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Zhang/Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Cinema, Space, Polylocality

Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. Precisely because space . . . is a product of relations-between . . . it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.

—Doreen Massey¹

Three key concepts of space reflect a significant recent development in human geography and social theory. The first is the concept of *space as product*, according to which space is seen as produced by social, political, and economic forces rather than as a natural given; an analogous concept is Henri Lefebvre’s “production of space,” which occurs at different scales, from the globe to the body, from cosmos to hearth.² The second key concept is that of *space as process*, according to which space is conceived as multiple, coeval, and relational; as such, space inevitably engages other terms such as place and locality, and it calls attention to its multidirectional flows and its historical contingency. The third concept is that of *space as productive*, according to which space becomes a dynamic force that generates changes, shapes experiences, and demands narratives; as such, space constitutes what Massey calls “a simultaneity of stories-so-far,” a discursive mechanism that at once foregrounds the multiplicity and heterogeneity of space and necessitates human intervention by way of narrativization and theoretization.

This book represents my efforts to trace distinctive threads in a multitude of “stories-so-far” concerning cinema, space, and polylocality in a globalizing China—stories seen through the abstraction of theoretical discourses, projected through imagination and technology on the screen, circulated through a myriad of spaces and places at different geographic scales, and received through negotiation in the experiential realm of everyday life. This book is not a theoretical treatise on cinema and space,³ nor is it exclusively a study of representations of space in

Chinese cinema, although several chapters deal with this second area extensively. Rather, my initial interests are twofold: first, to explore what kind of new perspectives and insights we may gain from an investigation of contemporary Chinese cinema and culture in terms of space and polylocality; and second, to bring into dialogue various “stories-so-far” in contemporary Chinese cinema that articulate, explicitly or implicitly, ideas of space and polylocality. This introductory chapter, therefore, is devoted to a consideration of the theories of space, place, locality, and globalization that inform my discussion in the following chapters on transnational cinema, the spaces of production and reception, the remapping of the city and polylocality, subjectivities and modes of independent filmmaking, performative documentaries, and piracy as intervention, as well as glocal, transnational market dynamics.

Cinema and Space

THEORIES OF SPACE AND CINEMA

Three major theoretical frameworks have inspired my investigation of cinema and space in contemporary China. First, as Lefebvre argues, if “space is a product,” then the object of our interest must “shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*,” that is, from space as a fixed entity to space as a “productive process” that induces change and is subject to revision.⁴ Corresponding to what he describes as “three moments of social space” or a “triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived,” Lefebvre differentiates three critical concepts: “spatial practice” (a physical space characterized by a certain cohesiveness without necessarily being coherent), “representations of space” (a space largely dominated by social engineers that tends toward a system of verbal signs), and “representational spaces” (a space dominated by artists and writers that tends toward a system of nonverbal symbols and signs, which David Harvey prefers to call “spaces of representation” linked to “imagination”).⁵ Cinema undoubtedly belongs to Lefebvre’s representational space, because it “has an affective kernel,” “embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations,” and “may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.”⁶ Lefebvre’s dynamic model accounts for the coexistence of heterogeneous spaces in a salient representational space that is cinema: absolute space, abstract space, contradictory space, differentiated space, appropriated space, social space, natural space, leisure space, counterspace, and so forth.

Lefebvre’s theory of space, which leaves an indelible mark on Massey’s conceptualization of the relationality and open-endedness of space, emphasizes the *interplay* between the production of space and the space of production. Lefebvre has

convinced me to direct attention not just to the dominant or official space, but to an array of dominated yet alternative, interstitial, and contingent spaces that have been opened up or produced by the new spaces of Chinese film production since the early 1990s: underground (*dixia*), independent (*duli*), semi-independent, semiofficial, translocal, and transnational. As illustrated in Chapters 3 through 6, such new spaces of production have further assisted the production of alternative spaces of appropriation, contestation, and subversion in film representation and reception.

The second framework is Miriam Bratu Hansen's theory of early cinema and the public sphere, which shifts the emphasis from the space of film representation (which pertains to the symbols and signs in Lefebvre's analysis) to that of film exhibition and reception (which pertains to lived experiences). Drawing on the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Hansen explores the possibility of a "plebeian," "proletarian," or "oppositional" public sphere vis-à-vis the dominant industrial-commercial public sphere (marked by its Taylorist-Fordist technological operations) on the one hand and the idealized bourgeois public sphere (marked by its Habermasian democratic reasoning) on the other.⁷ "The political issue," Hansen surmises, "is whether and to what extent a public sphere is organized from above—by the exclusive standards of high culture or the stereotypes of commodity culture—or by the experiencing subjects themselves, on the basis of their context of living (*Lebenszusammenhang*)."⁸ By offering an attractive public space where moviegoers from different classes congregate in their leisure time, cinema may constitute a public sphere whose experiential function differs from rationalization in the bourgeois public sphere or commodification in the industrial-commercial public sphere.

