

## Zhang Yimou's *Not One Less*: The Fable of a Migration

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In one of his more recent films, *Happy Time* (1999), Zhang Yimou has inserted a remarkable scene that may be cited as a summation of his consistently dialectical treatment of visibility. At the home of the fat lady who just received a marriage proposal from her suitor, Lao Zhao, we encounter the blind girl, left in her care by her previous husband, who has moved to Shenzhen. In order to impress her suitor, the fat lady, who normally treats this step-daughter rather cruelly, serves the latter some ice cream. But this gesture of kindness lasts only as long as the brief duration of the suitor's visit. Once he has left, the fat lady snatches the cup of ice cream from the blind girl and, scolding her as someone not worthy of such a luxury item, puts it back in the refrigerator.

Although it is possible to derive a moral lesson from this scene (for instance, by seeing it as yet another illustration of the lamentable condition of human hypocrisy), what is much more interesting is the suggestive reading it offers of the semiotics and politics of seeing — indeed, of sight itself as a kind of material sign around which specific values are implicitly enacted and negotiated. The fat lady's opportunistic manner of handling the ice cream indicates that sight, as what renders the world accessible, is not a natural but an artificial phenomenon, one that is, moreover, eminently manipulable. The fat lady consciously performs to Lao Zhao's sight by making an appearance of her own generosity; yet once that sight is no longer around, there is no need for this performance to continue. Sight, in other words, is not a medium of transparency or a means of understanding, as we commonly think; rather, it is a surveillance mechanism installed on (other) human bodies, which means that one must behave appropriately when someone else is watching, but that otherwise there is no intrinsic reason to do so. What Lao Zhao "sees" is actually the opposite of what he thinks he has obviously seen or understood. The fat lady's behaviour is disturbing because, contrary



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to what most people believe, she has not internalized or naturalized the function of sight in such a way as to make it her own conscience, her *automatized self-surveillance*. Sight remains for her something of an arbitrary and external function, a device to be exploited for her own benefit. As the film goes on to show, with the events that unfold around the blind girl, sight can also be a disability, an elaborate network of mendacity devised to fool others that ends up, ironically, trapping oneself more and more deeply. Having sight is not necessarily the opposite of being blind but may under some circumstances become an extension of blindness, a kind of handicap that distorts or obstructs reality as much as the physical inability to see.<sup>1</sup>

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These brief observations about *Happy Time* are offered here as an introduction to the film featured in this chapter, *Not One Less*, but because of the word limit set by the publishers, a full analysis of them will have to await another occasion.

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See, for instance, the discussions of Zhang's evolving work in the special issue devoted to *Not One Less* entitled *Yige dou buneng shao yingpian gean fenxi*, in *Zhongguo dianying meixue: 1999* [Aesthetics of Chinese Film: 1999] (published October, 2000), and various discussions of the film in *Dianying yishu* [Film Art], no. 1 (January 5, 2001), no. 3 (May 5, 2000), no. 5 (September 10, 1999).

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See Zhang Yiwu, "Zaido xiangxiang zhongguo: quanqiuhua de tiaozhan yu xin de 'neixianghua'" [Once Again Imagining China: the Challenge of Globalization and the New "Inward-Looking Tendency"], *Dianying yishu*, no. 1 (January 5, 2001), pp. 16-21. According to Zhang Yiwu, films made by the Fifth Generation directors in the 1980s represented a brief period in which the directors reacted against the "inward-looking" tradition in Chinese cinema (a cinema that concerns itself primarily with Chinese history and society) to create an "outward looking" one intent on drawing the attention of the rest of the world. With most of the world in economic recession and the overseas market for Chinese film dwindling in recent years, however, that outward-

This distinctive grasp of the materiality of a medium that has traditionally been associated with clarity, wisdom, and transcendental vision continues to mark Zhang Yimou's films of the mid to late 1990s and early 2000s, despite the rather misleading critical consensus that his recent films depart sharply from the early ones — *Red Sorghum* (1988), *Judou* (1990), and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) — that made him internationally famous.<sup>2</sup> It is now often suggested that Zhang has more or less abandoned the orientalist styles of the early classics, which portray a mythified timeless China in order to pander to the tastes of foreign devils, for a realist cinematic style that depicts simple people's lives in contemporary Chinese society. The well-known cultural critic Zhang Yiwu, for instance, has argued that this stylistic change, observed in films such as *The Story of Qiuju* (1993), *Keep Cool* (1997), and *The Road Home* (1999-2000), as well as *Not One Less* (1999-2000) and *Happy Time*, may be traceable to the changing trends in the mainland Chinese film industry, which has been compelled by the pressures of globalization to produce a more inward-looking approach to the issues of China today.<sup>3</sup> Having allegedly made such a change, Zhang has, it seems, finally been accepted and endorsed even by the Chinese authorities, once his most hostile critics, who not only consented to having him serve as the director of the unprecedented, internationally collaborative performance of Puccini's opera *Turandot* in Beijing in September 1998 (with Zubin Mehta as the conductor) but also appointed Zhang to film the official documentary showcasing Beijing in China's competition for hosting the 2008 Olympics. While this saga of how a native son who was first accused of selling out to the West is

subsequently fully co-opted by his critics for purposes that are, strictly speaking, no less orientalist, no less opportunistic, and no less commodification-driven, has to be dealt with in detail elsewhere, my point in bringing it up is simply to emphasize how the story of alternating rebuke and embrace that has followed Zhang's career, too, may itself be taken as an example of the power struggle over seeing and visibility in postcolonial postmodernity, a power struggle of which Zhang's work to date has provided some of the most provocative demonstrations.<sup>4</sup>

My aim, then, is to argue, in part through a reading of *Not One Less*, that the warm reception of Zhang's more realist films is perhaps as problematic as the hostile reactions to his early ones.

While the early films are consistently accused of orientalist tendencies involving ungrounded fantasies, the realist ones are generally considered as a return to more authentic subject matter and a faithful documentary style. But as one critic, Shi Wenhong, points out in relation to *Not One Less*, the subject matter of present-day poverty, too, can be exotic in the eyes of some (Western) audiences.<sup>5</sup> The valorization of realism as an ethnographically more authentic/faithful representation of a culture remains, strictly speaking, part and parcel of an ideological legacy, in particular that accompanying the treatment of non-Western peoples. (One need only think of *National Geographic* to see my point.<sup>6</sup>) Indeed, the study of modern and contemporary China is so dominated by so-called realism that even the most imaginative writings and artworks, however avant-garde they might be, have tended to be read largely for factographic value, for making contributions to the production of empirical knowledge about China. This critical proclivity toward realism in the institution of area studies is inseparable from the strategic targeting of non-Western political regimes during the Cold War, and the representational politics surrounding China remain tightly in its grip. If the preference for realist depictions belongs to a thoroughly politicized history of reading and viewing China (one in which the aesthetic qualities of works tend to be sidestepped or dismissed in order to legitimate the dogged attempts at information retrieval), then the critical, indeed laudatory, reevaluation of a director such as Zhang in the form of "Ah, he is finally becoming more realist!" must itself be subjected to rethinking.

