clearly ahistorical even within China, where the term for Chinese in America has gradually changed from overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) to Chinese American (*meiji huaren*), and such terms as the Hong Kong and Macao compatriot (*gang’ao tongbao*) and Taiwan compatriot (*Taiwan tongbao*) have given

way to Hong Kongers (*xianggangren*) and Taiwanese (*Taiwanren*). The overinvestment in the notion of the homeland in the study of the Chinese diaspora cannot account either for the global dispersion of Sinophone peoples or for the increasing heterogenization of ethnicities and cultures within any given nationality. From the perspective of the *longue durée* of globalization, heterogenization and hybridization have been the norm rather than the exception since time immemorial.⁷⁷

I propose in this book not only to find bridges between the study of the dispersion of Sinophone peoples, ethnic studies, area studies, and Chinese studies, but also to explore the resonances of this dispersion with the Francophone, Lusophone, Hispanophone, and Anglophone worlds. Hence the notion of the Sinophone is used here to include those areas of the world where different Sinitic languages are spoken and written outside China.⁷⁸ The Sinophone, like the other nonmetropolitan areas that speak metropolitan languages, has a colonial history. When China was a cultural empire, the literary, classical Han script was the lingua franca of the East Asian world, where scholars could converse by conducting so-called pen conversations (*bitan*) through writing. This is similar to the official Francophonie, whose existence owes largely to the expansion of the French empire and its cultural and linguistic colonization of parts of Africa and the Caribbean, as was the Hispanophone Latin American world and Spanish empire, British empire in India and Africa, Portuguese empire in Brazil and Africa, and so forth. Not all empires acted the same way, of course, and linguistic colonization and influence did occur through varying degrees of coercion and cooperation and to different degrees of success. What these empires uniformly left behind, however, are the linguistic consequences of their cultural dominance. In standard Japanese and Korean languages, for instance, there is a lasting, clearly recognizable presence of the classical Han script in localized forms: kanji in Japanese and hanja in Korean.

Contemporary communities of Sinophone peoples outside China, however, are not strictly colonial or postcolonial in relation to China except in a few cases. This is the major difference between the Sinophone and the other postcolonial language-based communities such as the Francophone and the Hispanophone, but they do share other similarities. Singapore as a settler society with the majority population being Han is akin to the United States as a settler Anglophone country. Taiwan, whose majority population is Han who settled there around the seventeenth century, is also similar to the colonial United States in its intention to

become formally independent from the country of immigration. Furthermore, Taiwan's situation is akin to Francophone Quebec. In Quebec, roughly 82 percent of the population is Francophone, and a similar percentage of the Taiwanese speak the standard Mandarin. The French-Canadian identity in Quebec has increasingly given way to a localized, modern Quebecois identity through a process of *Révolution Tranquille*,⁷⁹ just as the uniform Chinese identity imposed by the Guomintang regime in Taiwan has gradually given way to a localized New Taiwanese identity in today's Taiwan. Mandarin is now only one of the official languages in Taiwan's multilingual society, where the majority of the people actually speak Minnan, while the rest speak Hakka and various aboriginal languages. Finally, Taiwan as a settler society can also be compared to Lusophone Cape Verde and São Tomé, where the Portuguese settled in the fifteenth century and where diverse immigrants and Africans form a mixed-race community.⁸⁰

Those who settled in various parts of Southeast Asia also rarely speak the standard language defined by the Chinese state, but various old forms of topolects from the time when and the place where they emigrated from. "The time when" is important, since the topolects would have evolved differently inside and outside China. The Han people living in South Korea, for instance, speak a mixture of Shandongnese and Korean, often creolized to the extent that the semantics, syntax, and grammar of the two languages are intermingled in a single sentence. This is especially true for second- and third-generation Shandongnese in South Korea, even though the standard Hanyu was taught in the educational system set up by the locals originally supported by the Taiwan government, and now by the Chinese government after the reestablishment of diplomatic ties between South Korea and China. As elsewhere, Hanyu there is standard only to the extent that it is a written language; when spoken, it is sounded out in Shandongnese. The Shandongnese spoken in South Korea is also different from the Shandongnese spoken in the Shandong province of China, where there are in fact many topolects all calling themselves Shandongnese. The same can be said about the speakers of Teochiu, Hokkien, Hakka, and Hailam in Southeast Asia, speakers of Cantonese in Hong Kong, and all the different topolect speakers and Chinglish or pidgin speakers in the United States. The Straits Chinese (who settled in the British Straits Settlements), such as the babas, speak English as well as patois Malay.⁸¹ It goes without saying that there are various degrees of creolization of the languages as well as outright abandonment of ancestral linguistic links to China.

