

CHINA AND OTHER SPACES

SELECTED ESSAYS BY CONTRIBUTORS TO THE RESEARCH
SEMINAR SERIES OF THE INSTITUTE OF COMPARATIVE
CULTURAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTTINGHAM NINGBO, CHINA, 2005 –2007

edited by
Paul Gladston



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China and Other Spaces
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I would also like to thank my wife Lynne and my daughter Alicia, for putting up with all of this “non-sense”.

Paul Gladston

Preface

The field of comparative cultural studies has no definitive boundaries. Not only does it characteristically seek to illuminate instances of cultural difference as well as similarity but, in doing so, it also upholds the possibility, as Robert Stam suggests in the essay he has contributed to this collection, of a continuing “contrapuntal” reassessment of established cultural and academic values; one where meaning arises out of a dynamic critical interaction between differing cultural positions rather than the use of one cultural position as a foundation for the juxtapositional analysis of another. As the first in a projected series dedicated to current academic research and writing in the field of comparative cultural studies, this publication seeks to align itself with Stam’s vision of contrapuntal action by presenting a highly diverse range of essays that have no single investigative theme or shared interpretative stance. The series which this volume inaugurates is not, however, envisaged simply as a serially incomplete record of the current plurality of comparative cultural research. Rather, it is also projected as having the capacity to encompass far more focused, though still interactive, responses to the comparative study of cultures both in terms of subject matter and methodological approach. Consequently, it is hoped that while this present volume points towards the insistent heterogeneity of contemporary comparative cultural research, it is also indicative of more specific lines of enquiry that might be addressed in future editions of the series.

Paul Gladston

Introduction

Paul Gladston
University of Nottingham

[...] *the miseries of the present life, and the Barbarities of Mankind, the fatal disadvantages we are all under and the Hazard we run of being eternally Undone, lead the True Architect not to Harmony or to Rationall Beauty but to quite another Game.*¹

As its sub-title indicates, this publication contains essays by contributors to a series of research seminars hosted by the Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China between 2005 and 2007. It therefore carries with it a certain “historical” significance insofar as it can be understood to document events during the formative development of the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China, which, in 2004, became the first jointly run Sino-foreign university to start operating within the People’s Republic of China as part of the country’s renewed openness to outside economic and cultural influences following on from the adoption of Deng Xiaoping’s “Open-Door” policy in 1978. Beyond its role as a minor historical document, the limits of the present publication are, however, far from being clear-cut. Though it is projected as the first in a series of publications dedicated to current academic research and writing in the field of comparative cultural studies, the collection of essays which it contains has no single overarching investigative theme or premeditated focus for debate. There is, in addition, no commonly held methodological or theoretical approach that might otherwise link the conspicuously diverse array of subjects which those essays

¹ Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* (London: Abacus, 1991), p. 9.

cover. Consequently, there has been no attempt to structure the contents of this book according to a series of strongly related thematic headings. Instead, writings have been grouped together in a self-consciously open-ended manner on the basis of shared characteristics that were not foreseen and that have no overall consistency (indeed, not only could some essays have been placed quite easily within more than one of the chosen groupings, it would also have been possible to categorise the contents of this collection as a whole in a number of different ways). Moreover, no definitive conclusion will have been drawn here as to the collective significance of the texts at hand.

At this point it would be convenient, given the widespread climate of studied uncertainty under which academic enquiry now proceeds, to insist that the present collection of writings (if not the individual writings themselves) was intended from the outset to act as a direct form of critical intervention; one that, in a manner akin to the insistently non-linear display of artworks in the permanent collection of Tate Modern in London, knowingly appropriates accepted academic conventions only to subvert them by actively eschewing any abiding sense of thematic or narrative coherence. In actuality, however, the evident “formlessness” of this anthology was determined – as is so often the case in relation to retrospective claims of critical intent (one thinks in particular of events surrounding Marcel Duchamp’s incendiary (non)-presentation of the ready-made *Fountain* in 1917) – in the first instance at least by rather more prosaic, localised and less high-minded concerns.