As I will argue in the following reading of *Not One Less*, what is

looking moment, argues Zhang, has passed. Globalization, he writes, has led paradoxically to a renewal of the tradition of "inward-looking" cinema, centered on China's internal problems and produced for a predominantly Chinese audience. He writes: "Globalization is not just a background but a problem internal to film" (p.19).

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For a discussion of the implications of orientalism raised by Zhang's early work, see my *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), part 2, chapter 4, and part 3. For related discussions, including Zhang's responses to some of his critics, see the interviews with Zhang regarding the making of *Not One Less* in the following: *Zhongguo dianying meixue: 1999*, pp.29-35; *Jushi niandai de diwudai* [The Fifth Generation of Chinese Filmmakers in the 1990s], ed. Yang Yuanying et al. (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, November 2000), 121-27. For general interest, see also *Zhang Yimou: Interviews*, ed. Frances Gateward (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2001)

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See Shi Wenhong, "Yege dou buneng shao de aichou [The Sadness of *Not One Less*]," *Yingyingren jikan* [Film Critics Quarterly], no. 6 (2000), p.7.

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For a sustained critique of the magazine's politics of representing non-Western cultures, see Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993).

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The cast of *Not One Less*, for instance, was made up of amateur actors, many of whom were actual villagers from the film's location. Some of these villagers' names were used for characters' names in the film. However, as Xiaoling Zhang points out, "the whole suggestion of reality is entirely artificial: the school was chosen from a few dozen schools in that area, the eighteen pupils were selected from among thousands of pupils, and the girl playing Wei Minzhi was picked from twenty thousand girls, in an auditioning process which lasted more than half a month." See Zhang, "A Film Director's Criticism of Reform China: A Close Reading of Zhang Yimou's *Not One Less*," *China Information* Vol. XV, 2 (2001), p.138.

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As one critic, Zeng Guang, writes: "Under the current political system, he [Zhang Yimou] feels that the biggest difference between himself and directors from foreign countries, Hong Kong, and Taiwan lies in the fact that 'when I receive a film script, the first thing I think about is not whether there will be an investor for the film, but how I can make the kind of film I want with the approval of the authorities.'" This passage is cited as the epigraph in Sheldon H. Lu, "Understanding Chinese Film Culture at the End of the Twentieth Century: The Case of *Not One Less* by Zhang Yimou," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, vol. 4, no. 2 (January 2001), pp.123-142.

intriguing about Zhang's work is the possibility it offers for a critique of the historical import of the mediatized image, a critique that may have little to do with Zhang's personal intention per se but that nevertheless takes shape through the semiotic movement discernible in his handling of visuality. If Zhang has chosen more realist-looking locales, characters, and happenings in comparison with the mythical stories of his early films,<sup>7</sup> his recent work nevertheless continues to deliver shrewd reflections on the politics of visuality and cultural identity, and their imbrications with the massively uneven effects of globalization.

Such shrewd reflections have to do with Zhang's grasp of visuality as a second-order labour — labour not in the physical sense but in the form of cinematic and mediatized signification. Hence, strictly speaking, the early films displaying China's decrepitude were not only about poor peasants struggling against the injustice of life in the countryside but also about a process in which such struggles are transformed, through the film apparatus, into signs for a certain encounter, signs that convey the cross-cultural imaginary, "Chineseness," to those watching it from the outside. Making these signs, building entertaining stories around them, and rendering them visually appealing are for Zhang never a matter of realist reflectionism but always a matter of the specificities of filmmaking, of experimenting with colour, sound, time control, and narrative. His critics, by contrast, have repeatedly ignored the materiality of this filmmaking process and insisted on the reality that is somehow always lying beyond it. For the latter, that reality is, of course, always China and its people, a reality that 1) must, it is implied, direct and dictate how films should be made; 2) will always escape such framing; yet 3) must nonetheless continue to be used as a criterion for judging a film's merits.

In light of the hegemony of realist reflectionism in the field of China studies and of the obdurate moralism of his critics, it is interesting to consider the tactical adaptations Zhang makes in his evolving work.<sup>8</sup> As a way perhaps to distract and elude his critics' sight, he has been, over the past several years, making films that indeed seem more documentary-like in their contents and settings. Often, these films are about poor rural folk or *xiaoshimin* (ordinary citizens) in big cities, whose lives are unglamorous but filled with hardships. Like *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*, these

films are marked by Zhang's characteristic fascination with human endurance: the female characters in *Qiuju*, *The Road Home*, and *Happy Time*, like those in the early films, stubbornly persist in their pursuit of a specific goal. But whereas Jiu'er, Judou, Songlian, and Yan'er (the servant girl in *Raise the Red Lantern*) pay for their strength of character with their own lives or their sanity, the more contemporary female characters tend to be successful in getting what they want. Similarly, in *Not One Less*, we witness a young girl's struggle against systemic indifference that ends happily. Whereas the earlier films seem to be exhibits of a bygone cultural system, sealed off with an exotic allure, a film such as *Not One Less* seems to offer hope. Is this indeed so?

The story of *Not One Less* is briefly as follows. At the primary school of an impoverished northern Chinese village (Shuiquan Village), a group of pupils are learning under difficult conditions. Their teacher, Mr. Gao, has to go home to tend to his sick mother, and a thirteen-year-old girl from a neighboring village, Wei Minzhi, is hired as his substitute for one month. Before leaving, Mr. Gao advises Wei that quite a number of the pupils have been dropping out and instructs her to make sure that the remaining twenty-eight stay until he returns — "not one less." For her substitute teaching, Wei is promised 50 yuan. As she starts teaching, the pupils are not exactly cooperative, and Wei is confronted with various obstacles, including the relative lack of chalk, which she must use sparingly. One day, a boy named Zhang Huike fails to show up: his mother is ill and in debt, and can no longer afford his school fees, so the boy has been sent off to the city to look for work. Wei is determined to bring this pupil back. After a series of failed efforts at locating him, she succeeds in getting the attention of the manager of the city's television station, who arranges for her to make an appeal on a program called "Today in China." Zhang Huike, who is washing dishes at a restaurant and sees Wei on TV, is moved to tears by Wei's appeal and turns himself in. Teacher and pupil return to the village with a crowd of reporters as well as a large supply of classroom materials and gift donations to the village from audiences who have watched the program.

If stubbornness, persistence, and endurance are human qualities that recur in Zhang's films, in *Not One Less* they take on the additional significance of being constituents of a humanism vis-à-vis an impersonal and inefficient official system, which is impotent in

remedying the disastrous conditions of the village school. But how does this humanism express itself? Ironically, it does so through the very spirit of *productionism* that is, arguably, left over from official socialist propaganda, a productionism most clearly evident in the form of quantifiable accumulation (we recall the slogans of the Great Leap Forward period, for instance, during which the campaign for national well-being was promoted in terms of measurable units – so many tons of steel, so many tons of iron, so many tons of agricultural produces, etc.). As critics have reminded us, Wei Minzhi has come to Shuiquan Village to work for 50 yuan. Money, however, is only part of the issue. As the film progresses, we are made increasingly aware of the ideological as well as economic problem of how *resources* (of which money is an important though not the exclusive component) are (supposed) to be garnered and produced.