The spatiality of Hansen's theorization is conspicuous—the abstract, dominant spaces of the industrial-commercial and bourgeois public spheres vis-à-vis the empirical, dominated space of *Lebenszusammenhang*—and her emphasis is unequivocally placed on the latter. Hansen's work dovetails with that of Lefebvre and Massey in that *Lebenszusammenhang* exists in certain sociospatial relations to the dominant public spheres, and such relations are not fixed but change over time due to different spatial configurations of power or what Massey calls "power-geometries," thereby producing the possibility of *opposition* within the same system.⁹ While it is debatable whether the concept of a public sphere is applicable to modern China,¹⁰ I contend that the possible existence of an oppositional public sphere in the space of film exhibition and reception is indispensable to the formation and maintenance of alternative film culture in contemporary China (see Chapters 3 and 6).¹¹

The third framework is Michel de Certeau's theory of "spatial practices." It differs from Lefebvre's use of the same term in that it covers human activities more than physical space, and it also substantiates Hansen's conjecture concerning the

audience's sensorial, affective experience in an alternative, potentially oppositional, public sphere. Whereas Hansen speculates on the liberating effects derived from the female cult of Rudolf Valentino in the United States of the 1920s—"a kind of rebellion, a desperate protest against the passivity and one-sidedness with which patriarchal cinema supports the subordinate position of women in the gender hierarchy,"¹² de Certeau focuses on a more widespread, tangible everyday experience—"walking in the city"—and elevates this mundane act to a significant trope of spatial practices. Imagining a scenario of "pedestrian speech acts," he locates in this otherwise inconsequential practice of walking a triple enunciative function: "it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system . . . ; it is a spatial acting-out of the place . . . ; and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements."¹³ Space, in de Certeau's theorization, is defined as much by preconceived borders as by improvised movements, as much by rigid institutional systems as by imaginative individual subjects, as much by strategies of the dominant power as by tactics of performative appropriation. De Certeau writes thus of the contrastive, contradictory functions of walking as a particular form of spatial practice: "Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks.'"¹⁴

De Certeau's concept of spatial practices acknowledges the power of "cognitive spacing," which, according to Zygmunt Bauman, "derives from modernity's desire to master space; to determine a place for everything and ensure that everything is in its place—so that surveillance might readily reveal what is 'out of place,'"¹⁵ Although de Certeau's concept of power may be too monolithic and too binary in nature (domination versus resistance, surveillance versus transgression), the way he envisions walking as an act that "speaks" its own trajectories reaffirms Lefebvre's characterization of representational space—it "is alive: it speaks."¹⁶ As a representational space itself, cinema likewise speaks to its audience—attracting them with many "stories-so-far"—and, as Hansen suggests, drawing on Kluge's work, "makes the viewing 'public' (*Publikum*) a public sphere (*Offentlichkeit*)" through a shared intersubjective horizon in collective reception.¹⁷ Indeed, similar to de Certeau's scenario of an individual's appropriation or transgression under the dominant power's strategic surveillance, filmmakers and audiences may obtain new experiences and generate new meanings in excess of—if not in opposition to—those intended by the nation-state or the market, and they can choose to share these experiences and meanings in public, collectively. This is exactly what has happened in China as it globalizes, where a new set of power-geometries has produced new spaces of film production and reception, and these new spaces—however marginal, ephemeral, or liminal—have provided individuals with a potent means of experiencing, sharing, and enhancing the liberating potentials proffered by cinema.