The Sinophone recognizes that speaking fractions of different Sinitic languages associated with China is a matter of choice and other historical determinations, and hence the Sinophone exists only to the extent that these languages are somehow maintained. The Sinophone recedes or disappears as soon as the languages in question are abandoned, but this recession or disappearance should not be seen as a cause for lament or nostalgia. Francophone African nations have, to varying degrees, sought to maintain or abandon the colonial language and to devise their own linguistic futures. Hence, unlike the conception of the Chinese diaspora, the Sinophone foregrounds not the ethnicity or race of the person but the languages he or she speaks in either vibrant or vanishing communities of those languages. Instead of the perpetual bind to nationality, the Sinophone may be inherently transnational and global and includes wherever various Sinitic languages are spoken. By virtue of its residual nature, the Sinophone is largely confined to immigrant communities across all of the continents as well as those societies where the Han are the majority: Taiwan, Singapore, as well as pre-handover Hong Kong.⁸²

From the perspectives of Democratic Party members in pre-1997 Hong Kong or independentists in today's Taiwan, Sinophone articulations, furthermore, contain an anticolonial intent against Chinese hegemony. The Sinophone is a place-based, everyday practice and experience, and thus it is a historical formation that constantly undergoes transformation reflecting local needs and conditions. It can be a site of both a longing for and a rejection of various constructions of Chinese-ness; it can be a site of both nationalism of the long-distance kind, anti-China politics, or even nonrelation with China, whether real or imaginary. Speaking Sinitic languages with certain historical affinity to China does not necessarily need to be tied to contemporary China, just as speaking English is not tied to England *per se*. In other words, Sinophone articulations can take as many different positions as possible within the realm of human expression, whose axiological determinations are not necessarily dictated by China but by local, regional, or global contingencies and desires. Rather than a dialectics of rejection, incorporation, and sublimation, there is at least a trialectics, since mediation is exercised by more agents than one, the perennial other.

The Sinophone, therefore, maintains a precarious and problematic relation to China, similar to the Francophone's relation to France, the Hispanophone's to Spain, and the Anglophone's to England in its ambiguity and complexity. The dominant language of the Sinophone may be standard Hanyu, but it can be im-

plicated in a dynamic of linguistic power struggles. As a major language, standard Hanyu is the object against which various minor articulations are launched resulting in its destandardization, hybridization, fragmentation, or sometimes outright rejection. The practice of the Sinophone, on the one hand, is, to appropriate what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called “minor literature,” a form of “minor articulation,” that is, articulation by the minor or minoritized using the major language. In the process of this use, the major language is contested and appropriated for various constructive and deconstructive purposes. Ethnic minorities in China who speak the standard Hanyu as their ritualistic induction to Chineseness and Chinese nationality are prototypical of this kind of Sinophone articulation, as are those who resist Chinese domination outside China. On the other hand, the Sinophone is a constellation of local languages specific to their locality, and their meaning and significance do not need to be gauged only in terms of the major language. The Sinophone articulates its autonomy into being.

The Sinophone may articulate a China-centrism if it is the nostalgic kind that forever looks back at China as its cultural motherland or the source of value, nationalist or otherwise; but the Sinophone is often the site where powerful articulations against China-centrism can be heard. The Sinophone Taiwan, for instance, is only an aspect of Taiwan’s multilingual community, where aboriginal languages are also spoken, and post-martial law Taiwan cultural discourse is very much about articulating symbolic “farewells to China.”⁸³ The Sinophone pre-1997 Hong Kong also saw the emergence of a nativist fetishization of Cantonese against the looming hegemony of standard *putonghua*.