The clearest example of such productionism is the elementary method of counting and permuting adopted by Wei and her pupils to collect her bus fare for the city. Moving one brick (in a nearby factory), they discover, will earn them 15 cents, so to make 15 yuan, they should move 100 bricks. Although this method of making money is based on a basic exchange principle —  $X$  units of labour =  $Y$  units of cash — its anachronism is apparent precisely in the mechanical correspondence established between two different kinds of values involved — concrete muscular/manual labour, on the one hand, and the abstract, general equivalent of money, on the other. Sustained by the belief that if they contribute their labour they will indeed get the proper remuneration, the girl teacher and her pupils put themselves to work. At Zhang's hands, this simple event, what appears at first to be a mere narrative detail, turns out to be the manifestation of an entire economic rationale. As is demonstrated by the numerical calculations Wei and her pupils perform on the blackboard, this rationale is based not only on manual labour but also on the mathematics of simple addition, multiplication, and division. At the heart of this rationale is an attributed continuum, or balance, between the two sides of the equation — a continuum whereby effort logically and proportionally translates into reward.

The tension and, ultimately, incompatibility between this earnest, one-on-one method of accounting, on the one hand, and the increasingly technologized, corporatized, and abstract (that is, Enronesque) method of value generation, on the other, is staged in a series

of frustrations encountered by Wei, who is confronted each time with the futility of her own calculations. First, having earned \$15 for moving 100 bricks, she and her pupils discover that the bus fare is actually \$20.50 each way. She attempts to solve this problem with her physical body, first by trying to get on the bus illegally and then, reluctantly, by walking. She is finally able to get a ride with a truck driver. On arriving in the city with \$9 (having already spent \$6 on two cans of Coca-Cola for her pupils), she has to agree to pay \$2.50 to the girl who was last with Zhang Huike before this girl will take her to the train station to look for him. The two girls end up paging him with a loudspeaker announcement around the station — to no avail. Wei spends the remainder of her money, \$6.50, on ink, paper, and a brush in order to write out her notices one by one, only to be told by a passerby that such notices are useless and then to have them blown all over by the wind and swept away by the morning street cleaners. By this time Wei has, at the passerby's suggestion, made her way to the television station. After a long and stubborn wait, she finally succeeds in getting the attention of the manager.

Unlike her counterparts in Zhang's early films, women who have become immobilized in their rural positions or household status, Wei is the heroine of a migration, the migration from the countryside to the city. Even the countryside, however, is not the pure, original, primitive locale it is often imagined to be: the bus fare and the price of a can of Coke are but two examples of how a remote poor village, too, is part of the global capitalist circuit premised on commodified exchanges. If there is a residual primitivism here, it is, I'd contend, the ideology of accounting that Wei embodies, an ideology that has her believe that the expenditure of physical efforts will somehow be balanced off by due compensation and that, if she would try just a little harder, an equivalence can somehow be found between the two. To this extent, the film's title, *Yige dou bu neng shao* — literally, not even one can be allowed to be missing — foregrounds this ideology of accounting in an unexpected manner: the ostensible goal of bringing back the missing child becomes simultaneously the epistemological frame over which a residual and familiar kind of passion unfurls — one that is organized around actual, countable bodies, in an economy in which resources are still imagined as successive, iterative units that can be physically stockpiled, expended, or retrieved at will.<sup>9</sup> Wei's migration to the city is thus really a migration to a drastically different

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Note that although the film was adopted from Shi Xiangsheng's story "Tian shang you ge taiyang [A Sun in the Sky]," *Feitian*, no. 6 (1997), Zhang changed the title to one that highlights the act of counting (bodies).

mode of value production, a mode in which, instead of the exertions of the physical body, it is the mediatized image that arbitrates, that not only achieves her goal for her but also has the ability to make resources proliferate beyond her wildest imagination.

Despite her strenuous physical efforts (moving bricks, walking, writing out notices longhand, sleeping on the street, starving, waiting for hours), it is when Wei transforms herself into an image on metropolitan television that she finally and effortlessly accomplishes her mission. As Wang Yichuan comments, there are two stories in Zhang's film: one is about "human struggle"; the other has to do with the importance of money and television, and the emergence of the mediatized sign:

Money has been playing a fundamental role throughout the entire film: it is closely linked to Wei Minzhi's job as a substitute teacher, her attempt to save chalk, the collective moving of bricks, her ride to the city, and her search [for the missing pupil] through television; what's more, money controls it all. On this basis, the film seems emphatically to be narrating or confirming a frequently forgotten "reality," namely, that television and money are playing controlling functions in people's ordinary daily life experiences. My sense is that the narrative structure of the entire film contains two stories: underneath the story about a girl as a substitute teacher lurks another story — the story about the magic of television or money. . .

When the bumpkin-ish and flustered Wei Minzhi is brought before the TV screen by the program anchor as the interviewee making her appeal to the public, her bumpkin-ness and simplicity are no longer just bumpkin-ness and simplicity but instead turned into a powerful and conquering sign.<sup>10</sup>

The return to Shuiquan Village must therefore be understood as a post-migration event, when the system of value making has been fundamentally altered, when the fatigued, confused, and powerless figure of the girl herself has been transformed into an image signifying "the rural population." Recall how Wei's appeal is dramatized on television: she is featured on the program "Today in China," aimed explicitly at educating the metropolitan audiences about China's rural areas. As the anchor introduces the objectives of the program, in the

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Wang Yichuan, "Wenming yu wenming de yeman [Civilization and Civilized Barbarity]," *Zhongguo dianying meixue*, 1999, pp.67-75; the cited passages are on pages 71 and 73; loose translation from the Chinese is mine. This is the only reading I have come across that identifies money and the media as the decisive issues of the film.



background appears a bucolic, bright green lawn with pretty bluish hills in the distance and a clean white tricycle with flowers in front. This fantastical landscape, in stark contrast to the landscape of Shuiquan Village we have already seen, conjures the national imaginary by drawing attention to the plight of the countryside as an urgent social problem. Anonymous and unrelated TV consumers are thus interpellated as “the Chinese people” and, although they have never met the villagers in the flesh — how materially deprived they are, how hard they must work to keep surviving, and so forth — the effect of Wei-the-image is such that it forges “meaningful links” among this network of strangers at the speed of virtuality.

Once the rural population has been disseminated as a televised image, charitable donations pour in, and the return of Wei and Zhang to the village is accompanied by a plenitude of supplies, including especially color chalk of various kinds, which allow the students to practice writing a character each on the blackboard. As well, this return is accompanied by eager reporters with cameras, intent on “documenting” the village and its inhabitants with a relentless, henceforth infinitely reproducible gaze. In a public sphere made up of electronically transmitted signals, virtuality transforms exponentially into cash, in ways that would never have been achievable by the earnest logic of calculating resources on which Wei and her students had sought to rely. The closing credits offer a glimpse of the positive outcomes of this migration toward the image: Zhang Huike’s family debt is paid off; Wei is able to return to her own village; the girl pupil who is a fast runner has gone on to join the county’s track meet, and the village is now renamed Shuiquan Village of Hope. Finally, we read this important message: “One million children drop out of school because of poverty in China every year. With financial assistance from various sources, about 15 percent of them are able to return to school.”<sup>11</sup>