GLOBALIZATION, SPACE, AND PLACE

Globalization is subject to spatial conceptualization in a number of ways. First, in terms of sociospatial restructuring, Manuel Castells points to the transformation of socially and spatially based relationships of production into flows of information and power that articulate the new flexible system of production and management. Central to a new sociospatial logic, the “space of flows” is considered global in its impact on the new “informational society” and functional at three prominent levels: the infrastructural (the “wired world”), the organizational (world cities), and the managerial (informational elites). Although paying more attention to structural than human factors, Castells nonetheless presents a convincing argument that globalization is “an era where *timeless time* exists in tension with chronological time” and “a space of flows exists in tension with a space of places.”¹⁸

Second, in terms of the space-place configuration, place seems to be losing out to space in the era of globalization. As Castells asserts, “A place is a locale whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity.”¹⁹ Driven by the logic of flows, the world of places (for example, the home, the city) is increasingly superseded by spaces characterized by circulation, velocity, and flow, and this tendency is visually reflected, on the one hand, in the widespread demolition of old neighborhoods in developing cities like Beijing and Shanghai (see Chapter 4) and, on the other, in the proliferation of serialized, ahistorical, and acultural architectural projects like international hotels, airports, and supermarkets in world cities.²⁰ Interestingly, such architectural projects, along with the shopping mall, the highway, and the multiplex cinema, are classified by Marc Augé as “non-places,” which serve as symptoms of supermodernity and “its essential quality: excess.”²¹

Third, in terms of scale readjustment, globalization tends to favor the global at the expense of the local. Even the apparently balanced term of “glocalization”—a neologism derived from a 1980s Japanese marketing slogan, *dochakuka*—already implies unevenness in that it means globalization for some and localization for others.²² Globalization thus works to polarize society in accordance with differentiated mobility: “Some inhabit the globe; others are chained to place.”²³ The polarization of freedom of movement and its lack consequently adds a new dimension to deprivation: being merely local in a globalized (or glocalized) world is automatically rendered a secondary existence.²⁴ Globalization, in Bauman’s judgment, “divides as much as it unites—the causes of the division being identical with those that promote the uniformity of the globe.”²⁵

Some scholars, however, have questioned the current trope that local places are victimized by the forces of globalization. Arturo Escobar, for one, is not persuaded by the structurally lopsided view in which “the global is associated with

space, capital, history and agency while the local, conversely, is linked to place, labor, and tradition—as well as with women, minorities, the poor and . . . local cultures.”²⁶ The problem is that the victimization view identifies with a “development discourse” that champions the space of capital and power and gives the impression that place is left behind due to its grounded locality and backward tradition, both of which have rendered it less competitive in globalization and more susceptible to stagnation and poverty.²⁷ Worse still, Massey observes, “So long as inequality is read in terms of stages of advance and backwardness not only are alternative stories disallowed but also the fact of the production of poverty and polarization within and through ‘globalization’ itself can be erased from view.”²⁸ To restore a balanced view of place and locality in the geography of globalization, Massey calls for “a global sense of the local, a global sense of place.”²⁹

In a more radical fashion than Massey, Arif Dirlik draws on Bruno Latour and poses a challenging question: “What if the global were local, or placed-based, just as the local or placed-based were global?”³⁰ One objective of Dirlik’s challenge is to disrupt the deceptive symmetry in recent discussions of the global and the local: “The global is localized, and the local is globalized. That is the symmetry. But the globalization of the local does not compensate in terms of politics, economy, and culture for the localization of the global. That is the asymmetry.”³¹ Dirlik’s challenge also seeks to move beyond the hybridity of the global-local or the glocal toward “a recognition of the primacy of place, and of its autonomy, and, *on that irreducible basis*, to produce translocal or, better still, transplace alliances and cooperative formations.”³² Herein lies the core of Dirlik’s project of “placed-based imagination,” which Dirlik himself admits is open to the charge of “utopian dreaming” but which urges academics to prioritize “the voices of the weak who are straining to be heard” over “the voices of globalism that erase both people and places.”³³ As demonstrated throughout this book, many Chinese independent directors make it their mission to articulate the voices of the weak (Chapter 4), and translocal alliances have emerged to launch place-based projects of independent production and exhibition (Chapter 5). These new translocal formations thus require us to reflect further on issues of cinema and polylocality.