As previously indicated, in 2004 the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China, became the first jointly run Sino-foreign university to start operating within the People’s Republic of China as part of the country’s renewed openness to outside economic and cultural influences following on from the adoption of Deng Xiaoping’s “Open-Door” policy in 1978. This was made possible under new legislation – first enacted in 2002 – that allows non-Chinese universities to operate in mainland China with the financial backing and administrative support of a local Chinese partner.²

² The University of Nottingham Ningbo, China received its first intake of students in 2004 working from premises provided for it by Wanli University in Ningbo before moving to its own purpose-built campus nearby in 2005.

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The founding aim of the University, which is situated in the rapidly growing port city of Ningbo on China's south-eastern seaboard, was to provide – within the framework of the Chinese law – an international, though predominantly Chinese, student body with undergraduate and post-graduate study opportunities directly comparable to those offered by the University of Nottingham in the UK. As a direct consequence of which, the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China sought, in close collaboration with its local partner, the Wanli Education Group, to focus its efforts from the outset not only on teaching and learning, but also on the setting up of research centres and institutes relating to key aspects of its curriculum offer; thereby, taking steps to ensure the necessary currency, relevance and international credibility of its provision.

One of the first research institutes to be established as part of this strategy was the Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies, Ningbo, which came into existence as a semi-autonomous off-shoot of the University of Nottingham's existing Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies towards the end of 2005. The initial aims of the Institute were twofold: first, to act as a focus for the research activities of its membership, which was largely made up of academic staff drawn from the University's Division of International Communications; and second, to host an annual series of research seminars showcasing the work of invited speakers in the field of comparative cultural studies that would be open to both staff and students. As might be expected, given the geographical location and the nature of the student audience, efforts were made to engage speakers from China and elsewhere whose research focused in part at least on Chinese culture. However, to avoid any undue narrowing of the Institute's scope, no special emphasis was placed on this particular area of research. The only significant guidelines set out by the Institute in relation to its research seminar series were that speakers should engage critically with the study of cultural phenomena from an openly comparative standpoint

Partly as a result of the setting of these relatively capacious boundaries, and partly because of unavoidable expediencies surrounding the engagement of international speakers in a location many regarded as attractive but remote, the range of subjects

addressed by contributors to the Institute's research seminar series during the first two years of its development was extremely diverse; including as it did Latin-American film, the news media in the UK and China, literatures of the supernatural, Chinese sex education, German life writing, cross-cultural communication, museology and contemporary Chinese visual art. Indeed, the investigative plurality of the series was such that for some onlookers it may well have extended the Western academy's current fascination with interdisciplinarity and internationalism almost to the point of a disastrous inarticulacy.

Nevertheless, the seminar series in question not only remained remarkably popular with both students and the University's staff – sometimes attracting audiences in the several hundreds – but also proved itself to be the focus for often refreshingly sharp intercultural as well as interdisciplinary debate; not least with regard to the questions posed by the University's overwhelmingly Chinese student body, who often maintained a high degree of (healthy) scepticism in relation to the rampant anti-foundationalism of Western academic discourse. Persistent calls for new forms of interdisciplinarity, internationalism and knowledge transfer are, of course, a common feature of contemporary academic life. However, responses to such demands – both out of the persistence of an institutional desire for academic clarity and manageability as well as the ever-present need to justify access to funding – continue to place inescapable and sometimes undue restrictions on the possibilities of discursive interaction. The research seminar series initiated by the Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies between 2005 and 2007 can therefore be understood – largely through the unusual set of circumstances within which it took place – to have engendered an uncommon (and perhaps short-lived) state of openness that, while it may often have stood at the brink of outright incoherence, also at times approached what might be seen as a highly serendipitous state of cultural interactivity and exchange. The extent to which the series entered onto the ground of either of these possibilities is, however, not something that will be assessed here with any degree of finality. Such judgements are left to those who attended the actual seminars, who will undoubtedly have their own, perhaps, differing views.