If what Zhang has provided with his early films is an imaginary ethnographic treatment of China — as a decrepit primitive culture — what he accomplishes in *Not One Less* is, to my mind, a similar kind of ethnographic experiment, albeit *within* Chinese society itself. What is often criticized as the orientalist gaze in Zhang’s early films, a gaze that produces China as exotic, erotic, corrupt, patriarchally repressive, and so forth for the pleasurable consumption of Western audiences is here given a thought-provoking twist to become none other than the

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Hu Ke writes that Zhang’s narrative method is like an “ad for charity.” See his “*Jishi yu xugou* [Documentary Record and Fictional Construct],” *Zhongguo dianying meixue*: 1999, pp.41-49; the point about “ad for charity” is on page 42. This view is shared by other critics: see, for instance, Wang Ailing, “*Tinghua de haizi* [Obedient Children],” in 1999 *Xianggang dianying huigu* [A Look Back at Hong Kong Cinema of 1999] (Hong Kong: Xianggang dianying pinglun xuehui, 2000), pp.301-302; Valerie Wong, “*Not One Less*,” *Cinemaya* 45 (1999), pp.20-21. This type of reading is not incorrect, but the main problem I have with it is that these critics tend to read Zhang’s film as a completed realist *message* rather than as a process and a structure in which a dialectical understanding (of the changes brought to Chinese society by the new media) is being actively produced. While they are right about the explicit “propaganda” at the end of the film, then, they also tend to miss the significance of the presence of other “propaganda” messages (including the virtues of frugality and hard work, and the rationalistic logic, internalized by poor people, of equating units of physical labour with units of financial reward), a presence that is staged throughout the entire film. For an opposite type of reading that sees Zhang’s film not as propaganda but as a laudable piece of social criticism, see Xiaoling Zhang, “A Film Director’s Criticism of Reform China.”

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For the latter point, as well as an informative discussion of Zhang's film in relation to recent conditions of film production and reception in mainland China, see Lu, "Understanding Chinese Film Culture at the End of the Twentieth Century."

national gaze. Whereas the object of the orientalist gaze in the early films is arguably an ahistorical "China," in *Not One Less* that object is more specifically China's "rural population" living in wretched conditions, especially children deprived of education. In the latter case, the similarly fetishizing and exploitative tendency of the media is underwritten not by the discourse of orientalism (read: depraved Western imperialist practice) but instead by the oft-repeated and clichéd discourse of national self-strengthening and concern for future generations ("Save the children!").<sup>12</sup> These two seemingly opposed discourses are affined paradoxically through the magic of the image, which not only supersedes older notions of the exchange value of labour but eradicates the validity of manual labour and production altogether. The image asserts itself now as the indomitable way of creating resources, displacing an obsolete method such as moving one brick = 15 cents to the abject peripheries of contemporary Chinese society.

This migration toward the dominance of the image, which Zhang explores through an apparently more realist contemporary story is, therefore, in tandem with the experimental attitude expressed toward visuality in his early films. The humanistic impulses that guide the narrative, leading it toward the telos of collective good, are at the same time punctured by a firm refusal on Zhang's part to idealize or eulogize the image, including especially that of Wei making her sentimental plea. Instead, the latter is consciously presented as a media event in the new information economy. The image *works*, as it were, by deflating the currency of (human) work. Seen in this light, *Not One Less* rejoins the explorations of the non-urban others in the Chinese films of the 1980s (*Yellow Earth* [Chen Kaige, 1984], *On the Hunting Ground* [Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1985], *Sacrificed Youth* [Zhang Nuanxin, 1985], *Horse Thief* [Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1986], *A Good Woman* [Huang Jianzhong, 1986], *King of the Children* [Chen Kaige, 1987], just to mention a handful), albeit with a different emphasis. In the 1980s, when cultural introspection took shape in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, film offered the Fifth Generation directors and their contemporaries the exciting possibility of experimenting with technological reproducibility and artful defamiliarization. As China becomes globalized at the turn of the 21st century, the anthropological impulses of the 1980s films have given way to a sociological one. From an investment in, or a fascination

with, China's otherness, filmmaking at the hands of Zhang has shifted to a seasoned and cautionary approach to visuality as social regimentation, discipline, and surveillance, but above all as *benevolent coercion*.

In dramatizing this trans-valuation of the labour performed over quantifiable, slowly cumulative time (bricks, hours, days, dollars, written notices) into an instantaneous spectacle, *Not One Less* stages a schism between two irreconcilable kinds of philosophical trajectories. There is, on the one hand, the trajectory opened in accordance with a pro-Enlightenment telos of a better and brighter future, toward which human will power and media capability inadvertently join forces. On the other hand, as is demonstrated by the usurpatory nature of the mediatized image and its tendency to cannibalize human labour, we are confronted with an aggressive radicalization of the terms of communication, communal relations, and, increasingly in the case of the People's Republic of China, communism's own political agenda. The image's limitless potential, in this regard, cannot be seen naively as an ally to human will power or simply as its latest instrument. Rather, its smooth and speedy superficiality announces a new collective reality to which human will power is likely to find itself increasingly subordinated, and to which human beings, especially those struggling against any kind of social inequity, will need to resort just to be recognized. As the ending of the film shows, it is to the image that people will give their concern and compassion, and it is the image, rather than the actual suffering human body, that now generates capital and, with it, social influence and political power. Instead of propelling us toward the telos of an improved future, then, this other philosophical trajectory lays bare the expanse and intensity of a new kind of oppression.

This dialectical narrative method, which is as astute in its cynicism (in the etymological sense of skepticism) toward the mediatized image as it is skilled in conveying a warm, sentimental story, remains Zhang's unique contribution. His work is about the relationship between labour and the image, about the transit from an economy in which humans can still make the world with their physical bodies to one in which the image has taken over that function, leaving those bodies in an exotic but also superfluous condition (a condition in which being "real" simply means being stuck, that is, unable to trans-valuate into cash).

As in *Happy Time*, the ability to see, the availability of sight, and the possibility of becoming a spectacle that are made such palpable events in contemporary Chinese life are turned by Zhang into the ingredients of a fable with a certain moral. But the notion of fable is rooted in the process of fabulation, and the moral at stake in Zhang's work is often elsewhere from the place at which his critics try to see it. However artificial, being and becoming imaged is, his recent work says, something no one can afford not to desire; yet the ever-expanding capacities for seeing and, with them, the infinite transmigrations of cultures — national, ethnic, rural — into commodified electronic images are part and parcel of an emergent regime of value making that is as utterly ruthless as it is utterly creative. With the harsh *and* flexible materiality of this regime, critics of contemporary Chinese cinema have yet, seriously, to come to terms.<sup>13</sup>

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## Discussion

Moderator [S. Yoshimi]: In this morning's discussion, Session II, we talked about exhibiting the art and culture of Asia within the system of art museums, biennials, and other art events and how these exhibitions are related to the trend of globalization. This afternoon, I would like to expand the category of art to include film, theater, and the performing arts as well as the visual arts and take up questions of the representations and systems of contemporary Asian culture and issues of globalization and power.

After this morning's discussion, I believe that all of us have become more aware of the issues involved. Particularly with reference to this afternoon's presentation, what exactly is represented, or what is excluded, when Asia is represented?

