

The Hundred River Review

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The Writing Program
NYU Shanghai

海纳百川 有容乃大

The Hundred River Review is a journal of excellent student writing produced in our core writing courses here at NYU Shanghai. We celebrate essays that challenge our thinking, present us with new ways of seeing texts, build great arguments, and model the writing goals of our core courses.

We believe that students want to share their writing and read the work of their peers, and *The Hundred River Review* provides a space for this exchange.

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are excited to bring you this second volume of *The Hundred River Review*, NYU Shanghai's journal of excellent student writing. Our university calls students to "Make the World Your Major," to seek out encounters with those around us and with the city in which we live. Of course, all writing is an encounter of author and text, of writer and idea; all encounters are rife with the negotiation of language, culture, power, and place. Reading the five essays in this year's journal, we see our students creating their own encounters through engagement with important texts and complicated questions. The contents of these pages are a testament to students' curiosity, to their pursuit of intellectual encounters.

Haitian Ma's essay questions the presumption that individual encounters are the engine that drives cosmopolitanism. Madison E. Pelletier dives deep into the ethically fraught encounters between Western medical researchers and participants in placebo trials in the Global South. Cindy Wang examines the world of the live house, where interaction between musicians and their fans shape China's image on the global stage. Bai Xiao turns her analytical eye to Ezra Pound's long and passionate engagement with China, especially with the philosophy of Confucius. Finally, Claire Ren, through the lens of Carma Hinton and Richard Gordon's documentary *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, considers how one encounter between a government and its people has become

a source of political othering.

We believe that the work showcased here is a model of what first-year and sophomore students can accomplish in the *Writing as Inquiry (I & II)* and *Perspectives on the Humanities* core courses. We hope you that you find these essays enlightening and that they enrich your own writing and learning.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Tomscha and Sophia Gant

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Faculty Introduction

Haitian Ma wrote this essay for our *Writing as Inquiry (Writing II)* course. In this second major assignment, students were asked to perform a considered analysis of a central text, to add a second text to this analysis, and then to situate their own claims in relationship to these two texts. The assignment required students to consider deeply the arguments, assumptions, and methods of other scholars, and to place their own ideas among those given to them by the texts' authors.

In this essay, Haitian has created a rich and insightful critique of philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's conception of the individual. In building her own argument, Haitian deftly uses each source, selecting textual evidence to great effect. This essay models the excellent academic argumentation that arises from thorough close reading and careful attunement to the implications of another author's claims.

Jennifer Tomscha

Associate Director of and Lecturer in the Writing Program

CULTURAL BEINGS IN CONTEXT: REASSESSING THE INDIVIDUAL LOCUS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

马海天 (HAITIAN MA)

Inherent in human encounters with one another is the negotiation of different values and perspectives. The task of living with difference becomes increasingly urgent in the modern era as cultures interact with each other in more direct and confrontational ways. In the attempt to construct a healthy, non-hierarchical manner of interaction, cosmopolitanism has risen as a promising vision. We may literally interpret cosmopolitanism as a culture of the cosmos, or the world. Beyond the literal designation, however, the essential conceptualization of this cosmopolitan vision remains under debate. In “The Case for Contamination,” author Kwame Anthony Appiah critiques and differentiates cosmopolitanism from three candidate ways of interaction: cultural preservationism, anti-colonialism, and neo-fundamentalism. In juxtaposition, Appiah proposes his version of cosmopolitanism based on what he calls the “contamination model,” where individuals get accustomed to new cultural phenomena and gradually merge them into the existing cultural norms. Cultures contaminate each other through progressive mergence starting from the individual level. Now the question arises: has Appiah truly grasped

cosmopolitanism in its entirety through this model?

Just as Appiah critiques the three alternative ways of interaction, I argue that Appiah's project contains its own flaw as well. The primary problem with his contamination model rests in its underlying presumption of universal individual autonomy when it comes to cultural adaptation. In reality, collective entities always interfere with and restrain individual autonomy by bringing in social hierarchies. Argumentative negligence of such collective influence can lead to alienating individuals from the concrete cultural contexts they inhabit, turning them into homogeneous abstractions. In view of this universalist pitfall, I suggest the alternative approach of contemporary author Ross Douhat's idea of "disappearance," where we strive to understand other individuals' perspectives precisely by associating them with their surrounding cultures and comprehending the way these particular cultural conditions shape individual identity. With this empathetic approach in mind, we can better transform that understanding into a wholehearted embrace of diverse individual experiences.

