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What is transnational cinema? Thinking from the Chinese situation

ABSTRACT

This article examines Chinese cinema to think further about defining and researching transnational cinema. Can transnational cinema be defined as a theoretical concept and a set of practices? Can it become something more distinct and specific than just a catch-all category for everything that is not national cinema, or a synonym for existing terms? If 'transnational cinema' is to have any value, it needs to be more than just another way of saying 'international cinema' or 'world cinema'. The article analyses the times and conditions in which the term 'transnational cinema' came into use. On this basis, it argues for understanding transnational cinema as growing out of the conditions of globalization, shaped by neo-liberalism, 'free trade', the collapse of socialism, and post-Fordist production. In other words, transnational cinema is a different order of cinematic cultures and industries from the old national cinema order. It also argues that this is not the same thing as saying that all cinema produced under the umbrella of this transnational order embodies, promotes or supports neo-liberal global capitalism. Indeed, a full understanding of what transnational cinema is requires an approach that understands that the values and operations of global capitalism are contested by other forces within this order that it has contributed so much to producing.

KEYWORDS

transnational
Chinese cinema
globalization
co-production
national
international

In the first issue of *Transnational Cinemas*, Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim (2010) called for a 'critical transnationalism', as opposed to the established tendency to use the term widely, loosely and often without any definition. Of course, the varied uses of the term and its contestation help to make a journal such as this a lively and important contribution to the field. Nonetheless, insofar as their proposition for a more defined usage stimulates a more considered and reflexive use of the term, it is certainly timely. In the same article, Higbee and Lim develop their discussion by focusing on two cases. First, they examine diasporic and postcolonial cinema of the kind discussed by Hamid Naficy (2001) and Laura Marks (2000), and in particular North African émigré and Maghrebi-French film-makers working in France. Second, they analyse Chinese transnational cinemas. This essay returns to the Chinese case in an effort to think further about defining and researching transnational cinema with the kind of critical awareness Higbee and Lim call for. More precisely, can transnational cinema be defined as a theoretical concept and a set of practices? Can it become something more distinct and specific than just a catch-all category for everything that is not national cinema, or a synonym for existing terms? If 'transnational cinema' is to have any value, it needs to be more than just another way of saying 'international cinema' or 'world cinema'.

This essay follows up on Higbee and Lim's tracing and categorizing of existing patterns in the usage of the term. It analyses the times and conditions in which the term came into use. On this basis, it argues for understanding transnational cinema as growing out of the conditions of globalization, shaped by neo-liberalism, 'free trade', the collapse of socialism, and post-Fordist production. In other words, transnational cinema is a different order of cinematic cultures and industries from the old national cinema order, even though it may emerge as a result of the same capitalist forces that helped to shape the earlier order. Examining the Chinese situation, it also argues that that this is not the same thing as saying that all cinema produced under the umbrella of this transnational order embodies, promotes or supports neo-liberal global capitalism. Indeed, a full understanding of what transnational cinema is requires an approach that itself understands that the values and operations of global capitalism are contested by other forces within this order that it has contributed so much to producing. In the case of cinema, only such an approach can accommodate the full range of different transnational cinema formations and open a space in which to analyse their structural relations.

However, before pursuing matters further, it is important to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings by dealing with an objection that might be raised immediately. There seems to be something contradictory going on here. If the transnational is a movement away from the national, why is it that when we want to analyse transnational cinema, scholars return to the national for case studies? Whether it is the 'accented' and 'interstitial' Maghrebi and North African film-makers based in France that Higbee and Lim turn to or the Chinese transnational cinema used in both their essay and this one, our studies of the transnational can seem to be mired in the national. Here it is important to grasp that saying the old national cinema model has been superseded by transnational cinema is not tantamount to nor does it depend on the disappearance of nation states or national cultures. Indeed, both have persisted, prospered and even proliferated in the new transnational order. Therefore, no transnational cinema exists without encountering and negotiating national spaces and cultures.

Developing our understanding of the transnational on the basis of case studies that continue to engage with the national is also an epistemological

choice. It is grounded in the awareness that all knowledge comes out of and is shaped in a dialectical relationship with particular places, times and conditions of their production. If knowledge is, in this sense, perspectival, there are at least two consequences. First, we have to acknowledge that achieving an adequate understanding of transnational cinema – whether as an object of study or a theoretical concept – is going to be a long project involving different scholars and different case studies, including national ones. No individual scholar has knowledge of the varied conditions encountered by transnational cinemas around the world. Therefore, whatever knowledge derives from this Chinese case will be challenged, extended and further developed by other scholars. Second, as will be discussed further towards the end of this essay, the ongoing encounter with a variety of national cultures, regulations, economic conditions and more indicates that transnational cinema is very different from the fantasy of global smooth space often associated with the ideological rhetoric of globalism. A consideration of the tension between the ideology of globalism and the practices that have resulted from it will be crucial to efforts to produce the kind of critical transnationalism that Higbee and Lim have called for.