We are not approaching this issue simply at the level of a conventional view of the East, the stereotypical representation of Asia, or of China or India. Of course, stereotypes of Asia, one-sided definitions of Asia as the "other," still have a strong hold, as can be seen in events following September 11th. Under such circumstances, as Professor Tatehata pointed out this morning, multicultural representation can play a limited but critical role.

We need to understand this as we look at the issues presented by our speakers this afternoon, Professor Chow, Mr. Elliott, and Mr. Vellani: representations of India, China, and Japan in contemporary art; representations of India in contemporary Indian theater; representations of China in films; representation of contemporaneity in Asia. While looking at Asia represented by its poverty, contradictions, and hybrid or mixed cultures, we need to think about the questions of what is represented or not represented in these cases, why this is so and what can be done about it.

Having called attention to some of the issues, I would like to open the discussion to the floor. We would also like to hear the comments of our three panelists. Could you take questions from the floor, and also comment on each other's presentations?

Question: I would like to pose a question to art professionals in Japan. I live here. In this conference, we have been discussing political issues and ideological frameworks. It does not seem to me that there has been much discussion of art as such even though it is supposed to be a symposium about representations of Asian art or about Asian art that is not represented. In that context, I would like to ask the following question: "Is it possible to bridge the gap, which was formed in the Meiji Era, between the traditional and modern, which I think are two sides of the same coin?" I think that both were established through the same movement.

While living in Japan, I have noticed two things. First, art professionals form circles that never make contact with each other. Curators are bound by feudalism. It is thought traditional art is wrong, tainted by ideology, and indicative of an unprogressive attitude that cannot be incorporated in a modern, progressive presentation of Japan. That is a pity. I think that most foreigners also feel this way too. We are also interested in the old and traditional Japan. That is not because we are Orientalists but because there are aesthetic ideas and activities left in Japan that have been lost in the West. Traditional values have been lost in the West because of the philosophical change since Kant. In the West, art is considered a liberating force. Therefore it must be understood philosophically. It must serve to liberate the individual. That is why the arts in the imperial era were only Western. Everything else was considered decoration.

It seems a pity that Asia and Japan would accept these ideas and recognized such a narrow definition of art. I think it would be better if Asia would reexamine the positive aspects of tradition and promote them in the world. I think this is something that should also be discussed. It may not seem relevant, but I think you can understand what I am trying to say.

Question: There was a presentation on the film, *Not One Less*. Film is considered art, but it is also a medium that mirrors social problems. I am confused about the "art" that is discussed here at the symposium. Are you referring to art as a form of high culture, or are you referring to art as something that mirrors social issues?

Moderator (S. Yoshimi): So the question is about the concept of art?

Question: My question regards the issue of gender. The film that we saw reminded me of Fukuda Kazuko, a female murderer whose images were sensationally aired on television screen when she got arrested right before the ten-year statute of limitations ran out. I felt that the media was driven to portray her as an evil woman. In contrast, the young girl in today's film appeared on television with a committed, wholesome, and innocent image.

I understood that the director of this film always features a heroine in his films, but I wonder if you could comment on why he prefers a female protagonist.

Question: I have a question for Professor Chow. For me, the scene in which the two female characters interacted on the television screen was a dialog between urban and rural people.



What is your comment on the three types of female characters who are portrayed in the film — an urban woman, a woman in transition, and a woman who is absent, who tells her son to come home but is not there when he does? What do you think of their relationships? When we think of what they portray as images, the woman who has been a teacher seems to be the final image. Why is this? I am interested in knowing why this is important.

Question: I am a student from Beijing, China, studying in Japan. It has been very interesting to listen to the discussion today.

I have two questions. One refers to an account of Cai Guoqiang who won the International Award at the Venice Biennale, but was criticized by a group in China. His case symbolizes the discrimination, division, or conflict between an elite international Chinese artist who has studied overseas and native Chinese artists, who cannot speak English and do not have any chance of being invited to a biennial. How should this issue be seen in the context of globalization?

The second question refers to a work by an artist from Bangladesh who was showing at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum two years ago. His work involved cloth and photographs that were dyed in blood, as his concept was visual pain. In relation to Mr. Mohamad's presentation on pain and today's discussion on exhibitions, I would like to have your comment on how this pain could be rendered so that it could be revealed in an exhibit.

Question: There was a comment about "beyond the borders" referring to activities that reach beyond art and interact with sociology and other disciplines. I think today's globalization is based on information and media, which are influencing the arts as well. The art that has been discussed so far has been limited to contemporary art. But today's artworld consists of scientists and engineers, too. I think without these professionals, today's art would not exist. Yet, science or engineering are still considered to be anti-art disciplines.

The broadband era has arrived and we need to talk about the kind of art that will flourish with the help of broadband media



technology, and new museums will need to accommodate it. I wonder how you would like to deal with this issue in creating a new museum.

Moderator (S. Yoshimi): Thank you. Several questions were raised, so I would like to invite our panelists to respond to them. I would also like to invite them to comment on the issues raised that were relevant to all three areas — visual arts, performing arts, and film. Could I ask Mr. Elliott to respond first?

D. Elliott: I would like to respond to the first question, although you know I am not Japanese, regarding traditional discourse and why this is avoided within the dialog about modernity. I think the position that tradition has is strong in the culture, and, until quite recently, this has been a binary system where there is a traditional discourse and a modern or a contemporary discourse. People decide which they are going to be. Sometimes they may be in one, and some times in the other camp. What is very interesting in Japan now is that the boundaries between these two separate camps are eroding. One can even talk about this in a museological context.

For example, an excellent exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, “The Unfinished Century: Legacies of 20th Century Art” (January 16-March 10, 2002) this year which looked at the development of modernity in Japan from the 1880s to the 1970s. It showed a few Western influences and it went through several movements, starting with Realism, *yoga*, Cubism, Futurism, and included *nihonga*, photography, and war paintings (which Germans still find difficult to integrate in their exhibitions). I thought it was very strong show because it was confronting both art and history. You made a comment that things were quite political. But the subject is representation, and representation is political. It is both an ideological and a political issue. For us to have been talking from any other point of view, “just from an artistic standpoint” for example, would have been difficult if not impossible.

Art is intimately involved with representation, but I would

not want reduce art to politics or to ideologies. It is much greater than that, but it is involved with both and is also part of a system which has been formed by ideology. Art cannot be wholly innocent of either ideology or politics.

If I understood the question about Cai Guoqiang correctly, the question was why does Cai Guoqiang get all the credit when there are many other artists in China who do not get represented outside. You are right. There is an art circuit which is self-reinforcing. One reason he gets represented is he is a very good artist. There is no doubt about it. But there may be artists who do not get represented, and if you consider only the issue of who is represented, I think that you are in danger of tokenism. You get your token Mexican, Chinese, and other artists, because people know — or pronounce — their names, and if they have a track record, they will appear again. That is something about the system, and we who work in the system may have a position towards it as to whether it is a good or a bad thing. Our ultimate duty is not to be fair. Our duty is to make good exhibitions. I think our duty is to look for as many good artists as possible.

To jump to the question about blood, pain, and presentation, I think self-mutilation has been a real subject in art, certainly in literature, and in the arts from the 1970s, within performance works in Europe and North America and it is now very much part of the current discourse within performance in Asia. One can think of Chandrasekaran, from Singapore, who holds live performances with tensioned fish hooks impaling his body. He does not suffer much, but they are quite shocking. Are they any good? The shock is not the issue. We have to think about the meaning. How is he making his statement? What do these actions, which are strongly gendered, mean? How is it different when a woman uses or shows her own blood in a performance as when a man does the same thing? We need to reflect on what that adds up to.