Before we analyze Appiah's project, let us first look more carefully into his view of cosmopolitanism. Appiah describes the core of cosmopolitanism as "contamination—that endless process of imitation and revision." Achieving this contamination requires everyone to "take an interest in their [other] civilizations," which, according to Appiah, will enable us to "get used to one another." Upon closer analysis, this process contains two steps: first to acknowledge and tolerate a different culture, and second to integrate the originally peculiar differences into the ordinariness of one's cultural community.

Within this mechanism lies an important premise—that the fundamental agents of contamination are individuals as autonomous members within any given culture. Although situated within a particular cultural context, individuals in Appiah’s model reserve the autonomy to make choices—to acknowledge and accept rather than reject and alienate other cultures. For Appiah, it is the accumulation of “perspectival shift[s]” on the individual level that initiates cultural contamination in a broader sense, and, in affirming the individual origination of such “perspectival shift[s],” he undeniably presumes the individual autonomy of deciding for oneself what attitude to adopt towards any cultural representation.

However, this cosmopolitan vision based on individual adaptation overlooks the non-linear struggles throughout the actual process of cultural hybridization, where various collective institutions take form to influence individual agency. Appiah’s explication of the eradication of footbinding in China, for instance, manifests such negligence by generalizing the revolutionary details, assuming the rapid change in customs as rationally unexplainable: “What had been beautiful became ugly; ornamentation became disfigurement. The appeal to reason can explain neither the custom nor its abolition.” Correspondingly, the only plausible explanation lands on “the consequence of our getting used to new ways of doing things” (Appiah). Yet this explanation is a relatively rough one. Appiah solely stresses the result of people getting used to footbinding, while leaving out many painstaking details in the struggling process. In his essay “From Cultural Capital to National Stigma: The Anti-Footbinding Movements in China and Tai-

wan,” scholar Yen-Wei Miao thoroughly represents the violent political endeavors during the revolutionary period. According to Miao, despite the groundbreaking establishment of anti-footbinding institutions, the first-documented Nanhai Jie Chanzu Hui (Foot Emancipation Society) in 1883 was soon dismissed due to “huge pressure from the community” (Miao 220). In 1898, government conservatives forcefully suppressed early anti-footbinding movements following the failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform (Miao 232). Even Appiah himself mentions numerous “older women with bound feet” who suffered greatly from “the agonies of unbinding.” Taking these factors and occurrences into consideration, what triggers the “perspectival shift” here cannot simply be an individual choice of getting used to natural feet. Social institutions and cultural communities impacted individual reactions at all times.

To some extent, Appiah does acknowledge the collective influences within struggle and their contradictory moral implications. He mentions this contradiction in discussing women’s equality in Islamic cultural communities, where “liberty,” displayed mostly in Western human rights treaties, and “diversity,” referring to the respect for Islamic cultural traditions, may “well be at odds” (Appiah). But Appiah does not provide a resolution to the dilemma. Collective influence seems something easily ignored once individuals become the “proper object of moral concern.” This confidence—that individual autonomy outweighs collective influences—is most conspicuously displayed in Appiah’s reference to Zulu viewers of American soap dramas. Appiah contends that these viewers in the periphery do not necessarily suffer

from cultural imperialism as cultural preservationists often claim, for they are not powerless “blank slates” susceptible to intrusive cultural influences. Put differently, individuals do not passively submit to higher forms of institutional impacts, but instead hold a considerable degree of autonomy in their choice-making. Nevertheless, if the rhetoric of cultural imperialism fails to recognize individual autonomy in cultural interaction, Appiah’s unmitigated affirmation of individual agency does not ultimately explain the cultural reaction of Zulu viewers either. The two seemingly oppositional perceptions—submission to imperial imposition and agency in cultural self-determination—are in fact compatible and, moreover, often co-exist and work together. As individuals are “[deciding] for themselves what they do and do not approve of,” their conscious responses can also reflect and indicate the changing dynamics of the imperialistic cultural framework. Given the historical trajectory of colonialism and its present influence on South African societies, these individual audiences may well have participated in constructing and reproducing the cultural othering of themselves without without their own realization. Therefore, we must bear in mind the possibility that they inhabit the accompanying cultural discourses as they approve messages in the soap drama, just as we should equally attune ourselves to the inherent political statement of anti-colonialism in their disapproval as such. That imperialist ideologies largely embed themselves in personal values is what puts individual autonomy onto the precipice.