PROBLEMS IN DEFINING THE TRANSNATIONAL

If the different locations of scholars and the different cinemas they write on condition the understanding of what transnational cinema is, then it is not surprising to find different uses of the term. In their article, Higbee and Lim point to three main patterns. The first rejects ‘national cinema’ as a theoretical model that cannot accommodate the movement of films across borders, reception of foreign films, and so forth. The second focuses on cultural formations that sustain cinemas that exceed the borders of individual nation states or operate at a more local level within them, for example Arab cinemas, Chinese cinemas, Telugu cinema in South India, and so on. The third is the focus on diasporic, exilic and other cinemas that challenge ideas of stable national cultural identity.

In addition to these different patterns of use for the term ‘transnational cinema’, other tensions around the definition and understanding of ‘transnational cinema’ can be discerned in Higbee and Lim’s article. They note that neither Naficy nor Marks adopts the term ‘transnational cinema’ in their studies of diasporic and postcolonial film-makers (2010: 13). Although this can only be speculation, perhaps the location of both scholars in the United States may play a role in their apparent aversion to ‘transnational cinema’. In the United States, Hollywood has an overwhelming presence. For scholars based in the United States, on hearing the term ‘transnational cinema’, Hollywood is quite likely to be the first thing that springs to mind. As Hollywood also seems to be the antithesis of the kind of cinema Naficy and Marks are interested in and wish to encourage, perhaps it is not so surprising that they eschew the term ‘transnational cinema’.

Turning to the Chinese situation, we can see a similar potential problem. There, ‘transnational’ is most commonly used to talk about Asian martial arts blockbusters and other Hollywood-style productions. Therefore, Higbee and Lim express a concern that ‘one of the potential weaknesses of the conceptual term “transnational cinema” [...] [is that] it risks celebrating the supranational flow or transnational exchange of peoples, images and cultures at the expense of the specific cultural, historical or ideological context in which these exchanges take place’ (2010: 11–12). Yet, their own use of the same cinemas that Naficy and Marks focus on indicates a determination on their part to include not only

an emphasis on specific contexts but also other kinds of non-national cinemas under the umbrella of the 'transnational'. Is there a way of defining and understanding 'transnational cinema' that legitimates such a move without simply reducing it to a completely open and loose term that lacks any critical value?

Furthermore, not only is there a problem concerning what kinds of cinema can be called 'transnational', but there is also a problem with regard to the historical periodization of 'transnational cinema'. This can be discerned most readily in one of the key texts on the transnational in Chinese cinema that not only Higbee and Lim, but also almost everyone else writing on the topic refers to. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu's anthology *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (1997a) was 'a watershed moment in the study of Chinese cinemas' (Berry and Pang 2008: 3) after which the term 'transnational' became routine in all discussions of Chinese cinema(s). In his introduction, Lu writes that 'The occasion for such a project is the globalization of Chinese cinemas in the international film market' (1997b: 1). However, he goes on to note, 'We begin in 1896 because that was the year of the beginning of film consumption and distribution of an essentially transnational nature in China' (1997b: 2). Here, an ambiguity opens up around the relationship between transnational cinema and globalization. Lu notes a connection between the two in the first sentence, but with globalization only classified as a kind of trigger ('The occasion ...') for thinking about the transnational. In the second sentence, he takes the scope of the book and the 'transnational' back to the beginnings of Chinese cinema.

From this account, it is clear that the potential meanings of 'transnational cinema' are many and various. It can be traced back to the beginnings of cinema itself. Or it can be dated from the impact of globalization in the cinema. It can refer to big-budget blockbuster cinema associated with the operations of global corporate capital. Or it can refer to small-budget diasporic and exilic cinema. It can refer to films that challenge national identity, or it can refer to the consumption of foreign films as part of the process of a discourse about what national identity is. For the editors of a journal such as this one, such a complex array of different usages and understandings constitutes a rich and valuable problematic. If maintaining a wide and inclusive stance can help to stimulate debates about the different understandings rather than just resulting in a loose and unreflexive usage, then this will be productive. But for an individual scholar who wishes to use the concept of 'transnational cinema' as a research tool, there is a danger of it becoming too contradictory and too similar to many other terms to be useful.

While most of us have happily and perhaps unthinkingly rushed to take the term 'transnational' on board in Chinese cinema studies, Zhang Yingjin is one of the few scholars to have interrogated the term. On the basis of what he finds, he goes on to question whether it is useful at all. He writes:

The term 'transnational' remains unsettled primarily because of multiple interpretations of the national in transnationalism. What is emphasized in the term 'transnational'? If it is the national, then what does this 'national' encompass – national culture, language, economy, politics, ethnicity, religion, and/or regionalism? If the emphasis falls on the prefix 'trans' (i.e. on cinema's ability to cross and bring together, if not transcend, different nations, cultures, and languages), then this aspect of transnational film studies is already subsumed by comparative film studies.

