

In demystifying the total effect of the national in Chinese film-making and studies, Zhang reflects upon scholarship on Chinese cinema, a field he has been engaged with for over a decade. He revisits the thorny issue of what constitutes “Chinese cinema” and points out the insufficiency in defining it by privileging the linguistic over the national, in terms such as “Chinese-language cinema” or “Sinophone cinema.” Zhang moves his focus from the definition to a more productive approach to Chinese cinema. In terms of discipline, he prefers comparative films studies to transnational film studies because “comparative studies is more likely to capture the multi-directionality” (p. 31) and the connotation of the national in transnationalism is unsettled (p. 40). Within the comparative paradigm, Zhang differentiates the framework of comparative film studies from comparative literature. In particular, he notes that comparative film studies moves beyond the nation-state model, disavows the elitism in comparative literature, and encompasses influences, parallels, interrelations and cross-fertilization between disciplines, media and technologies (p. 33).

Shifting the paradigm beyond the national, Zhang is able to open up underdeveloped and obscure sectors in Chinese cinema studies. He attentively sheds light on marginality in Chinese cinema, while attending to its centralized counterpart; for example, independent versus institutional film making, audience versus auteur in film research, Beijing versus Shanghai in polylocality, documentarists’ collective versus individual articulation of subjectivity, performativity versus objectivity. Zhang’s demystification of the claim by notable sixth-generation directors – “my camera does not lie” – is remarkable. He keenly identifies what lies behind this collective claim by distinguishing the actual truth from what the film makers perceive as truth.

Zhang’s book illustrates the productiveness of space as a conceptual and thematic term in contemporary Chinese cinema in particular and cinema studies in general. The treatment of space as a critical term, however, is uneven across chapters. Zhang’s preference for the prefix of “multi” and “poly” over “trans” implies the heterogeneity inherent in Chinese cinema in the global age including the capital, politics, aesthetics, consumption and discourse. It also shows his open-mindedness and inclusiveness in considering his research object. Zhang gives the nature of the subject equal importance regardless of the amount of invested capital or size of box office returns, whether elite or plebian in content, by famed or obscure director, distributed legally or otherwise. For this reader, it is arguable whether parody, either through intertextuality or intercontextuality, should be considered as a form of piracy. The concept of piracy seems to be expanded so broad as to leading to a limitless tolerance of the alternative in film circulation, distribution, making and remaking. Finally, still shots that illustrate issues under discussion would be better than the DVD covers or posters of such films that are used here.

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*Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*

YOMI BRAESTER

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010

Xiv + 405 pp. £16.99; \$26.95

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Yomi Braester’s *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* is a revisionist study of, as well as an important theoretical intervention in, Chinese urban

cinema and drama between 1949 and 2008 that is rooted in close textual readings and archival research. By tracing the urban development of such cities as Beijing, Shanghai and Taipei, Braester's work sheds new light on the intimate and shifting power relationships between urban planning, film and theatrical productions on the one hand, and the tensions between cinematic representations of city spaces and urban discourses of global modernity on the other. In *Painting the City Red*, Braester returns to the centre stage the role of urban visual media in creating real and imaginary temporal, spatial and ideological dimensions of today's Chinese cityscapes. The "urban contract" (p. 1) forged between urban planners, policy makers and filmmakers, reveals how visual representations could both adopt and resist the official regulatory power over the visions of post-socialist China.

Structured by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "chronotopes," or the symbiosis pairing of "locations and temporal perceptions" (p. 18), each of the seven chapters in *Painting the City Red* interrogates how the construction of cityscapes in and through cinema and drama shapes people's urban identities and changing visions of urban sites such as Shanghai's Nanjing Road and Taipei's veterans' villages. The first three chapters examine how the government often intervened in both staged dramas and film productions to influence the public opinion of its urban policies. For instance, in order to justify the transformation of Beijing's Longxugou area into an urbanized neighbourhood for modern living in the early 1950s, the government presented this public works project as a "socialist utopia" (p. 41) in the play and film versions of *Dragon Whisker Creek* (chapter one). Similarly, state-sponsored heavy-handed "main melody" plays such as *Goldfish Ponds* (2001) were used as vehicles to quell the debates between the preservation of vernacular architectural heritage of Beijing's courtyard houses on the one hand and the post-Maoist policies and projects of demolition-and-relocation in the new global economy of marketization on the other.

