

Report of the first network meeting

Location: King's College London, May 30th, 2013.

Participants: Chris Berry (PI), Luke Robinson (CI), Bao Hongwei, Jenny Chio, Dina Iordanova, Flora Lichaa, Karen Lury, Ma Ran, Elena Pollacchi, Ming-Yeh Rawnsley, Julian Stringer, Cindy Wong, Su-Anne Yeo, Sabrina Yu.

The day consisted of brief presentations by network members on research they have done on film festivals, Chinese or otherwise, and what research they would like to do in the context of the network. Discussion then ensued of the issues that emerged from these presentations around questions of Chinese film festivals and cultural translation. This was interspersed with:

- Public Q&As with directors of three Chinese-language film festivals in London: Steven Flynn of the Taiwan Cinefest, Xie Jingjing and Sylvia Zhan Xuhua of the Chinese Visual Festival, and Xiaoxiao Sun of the Filming East Festival.
- A public lecture by Prof. Dina Iordanova, to conclude proceedings.

These events were all recorded for uploading to the website.

Key questions or themes that emerged from these presentations and discussion included:

- What happens when we shift festival paradigms developed in a western context into non-western context that is not characterised by liberal democracy? What particular differences can one immediately identify (e.g. the question of “naming” in the PRC – “jie” vs. “zhan” (节 versus 展)?
- Should we understand this process as one of “translation”, or are other models (e.g. “adaptation”) equally applicable?
- What different film histories can we find in the greater Chinese context (e.g. teahouse culture; the film exchange model of government to government relations; the guerrilla or fugitive festival and its relationship to Maoist theory/film practice; Hong Kong’s colonial history) that could shape the practices of Chinese film festival today?
- How do film festivals in the PRC interact with the state (e.g. local, provincial and national government, the censorship authorities), and relate to state policies (e.g. those of the “creative industries”)?
- What is the significance of, or distinct about, the particular physical spaces in which film festival in the Chinese-speaking world take place?
- How are specialist festivals (e.g. Childrens’ festivals) organised in the Chinese-speaking world?
- How do different kinds of mainland Chinese film festival (e.g. unofficial and official) interact with one another? What kind of networks are emerging between them?
- How do Chinese film festivals operate as symbolic or ritual spaces, and for whom? What communities or identities do they help to form (e.g. ‘independent filmmaker’, activist, queer)? Who acts as gatekeeper in this process, and who is included or excluded through the formations of these identities/communities? Are the subjectivities generated by these practices the same as, or different from, their overseas counterparts?
- How do these rituals differ between e.g. official and unofficial festivals in the PRC (e.g. festivals as markers of Shanghai/Beijing’s status as “world” or “global” cities vs. markers of cinephilia and belonging on the independent circuit – so the films matter less at the former than the latter)?

- How do Chinese festivals interact with festivals overseas? How do they position themselves in relation to other festivals in the region (e.g. Pusan) and outside it (e.g. Venice, Cannes)? What new circuits are emerging through these networks (e.g. pan-Chinese vs. pan-East Asian)?
- What impact is the emergence of Chinese film festivals having on the practices of film festival elsewhere in the world (e.g. does “red carpet syndrome” feed back into the way that European film festivals stage the red carpet for Chinese filmmakers)?
- How do overseas festivals shape our understanding of what constitutes “Chinese” cinema? How do they interact with new models of distribution (e.g. online, dGenerate, CIDFA)? How do the particular spaces in which these films are shown overseas (e.g. MoMA) constitute the festival experience, but also position these films in particular ways/in relation to particular traditions?
- What is the role of the government (e.g. through the Confucius Institutes; through the Taipei Representative’s Offices; or through the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices) in promoting Chinese-language film overseas through film festivals? How – if at all – does this fit into an emerging “soft power” infrastructure, or the on-going diplomatic battle between the ROC and the PRC?
- Are we in a position to map the impact our engagement with film festival partners is having on these festivals, and if so, how should we go about this?

It was also agreed that:

- The network would seek to start to collate a working bibliography on Chinese film festival studies, to be posted on the website. This would start with work published by network members, but would be expanded and updated over the course of the year.
- The network would start to compile a list of relevant film festivals, with links to be published on the website. This would also be updated as the year progresses.
- If and when network members visit a Chinese film festival over the course of the year, they are welcome to write a report/diary, or take photographs, for publication on the website.
- Network members are encouraged to do video or text interviews with programmers or other figures significantly involved with Chinese film festivals, to add to the materials accessible on the website.
- By 30th September, members should be able to suggest potential chapter-length contributions to the final edited volume, so that the PI and CI can start to draft a book proposal.