(Zhang 2007: 37)

WHY WE NEED THE TRANSNATIONAL

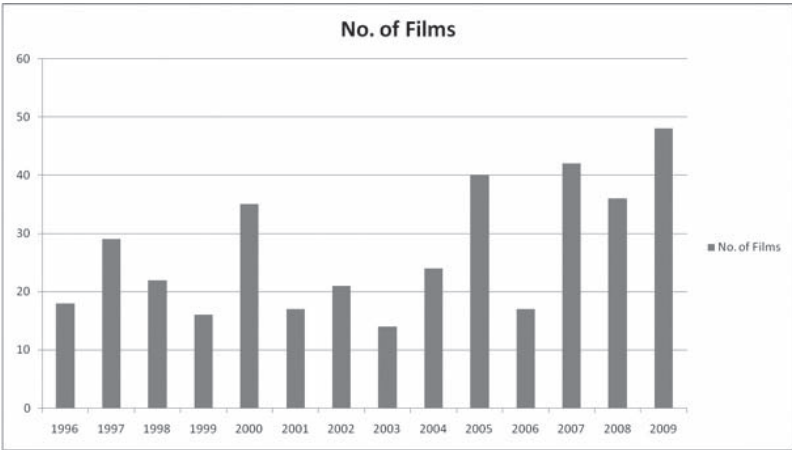
Zhang's argument rightly throws down the gauntlet to transnational cinema studies. No doubt different scholars will continue to use the term 'transnational' in a variety of different and contradictory ways. But indeed, if he is correct that 'transnational' is just a fashionable word with no distinct meaning of its own, then there is no reason to hang on to it. However, can transnational film studies really be subsumed by comparative film studies? The idea of comparative film studies suggests bounded cinemas that can be held separate from one another for the purposes of comparison. This could take us back all too easily to the idea of cinemas distinguished according to territorial polities, with films flowing back and forth as exports and imports.

Yet, as some discussion of the current situation of Chinese cinema will indicate, persisting with such an approach may obscure more than it reveals. Let us begin by following the conventional approach of treating Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland People's Republic of China separately. Of course, this in itself is problematic and controversial. From the official perspective of the government of the People's Republic, Taiwan is merely a renegade province and not a nation state in its own right. And until 1991, the government of Taiwan saw Taipei as its temporary capital until it could return to legitimate rule over all of China. Furthermore, Hong Kong has never been a nation state. It was a British colony until 1997, since which it has been under the rule of the People's Republic, but operating on a 'one country, two systems' policy that allows it to retain its pre-1997 laws until 2046. Indeed, the 'bad fit' of these three territories as 'nations' in the sense of a nation state under conditions of modernity may help to explain why so many scholars working on Chinese cinemas have embraced the idea of transnational cinema so enthusiastically. Nevertheless, Hong Kong Taiwan and the mainland People's Republic have been conventionally treated as separate polities, and production statistics have been collected accordingly. What do these statistics show?

If we follow the production statistics, Figure 1 indicates that output numbers for feature films from Taiwan have been volatile over the last decade. But this is a place that produced 189 films in 1968 (Lu 1998: 434), and now does produce fewer than 50, so the overall picture is of decline. Figure 2 shows the statistics for Hong Kong.

Output in Hong Kong picks up in the late 1980s after the initial shock of the news about the deal that was made between Beijing and London to hand rule of the territory over to Beijing. It dips in the years immediately prior to the 1997 date when the transfer of power occurred. Reasons for this are various. They may include outflows of capital and talent in anticipation of 1997 and local film-makers just waiting to see what would happen in 1997 rather than risking investment. But they may also include economic and systemic factors that operated independently of politics, as discussed by Michael Curtin in his chapter 'Hyperproduction Erodes Overseas Circulation' (Curtin 2007: 68–84). Then, after an initial recovery, a downward trend quickly sets in again.

On contrary, the output figures for the People's Republic (which do not yet include Hong Kong) demonstrate a very rapid increase in recent years. The 1990s were a trough in Chinese film production statistics as movie theatres closed and audiences transferred their loyalties to the booming television industry (Li Xiaoping 2001). The 1995 decision to permit more imports of Hollywood films was a huge challenge (Wang Zhiqiang 1996). News of China's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 was heralded by some



Source: Government Information Office website, Taiwan: <http://www.taiwancinema.com/ct.asp?xItem=50897&ctNode=144&mp=2> (accessed 11 July 2010).

Figure 1: Feature film output in Taiwan. This graph represents the number of domestic films passed for distribution each year by the Censorship Board.

as the end of the Chinese film industry, as expressed in the debates in books like Zhang Zhenqin and Yang Yuanying’s *WTO and Chinese Cinema* (2002) and Zhang Fengtao, Huang Shixian and Hu Zhifeng’s *Globalization and the Destiny of Chinese Film and Television* (2002). However, although it must be acknowledged that many of these films are never released in Chinese movie theatres, the charts indicate that reports of Chinese cinema’s death were much exaggerated.