Cinema and Polylocality

THE PRODUCTION OF SCALE AND TRANSLOCALITY

In reasserting the primacy of place, Dirlik has, in effect, attempted to rebalance the scales in relation to place, tipping them toward the local: “Place as metaphor suggests groundedness from below, and a flexible and porous boundary around it, without closing out the extralocal, all the way to the global.”³⁴ Two ideas are behind

this attempt: the multiplicity of places along the continuum of scale, and the production of scale itself. First, as Yi-Fu Tuan remarked decades ago, “Place exists at different scales,” which stretch from the cherished hearth (home) to the boundless cosmos (nature).³⁵ Notwithstanding Dirlik’s emphasis on the political advantage of staying place-based, the sheer possibility of the coexistence of place at different scales implies the necessity to consider the relationality and multiplicity of place and locality; this is what Massey has pursued in her work. Second, as Neil Smith theorizes, geographical scales such as local, regional, national, and global are not given in nature but are historically contingent outcomes of diverse social processes.³⁶ As with space, scale is socially produced. Understood as “a process that is always deeply heterogeneous, conflictual, and contested,”³⁷ the production of scale thus permits the possibility of jumping scale, both jumping up vertically along a hierarchy (as in a corporation bypassing the state and reaching the European Union directly) and jumping across horizontally (as in an NGO [non-government organization] forming an alliance through a multilocal network).

Jing Wang’s study of the changing cultural policy in a globalizing China reveals that the production of scale can be done in an authoritarian (that is, state-mandated) manner or in a contested (that is, extrastate or even counterstate) manner. The overhaul of the state-owned media industries reflects authoritarian, yet market-driven, efforts in the production of scale.³⁸ To furnish an example from China’s film industry: several previously state-owned but city-based film studios were merged around 2001 to form new, formidable-sounding “film groups” (*dianying jituan*), such as the North China Film Group, based in Changchun; the Northwest Film Group, in Xi’an; the Southwest Film Group, in Chengdu; and the South China Film Group in Guangzhou. Strategically positioned as *regional* players, these new film groups have shed their former *municipal* affiliations (such as Changchun and Xi’an) or geographic associations (for example, Emei, a mountain near Chengdu, and Zhujiang or the Pearl River, which runs through Guangzhou), have jumped beyond the *provincial* scale of certain smaller provincial studios (such as Fujian and Zhejiang), and are competing for investment *nationally* and *internationally* with the two most prominent film production conglomerates, China Film Group, based in Beijing, and Shanghai Film Group, in Shanghai. By producing a new regional scale—capable of encompassing both intranational regions (as in new film groups) and extranational regions (as in coproductions with Japan and South Korea), Chinese state policy-makers appear to believe that size and scale matter in China’s confrontation with Hollywood, especially after its entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001.³⁹

The production of scale engenders new scale relations, which are complicated by the increasing flows of capital, information, goods, and people in a globalizing China. Moreover, such flows across scale create new linkages among previously

unconnected or loosely connected locales, thereby generating a new sense of translocality. According to Carolyn Cartier, “Dialectical scale relations may be thought of as a set of ‘translocal’ processes for the ways in which the translocal are those multiple places of attachment experienced by highly mobile people.”⁴⁰ In China today, highly mobile people include not only the transnational business elites who trot the globe with ease but also—and far more important for anthropologists and sociologists—hundreds of millions of “migrant workers” (*mingong*; also known as the floating population) who leave their rural villages and move about in big cities in search of better opportunities.⁴¹

Proceeding with David Goodman’s working definition of translocality as “*being identified with more than one location*,” Tim Oakes and Louisa Schein elaborate the concept in order “to highlight a simultaneous analytic focus on mobilities *and* localities,” as well as identities and subjectivities.⁴² For them, translocality designates not just the mobility of people but also the circulation of capital, ideas and images, goods and styles, services, diseases, technologies, and modes of communication. “The flow of media messages represents a chief form of translocality that does not entail human movement,” they remind us; so even when people stay put in a local place, their subjectivities may be transformed by translocal processes.⁴³ In Oakes’ study, ethnic tourism in southwest China is one such translocal process, in which a local village theme park is linked to the national agenda of modernity, while in Schein’s study, migrant Miao minority women’s hair dye, ethnic costume, and chili spices become their embodied means of translocal identification.⁴⁴

Thus elaborated, translocality implies multiple sites of identification (no longer a unique “native place” or *guxiang*) and suggests that “home itself becomes complicated, its roots to a single locality multiplied to a network of localities.”⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, such a home-related network of localities can be multiplied across scale, as is confirmed by Yunxiang Yan’s fieldwork on managed globalization in China. In 1998 Yan met a successful Chinese businesswoman in her late thirties, a self-styled “world citizen.” She was a U.S. permanent resident who owned two real estate companies in two mainland Chinese cities, an export-import firm in Hong Kong, and a family house in Connecticut, and she claimed that she only experienced “the feeling of being at home” in her American residence.⁴⁶

Yan’s example demonstrates that the production of translocality in the age of globalization involves both displacement (migration) and emplacement (resettlement) and that people on the move may have access to *agency* and assert identity in a place where it is least expected. Stuart Hall’s insight is illuminating: “From the diaspora perspective, identity has many imagined ‘homes’ (and therefore no one single homeland); it has many different ways of ‘being at home’—since it conceives of individuals as capable of drawing in different maps of meaning and locating them in different geographies at one and the same time—but it is not tied to one,

particular place.”⁴⁷ Not only does such identification with multiple places of “being at home” establish the persistence of translocality across scale, but it also keeps agency alive, no matter how intermittently or interstitially, in a world dominated by capital and its attendant development discourse.