Mainly due to the limitation of the author’s expertise, the Sinophone visual works examined in this book are limited to contemporary Taiwan, pre-handover Hong Kong, and the contemporary United States, but much work needs to be done to examine various other sites across Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia. The purpose of Sinophone studies is not to construct yet another universal category such as the Chinese diaspora and “Cultural China” with obligatory relationship to China, but rather to examine how the relationship becomes more and more various and problematic and how it becomes but one of the many relationships that define the Sinophone in the multiangulated and multi-axiological contexts of the local, the global, the national, the transnational, and above all, the place of settlement and everyday practice. As such, the Sinophone can only be a notion in the process of disappearance as soon as it undergoes the process of

becoming, when local concerns voiced in local languages gradually supersede pre-immigration concerns for immigrants and their descendents through generations, with the Sinophone eventually losing its *raison d'être*. The Sinophone as an analytical and cognitive category is therefore both spatially and temporally specific.

The visual media through which the Sinophone is most clearly articulated are cinema and television, and Sinophone Taiwan, pre-1997 Hong Kong, followed by immigrant television broadcasting and filmmaking in the United States (mainly in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco) are three of the most vibrant locations of their production. In the more artistically oriented media such as conceptual art, oil paintings, installation art or digital art, Sinitic-language-speaking artists often convey distinctly Sinophone sensibilities. We can see this to the extent that art making and art viewing constitute subjectivity and that visual materials rely on textual meanings in the written form. To borrow from Mieke Bal's narratological understanding of visuality, the Sinophone subject can be said to be situated in front of visual artworks as their focalizer and attains subjectivity by making narrative sense out of the artworks passing before him or her.⁸⁴ An interdisciplinary and broad notion of visuality not only as a culture of images but also as what Mitchell has called "imagetexts," also allows for the textual and narrative orientations of some installation and conceptual art to be considered as integral to the Sinophone. Imagetexts are intermedia and intersemiotic to include various textual applications of images and imagistic applications of texts as integrated practices.⁸⁵ The notion of the Sinophone has the expansiveness to include both visual and textual practices, to make up for the lack of a term to describe the work of an artist who speaks a given Sinitic language. In the past, a Sinophone artwork would have mainly been defined by the ethnicity of the artist, not by the work's position in the local context and the languages—visual, aural, textual—it speaks and writes.

It should also be noted that the Sinophone is a very useful category for literature written in different Sinitic languages. In the past, the distinction between literature written in Chinese languages from inside and outside China has been rather blurry, and this blurriness has had the effect of throwing literature written in Sinitic languages outside China, standard Hanyu or otherwise, into neglect, if not oblivion. What used to be categorized in English as "Chinese literature" (*Zhong-guo wenxue*, literature from China) and "literature in Chinese" (*huawen wenxue*, literature from outside China) added confusion. The singularity of the word *Chi-*

nese in both terms in English erases the distinction between Zhongwen (Chinese) and Huawen (Sinophone) and easily slips into China-centrism. Similarly, there was no clear way to designate Chinese American literature written in Hanyu, hence Sau-ling Wong's designation of the important distinction between "Anglophone Chinese American literature" and "Sinophone Chinese American literature."⁸⁶

In the context of Chinese American literature, literature written in Hanyu has been systematically marginalized, if not considered politically suspect for its "un-Americanness" that can elicit charges of unassimilability. Dismissed in both the canons of "Chinese literature" and "Chinese American literature," which are based on models of nationality and ethnicity, respectively, the Sinophone has been crying for a name for itself. In this sense, it is also possible to consider literature written by ethnic minorities inside China as Sinophone literature, since some of these writers consider themselves to be subjects living under a colonial condition, external (if their desire is sovereignty) or internal (if they feel oppressed). They may write in Hanyu, but their sensibilities are ambiguously positioned vis-à-vis politico-cultural China and a uniform construction of Chineseness as Han-centered and Han-dominant. The Sinophone, like the category of the "Third World," which can also exist within the First World, therefore also exists on the margins within China. In the unlikely event that the dominant Chinese relinquish the notion of cultural and linguistic authenticity, to accept that the Han is nothing but the name of a river, that the concept of "China" itself is but a series of constructions over a long historical trajectory, the Chinese as such may then be replaced by the Sinophone as heterogeneous practices of language and culture.

Similar to its complex relationship to China and Chineseness, the Sinophone also evinces a complex relationship with the sites of its settlement and lived experience. For first-generation Chinese Americans who have emigrated from various other Sinophone sites or China, for example, their relationship to the cultures and languages of the United States is, though equally ambivalent and complex, of a qualitatively different kind. As the Sinophone distinguishes itself from the dominant construction of Chineseness, it also distinguishes itself from the dominant construction of Americanness in a way that is borne out by the exigencies of lived experience in the United States. While the Sinophone heterogenizes both the dominant constructions of Chineseness and Americanness, it maintains its own subjectivity. Some might flaunt this as the postmodernist in-between-ness, which I critique in this book; others are adamantly local in their ar-

ticulation of political and cultural meanings. Place matters as the grounding where the Sinophone acquires its valance and relevance.