Absence of theatrical release in the People’s Republic is not the only thing that these statistics disguise. Collection on the basis of national and quasi-national territories assumes that the identity of film productions can be

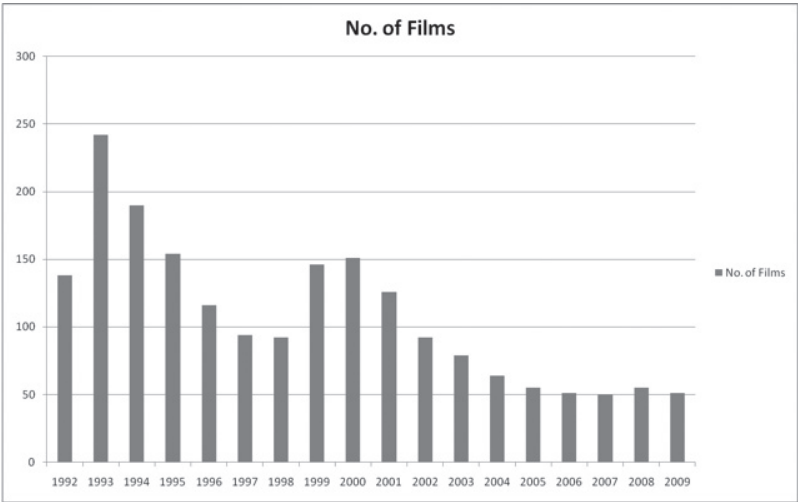


Figure 2: Feature film output in Hong Kong. This information is drawn from the Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA)’s publications.

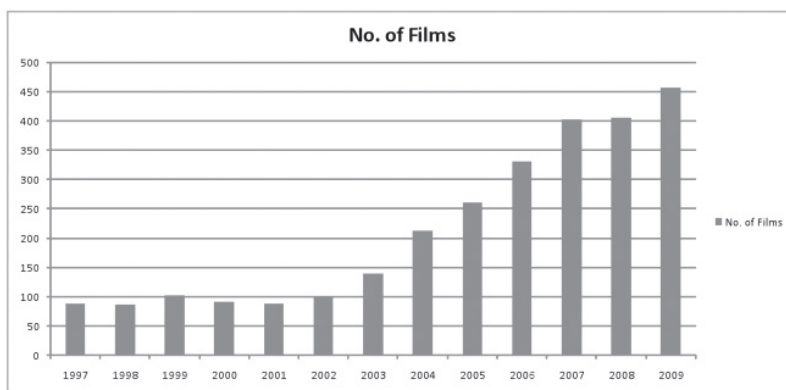


Figure 3: Feature film output in the People's Republic of China. The figures on this graph are compiled from different sources. The figures for the 1997 to 2005 are from Zhang Huijun and Yu Jianhong (2006: 19), which attributes them to the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). From 2006 to 2008, the figures are from Chen Weisong (2009). This source also gives figures for earlier years with match those in Zhang Huijun and Yu Jianhong, suggesting they come from the same source. The figure for 2009 is from The Central Government of the People's Republic of China (2010), which attributes the original source of the story as the foreign edition of The People's Daily newspaper. The article itself claims the statistics are from SARFT.

confidently differentiated on this principle. Such a model can accommodate the distribution and consumption of locally made films beyond the territory of production as a process of 'exports' and 'imports'. But it assumes a point of origin within territorial boundaries. As such, it cannot register the complexities of productions that straddle the borders of those territories, apart from classifying them as 'co-productions' between production entities, each based within a territorially bounded polity.

Indeed, it is precisely the increase in cross-border involvement in film production that is not registered and is even disguised by tables such as those above. They treat film production in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China as though they occur entirely separately from one another. This has rarely been true for Hong Kong and Taiwan, where stars, film directors, production money and crews have moved back and forth since the 1960s and probably earlier, creating a synergistic relationship where the distinct industries divided up talent and their shared market for Chinese-language cinema outside the People's Republic among different genres that each specialized in (Chiao Hsiung-Ping 1991). As various treaties and agreements have eased the flow of money and personnel across borders of the People's Republic, that flow has now increased to include all three territories. Because of the way statistics are collected on the basis of territory, the statistical figures simply do not exist to demonstrate this at the moment, and we have to turn to specific examples to illustrate what is happening.

As the Taiwanese feature film industry has dwindled within the borders of Taiwan, many Taiwanese film-makers have dispersed, seeking jobs elsewhere. For example, Hsu Hsiao-ming, the director of *Qinian Dongtian/Heartbreak Island* (1995) and producer of *Lanse Damen/Blue Gate Crossing* (2002), now has his offices in Beijing, located in a converted textile factory he shares with the CNEX

documentary producers. CNEX stands for 'China Next'. Although its primary base is in Beijing, it has offices in Taipei and Hong Kong, and its three main figures, Ben Tsiang, Ruby Chen and Chang Chaowei, are all originally from Taiwan (http://www.cnex.org.cn/cnex_all.php/6.html, accessed 12 July 2010).

