

Report of the second network meeting

Location: Department of Comparative Literature, Hong Kong University, Hong Kong, March 31st-April 1st, 2014.

Day One (March 31st)

Participants: Chris Berry (PI), Luke Robinson (CI), Bao Hongwei, Jenny Chio, Dina Iordanova, Nikki J-Y. Lee, Flora Lichaa, Ma Ran, Gina Marchetti, Elena Pollacchi, Ming-Yeh Rawnsley, Julian Stringer, Cindy Wong, Esther Yau, Su-Anne Yeo, Sabrina Yu.

The first day of the event consisted of a closed workshop for network members and invited attendees. The day was divided into three sections – “Chinese Films and Film Festivals outside the Chinese-Speaking World”, “Local and Alternative Festivals in the Chinese-speaking World”, and “International Festivals in the Chinese-Speaking World” – meant to reflect a potential structure for the final edited collection, to be informed by questions of film festivals and their relation to “cultural translation”. Abstracts for book chapters that network members are proposing for this volume had been pre-circulated. Each member was then allocated 20 minutes for further presentation on the proposed chapter and for discussion. Following the formal conclusion of the workshop, in the evening, editor Mary Stephen gave a talk discussing her work as an editor, in particular with Chinese filmmakers in the PRC and overseas.

A number of different themes emerged over the course of the day, both through presentations, and as a result of discussions that resulted from them. These included:

- The role of stakeholders in Chinese film festivals, and how different configurations of stakeholders reconfigure the form and function of a festival. In particular, the role of the state – both domestically and overseas – as a stakeholder is often a critical to the way that Chinese film festivals operate, and the role they are understood to play. Speakers also noted that – perhaps counterintuitively – audiences are quite often not significant stakeholders, but that nearly all stakeholders imagine the audience as part of their narrative about the festival in question and its function. To put it another and slightly different way, who loves the festival and who does not?
- How the rise and fall of certain kinds of festivals in the Chinese-speaking world, and festivals of Chinese-language film overseas relates to broader questions of international relations and cultural policy (e.g. soft power, attempts to promote/brand Taiwan overseas). The related question of the region as well as global connections.
- The manner in which disjunctures, and not just flows, within the global economy help shape Chinese film festivals.
- How festivals help translate certain qualities (e.g. different kinds of Chineseness and Chinese identities, independent film) both for overseas, but also within China (e.g. the rural for an urban audience; ideas of queerness), and between different regions of the Chinese-speaking world (e.g. the PRC and the Hong Kong SAR; the PRC and the ROC).
- The issue of who festivals create value (or cultural capital) for, what that value might be, and how that value is created. The work of the “cultural broker” (individual and institutional).

- How Chinese-language festivals are being shaped by the rise of the PRC commercial film market, e.g. the development of “China’s Sundance” with Tudou and Youku as an online festival.
- The critical role that space and place plays in the configuration of the Chinese film festival. This can include topography; the role of local authorities; local economics; online and offline spaces; etc.
- How the proliferation of “festivals” in the Chinese-speaking world, and overseas, forces us to consider both what constitutes a film “festival” – as opposed to a programme, showcase, or exhibition of films, or screenings – and what is at stake in naming something a “film festival”, both in East Asia and abroad. Can a “festival” be held in a “private” space, in response to pressure from government, and still be a “festival”? Is this a case of Chinese conditions changing the meaning of what a “festival” can be?
- The role that film festivals play as producers, and therefore translating audience taste into production.
- The scale of the festival, and the relation of large to medium to small scale festivals. To what extent do small festivals “mirror and mimic” larger festivals, and to what extent do they have their own unique dynamics (e.g. absence of markets, extreme significance of personal networks)?

At the end of the workshop, it was agreed that:

- Network members should revise and extend the abstracts submitted for this workshop by April 15th. These would form the basis of the initial book proposal draft, to be put together by the network PI and CI.
- All members should prepare a draft of a paper – either in full or note form – for pre-circulation before the final network meeting, in June in London.

Day Two (April 1st)

The second day consisted of an open conference on Chinese Film Festival Studies, organized in conjunction with the Department of Comparative Literature at Hong Kong University. This conference was open to the public, and attended by network members, faculty and graduate students from the Hong Kong university system (including Hong Kong University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Lingnan University), and invited guests from the region. In the morning, there were two panels of papers. In the first panel, on “The Circulation of Chinese Films”, papers were presented by Feng Pin-Chia (National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan), and Beth Tsai (SUNY, Stony Brook), while Prof. Tan See-Kam (University of Macau) chaired and responded. In the second panel, “Screening Chinese Documentaries”, papers were presented by Li Tiecheng (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Zeng Jinyan (Hong Kong University) and Cheung Tit-Leung (Lingnan University). Prof. Esther Yau (Hong Kong University) chaired and responded.

In the afternoon, there was an open panel discussion around the theme of “Film Festivals as Institutions”, moderated by Prof. Mirana May Szeto (Hong Kong University). This panel ranged over a variety of festivals from several continents, and their role in circulating East Asian cinema within and outside Asia, and programming niche cinema for Asian audiences. Eija Niskanen (Independent Scholar), via Skype from Finland, discussed the role of small and specialist film festivals in cultivating an audience for Asian cinema in Europe. Prof. Peter Rist (Concordia) discussed the programming of

Chinese film in Canadian film festivals. Prof. Denise Tang (Hong Kong University and the Hong Kong Gay and Lesbian Film Festival) discussed the dynamics of programming for the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Hong Kong, particularly in relation to funding and addressing different audience segments. Dr Aruna Vasudev (Netpac) discussed the role of Cinefan – the first festival of Asian cinema in India, which she founded – in encouraging intra-Asian cultural exchange, while Jeannette Paulson Hereniko (Alexander Street Press) discussed the establishment of the Hawaii International Film Festival, where she was founding director, and that festival's role in bringing cinema from East Asia to the United States. Finally, Gina Wong (Pineapple Underground festival) discussed screening independent cinema to the PRC, and the problems inherent in programming a festival of independent Chinese cinema in Shanghai. This panel was followed by a Q&A with members of the audience.

Finally, Prof. Berry and Dr Robinson introduced the Chinese Film Festival Studies Network. Prof. Berry outlined the genesis and goals of the network, while Dr Robinson introduced the website. The session concluded with a broad discussion of Film Festival Studies as a sub-field, and what in particular the study of films festivals in Asia – Chinese and otherwise – can bring to this sub-field. A key point to emerge from this discussion was that the history of the film festival as an institution has so far largely excluded Asian film festivals. As a result, our understanding of the film festival's evolution over the course of the twentieth century is extremely partial, and heavily weighted towards particular moments in European and North American history. In mapping the Chinese film festival circuit, this research network will therefore be contributing to a restructuring of the sub-field which acknowledges a more complex set of relationships and flows both between Europe, North America and the Asia Pacific, but also potentially within Asia itself.

After the conference, there was a public screening of Louisa Wei's new documentary, *Golden Gate Girls* (2013).