To sum up, the definition of the Sinophone must be place-based and it must be sensitive to time, being able to attend to the process of its formation and disappearance. If, for Taiwan in the late twentieth century, the Sinophone became a self-conscious category when mainland Chinese colonialism of the Guomindang was recognized and peacefully overthrown, for Hong Kong its incorporation into the Chinese polity in 1997 marked the waning of the Sinophone as its integration into China became inevitable. For recent immigrant communities in the United States that speak Cantonese, Taiwanese, and various other Sinitic languages, political allegiances often run the gamut of extreme positions at odds with each other, while the psychosocial investment in the land of settlement may increasingly outweigh older attachments. The Sinophone is kept alive by successive waves of new immigrants, while earlier immigrants may move further toward the mainstream to heterogenize the mainstream culture in a bid for pluralism and equality. But the sheer creativity of Sinophone directors such as Ang Lee, who makes movies in both English and Hanyu (in many accents), or Sinophone artists such as Wu Mali, who evinces a cultural cosmopolitanism that can be more adventurous and open-ended than that of self-righteous metropolitan cosmopolitans, and the impressive output of movies and art from Taiwan, pre-1997 Hong Kong, and Sinophone America attest to the vibrancy of Sinophone cultures in the making and becoming. In an increasingly globalized world, where cultures and languages are more and more decodable through visual mediations, the Sinophone stands as an open category that views China and Chineseness at an oblique angle in light of place-specific experiences.

The history of the official Francophonie cautions us that the notion of the Sinophone also bears the risk of being appropriated by the Chinese state. In the case of the Francophonie as an institutional concept, the French state can willfully neglect its anticolonial character and instead highlight its potential as the champion of pluralism in order to refute the overpowering pressure of American cultural hegemony.⁸⁷ The Francophonie can be partly seen as spectral remains of the French empire under whose warm shadow contemporary France's waning cultural influence in the globe can be temporarily displaced. Unfortunately, it can be turned into a new fantasy of French global influence, if not a point of mobilization for imperial nostalgia. The notion of the Chinese diaspora has led to similar

consequences: it centered China as the place of origin and implicitly demonstrated China's global influence. The Sinophone is many things, and as lived cultures and languages, it cannot be contained by uniform definitions. However, the Sinophone's insistence on its settlement outside China, its minor status within China, and its place-and-time-specific articulation is where its historical character lies. Rather than a testament to the classical Chinese empire, such as the premodern Sinophone worlds of Japan and Korea, or an emerging Chinese empire that claims the sole right to Chineseness, contemporary Sinophone articulations, with the exception of those of minority groups in China, may determine whether to respond to such claims or to ignore them altogether. In the last two centuries, Japan tried to "overcome" China militarily by instigating the two Sino-Japanese Wars, and symbolically through a vernacular movement that displaced the Han written script. For Korea, the resistance was more circuitous: denouncing the ideology of "serving the great" (*sadae ju'ui*) in the seventeenth century was simultaneously producing its authenticity as preserver of Chinese culture against the Manchus,⁸⁸ but twentieth-century history saw a gradual move away from Chinese influence and the fitful abolishment of the mandatory study of hanja (Han written characters) in its educational system until the recent rise of China as a global power.

It is in order to register the agency of those who work in various visual and textual media in Sinophone areas that I use the term *articulation* to describe the expressive act of art and filmmaking. In the particular definition of the term by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, articulation is a social practice that participates in the larger discursive field by constructing new differences and interjecting contingency to necessity.⁸⁹ If we posit that the Chinese discursive field envisages a list of necessary and fixed identities for ideological and political purposes, Sinophone articulation introduces difference, contradiction, and contingency into those identities. Articulation as a practice not only subverts fixed identities but also opens up the possibility for new identities, which in turn can lead to new social and cultural formations. Sinophone articulation, by the acts and practices of cultural production—naming, writing, making art, making film, and so forth—disrupts the symbolic totality that is Chinese and instead projects the possibility of a new symbolization beyond reified Chinese and Chineseness. Articulation by Sinophone peoples thus brings the Sinophone into being as a new social and cultural formation that interrupts fixity with difference, totality with partiality.