Perhaps the hottest producer at one of Beijing's most rapidly growing private production companies, Huayi Brothers, is also from Taiwan. Chen Kuofu started life as a critic, but in the 1990s he also got involved in directing films on Taiwan. His highest-profile venture there was probably *Shuangtong/Double Vision* (2002), a sort of Daoist cop thriller blockbuster, with a Hollywood star (David Morse). However, because this film was produced by Columbia Pictures, it often gets classified as an American film. This in itself illustrates how a territorial mode of classifying films is increasingly problematic. Since moving to Huayi, Chen has been involved in the production of films such as Feng Xiaogang's war blockbuster *Jijiehao/Assembly* (2007); a horror film called *Xinzhong You Gui/Matrimony* (2007) that has helped to push the boundaries of what is not permitted in China because ghosts are supposedly superstitious and feudal; Chen Kaige's bio-pic on the Beijing opera star *Mei Lanfang* (2008); and his own answer to Ang Lee's *Se Jiel/Lust Caution* (2007), *Feng Sheng/The Message* (2009).

Back in Taiwan itself, another younger generation of Taiwanese directors is aiming to make genre films that do not have Taiwan-specific appeal, but can reach young ethnically Chinese audiences wherever they might be. Robin Lee (Lee Yun-chan) made her directing debut with *Renyu Duoduo/The Shoe Fairy* (2005) in the First Focus series executive-produced by Daniel Yu Wai-kuok of Hong Kong. Although her second film was produced in Taiwan by Three Dots Entertainment, the narrative of *Jiyin Jueding Wo Ai Ni/My DNA Says I Love You* (2007) leaves Taiwan completely for a generic modern Chinese city (the film was actually shot in Xiamen). The stars are from all over the Chinese-speaking world, and include the Taiwanese Terri Kwan, the mainland Yu Nan and the Chinese American Peter Ho.

The examples given above indicate that, although the number of Taiwanese feature films produced each year may be well down from its heyday, this decline does not mean that Taiwanese film-makers are not making films – they are just not making them in Taiwan so often anymore. Similar patterns can be discerned for Hong Kong film-makers. Indeed, specific conditions are encouraging movement to the 'interior', as Hongkongers often refer to the rest of the People's Republic. First, given the loss of the South-east Asian market to Korean films and Hollywood, it makes sense for Hong Kong film-makers to orient themselves north. However, although the People's Republic gained sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, it is still treated as a foreign site of film production. Therefore, imports are limited by quota in the same way as for any other foreign films. As a result, in much the same way as their Taiwanese counterparts, many Hong Kong film-makers and investors are working and/or moving their money north of the border to get direct access to the burgeoning mainland market.

On the other hand, the Common Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), in operation since 2003, has ameliorated the negative impact on the Hong Kong film industry that results from the People's Republic treating it as a foreign place. According to CEPA conditions, Hong Kong films with a sufficient degree of mainland participation are treated in the same way as mainland films by the authorities in Beijing. Chan et al. (2010: 72) report that more than half of the annual output of Hong Kong films now are co-productions of this nature. These statistics may be read as indicating that without CEPA, film-making in

Hong Kong would be in even more dire straits than it is. Such co-productions are not limited by the quotas on the import of 'foreign films' into the mainland of the People's Republic, and have free access to the mainland market. However, they also demonstrate another limitation of statistics based on national and quasi-national territories, because some of the films listed as Hong Kong films in Hong Kong statistics are also listed as mainland films in People's Republic statistics.

The circumstances described above not only indicate that increasing levels of cross-border activities limit how meaningful territory-based output statistics are, but also that those statistics obscure and confuse the transnational reality of the contemporary situation. Both these territorial state-based statistics and the comparative studies model of research depend on the presumption that things can be distinguished sufficiently for them to be compared. Yet, this is precisely what is being challenged by the circumstances just described. Therefore, abandoning the idea of transnational film studies for comparative studies may not be the best way to confront the confused and loose use of the term 'transnational' that Zhang Yingjin rightly points to. Instead, maybe we should turn to the specificity of the current situation in order to understand the specificity of 'transnational' as a concept and a practice.

THE INTERNATIONAL AND THE TRANSNATIONAL

Although the term 'transnational' has been used to refer to many different and sometimes conflicting things in film studies, these different usages all have one thing in common – they originated around the same time as the discourse on globalization was becoming widespread towards the end of the last century. This is different from the situation in economic studies, where globalization as a deeper level of integration follows 'internationalisation' (as in the increasing interwovenness of national economies through international trade) and transnationalisation (as in the increasing organization of production on a cross-border basis by multi-national organizations)' (Hoogevelt 1997: 114). But in the case of film studies, the 'transnational' tracked or even came after 'globalization' became a popular discourse.