Lastly, about the idea of art and anti-technological statements. I was not aware that anyone has been making any anti-technological statements. I think that the point is that many artists are now dependent on technicians and people who are able

to use these technologies. Any museum today needs a lot of technicians just to operate. The thing is technology is a possibility. It is a medium. I do not agree that medium is message. Art can counteract this. The medium is very powerful, but it is up to the artist to use the medium to make a message. If you let it become the message, which I understand is what Zhang Yimou's film was largely about, you get into the system of oppression. We must let not that happen. Be it charcoal, video, or anything digital, the medium is only something you work with. You work with it in the best way. If we do not, we lose control.

Moderator (S.Yoshimi): Mr. Vellani, please.

A. Vellani: I would like to speak about bridging the gap between the traditional and the modern in relation to the performing arts, although it was mentioned in the context of the fine arts.

The contemporary performing arts in India, and probably elsewhere in Asia, have been attacked from two sides. They have been attacked by the State, as being a vestige of colonialism and therefore as having no legitimacy. They have been attacked by the West for being derivative. This places them in an unenviable position.

Should the performing artist respond to this double attack by attempting to bridge the gap between the traditional and the modern? This is exactly what the Indian State, given its perspective, would like the contemporary performing artist to do. It has funded modern artists to excavate tradition and use it in their own work, even if it lies outside their experience, even if it is unrelated to their concerns. But should artists reinvent their identities in this manner, or should they remain true to themselves?

The question that interests me is: "Is there another way in which the contemporary Indian performing artist could respond to this double attack?" "Could there be such a thing as an Indian modernism, and where would it come from?" Many Indian performing artists have a dual identity: they have one foot in the West, perhaps because of their education, and one foot in their

own culture. One source of Indian modernism in performance, therefore, might lie in performing artists' upholding this dual identity and exploring its implications in their art.

Another source might be artists whose impulse is towards modernism in art but who are not "westernized," and lack familiarity with Western modernism, particularly in the performing arts. Their contemporary performing arts practice, as a result, is likely to be rooted in their experience of the social and political life of a modernizing India, combined with an artistic sensibility that, rather than being influenced by the trajectory of Western modern art, springs from their insider-outsider relationship with local cultural expression.

Perhaps the gap between tradition and modernity can be bridged, and an Indian modernism in the performing arts can emerge, if tradition itself modernizes. One could argue that this has indeed happened, for instance, in the case of the dance form, Bharatanatyam. This dance form was re-invented during the colonial period. It was taken out of the temples and refashioned for the proscenium stage. Brahmins took the lead to "purify," "classicize" and rename *sadir* or *dasi-attam* as Bharatanatyam (the dance of India), and high-caste women began to perform it, replacing the low-caste temple *devadasi*. The emerging urban professional classes became its patrons and audience. For Bharatanatyam, in short, the circumstances of patronage, production and reception altered radically.

But the Bharatanatyam that emerged from this process reflected a fractured modernism. It inherited the trappings but not the spirit of modernism in art. The project to modernize the dance form remained incomplete because it was propelled by nationalist sentiments. It was a project motivated by a desire to purify and protect "the dance of India." Bharatanatyam was re-invented in order to be frozen, not to open it out to the possibility of being re-invented again and again.

Moderator (S.Yoshimi): Thank you. Could we now have Professor Chow?

R. Chow: I have quite a lot to say, but I will begin by indicating some of my responses to particularly Anmol Vellani's paper, which I find fascinating in the sense that it does not offer a sentimental notion of the state. I think Mr. Vellani has pinpointed the predicament faced by Asian cultures since the opening of Asia to the West, namely, that the State, or the nation, in Asia is typically confronted by the question: "If we were to modernize, what do we do with that thing that we call 'national' or 'native' past?" To that extent, I find very interesting Mr. Vellani's description of the Indian artists, performers and so on, who have to enter a kind of denial in that they cannot actually put on stage someone like himself — the hybrid, the migrant, the person who does not belong to one particular state or speak only one language. I see that as a general predicament faced by Asian artistic production in general. This also takes us back to Professor Sakai's reminder that we need to think about what we really mean when we talk about Asia and its concept.

I would now like to turn to the director Zhang Yimou. I can only comment on the questions about art from this perspective, based on the little that I know of contemporary Chinese cinema. For directors like Zhang Yimou, working in contemporary China, the State is still an oppressive force to contend with, even though he may not show it in this light in his works. In fact, the State is always there, hindering and modifying his conception of what he can do when making a film. He is known to have said something to this effect in an interview, "When I look at a script, when I think about a film that I would like to make, the first question that occurs to me is not where I am going to find funding but how I am going to make something the authorities will not simply censor." This means that State censorship still remains the topmost of his concerns. Because he is a very good artist, Zhang is aware of the politics that govern filmmaking and any artistic endeavor in China. He is aware of what the restrictions are. At the same time, he has at his command a relatively new medium: film language. Because he is a good and sensitive artist, the best of his films always read like holograms: you can read them at one level as perfectly realist, acceptable, and sentimental stories, yet if

you read more carefully, you would see another side, which is extremely skeptical and critical of the sentimental and humanistic messages that the film seems to embody. For me, therefore, the politics of art here is inseparable from the politics of interpretation and critical practice.

Finally, let me say a few words about the issue of gender. The use of women characters is very common in Zhang Yimou's movies because he probably understands that women are a historically-loaded category. If you put a woman on stage, you are immediately representing various kinds of pressure — social, cultural, and sexual — being put on that person by Chinese society.

On the question of the relationships among the three women in the film: the country girl is 13 years old and not much older than the pupils. She does not have many concerns, and she has become a teacher simply because she needs the money. When she runs into difficulties, she tries to solve them in the best way she can. In contrast, the television anchor is much more sophisticated as an urban professional — she is a type of woman who has not been widely treated in Chinese cinema as yet, but I am sure there will be more portrayals of her in the years to come. The relationship between the two is interesting, especially when they are sitting side by side on the television news program. With her questions, the television anchor is guiding the audience to think about the whole problem of China's rural population. She also tries to solicit responses from the girl but does not have much success. The mother of the boy actually does appear in the film. She is ill and bedridden, and she is the one who sent the boy to the city so that he can make some money.

Moderator [S.Yoshimi]: Thank you.

The comments of the three panelists have provided a summary of the discussion so far. I am sure the points they have made will be developed further in the general discussion moderated by Professor Sakai.

Yesterday, after Professor Sakai's keynote speech and presentations from Professor Koizumi and Mr. Mohamad, it was

suggested that talking about Asia often involves a imagining a colonial type of self-identity and that this problem is not yet resolved.

Today, we left behind yesterday's questions pertaining to the 19th century and considered the dramatic changes of the last decade or so, since the 1990s, from different perspectives. We have discussed specific cases of representation in contemporary art, performance art, or film as well as art institutions such as the biennial and the art museums.