The Sinophone's favorite modes therefore tend to be intertextual: satire, irony,

paradox, bricolage, collage, and others. This intertextuality, however, is not simply rewriting or reinvention, but a means to construct new identities and cultures. These new identities and cultures have been heavily reliant on visual culture and popular media in the past half century. For instance, we can consider Hong Kong cinema that traveled to various Sinophone sites in Asia from the 1960s to the present day as helping to construct the Sinophone as an imagined community. A person who speaks a smattering of Sinitic languages watching Hong Kong musicals and martial arts films of the 1960s and 1970s in South Korea is necessarily implied within a collective imaginary of the Sinophone across other Asian and Southeast Asian sites through the identificatory practices of the cinema. Through the rich images in these films, a “critical constellation” of the past and the present is represented, so that the images acquire a historical character. These and other dialectical images, by virtue of the dispersion of Sinophone sites, remain nonlinear and discontinuous, but nonetheless act as agents that “telescope” the past through the present, thereby helping to constitute the Sinophone as a transnational and yet historically specific, imagined community.⁹⁰

This book is an attempt to understand the Sinophone in its various intertextual moments of cultural articulation situated within the transnational political economies and cultural relationships with China, Asia, and the United States. It analyzes Sinophone’s overdetermined (multiple but not infinite) axes of articulation in time and space. Identity, for sure, is a process that occurs in time; it is processional. It takes time to refute old identities and construct new identities, when changing political realities demand corresponding responses. The transformation of the “Republic of China” to “Taiwan,” colonial Hong Kong to (post)colonial Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Chinese and Taiwanese to Chinese and Taiwanese Americans all takes time. Equally, geopolitics changes the conception of space. Taiwan is farther from China in spatial imaginary than the Republic of China was; (post)colonial Hong Kong is closer to China than colonial Hong Kong was. Articulations of cultural nationalism against China are therefore more prominent in Taiwan, whereas Hong Kong film imaginary seems to travel more and more northward to include various Chinese sites as locations of action and narration after 1997. Across the Taiwan Strait, triangulation among Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China is clearly unbalanced: the Taiwan–Hong Kong cultural relationship is displaced by their vibrant economic ties with China, even though they are both under the shadow of Chinese political hegemony to different de-

grees and in different ways. The relationship is more vertical than horizontal. Crossing different oceans, the Sinophone peoples in North America are closer or farther from China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, or the other Sinophone sites in Asia where they have emigrated from, depending on their perceptions of both geographical and psychic space. In their rootedness in the local place, the Sinophone peoples across different oceans and territories negotiate the relationship between space and place creatively in their articulatory practices.

It will be apropos to end this introduction by returning to the film that I started with in order to illustrate, now more retrospectively, the differences between the Sinophone and the Chinese played out on the transnational stage. The case in point is a highly publicized rivalry between *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* by Ang Lee and *Hero* by Zhang Yimou. Although shown several years apart, the rumor has it that Zhang shot his film with the aim of showing the world how to make a “real” martial arts film after the global success of Lee’s film.⁹¹ Some of the resentment toward Lee’s film by Chinese audiences also had to do with the issue of ownership—who owns the genre and who are the most legitimate inheritors of the genre. A film that flaunts something essential about Chinese culture needs certified producers from China proper, not from a Taiwanese American. In various interviews in 2004, when *Hero* was finally released in the United States after several years of delay, Zhang credited the success of Lee’s film as having prepared the reception of his own film, but he made sure to mention that his film was developed long before Lee’s film, hence he was not following in the footsteps of Lee.⁹² This is despite the fact that Zhang used the same cinematographer and cast one of the same actresses for his film. To deflect the suspicion that he was following Ang Lee, Zhang again noted that even his second martial arts film, also released in 2004 in the United States, *House of Flying Daggers*, was developed before *Crouching Tiger*. In short, he developed both *Hero* and the *House of Flying Daggers* before Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger*, so neither was a case of imitation. The charge that the ending of the *House of Flying Daggers* appears to be a copy of *Crouching Tiger* was responded to again by either such simple assertion or temporal precedence.⁹³ The compulsion to claim precedence is aimed to deflect the suspicion of imitation or reaction, but what it reveals most tellingly is the hidden assertion of authenticity and ownership. How can an inauthentic subject use the genre so successfully in the international film market when the genre belongs to the Chinese director, its true inheritor?