Of course, the debates about what exactly the term 'globalization' means are at least as complicated as those concerning the 'transnational' traced above. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they follow similar lines. While it is generally thought of as a recent 'epochal transformation' (Sassen 2006: 1), André Gunder Frank (1998) traces it back to trading between the inhabitants of the Indus valley and the Sumerians in the third century B.C. However, in the same way that too loose a definition of 'transnational' risks it losing critical purchase, such an all-encompassing understanding of globalization diminishes its value. Therefore, the most productive way of proceeding is to pursue what is distinctive about globalization, because only this can make it a meaningful and useful concept.

The discourse of globalization goes along with larger shifts that made the kinds of changes in Chinese film production noted above possible. These centre round a rollback in the functions and powers of the state, especially concerning the economy, or what Sassen calls 'processes of denationalization' (2006: 1). The state is the collective agency that maintains and operates the modern territorial form known as the nation state. Within the nation state, as part of this rollback, many state-owned enterprises have been sold to private enterprises. Those states that operate command economies have often stepped

back to allow citizens and companies to take the initiative more. Regulations that block or inhibit trade between nation states are being lowered, enabling those who wish to operate across national borders more straightforwardly and with less need for state approval. Although arguments proliferate about the reasons for and forms of change in China, the recent history of the post-Mao 'Reform' (*gaige*) era in the People's Republic can be seen a classic example of these developments (see, for example, Huang 2008).

Taking all these factors into account, we can see that both the terms 'globalization' and 'transnational' (as used in film studies) refer to a larger structural shift in the world order away from the old order of nation states. For the purposes of this essay, that organization of the world order around nation states can be called the 'international order'. According to the principles and presumptions that organize this system, the nation state is understood to have complete sovereignty over the territory that it rules, and the world order is organized as transactions of various kinds between and regulated by these states. It is literally an inter-national order. In the transnational order, the nation state does not disappear. Indeed, in recent years we have seen the emergence of a large number of new nation states. But with the rollback in the absolute power of the nation state described above, a new order emerges in which citizens and – at least as important – corporations have greater relative autonomy from the state in regard to the economy at least and can operate economically across state borders more easily. All the transborder film-making activities described in the previous section have been facilitated by this shift.

In terms of practices, the change from an international to a transnational order is not something that happens suddenly on a particular date. Despite the fact that we can say consciousness of the phenomenon came to a head in late 1990s, it remains difficult to draw a clear historical line that would distinguish an era of the international from the transnational. This is because the transnational develops out of rather than against the international order of nation states. When companies were founded within the borders of individual nation states, those territorially bounded polities provided suitable spaces for their protection and development. This is particularly evident in the processes of imperialism and colonialism, where corporations were able to call upon the administrative and military resources of the nation states they were located in to support their interests beyond the borders of the individual nation state. An example of this process would be the Opium Wars, conducted against the Qing Empire and to protect the interests of British merchants. As a result of this, some scholars have referred to the era of colonialism and imperialism as 'proto-globalization' (Ballantyne 2002).

The same drive for profit maximization and accumulation that established the international order as the playing field – level or not – on which corporations conducted their business has now led away from the concentrated and regulated model of Fordist mass production to the post-Fordist model of flexible production and distribution. Post-Fordism seeks out the cheapest sources of labour, parts and supplies, crossing national borders and driving what we know as globalization. Hollywood once followed a more or less Fordist model, gathering all the elements of the industry into Los Angeles to create maximum economies of scale (Hoogvelt 1997: 90–113). Today, Hollywood is a hub in a network and globalized industry that operates what Toby Miller and his colleagues have called the New International Division of Cultural Labour to seek out the cheapest locations, post-production facilities and so forth to further maximize profits (Miller et al. 2001, see especially pp. 44–82).

Given this process where one order grows out of the other, distinguishing the two historically can be difficult. Just when did Hollywood cease to be a nationally based industry that exported as part of an international order and become a hub in a global network that operates in a transnational order? Nevertheless, the conceptual distinction between the international and the transnational can be very useful. For example, it enables us to distinguish between co-productions (between two or more nationally separated companies in two or more nation states) and transnational production (where a production company operates across borders). It can also help us to understand the difference between third cinema and world cinema. Whether third cinema is understood in the original way expressed in Solanas and Getino's late 1960s manifesto as a guerilla cinema that is actively combating capitalism and imperialism (Solanas and Getino 1976), or whether it is understood in a broader and looser sense to refer to a variety of alternative and resistant third world cinemas (see, for example, some of the essays collected in Pines and Willemen 1989), it is part of an international order where nation states can be sorted into three worlds. On the other hand, like the term 'world music' that it is derived from, world cinema is either a product category that classifies films as they circulate on global festival circuits and through DVD stores, or an academic term. In the latter case, it refers to all films that are non-western, and sometimes even to all non-English language films (see, for example, the essays collected in Hill and Gibson 2000), or even simply everything ever made (see, for example, Nowell-Smith 1996). These very disparate uses are premised on a conceptual order where the primordial status of nation states is no longer taken for granted.