These new expressions do not contain the old stereotypes of exoticism or Orientalism. We have pointed to a new trend, the biennial, which opposes the museum, although the system dominated by Western-type museums is still strong. The media images that flow with unparalleled speed is also influencing art. In the midst of these dynamic changes, the problems of the nation state and colonial relationships are emerging again in new ways. How should we think about these multifaceted conditions? I would like to defer this discussion to the next session, which will be moderated by Professor Sakai. Please give a hand to the three panelists. Thank you.



## Session IV

### Plenary Session “What is Asia? — Transforming Cultures”

In this session, we would like to invite all the speakers on our panel to engage in a free discussion about the contemporary idea and function of “Asia” which have been reassessed several times to date, and to explore its future prospect.

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Moderator: Sakai Naoki



Moderator (N. Sakai): We have had a very productive discussion today. I am afraid our audience may be tired after long hours of presentation and discussion, but I think we have now started to see links between the discussions, so I hope you can stay with us for a while longer. I have several questions here that have been handed in from the audience. To start I would like to read the questions that are addressed to specific panelists, and have each of them respond. Later, I would like to read questions that are open to all panelists and open the discussion to the floor.

The first question is for Professor Chow.

"In one of the scenes in *Not One Less*, the girl speaking while looking at the television camera left an impression on me. The television propaganda ironically shows the connection between propaganda and propaganda, or propaganda and politics, ridiculing the authorities by showing what happens behind the scenes in propaganda-making, an art in which Chinese authorities excel. I would like to understand the relationship between propaganda and power, in relation to Zhang Yimou, a former dissident who is now commissioned by the Chinese government to produce documentary films."

The next question is addressed to Professor Yoshimi.

"My question may be too simple, but what does it mean to go 'beyond Asia'? You may have explained this yesterday already, but since it was mentioned several times, I would like to know what you meant by it. Is this border distinct? Or is it ambiguous?"

The next question is for Professor Koizumi and me. For now, let's address it to Professor Koizumi.

"You pointed out that Asia becomes visible in a relationship with what is not Asia (a word that is difficult to define). I think that the notion of the 'other' was familiar in Asia, even before the modern times. But it is a notion that is distinct from the notion of the 'other' in the Western context. Unlike the West, where 'you' comes only after a definite 'I' is established, the 'other' in Asia may include the self and the 'self' is determined by its relationship to, or distance from, the 'other.' Therefore, I think that Asians have always thought in terms of co-figuration, that is,

the formation of things in relationship rather than in isolation. In this context, isn't Okakura's idea of 'emptiness' (a concept used to define the 'self' by measuring the distance from the 'other') very Asian?

I am also concerned with the difference between Asia and the East. I do not think that Asia is synonymous with the East. It seems that China has long been considered the source of Eastern culture in the same way that Greece has been considered the pure source of Western identity. Let's take *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) and the East. I think that China is an illusionary community conjured up by the Japanese to be used as reference point. Okakura's choice of fashions related to China portrays him as a person from the East (a slightly different notion than that of an Asian person). His attitude is the same as the Westerners who try to find their roots in Greece.

About the concept of the 'other.' The 'other' in the West entails a definite 'self,' the 'you' opposed to 'me.' In Asia, especially East Asia, the 'other' might include the 'self.' Even before modern times, Asians always thought of things in pairs and determined the position of the self in a fluid relationship with others. Was it not modern Westernization that stopped this fluidity?"

The next question is addressed to Mr. Elliott and myself. I think that Mr. Elliott is the best person to answer this question.

"With all due respect to what the Japan Foundation is doing, I have a question about the exhibition, 'Under Construction' in relation to the symposium 'Asia in Transition.' My first reaction on receiving the brochure was, 'Why isn't Singapore or Malaysia part of the Asia under construction?' I enjoyed seeing the interesting work by Japanese artists, but was disturbed by the representation of 'the other.' I could not help but wonder after listening to Rey Chow's discussion of the transformation of the 'Western' gaze into a 'national gaze' with respect to the villages in Zhang's film. In this case, the 'Western gaze' was changed into the 'Japanese gaze' toward art in Asia (other Asian countries). There seem to be some inconsistencies in the related art exhibition and today's theme of Asian representation and

identity. “

The next three questions are addressed to all of us.

“In the discussion, biennials and triennials were considered an apparatus of cultural representation for the public. Does this mean that triennales are playing a completely different role from pure art? Art is part of most people’s lives, and something that they enjoy during their leisurely time. There seems to be a distance between the art that artists pursue, and art and culture that the general public, including businessmen, enjoy. To whom are we representing culture when we represent the arts and cultures of Asia, particularly in developing countries? I think this is a very fundamental issue.

There may be a political agenda embedded in multiculturalism aimed at letting people who come from different cultural backgrounds live together. Is it important to put emphasis on traditional culture in order to maintain cultural diversity? Is it possible to pursue multiculturalism as well as contemporary art in Asia? What kind of art is exhibited at triennials? Are all dimensions of culture, including religion, art, and ways of life (ethnographic objects), introduced at such events?”

The next question is more general.

“If culture is something that is inherited, can contemporary



art be left for later generations? It seems that it is the fate of contemporary art to be made and dismantled over and over. The reasons for this are: 1) It does not all fit in the white cube. 2) There are too many biennials. 3) The creative process cannot be fully exhibited."

Another question.

"Good audiences produce good artists. But I do not think that many good audiences for contemporary art have been developed in Asia. What should we do to nurture and expand the audience?"

There are two more questions, which are addressed to me. I would like to respond to them at the end.

"In yesterday's discussion, you mentioned Japan's over-emphasis on modernism, but I think this is based on *jo*, or compassion. For example, films by directors such as Kurosawa Akira, Ozu Yasujiro, and Miyazaki Hayao are very popular in Japan. On the contrary, Euro-American conceptual art that is based on postmodern theory has not been easily accepted by the Japanese, perhaps because it lacks humanistic and narrative characteristics that appeal to the Japanese. What do you think? I think the Japanese have an excessive interest in humanism."

"David Elliott spoke about tokenism and its problems, but also proposed to consider 'Asia' as a performative concept (making trousers that fit). Could I have a comment on this in relation to the postcolonialist potential of 'Asia'?"

Also, I am very interested in the opinion of art professionals on 'the unique history of identification'? Also, what are the panelists' suggestions to how to 'wear the trousers,' in the words of Mr. Elliott?"

Could I first ask Professor Chow to answer the questions?

R. Chow: The question that was specifically addressed to me was about propaganda and politics. I have several things I have to say.

First of all, I believe the notion of propaganda itself has to be interrogated and re-thought. I say this, because the notion of propaganda is used, for instance, by countries like the United States to refer to other political entities such as the former Soviet

Union, Cuba, or Communist China, in order to distinguish a Western form of government from other forms of government that are considered totalitarian. In other words, propaganda is often associated with totalitarianism. If we accept that definition of propaganda, then we are implicitly also accepting the ideology that underlies American way of thinking. There is a "Cold War" implication here. I am not sure that I would myself agree with propaganda defined in those terms.

Has the Chinese government not, in fact, been using this kind of propaganda all along? I would say yes and no. If you think that a communist government or a totalitarian government always issues propaganda, then yes. But what is interesting here, at least in this film, is that we are shown China in transition. Contemporary China has opened itself to the market, and has accepted a capitalist mode of production and consumption. So Zhang's film is interesting because it asks us to think about what has happened, in a situation like this, to the older notion of the community. I would say that this film is not propaganda, but that it shows us how the media could work under the present circumstances, when China is no longer acting like a totalitarian government any more.