Introduction

The evident formlessness of this publication should not be seen therefore as a marker of some pre-planned critical assault on the conventions of the academic anthology. Rather, it has been maintained as a means of recounting the traces of an unusual and (as previously suggested) “historic” set of circumstances; one where researchers from very diverse backgrounds, who might otherwise have remained immured for the most part within their disciplinary boundaries, were able to present their findings within the context of a renewed Chinese internationalism, wherein an unprecedented crossing and recrossing of cultural boundaries has become a very real possibility. Even within the context of contemporary academic life where openness to cultural heterogeneity and hybridity is now something of a *sine qua non*, this text can therefore be understood to offer an insight into an uncommon series of cultural encounters many of which might not have taken place within the normal run of things.

As befits the setting, part one of this anthology contains four essays that address subjects relating to cultural encounters between China and the West. Colin Mackerras’s essay, “Chinese and Western Drama Traditions: a Comparative Perspective” maps out points of departure for a comparative study of the Chinese and Western traditions of dramatic performance. In it Mackerras seeks to demonstrate that while traditional forms of Chinese dramatic performance have proceeded historically on the basis of sometimes very different concerns from those exhibited by their Western counterparts, there is nevertheless much that is shared by both; not least with regard to Western drama’s continuing indebtedness to, and recently renewed fascination with, the staging of medieval and Shakespearean performance. A similar approach is taken by Michael Kelly in his contribution “Cultural Differences in Education: Europe and China”. In this essay Kelly not only traces an extended genealogy of the philosophical thinking that has underpinned teaching and learning within a Western tradition, but also seeks to compare that thinking with that upon which teaching and learning in China has been conventionally based. This then enables Kelly to cast a critical eye on contemporary attitudes to education in the UK. In his essay “André Malraux and Shanghai”, Nicholas Hewitt sets aside direct cultural comparison in favour of an analysis which looks towards the West’s creative mis-readings

of China. Taking Andre Malraux's political novel *La Condition humaine* as his starting point, Hewitt interrogates the seemingly smooth representational surface of the author's Shanghai, and in particular the city's Quartier Français, as a literary setting. Hewitt argues that not only is Malraux's Shanghai the imaginative construct of a man who had very little or no direct engagement with the city, but also that interwoven with the ostensible "realism" of his novel is an allegory of contemporaneous political events far closer to the author's European home. Andrew Cobbing's essay "Opium War and Memory: Revisiting the Battle of Zhoushan" is very much a product of the author's two year secondment as a lecturer and researcher to the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. In it Cobbing, who is perhaps better known for his work on the history of Japan, addresses a little known aspect – in the UK at least – of the history of British colonialism; the assault on Zhoushan and the short-lived occupation of strategic territories in and around Ningbo by British forces during the eighteen-forties. Here, Cobbing shows that while this enterprise has long since been eclipsed in the British consciousness by the subsequent colonisation of Hong Kong, for mainland China it retains a formative place within the nation's official historical consciousness; one that seeks to mythologise the battle of Zhoushan as a means of reinforcing national cultural identity in the face of unsettling military defeat.

Part two of this collection, "Cinema at the Border", contains two closely related essays on cinema and national identity: Lúcia Nagib's "Panaméricas Utópicas: Entranced and Transient Nations in *I Am Cuba* and *Land in Trance*" and Armida de la Garza's "Challenging the Territorial Boundaries of the Nation: Chicanos on Mexican film in the 1990s", as well as a third by Germán Gil-Curiel entitled "Music, Literature and Cinema: A Comparative Approach to the Aesthetics of Death in *Tous les matins du monde*" which addresses the rather more metaphysical question of the transition between life and death. In her essay Nagib draws our attention to two films which take Latin American national and cultural identity as their subject matter and whose extraordinary technical virtuosity and inventiveness has, especially in the case of *I am Cuba*, until recently been scandalously overlooked. Nagib draws the conclusion that in the case of both films avant-gardist