THE TRANSNATIONAL VERSUS GLOBALIZATION

Grounding transnational cinema in Sassen's 'epochal transformation' of the international order by the forces that build globalization helps to make it less loose and general. However, if we define transnational cinema on the basis of the distinction between an international order of nationally based and Fordist modes of production and accumulation and a transnational order of post-Fordist and flexible modes of production, are we not running the risk of unreflexively accepting globalizing neo-liberalism and its values as givens? As mentioned above, Higbee and Lim (2010: 11–12) see this as a particular problem in scholarship on transnational Chinese cinemas: 'one of the potential weaknesses of the conceptual term "transnational cinema" [...] [is that] it risks celebrating the supranational flow or transnational exchange of peoples, images and cultures at the expense of the specific cultural, historical or ideological context in which these exchanges take place'.

Higbee and Lim are quite right to raise this issue. However, the example of third cinema as a cultural form that developed within the international order driven by capitalism in its earlier forms can help us to see a way out of this problem. For third cinema developed as part of the international order just as surely as the Hollywood studio system did. In other words, while the forces of capitalist accumulation may be among the primary forces driving the establishment of the international order, it would be a mistake to suggest that this order was uncontested. The same is true of the transnational order. Just because this order is driven in many cases by the fantasy of achieving what Hardt and Negri have written about as the smooth space of Empire (2001), this does not mean that fantasy either had been or inevitably will be realized.

In fact, the very existence of their book, written against that order, is evidence of this contest. Nor does it mean that all film-makers operating in the space opened up by the transnational order are operating according to the principles of profit maximization.

Anna Tsing's work (2000) on the distinction between globalization as an ideology and the transnational as a practice is useful to grasp this distinction. Many people use the terms 'global' and 'transnational' interchangeably, and that has been the practice of this essay so far. However, Tsing has argued for a distinction between the two terms. She suggests we use 'globalization' as part of the ideological rhetoric of globalism, whereas we use 'transnational' to refer to the specific 'transborder projects' that actually constitute the growth of the transnational on the ground, so to speak. At first, this idea of a myriad of transborder projects can sound like Sassen's idea that 'globalization consists of an enormous variety of micro-processes that begin to denationalize ...' (Sassen 2006: 1). However, not only do Tsing's 'transnational projects' constitute a multitude of different and often micro-level practices, but also they are not necessarily unified in their promotion of globalization, even if they operate within it. Tsing argues that the rhetoric of globalization driven by neo-liberal transnational capitalism seeks to present it as a force of nature, a 'flow', limited by the 'barriers' put in place by the nation state. However, she points out that, at the same time, forces opposed to neo-liberal global capitalism also operate as transnational networks within the same transnational order, as do various alternative NGOs driven by values that have nothing to do with profit maximization.

Tsing's picture of a transnational order that the fantasy of total globalized capitalism both helps to constitute and operates within, but which at the same exceeds that fantasy and includes other forces antithetical to it or simply different from it, is crucial if we are to avoid the dangers that Higbee and Lim have pointed to. It enables an understanding of the transnational that includes the activities and forces that are unleashed by globalization, including those that do not subscribe to the logic of capitalist accumulation driving it. Just how important it is to take this on board is underlined by some of the recent scholarship in Chinese cinema studies that has not only participated in the shift to the transnational, but also in a shift away from a focus on texts alone to include production and consumption cultures. In principle, this is a very welcome move indeed. Two volumes in particular are important here. One is Michael Curtin's *Playing to the Biggest Audience* (2007), which covers television as well as film. The second is Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh's volume on the *East Asian Screen Industries*, in which Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China take centre stage (2008). Both books contribute a great deal to our understanding of developing transnational production linkage, but I want to engage with them a bit more to set out some further distinctions in how we can think about and therefore study the transnational.

Tsing's (2000) emphasis on the imagination of globalization as a natural flow impeded by the barriers of the nation state suggests a deeper problem underneath globalist rhetoric. This is the liberal capitalist conception of power. In this understanding, power is held by the state, and freedom means the removal of state power. As this pertains to the rhetoric of globalism, removing 'trade barriers' and so on restores the natural forces of the market. However, as Sassen (2006) readily acknowledges in her work, there is nothing natural about markets, and indeed the nation state was a powerful agent in the production of national markets, not only by setting up various measures to

protect corporations based within their borders, but also by removing internal barriers to the circulation of goods within their borders.

Yet the assumption of the state as a barrier to the natural flows and forces of the market underlies much of the rhetoric and investigation in both *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience* and *East Asian Film Industries*. This is implicit in their political economy approach to the question of production and transnational Chinese cinema, which understands what goes on as the result of questions of ownership and market strategy above all else. While I do not dispute the importance of these issues and greatly admire the investigations that these authors have already carried out, this produces the kind of account of transnational cinema that Higbee and Lim are so concerned about.

