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- 1 This book proposes the catchy phrase of “Chinese ecocinema” as a new critical paradigm to investigate how Chinese films have engaged environmental and ecological issues in the active re-imagination of locale, place, and space. Whereas Socialist China began breaking with traditional Chinese beliefs in a harmonious social and natural order, it was the state-sponsored developmentalism of the post-Mao era that brought about an unprecedented scale of modernisation-cum-destruction. Hence the volume focuses on Chinese-language feature films and documentaries from the 1980s to the present, which its contributors argue have manifested a new ecological consciousness by featuring biocentric approaches to nature, humanity, and modernity. The individual essays provide interesting and innovative readings of both canonical and little studied contemporary films, with attention to both cinematic form and the “real world” to which the texts refer.

- 2 The 14 chapters are organised into four parts on water, manufactured landscapes, urban spaces, and bioethics. Part I probes the pathology of Chinese rivers in contemporary film, with the first three essays by Jiayan Mi, Sheldon Lu, and Nick Kaldis focusing on a cluster of films that depict the environmental and psychic impact of inundation, demolition, and dislocation resulting from the Three Gorges Dam Project. They all read films such as Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*, Zhang Ming's *Wushan Yunyu*, and Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* as testimonies to the disorientating, traumatic experience of massive, irreversible obliteration of historically rich local communities. Also discussing films on water scarcity or pollution such as Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth*, Wu Tianming's *Old Well*, and Tsai Mingliang's waterlogged works, Mi's essay compellingly argues that water-themed films are not so much "ethnographical" as they are "topological," mapping out the affective bond between people and their localities as well as connecting death by drowning with ecological breakdown. Andrew Hageman's chapter considers the gritty cinematic aesthetic of Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* as a representation of Shanghai's contemporary ecology, with the camera aligned with the point of view of debris floating down the river, hence making us "tarry in the murky world of our own late capitalist creation."
- 3 Part II, "Eco-Aesthetics, Nature, and Manufactured Landscape," contains three of the most fascinating essays in this book. With Zhang Yimou's *Hero* as a case study, Mary Farquhar uses the traditional concept of the "idea-image" (*yijing*) to highlight the art and artifice of landscapes in "martial arts films in the age of digital reproduction." Besides an innovative analysis of *Hero*'s theme "all land under heaven" (*tianxia*) as well as its colours and digital transformations, which can "expunge real pollution with a flick of the finger," the postscript also turns to the real places where the film was shot, linking land, landscape, location, and the law through recent environmental debates. Jerome Silbergeld focuses on the question of facades and Beijing's ecology in his analysis of Jia Zhangke's *The World*, about the lives of migrant workers who staff a theme park with scaled-down replicas of landmarks from around the globe. Besides pointing out the film's various linkages with contemporary ecological issues, Silbergeld also notes Chinese imperial precedents for landscape simulations. Likewise discussing Jia Zhangke's films, Hongbing Zhang's chapter explores the spatial relationship between the characters and the *mise-en-scene*, particularly the complementary figures of "ruins and grassroots." Departing from the heroic portrayal of protagonists in mainstream cinema, Jia kept his grassroots characters away from the foreground through long shots, dwarfing them with the ruins of old socialist factories and demolished neighbourhoods, meanwhile showing their extraordinary resilience and ability to survive against all odds.
- 4 Highlighting the production and disappearance of urban spaces, Part III takes us to illegal coalmines in Shanxi and the industrial landscape of the Northeast, as well as the contemporary cityscapes of Hong Kong and Beijing. Ban Wang prefaces his essay on Li Yang's murder tale *Blind Shaft* and Wang Bing's documentary *West of the Tracks* by describing the "tug of war" between "development-driven policy orientations" and the more "community-based," "nature-friendly," and "non-exploitative" socialist modernity (at least in theory). This chapter goes on to contrast the "beastly, barbarous existence" of workers – victims of the "unregulated market" – in contemporary neorealist and documentary cinema against the "proud socialist working class" as portrayed in the idealised images of Mao era films. Next, Chris Tong examines three

Fruit Chan films as showing the “ecoscape” of the “real Hong Kong” that has so far eluded the (mis)representations of the city, exploring themes such as the degeneration and regeneration of urban space and bodies as well as entrapment and mobility across borders. Jing Nie’s chapter discusses the representations of Beijing’s urban space and malaise in Zhang Yang’s *Shower*, Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle*, Feng Xiaogang’s *Cell Phone*, and again Jia Zhangke’s *The World*. It pays special attention to the disappearing traditional spaces of *hutongs* and bathhouses that facilitated interpersonal relationships and memories, showing how the cosy and familiar sense of community gives way to alienation and displacement within the superficial mirage of a modern metropolis.

- 5 The remaining four chapters grouped under Part IV, “Bioethics, Non-Anthropocentrism, and Green Sovereignty,” shift their attention from urban to rural spaces in mainland China, Taiwan, and Tibet, examining films that search for other forms of spirituality than the commodity fetish. In his chapter on the ethical claims of place attachment, Xinmin Liu observes in Wu Tianming’s *Old Well* the emotive bonds local peasants forge with their ancestral habitat through manual labour, and the critique of urban betrayal and desertion of the rural in Hou Jianqi’s *Nuan*. Xiaoping Lin gives a descriptive analysis of Ning Hao’s *Incense*, which follows the tribulations of an impoverished Buddhist monk who tries to rescue his “hundred-year-old temple” by appealing to the government, begging for alms, and turning into a “venture capitalist,” only to be notified of the temple’s imminent demolition to make way for a new “road to riches.” Investigating the “woman-animal meme” in contemporary Taiwanese cinema, Chia-ju Chang analyses both Li Ang’s novella *The Butcher’s Wife* and its film adaptation by Zeng Zhuangxiang, *Woman of Wrath*, as vegetarian ecofeminist texts. Chang goes on to discuss the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals in Wang Shaodi’s animation *Grandma and Her Ghosts*, which challenges an anthropocentric vision of community by highlighting animal subjectivity. Finally, Donghui He examines recent film representations of Tibet, contrasting Tian Zhuangzhuang’s ethnographic documentary *Delamu* with Tibetan director Pema Tsedan (Wanma Caidan)’s debut feature *The Silent Holy Stones*. Whereas Tian portrays the ancient trade route between Yunnan and Tibet as a soon-to-be-wiped-out harmonious paradise, Pema shows us a “lived-in environment firmly grounded in everyday specifics,” where Tibetans fit a modern Chinese television drama version of *Journey to the West* into their own beliefs in pilgrimage.
- 6 As a whole, this collection of essays effectively connects aesthetic critiques of contemporary Chinese cinema to environmental, ecological, and bioethical issues, employing close readings of film texts as the dominant approach. With the exception of Farquhar’s chapter, however, little attention is given to the production and reception of these films, or to the economy and ecology of cinematic circulation. Apart from a general condemnation of global capital and market reforms, what remains elusive is how these films might change the environment or compel their audiences to act differently. Yet in teasing out the dialectic of utopia and dystopia in these cinematic portrayals of Chinese locales, this volume may help cultivate among its readers more discerning views of today’s environmental crises as mediated through contemporary cinema.

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