Whereas the first three chapters recount the top-down intervention of the government in film and drama productions, the next four chapters offer glimpses of "dissident resistance" (p. 153) and alternative visions of Chinese cityscapes. The statist monopoly over public urban spaces and national identity is contested and negotiated for instance in and through the visual renditions of Tiananmen Square from 1949 to the present by such directors as Teng Wenji and Zhang Yuan (chapter four). Their bold cinematic and aesthetic visions of Tiananmen Square "[tilted] the balance of power" (p. 186) by transforming the singular "state symbolism" of this "monumental space" (p. 153) into a daily-lived space infused with multiple uses and meanings for the citizens.

In the 1980s, amidst the urbanization of Taipei and Beijing, these cities experienced the trauma of the gentrification processes (chapters five and six). Despite the fact that both the New Taiwan Cinema and recent mainland films could not stop the violence of gentrification policies on the citizens, filmmakers took on the crusade to document the changing cities. Through their cinematic strategy of preserving the very acts of demolition on the celluloid, filmmakers were able to symbolically challenge official policies of demolition and relocation.

Braester's innovative reinterpretations of films by such renowned Chinese filmmakers as Tsai Ming-Liang, Chen Kaige, Feng Xiaogang and Jia Zhangke move beyond the auteurist approach and offer new assessments of their contributions in the rewriting of urban Chinese history and identities. Although this study focuses on the hegemonic ethos of political seats of power in major cities at the expense of "marginalized locations" at "the city's edge" (p. 24), this omission by no means detracts the importance of Braester's work but rather signals the possibilities of his

new methodological approach to Chinese film studies. Another area that needs further exploration is the role of citizens as critical spectators and active participants in the forging of the urban contract. Just as the meanings of urban spaces could never be monopolized by the singular statist gaze of the Maoist and post-Maoist regimes, in post-socialist China's globalizing economy, citizens become travellers in transit who may offer new visions of unbounded cinematic and spatial configurations of urban spaces which could encompass a multitude of experiences of virtual communities beyond the limits of geopolitical boundaries.

This theoretically sophisticated and painstakingly researched monograph is a welcome addition to the fields of Chinese film studies and urban history. Students and scholars from a wide range of disciplines such as Chinese and Asian studies, film and theatre, urban planning, global studies and cultural studies will find valuable approaches not only to the study of Chinese cities and urban cinema but also to new understandings of the urban milieu and visual media representations of other global cities.

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*Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse*

SHELLEY RIGGER

Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011

ix + 209 pp. \$32.95

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Shelley Rigger is one of the most incisive analysts of Taiwanese politics in the field. Her first two books are, in my opinion, among the finest on democratization in Taiwan and are still highly relevant more than a decade after being published. But those of you hoping (as I was) for a sequel to the rigorous *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy* (Routledge, 1999) or the riveting *From Opposition to Power: Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party* (Rienner, 2001), will be disappointed with this new book. Yet, although there is little by way of novel information for Taiwan politics specialists, there is much to admire (and to recommend) in this history/sociology/politics primer.

Rigger, as always, shows her observant eye and wisdom hewn by three decades researching Taiwan. The trademark anecdotes and tales from the field, seamlessly integrated into an ebullient text, will resonate with colleagues and charm students. One sympathizes with the way in which Rigger's obvious affection for Taiwan is tempered by frustration and occasional bewilderment about its politics. Many readers will recognize Rigger's sympathetic portrayal of the (in my words) plucky underdog, misconstrued and mistreated, which, despite performing economic and political "miracles," is unable to enjoy the fruits of its labour and is constantly under the threat of losing the astonishing gains it has made. But, as I have already intimated, this book is not really for Taiwan specialists, even though we have our own concerns about Taiwan's increasing marginalization in the academy and in international society (see Jonathan Sullivan, "Is Taiwan studies in decline?" *The China Quarterly*, No. 207, pp. 706–18).

Taiwan as a polity, as a nation or whatever descriptive you prefer, is at a crucial juncture. As readers of this review will know only too well, Taiwan faces a series of political and economic challenges, and after three decades of political liberalization