The changes in the patterns of film production across the territories of Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland People's Republic of China detailed earlier in this essay confirm Tsing's observations about the need to distinguish between a fantasy of globalization and a reality composed of numerous incommensurable transnational projects. First, once the 'barriers' set up by the nation state are 'removed' or 'lowered', or, to put it another way, once nation states encourage transborder production practice, there is little evidence of any 'flow' that simply and naturally spreads out evenly across the idealized 'smooth' space of the globe. Instead, as the examples of transborder Chinese film-making indicate, flow occurs in particular channels, in particular directions and in particular ways as part of Tsing's 'transnational projects'. Plenty of Chinese film-makers are working outside the territorial states they were born in. Some have gone to Hollywood. But not many are working, say, in the Mexican film industry. There are reasons why they gravitate to certain places and not to others. Perhaps not surprisingly, I would argue that the greatest flows of personnel and investment have been amongst people situated in different Chinese territories. But here again, the risk would be to see simply another 'natural force' at work, along with the market – cultural and ethnic affinity. After all, it is equally important to know that these flows have been between particular networked cities, with Taipei, Hong Kong and Beijing featuring particularly strongly. While there might be significant numbers of Taiwanese film industry personnel leaving Taipei for the mainland, not many are headed to rural Gansu, or even to Shanghai, whose film production industry has been in decline for some time. One set of questions for research on transnational cinema to examine is precisely what the new transborder patterns are that emerge under the transnational order, and how to account for them. This may involve considering more than market forces alone. This raises other issues.

Second, the multitude of transnational projects constituting these transborder cinema practices cannot all be reduced to and accounted for wholly in terms of the logic of the market, its so-called 'imperatives', and the even larger forces such as cultural affinity that shape it in certain ways. Turning back to Michael Curtin's *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience* and Davis and Yeh's *East Asian Film Industries* again, there seem to be some foreclosures concerning the perception of the transnational that are manifested in the choice of phenomenon to include in the scopes of the two books. The neo-liberal rhetoric of globalization is blind to those 'transnational projects' driven by interests, aims, desires and other forces that are not primarily profit driven. So, too, Curtin and Davis and Yeh focus on commercial mainstream cinema, with some secondary work on festival cinema. Yet, the connections between Chinese film-makers and the transborder practices of production that I have been talking about are by no means confined to films made with the logic of box office maximization.

Take, for example, the well-known independent film-maker Jia Zhangke, whose *Sanxia Haoren/Still Life* won the Golden Lion at Venice in 2006. Until very recently, he was working as an unofficial film-maker within the People's Republic. Of course, this does not mean he operates outside of the logic of the market altogether. His films are marketed outside China, and people invest in them. Nonetheless, the decision to start making films in a manner that excluded him from access to his own domestic market suggests a practice motivated and shaped by other concerns. I think the same is certainly true for those engaged in experimental film, documentary film and many more, and this is true not only in the mainland People's Republic but also in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although their budgets and also their resources are very limited, the reduced cost of international communication thanks to the Internet and the reduced cost of circulating and screening films that are digitalized rather than celluloid has made the activities of transborder organizations like CNEX and other transborder connections between small and local operations more and more common.

CONCLUSION

This essay has set out to use the case study of Chinese transnational cinema to interrogate the term 'transnational cinema', not so much by looking at its existing usage, but rather by asking how it can become a critical concept. It has argued against abandoning the term altogether on the grounds of its loose and often contradictory usage so far. Instead, it has noted that its usage in film studies has followed the mainstreaming of the discourse on globalization. Therefore, it has argued that the specificity of 'transnational cinema' can be grasped by distinguishing the earlier international order of nation states from the current transnational order of globalization, and that the primary characteristics of 'transnational cinema' can be best understood by examining it as the cinema of this emergent order. However, it has ended by insisting that any proper consideration of this transnational order must not only take into account the economic forces of global capital in the cinema, but also the fact that by understanding that the spaces opened up in the course of accommodating those forces have also allowed a host of other cinematic activities to develop and thrive, often with no primary consideration of profitability at all. Looking forward, as we begin to detail and describe the various 'transnational projects' that make up Chinese transnational cinema, a further task will be to theorize the nature of the connections between these projects. Are they simply a system much akin to the system of a national cinema but on a scale that exceeds that of the old territorial states, or are they a new entity altogether?

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I would like to dedicate this essay to Professor Teshome Gabriel of UCLA. News of his sudden death on 14 June 2010 came while I was writing this.

Teshome's cheerful, relaxed and informal way of treating his students as equals was an inspiration to me. His spirit of encouragement – sometimes relentless – pushed me to pursue my interest in Chinese cinema with serious intent. Without him, I would not be here. I will forever be in his debt.

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