The question of agency surfaces when migrant Miao workers, in Schein’s study, renegotiate the ranking of scales between urban and rural and remake them so they are less hierarchical and more horizontal. “Horizontal, then, becomes another way of expressing an unbounded local scale,” Oakes and Schein contend, and they encourage us to “read these instances as struggles that seek to ‘equalize’ social relations across scale, to replace the ladder with more traversable concentric circles.”⁴⁸ Admittedly, in a fundamentally authoritarian society like China, the projection of agency in such a bottom-up attempt at scale adjustment seems to verge on utopian dreaming, as Dirlik acknowledges for his place-based projects. Nonetheless, a reexamination of scale relations highlights the still-evolving and unprecedented phenomenon of migration and mobility in today’s China.

In the framework of cinema and polylocality, my discussion of the production of scale and translocality serves to foreground an unswerving concern with the *experiential* realm of everyday life or the quotidian, a concern China anthropologists and geographers—more than China economists and sociologists—share with the majority of Chinese filmmakers. Everyday spatial practices in specific locales are what attract scholars and filmmakers alike. In Jing Wang’s opinion, “This emphasis on practice and locale immediacy inevitably turns the quotidian into the most important scale for the Chinese. . . . It is in the quotidian where their struggle over space is improvised, where the inevitable embeddedness of a place is lived and the production of differences taken for granted.”⁴⁹

POLYLOCALITY, TRANS-SPATIALITY, CINEMA

Trans-spatiality enables cinema to play with all kinds of space, and such play contributes substantially to the production of space at different scales. As summarized above, translocality simultaneously designates three areas: places of attachment or identification, people whose physical or imaginary movements across scale connect disparate spaces and places, and technologies and modes of communication that facilitate such attachment, identification, movement, and connection. Although I use both translocality and polylocality in this book to denote the multiplicity of space and locality in contemporary Chinese cinema, I maintain a crucial difference between the two terms. Whereas *polylocality* recognizes the existence of multiple, diverse localities and therefore contains the possibility of a *translocality* that could connect these localities, it differs from translocality in that it does not guarantee the realization of this translocal potential. In other words, polylocality acknowledges that identification and connection between localities can be denied

or prohibited; that not all polylocality is brought into translocality in the same way; and that inequality or unevenness exists in polylocality because of different access to translocality.

As a spectacularly successful product of and vehicle for modern technology and culture, cinema is polylocal and translocal at different scales. Insofar as production is concerned, the polylocality of cinema is built into its division of labor; the individual responsibilities of the producer, the director, the screenwriter, the cinematographer, the cast, the crew, and so forth are rarely accomplished in one locality alone, and the practice of shooting on location requires travel to different places beyond the studio. Cinema's capital-intensive processes are complicated by equally intensive, and often highly precarious processes of distribution, exhibition, and reception—processes that by necessity extend from the local through the provincial to the national (for a domestic box-office success) and, in the case of transnational blockbusters (*dapian*), to the regional, the continental (Asia, Europe, North America), and even the global (in the case of simultaneous premieres). Such is the translocality of cinema that all localities across scale must be coordinated in an efficient way, and all disparate elements must weave together into a seamless screen product. It is a truism to declare that “no film is an island.”⁵⁰