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technique does not detract from the desire of the film makers to address serious political and material concerns. Rather, it allows for a powerfully creative and politically vital reworking of national and cultural identities. Armida de la Garza's essay deals similarly with film making related to Latin American national and cultural identity, in this case those of Mexico and the Mexican diaspora in North America known as Chicanos (people of Mexican descent who live and work in the US). De la Garza argues that while Mexican cinema has – against the background of globalisation – recently begun to reappraise the once suspect hybridity of the Chicano, the acceptance of their uncertain positioning as a model of national cultural identity by film makers working within a persistently conservative nation is far from being complete. In his contribution to this collection, “Music, Literature and Cinema: a comparative approach to the aesthetics of death in *Tous les matins du monde*” Germán Gil-Curiel, offers an impassioned, post-Nietzschean reading of the film in question and the book upon which it is based. According to Gil-Curiel, the film's treatment of the abyssal sublimity of death is not characterised simply by notions of finality. Instead, for Gil-Curiel, it extends the possibility of an eternal (spectral) return both in theory and in practice.

The essays in part three of this collection, “Cultural Re-Visions, Performance and Display”, concentrate on a diverse range of practices brought together by their shared standing as points of focus for the rethinking of cultural perspectives. In his essay, “What (Brazilian) Cultural Studies Can Learn From Tropicália” Robert Stam looks towards the Brazilian Tropicália movement of the nineteen-sixties as a forerunner of contemporary Cultural Studies. For Stam, not only does the Tropicália movement address itself in a highly prescient manner to notions of cultural hybridity and the need to rework notions of national and cultural identity in the post-colonial era, it also does so by performatively upholding the transnational complexity of Brazil's cultural identities; on the basis of which Stam calls for a renewed contrapuntal interdisciplinarity in Brazilian Cultural Studies. Jonathan Kwan's essay, “On Late Imperial Culture: the Case of the Habsburg Monarchy” shifts our focus to another complex layering of cultural identities; those of the late Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire. As Kwan points out, this period of Austro-Hungarian history was

one very much embroiled in a significant over-determination of differing cultural discourses. Moreover, it was one that was played out in all its complexity through the art and literature of the time. Lynne Howarth's essay, "A Cabinet of Uncertainties: the Marianne North Gallery as Hybrid Space" takes as its subject the work of the nineteenth-century British botanical illustrator Marianne North. Howarth argues that there is continuing uncertainty surrounding the function and significance of the purpose-built gallery which North commissioned to display her work at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London. Paul Gladston's essay "Inclining towards Reversion: Gu Dexin's 2007.04.14" is the product of a direct immersion in Contemporary Chinese culture. In it Gladston addresses the emergence of increasingly essentialist readings of contemporary Chinese visual art through a close analysis of the potential significance of an installation by the Chinese artist Gu Dexin. With regard to which, he argues that the work concerned is a complex cultural hybrid of (always and already hybridised) Western and Chinese artistic thought and practice that, as a consequence, roundly problematises the application of any single interpretative point of view.

Part four, "Culture, Society and the Self" couples two essays: Roger Woods's "The Uses of East German Autobiography since the End of the GDR" and Lili Hernández's "Reviewing the Social: Bringing 'Playing' into the Everyday". In his essay Roger Woods gives a considered response to the growing body of life-writing that has emerged in eastern Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall. While Woods accepts the importance of this writing as a sign of Germany's continuing struggle to reconcile current notions of national and cultural identity with the insistent traumas of War, Holocaust and geographical/political/economic division, he is also at pains to show how life writing in post-division Germany leads not to a clear understanding of the positioning of individual subjects in relation to this struggle, but to rather more complex and inconclusive subject positions. In her essay Hernández addresses continuing concerns with social alienation and resistance. However, she does not seek to do so simply from the point of view of an overarching political meta-narrative, but instead by the combined use of personal anecdote and various theories of "playing". What emerges is a highly personalised

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response – as befits current critical responses to the everyday – that nevertheless points towards the practical possibility of a wider transformative response to the life-world – a most fitting point, perhaps, upon which to conclude these introductory remarks.

Notes on Contributors

Andrew Cobbing is Lecturer in Modern History in the School of History at the University of Nottingham. He recently spent two years on secondment at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China from 2005 to 2007. His recent publications include the co-authored *Kawada Ryokichi: Jeanie Eadie's Samurai* (Global Oriental, 2006) and three biographical essays in *Japanese Envoys in Britain* edited by Ian Nish (Global Oriental, 2007).