Ownership of cultural material becomes an issue only when competitive claims are waged or when there is a need to demarcate the boundary of the cultural community. For Zhang Yimou to evoke *Crouching Tiger* in the context of the U.S. market makes advertising sense, but it does not make sense for him in terms of his perceived right to ownership and authenticity. In view of Zhang's early films, which epitomized the fifth-generation cinema as national allegories, we may say that his claim to Chineseness has changed in strategy and direction. He had been criticized, for instance, as catering to Western tastes by offering a typical, self-exercised Orientalism that criticized the authoritarian Chinese government on the one hand and exoticized Chinese cultural symbols on the other. The new mode he deploys in these two martial arts films retains the latter but discards the former. The national allegorical impulse that exposed repression by the Chinese gerontocracy is now turned into a celebration of empire in the film *Hero*.⁹⁴ The hero must sacrifice for the "good" of the collective even if it means massive sacrifices will be required on the way to the unification of the empire. As Zhang puts it, "'Hero' is about sacrifice of oneself for a larger purpose, for one's country."⁹⁵ Even though, and paradoxically because, the Qin ruler depicted in the film is so brutal, the hero's sacrifice will guarantee the unification of the realm under heaven (*tianxia*) and end the condition of war among the various states. It is difficult to imagine another more blatant imperial apologia that rationalizes violence as the means to peace. Humanism gives way to a self-righteous celebration marking, so to speak, the rise of China in the global imaginary. If *Crouching Tiger* evinces a multiaccented or multilingual negotiation with China and Chineseness, *Hero* constructs a prehistory of China as the inevitable process of becoming a singular unity out of the instability of heterogeneity. There is nothing more telling than the historical fact that the Qin emperor is credited as having unified the Chinese written script and crushed intellectual dissent (by burying dissenting scholars alive and by burning books), in short, by suppressing heterogeneity and difference. At the cusp of China's emergence as a superpower vying with the U.S. empire, the era of empires once again seems to have returned. Sinophone areas are in this sense important sites of cultural production on the margins of empires where empires collide and collude, and where heterogeneity and difference can be retained and celebrated.

Present-day empires work through military might as well as mass media. It is therefore not surprising that some have made the far-fetched conjecture that *Hero* is also simultaneously an apologia for the U.S. empire, especially in light of its in-

vasion of Iraq in the name of universal democracy. The time of heroes has again arrived—notice the proliferation of hero narratives in Hollywood around 2004—and these films uniformly celebrate star power and produce a cult of media personality. The Benjaminian aura around a work of art has now waned to be reincarnated as mass media star power, becoming, in Samuel Weber’s ironic phrasing, “mass mediauras.”⁹⁶ Here, a splitting occurs between the makers of the film and the audience of the film, with the former enjoying full subjectivity and mass mediauras, and the latter becoming subjected to illusory fantasies of subjectivity or alienating subjugation to the aura of the star. This is indeed far from the mass consciousness with revolutionary potential that Benjamin was allegorizing. Those who manipulate the means of production manipulate the audience, and in the case of *Hero*, the relation of production mimics the imperial relation between subject and object. The film functions as a “synopticon” in which the many watch the few, whose ability to hold the attention and fascination confers the few power over the many.⁹⁷ No longer is to-be-watchedness only the mark of the feminine and the powerless as in classic feminist film theory and in Foucault’s characterization of power in the panopticon. Rather, to-be-watchedness is a term of value indicating celebrity status, which translates into money and fame. This returns us, then, to the attention theory of value discussed earlier in this introduction. Attention equals value for the watched; more pertinently, in the case of *Hero*, attention solicits subjugation just as the heroes in the movie solicit subjugation by all to the Qin emperor. This is the call of China-centrism of an imperial order; the realm under heaven, in this sense, expands to all reaches of the world. By contrast, the Sinophone, in its multiaccented fracturing of China-centrism, can embody the transformative capacity when its articulators take seriously the idea that the promise of image-texts is precisely the practice of potentiality and the imagination of new possibilities.⁹⁸ The wherewithal of this capacity will determine whether a given artist succumbs to, resists, or transcends cultural and political economic realities in Sinophone sites across the Pacific.