In the era of globalization, the polylocality of cinema can be stretched in an extraordinary fashion in order to minimize production costs, maximize market profits, and intensify visual and other pleasures. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 1999) is one such celebrated success. The principal personnel of this transnational coproduction consisted of director Ang Lee (Taiwan-born, U.S.-educated); screenwriters James Schamus (Lee's longtime New York-based collaborator), Wang Hui Ling (Taiwan), and Tsai Kuo Jung (Taiwan); cinematographer Peter Pau (Hong Kong); action choreographer Yuen Wo Ping (Hong Kong); production and costume designer Tim Yip (Hong Kong); music composer Tan Dun (mainland China-born, U.S.-educated); as well as major stars Chow Yun-Fat (Hong Kong), Michelle Yeoh (Hong Kong), Chen Chang (Taiwan), and Zhang Ziyi (mainland China).⁵¹ Originally marketed as a martial arts picture for the art-house circuit in the West (including Australia, Europe, and North America), *Crouching Tiger* garnered high praise at European film festivals and went on to rake in US\$128 million in the United States alone, making it the highest-grossing Chinese-language film to date.⁵² The film was nominated for Best Picture and Best Director at the Academy Awards and won Oscars for Best Foreign Film, Best Art Direction, Best Cinematographer, and Best Music-Original Score.

Schamus touches on the film's polylocality in his reminiscence:

This film was shot in almost every corner of China, including the Gobi Desert and the Taklamakan Plateau, north of Tibet, near the Kyrgyzstan border. We

were based for a time in Urumchi, where all the street signs are in Chinese and Arabic, then all the way down south to the Bamboo Forest in Anji and north to Cheng De, where the famous summer palace is. The studio work was done in Beijing; we recorded the music in Shanghai. The background vocals for the end credit song were recorded in Los Angeles and we did post-production looping in Hong Kong.⁵³

Apart from such polylocality on and off screen, many other aspects of the film also underscore translocality at work. The screenplay and subtitles, for instance, undertook several translocal—or trans-Pacific in this case—shuffles. As Schamus recalls, “I write in English, it’s rewritten into Mandarin, then I have it translated back into English”; after adapting what he calls the “international subtitle” style for the screenplay, he compares his translocal, translanguing experience to “going

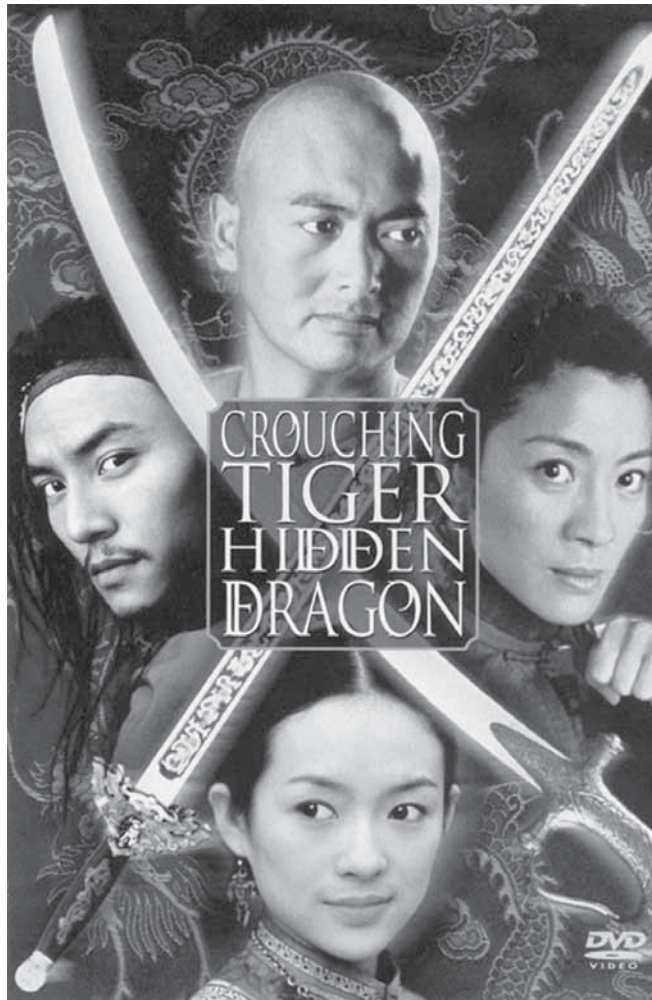


Figure 1.1. DVD cover of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (1999): a worldwide martial arts sensation

to another mental space.”⁵⁴ The music in the film likewise reveals its polylocal sources (from traditional, ethnic, and pop music in China to Western orchestral music), and Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello solos.

