(Re)Inventing ‘Realities’ in China

Editorial [English Version]

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Editorial

FLORENT VILLARD

Texte intégral

1 Having inherited a vision of modernity which is of colonial and global origins, one of our main priorities is including papers which cross and go beyond pre-defined cultural areas. However we do not intend to neglect these areas. Our aim is achieving transculturalism without forgetting the historical backgrounds of different contexts, in which the dynamics of modernity, its alienations, its oppositions and its creative energy unfold.

2 Since the mid-19th century China has been a part of this modernity, and nowadays China is pictured as the most advanced country in terms of neo-liberal globalisation and industrial, technical, cultural and artistic (post-)modernity. China’s development pattern is, in many ways, a new outstanding phenomenon. There is also, however, a more hidden side to China’s development: the inequalities that exist within the country itself. In China, (post-)modernity also implies social and disciplinary control carried out by a political system which bases its legitimacy and functions outside the boundaries of the western liberal democracy system. China swings between a far-reaching liberalisation process and a
persistent logic resembling power schemes of totalitarian regimes.

This issue of *TransText(e)s-Transcultures* focuses on different forms of representation – for instance language and art – with special attention to their political performance. The following pages contain stimulating and inspiring papers, that objectively question China’s past and present “idiosyncrasies” (and those of Asia), with a focus on the (political) forms of domination and resistance which develop through language and body.

For instance in this issue Erik Bordeleau shows how performative art in China translates in/through “the body” the questions which are put forward by the contemporary social, economic and political spheres. The artists give rise to biopolitical issues on the human being which go beyond the Chinese context, even if their performances often express the political schizophrenia of China mentioned above.

Thomas Boutonnet’s in-depth analysis of the discourse of “harmonious society”, or else of *hexie shehui* 和谐社会, questions the official ideology of contemporary China. In more detail, Boutonnet questions how concerns about disciplining and controlling the atomised and unstable social body hide behind the intention to civilise and educate. The background of this study is contradiction and inequality intrinsic to capitalism in contemporary China.

The topic of the political use of language is also dealt with by Maurizio Marinelli, who provides a detailed and thorough study on Mao Zedong’s and Deng Xiaoping’s speeches. Marinelli observes power patterns in contemporary China, together with the socio-political construction of reality by the propagandists. He also mentions language developments in China between the Maoist period and the 1980s, when official language and its hegemony began to crumble.

The fact we are dealing with the peculiar Chinese context does not mean, however, that we are free from the obligation to keep observing ourselves, the “Western” speaker, with a critical eye. A comparative historicised approach seems at this stage necessary. This approach can be adopted in order to prevent the space of enunciation of the object of study, in this case the “West”, from being perceived in an illusionary way as ideologically and politically flawless and independent.

Vanessa Frangville deliberately adopts this perspective to question the mixed representations of Tibet in Chinese and American cinema, through the films “Seven Years in Tibet” and “Hong Gu He” (Red River Valley). The author shows how, although the Chinese and the Western perspectives of Tibet differ in terms of diverging ideological discourses and conflicting historical interpretations, these two views also have common points. Tibet is depicted through biased representations, constantly orientalised and pictured as pure, natural, primitive, and Other.

Lionel Obadia adopts the same comparative approach to interpret a globalisation of medical practices. He avoids an ethnocentric perspective to ponder the mixed movements of “Western medicine” in Nepal and medical practices from Asia in Europe. His study focuses on a disjunction between the mixed forms of imagination in different historical
contexts, and eludes the critical perspective of the “orientalisation” of the West through the trends of oriental kinds of medicine. The author points out a parallel but contrary movement, that is to say a westernisation of “Asian medicine”.

The dichotomy between Orient/Asia/China and the West, even within the critical perspective of Orientalism, does not always allow taking into account other less linear historical paths. Isabel Morais’s contribution to this issue shakes off traditional representations by introducing a topic which is often disregarded, i.e. contacts between China and Africa - through African emigration to Southern China and the Portuguese settlements in Macao.

Last but not least, Tsung-Huei Huang’s paper reinterprets Ka-shiang Liu’s novel Yegou zhi qiu 野狗之丘 (Hill of Stray Dogs) through a clever and audacious theoretical usage of the Deleuzian and Guattarian concept of “becoming”. In this paper Tsung-Huei Huang stresses the novelist’s capacity to speak for the animal-other without being caught up in an anthropocentric perspective, questioning therefore the “becoming-dog” possibility for the speaker.

Since the very first few issues, the main aim of this journal has been providing a publication that adopts a transcultural perspective which goes beyond boundaries between disciplines. The contributions of Transtext(e)s-Transcultures, number 5, fulfil this challenging objective through original approaches and interpretations. These papers raise some new questions, which are essential in order to reconfigure representations and put into practice a decolonisation of imaginaries.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

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Articles du même auteur

China in French Tourist Industry Discourse: From Orientalist Imaginary to Chinese Postmodernity [Texte intégral]
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