Armida de la Garza is Lecturer in International Communications at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. Her recent publications include *Mexico on Film: National Identity and International Relations* (Arena, 2006). She is currently working on a research project entitled "Transnational Cinema in Globalising Societies".

Paul Gladston is currently seconded from the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University Nottingham as Head of the Division of International Communications Studies and Director of the Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. His recent publications include *Art History after Deconstruction* (Magnolia, 2005) as well as an extended critical dialogue with the curator and art historian Gao Minglu, which appeared in successive editions of *Yishu*, the international journal of contemporary Chinese art during 2007.

Germán Gil-Curiel is Lecturer in International Communications at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China and PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Sheffield. His research interests lie in supernatural literature and the relationship between music, literature and film.

Lili Hernández is Lecturer in International Communications at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. Her recent publications include *Globalisation of Information Technologies and the Exclusion of Everyday Life* (Common Ground Publishers, 2004). She was one of the organisers at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China of the international conference *Crossing Cultural Boundaries* (2007) and is currently co-editing a book *Crossing Cultural Boundaries: Taboos and Other Issues around the Body* (Cambridge Scholars).

Notes on Contributors

Nicholas Hewitt is Professor of French and Head of the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham, where he is also Director of the Institute for Comparative Cultural Studies. He is the author of books on Henri Troyat, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, interwar “malaise” and the French literary Right, and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*. He has published extensively on the cultural history of Montmartre and is currently working on Marseille.

Lynne Howarth is a PhD candidate at the University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on the life and work of the nineteenth-century botanical illustrator and traveller, Marianne North. Her recent publications include “Weeds as Diaspora” in Nicholas Hewitt and Dick Geary (eds.) *Diaspora(s)* (CCCP Press, 2007).

Michael Kelly is Professor of French and Head of the School of Humanities at the University of Southampton. He is also Director of the UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. In these capacities he has a strong interest in the philosophy of education and in the different approaches to education in different intellectual traditions.

Jonathan Kwan is Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Nottingham and until recently was part of the International Studies Division at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. His main area of research is the development of Austro-German liberalism and his recent publications include “Competing Historical Narratives: Memory, Identity and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Bohemia” in Hans Henning-Hahn and Heidi Hein (eds.), *Politische Mythen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Marburg, 2006).

Colin Mackerras is Professor Emeritus in the Department of International Business and Asian Studies, Griffith University, Queensland, and author of many books and scholarly articles on China, especially its theatre and ethnic minorities. Among his main recent publications are *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation* (Routledge-Curzon, 2003); he is the “Traditional China” section

editor and a major contributor to *The Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre* (Greenwood Press, 2007).

Lúcia Nagib is Centenary Professor of World Cinemas and Director of the Centre for World Cinemas, University of Leeds. Her major research subjects are cinematic realism, New Waves and contemporary New Cinemas. She is the author of the books *Werner Herzog: Film as Reality* (Estação Liberdade), *Around the Japanese Nouvelle Vague* (Editora da Unicamp), *Born of the Ashes: The Auteur and the Individual in Oshima's Films* (Edusp), *The Brazilian Film Revival: Interviews with 90 filmmakers of the 90s* (Editora 34) and *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (I.B. Tauris). She is the editor of *The New Brazilian Cinema* (I.B. Tauris), *Ozu* (Marco Zero) and *Master Mizoguchi* (Navegar).

Robert Stam is University Professor at New York University, where he teaches on the subject of French New Wave film makers. He has published widely on French literature, comparative cultural studies and Cinema including topics such as film history and film theory. His major publications include *François Truffaut and Friends: Modernism, Sexuality and Film Adaptation* (Rutgers University Press, 2006) and *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (Columbia University Press, 1985).

Roger Woods is Professor of German at the University of Nottingham and Vice-President of the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. He researches on modern German culture and has recently completed a book *The New Right in Germany as Culture and Politics* (Macmillan, 2007). He is currently editing a volume of essays on German life writing in the Twentieth Century.

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