While recent global successes such as *Crouching Tiger* have compelled scholars to reexamine the paradigm of national cinema and explore transnational cinema (see Chapter 2), Schamus’ experience of “going to another mental space” redirects our attention to cinema and space. In addition to being polylocal, cinema is *trans-spatial*. Its trans-spatiality is embodied first and foremost in the multi-dimensioned space created by the screen projection, so the viewer’s attention can easily travel from one space to another, from the image-track (for example, the sets, the costumes, the *mise-en-scène*) to the sound track (both diegetic and non-diegetic sound), from the space of narrative to that of performance, from physical to symbolic and imaginary spaces on and off screen—in short, from the material to the dream world.⁵⁵ After all, Ang Lee confesses, “My desire to direct a martial arts film comes from nostalgia for classical China . . . a conceptual world based on ‘imaginary China’ . . . that does not exist in reality”; precisely because it no longer exists, Lee feels “free and unrestrained” in his recreation of that dream world on screen: “I can express sentimentality. . . . I can design music and sound effects. There are no limitations.”⁵⁶ Indeed, cinematic space is virtually boundless.

Cinema’s trans-spatial practice returns us to Massey’s concept of space as multiple and relational, and this conceptualization makes “trans-spatiality” a superfluous term because space itself now contains such trans-spatiality or multiple spatialities. I will therefore drop “trans-spatiality” in the following chapters, but I want to emphasize that cinema’s capacity to play with all kinds of space contributes directly to the production of space at different scales. Polylocality, which pertains more to the space of production than to the production of space, further enriches the enormous sociospatial potentiality of cinema. Together, space and polylocality have engendered countless stories-so-far in film studies, film production, and film reception, some of which I will now investigate in the context of a globalizing China.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 2 THROUGH 7

Chapters 2 through 7 are also each divided into two interrelated parts, and the term “space” is used more thematically than conceptually in chapter titles to pinpoint topics under double scrutiny. Chapter 2, “Space of Scholarship: Trans/National and Comparative Studies,” urges scholars to move beyond the national cinema paradigm and to explore the transnational and comparative frameworks of film studies. The first part of the chapter revisits the concept of national cinema and investigates what the old paradigm has marginalized or obscured. I argue that the movement and auteur approaches typical of national cinema scholarship tend

to emphasize national cultures and political exigencies at the expense of transnational and cross-regional practices. If examined from the perspective of translocal or transnational flows, certain “ruptures” dismissed by official film historiography may be reconfigured as polylocal dynamics that have tapped into vast resources from disparate geopolitical localities.

The second part of Chapter 2 pursues a different kind of translocality by proposing comparative film studies as a subfield larger than transnational film studies. I recommend that, apart from rethinking issues of Eurocentrism, film studies go beyond the imperative of following money and simultaneously address contextual as well as textual, intertextual, and subtextual aspects of film production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. Within a general comparative framework, this part identifies certain neglected and underdeveloped areas in Chinese film studies, such as audience research, piracy, literary adaptation, and cross-mediality between film and arts such as theater, photography, and video. An emphasis on interdisciplinarity only enriches our understanding of the transcultural visuality embodied by film language and technology.

Chapter 3, “Space of Production: Postsocialist Filmmaking,” considers both the space of production and the production of space in postsocialist Chinese cinema. Dai Jinhua’s *guangchang* (square) complex provides a sharp lens on the changing power-geometries in 1990s China, while Lefebvre’s differentiation of isotopias, utopias, and heterotopias and Foucault’s meditation on other spaces help illustrate the coexistence and interpenetration of underground, independent, semi-independent, and official modes of filmmaking. After presenting a diagram on modes of interactions among contending players of politics, capital, art, and marginality, the first part of the chapter traces the early trajectories of Wang Xiaoshuai and Zhang Yuan and emphasizes the importance of marginality in cultivating an alternative public sphere.

The second part of Chapter 3 examines the emergence of the sixth generation by focusing on a symptomatic film, *Dirt* (Guan Hu, 1994), which, by mixing outcry with nostalgia and implosion, represents a rebellious spirit and intentionally depicts socialist history and memory in ruins. A detour through the subcultural margins of rock music in the early 1990s further clarifies the situation in which a new urban generation struggled to position themselves in a changing landscape of postsocialist China. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, Chinese urban cinema went through substantial transformation as a newer group of young filmmakers joined the earlier generation and explored feelings of deprivation, disillusion, despair, disdain, and indignation.

Chapter 4, “Space of Polylocality: Remapping the City,” examines the cinematic representations of Beijing and a persistent engagement with polylocality in hinterland China. In this era of globalization, Chinese filmmakers’ remapping of

Beijing favors street-level views over cartographic surveys, contingent experience over systematic knowledge, and bittersweet local *histoires* over grand-scale global history. The first part of the chapter delineates the local/global dynamic of Beijing in two ways: it surveys the imaginaries of Beijing in Hollywood history and then analyzes four Chinese films set in Beijing and released in the new millennium. Significantly, Beijing has emerged from this new round of cinematic remapping as a city of polylocality, and the transnational production of all four films reveals another kind of polylocality at work in postsocialist China.