To the question about cinema and propaganda in general, I do not know what my response is. I am not sure if I would always automatically equate cinema and propaganda. I think it has been negotiated in each case, depending on which film or which groups of film we are talking about.

D. Elliott: I would like to add to this comment on propaganda. This word exists as the same in Russian and related Slavic languages, and maybe also in Chinese. There is no negative meaning when it is used by an authoritarian State system, whereas in the West, it is regarded as a bad thing. But that is not to say that propaganda does not exist in the West. I think a number of us now are watching the Western media just for propaganda, particularly in relation to the world situation. It does exist.

Moderator (N. Sakai): The next question is for Professor Yoshimi.

5. Yoshimi: The question addressed to me asked what is the border or boundary? I do not recall using such an expression. If I used the word at all, I may have used it unconsciously. If I mentioned going "beyond Asia," I would have to explain what I meant by this phrase.

There are two aspects to be considered when I use the word "border." When thinking about this theoretically, I could consider the issue of border at the level of cultural representation. As Professor Sakai explained with his word, "co-figuration," there is an issue of demarcation, when we define our identity in reference to the "other" that we project outside our boundaries.

At a different level, there is an issue of demarcation and activities to cross borders that involves violence: military forces, the State, and the political and economic system, and other structural frameworks. This applies to American hegemony as well as colonialism. I would like to try to connect such violent events occurring at the national level by taking an approach that is not a simple reductionism.

Therefore, when I talk about borders, I refer to creating borders with these two perspectives in mind. In other words, I would like to turn to the problem involved in the process of developing independent subjectivity, in which borders are created at both political/militaristic and cultural representation/discourse levels.

If I referred to anything related to transcending Asia, I think I may have made a misleading statement. What I was thinking is that there are two sides to the process of creating the self or constructing Asia within a colonialist framework. The issue, in this context, is whether or not we can find a way to free ourselves from such colonialist constructs. We can only do this by discussing about Asia and representing Asia.

If I were to describe this process simply as transcending Asia, then it would conform to the current idea of globalism. That would involve the problem of, as Professor Lee put it, how representation of something Asian could coincide with the global homogeneity supported by non-Asian global identity.

*Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, a journal I mentioned earlier, is a

specific example of my activities related to this issue. Our objective is similar to what Professor Sakai is working hard to achieve in his involvement in the journal *Traces*. Our journal aims to create a new space for dialog between young researchers in the field of cultural studies, and try to discover solutions in the process. These activities take part in the globalizing process, but I think we may eventually find something meaningful along the way.

I would also like to add my comments on the issue of propaganda. I have done some research on the history of discourses related to 20th century mass communication. I have found out that during World War II, Germans, Americans, and Japanese studied propaganda energetically. Wartime propaganda studies in America turned into mass communication studies. After the war, a number of Japanese scholars who had been involved with propaganda began to say that propaganda was mass communication. Since they acknowledged that propaganda is equal to mass communication, it made perfect sense to them to substitute the concepts used for propaganda in the structure of knowledge connected to mass communications.

As seen in this example, the discursive structures supporting propaganda and mass communication are progressively linked with each other.

Moderator (N. Sakai): Thank you. If there are any questions or comments to be addressed to the panelists who have just spoken, please remember them so that you can share them with us when we open our discussion to the floor.

Now, I would like to invite Professor Koizumi to talk about the concept of *kyo*, or emptiness, in relation to Okakura and Asia.

§. Koizumi: The question that was just presented was quite penetrating and I can only agree. However, Okakura was different from those of us who unconsciously learn about China and then discover Europe because he went through this process in reverse. His father was engaged in trade, so he had Okakura educated to acquire English as his first language. Then his father

took him out in the street one day, and realized that he could not read a word of *kanji* (Chinese characters), so he enrolled him in a class to learn *kanbun* (classical Chinese). Thereafter, Okakura's writings, other than those translated from an English text, are all in a classical Chinese style. In this sense, Okakura discovered Europe before discovering China. His research in the arts also followed this order. He first went to Europe to do research on fine arts and then went to China after he became the director of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. When he went to China, he described China not as an integrated nation but as an entity similar to Europe.

In Okakura's case, the co-figuration of Asia was carried out first by taking Europe, and later by taking China, as a standard. Because of this, I do not think that the relationship between Okakura and China can be compared to that of Europeans and Greece.

Moderator (N. Sakai): This question is also addressed to me, but I think the issue entails a problem closely related to the issue of Hinglish that Mr. Vellani raised in his presentation. I would like to comment from this perspective.

In Professor Koizumi's view, the people of Japan co-figured China before the modern era, particularly in the Edo period and earlier, but I do not think this is correct. Although the word *kan* or *han* is included in the word *kanji*, which means Chinese characters, I do not think the people of the time thought of these ideographs as a Chinese writing system. This use of a certain type of script in different languages can be seen not only in the East but around the world, for example, in the use of Arabic, Sanskrit, and Latin languages.

Until the 18th century or so, the Japanese referred to Chinese characters as *mana*. *Mana* means "true script" as opposed to *kana* (the Japanese syllabary) which was ad hoc, temporary, and evasive. Therefore, I do not think that there was a concept of a Chinese language opposed to Japanese.

Therefore, the identification of linguistic imagination, in which Japan is posited against China in a co-figurative scheme, is



actually a modernist construct. Co-figuration does not take place only in a relationship with “them.” The scheme is first constructed by marking “us” and “them” as two distinct entities, and then “us” building a relationship with “them.” But it is not only that. It is an apparatus that makes us eventually forget that “us” and “them” are mutually dependent in this construct.

The circumstances changed in Japan after the Meiji Era. Until Meiji, Japanese intellectuals, primarily male, wrote *kanbun* or its transliterated style as well as pseudoclassical Japanese, creating a multilinguistic environment, similar to what Mr. Vellani described among the Indian intellectuals who use English and several vernacular languages at the same time. There must have been similar situations in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Similarly, in South Asia and Southeast Asia at a different time in history, Sanskrit may have been used in the same way *kanji* was used in Japan. Circumstances in which multiple languages co-exist, where vernacular languages are distinguished in the Indian-style of multilingual society, are themselves closely related to the issue of modernity.

There was a reference made to tracing roots back to Greece. As Mr. Mohamad revealed yesterday, Greece is not a legacy that should be monopolized by the West. This notion is comparable to the situation in Japan in the 18th century, when scholars in *kokugaku*, or the study of Japanese classical literature, were trying to reclaim Japanese classics to posit a continuum in Japanese history. In the same way, Europeans were trying to reclaim the classical period of Greece in the 18th century to posit the system of Western history.

So, the structure and mechanism by which Western scholars claimed Greece as their origin, is similar to that of the *kokugaku* scholars who claimed *Manyoshu* and *Kojiki* as Japan’s historical origin.

I would like to invite Mr. Vellani to respond.

A. Vellani: It is worth noting that the role played by Sanskrit in India in earlier times is different from the role played by English today. At some point, the Brahmins claimed the exclusive right to