The second part of Chapter 4 analyzes Jia Zhangke's most recent works as place-based projects grounded in polylocality and critical of the trappings of modernity and globalization. While his documentaries *In Public* (2001) and *Dong* (2006) record the ambivalences of public space, expose the journey as a recurring trope in contemporary life, and heighten the vitality and dignity of human bodies, his feature *Still Life* (2006) foregrounds the disappearance of the local at the same time that it captures translocal connections ranging from landscapes on RMB banknotes to migrant workers displaced to faraway provinces like Guangdong and Shanxi. The motif of currencies—Euros, U.S. dollars, and RMB—further intensifies translocality at different scales, as underprivileged people struggle to cope with the enormous consequences of the Three Gorges Dam, a place of history superimposed on the space of nature.

Chapter 5, "Space of Subjectivity: Independent Documentary," contextualizes the claims of independent Chinese directors to truth and reality and their experiments with various documentary modes and styles. The first part of the chapter exposes the subjectivity hidden behind the Chinese independents' insistence on the truthfulness of their perception of realities. The question of the audience complicates the unusual methods of underground film production and their limited exhibition in unofficial venues in Chinese cities. A study of the drastically different reception of *Xiao Wu* at home and abroad further underscores the dilemma facing Chinese independents, who seek to redefine their positions as unofficial, underground, independent, personal, and/or amateur filmmakers.

The second part of Chapter 5 explores the origins, styles, problems, solutions, and directions of the Chinese independent documentary. I argue that the Chinese preference for the *cinéma vérité* and interview styles represents an attempt to resist the propagandist, voice-of-God approach in official news and documentary programming. However, self-erasure and misconceived objectivity typical of earlier independent works engendered problems in documentary filmmaking, and a self-repositioning from the late 1990s onward has reclaimed the subjective voice and readjusted the artists' attitude toward their subjects. The call for returning to the personal is further exemplified in the current euphoria for DV (digital video) works, and amateur and activist filmmaking once again highlights the translocal

connections between independent documentary and ordinary people's lives in a changing society.

Chapter 6, "Space of Performance: Media and Mediation," examines Chinese independent works in a reception context of polylocality where domestic neglect contrasts with overseas celebration. The first part of the chapter proposes that we approach the contemporary Chinese independent documentary as a troubling case of information. The case is troubling not only because certain types of intended information may trouble age-old normative concepts in Chinese culture and society, but also because the status of images and information in Chinese independent documentaries raises critical questions regarding interpretation, access, mediation, ethics, affect, and agency. An analysis of *The Box* (Ying Weiwei, 2001), a documentary about a lesbian couple, brings the performative into critical scrutiny and challenges the conventional framework of truth and reality.

The second part of Chapter 6 examines piracy as a thorny issue that cuts across the interconnected domains of film, law, market, morality, creativity, and democracy. Rather than endorsing the media industry's outright condemnation of film piracy as an illegal practice in need of control and eradication, I am interested in both the intertextuality and the contextuality of film piracy in China. The intertextuality in question derives from the multifarious uses of piracy on and off the Chinese screen, and I focus particularly on the production of alternative meanings through the "pirated" intertextuality in recent Chinese independent filmmaking.

Finally, Chapter 7, "Conclusion: Progress, Problems, Prospects," offers an overview of Chinese cinema in the twenty-first century and traces representative directors and important works in a lopsided industry dominated by transnational coproductions of blockbuster films. I offer two tables of the latest market statistics, which I hope will stimulate further research into the interplay between production and exhibition, between underground and aboveground, between domestic and overseas agencies, and between capital and culture.

Overall, this book seeks to rethink the local/global dynamics in contemporary Chinese cinema and to prioritize space and polylocality in our consideration of the power-geometries in a rapidly changing society. If I devote most of my attention to the space of marginality and alternative film culture, it is because this newly opened space represents some of the most interesting works, ones that broaden the scope of social concerns and artistic expressions at the local and global scales. My emphasis on either end of the scale, however, does not in any way render the national insignificant or ineffective. On the contrary, the national remains a haunting presence, which is why I have chosen to confront it first, in Chapter 2.