Manifested in this television-drama example is the omnipresence of collective influences. While individuals do possess agency in

their choices to embrace or reject cultural values, collective influences still tend to predominate over individual autonomy. This is because individuals do not interact with cultures the way workers operate machines; individuals are themselves part of the culture—they are inside the community of a particular culture, or a collection of mutual-influencing cultures. Furthermore, as contemporary American writer and *The New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat points out in his article “The Myth of Cosmopolitanism,” it is human nature to “seek community.” This intrinsic desire to belong predetermines the confinement of individual agency to collective wills and standards.

Even if individual autonomy manages to overcome collective influences, the subsequent question comes to whether every individual can access that degree of autonomy. The answer is apparently negative, for both real (realistically existing) and imagined (organized upon shared social identities) communities hierarchize their members on the spectrum of social mobility. Take class as an example. An individual’s degree of autonomy depends extensively upon their possession of economic and social capital; people with different socio-economic conditions thus constitute different communities of classes. This variation limits the right of making autonomous choices mostly to upper-class individuals, turning this right into a sign of privilege instead of freedom. The prestigious background of pioneering figures in the anti-footbinding movement evidences this point. As American scholar Brent Whitefield introduces in his essay “The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society): Christian Women in China and the Fight against Footbinding,” founder of Natural Foot Society, Alicia Little, was the

“wife of a prominent British merchant and writer”; Kang Youwei, who founded the Anti-footbinding Society in Canton, enjoyed high reputation in the political domain in addition to status as a “famous literus and writer” (206). With many others, these progressive elites shared commonality in possessing superior family backgrounds and higher social status to back them in their activist work. People lower down on the social ladder, by contrast, are often “too poor to live the life they want to lead” at all, for they do not possess the basic financial means to attain political leverage such that their demands can receive legitimization and satisfaction (Appiah). Moreover, lack of economic and social capital brings about subsequent poverty in cultural capital, making the poor not only unable to afford autonomy, but also unaware of the notion at all given their limited access to education.

We can formulate similar analyses upon other realms of social identities such as race, gender, and religion and upon historical trajectories to uncover their hierarchizing impact on individual autonomy. The reality can display further complications since these identities often interlock and burden one another. We will not discuss intersectionality in detail, but the main point here is that hierarchical divisions in collective communities make it almost impossible for equal individual autonomy in choice-making. Together with humans’ instinctive urge for community belonging, these two factors demonstrate Appiah’s confidence in individual autonomy as idealistic and lacking contextual considerations. Returning to the specific process of the anti-footbinding campaign, we see that whether they were government officials, progressive pioneers, or the general masses, all sought transformative

power as members of collective entities rather than separate individuals; aggressive power struggles continued throughout the movement until reformers attained sustainable power dominance over other collective forces and, consequently, eradicated footbinding. Apparently, these collective struggles went beyond the individual level, or at least tied individual choices to underlying social impositions.

Moving to the contemporary global context, one may argue that Appiah's project centering on the individual actually attains more promise given social development through time and a cultural environment that is correspondingly more open. Yet we must also note that such openness simultaneously entails more direct confrontation of diverging beliefs and values among different cultural groups as well. In the face of these confrontations, individuals are more inclined to attach themselves to collective influences in search of security and legitimacy. In this sense, the power of the collective may matter more than we think and, given the trend of globalization, can operate on more subtle ideological levels. Cosmopolitan elitism serves as a paradigmatic example here. The more that privileged individuals seemingly detach themselves from their local communities, the more they tend to aggregate into a new community that Douthat calls the elite tribe. "Global citizens," as they often refer to themselves, these elitists still have their own "distinctive worldview" and "shared values" that alienate other communities and individual experiences (Douthat). What engenders further stake, moreover, is individuals' unawareness of such collective enclosure: the sharpening collective influences have accumulated more power by becoming invisible. Douthat himself is

deeply concerned with this unnoticed congregation: “[I]t’s a problem that our tribe of self-styled cosmopolitans doesn’t see itself clearly as a tribe.” Following Douthat’s line of argument, we may find this exact elitist pitfall in Appiah’s cosmopolitan project of contamination. His underlying affirmation of “individual freedom” in the contaminating process is substantially an aristocratic by-product available to “insider” elites alone: only they are entitled to exercise the contamination model of cosmopolitanism because of their privilege in choice-making. When Appiah humbly claims that “cosmopolitans don’t insist that everyone become cosmopolitan,” he already ignores and marginalizes the majority of individuals who have no agency to choose that vision.

Does this mean that we should not take individuals “as the proper object of moral concern” in comprehending cosmopolitanism (Appiah)? Of course not. Appiah’s highlighting of individuals is still significant and illuminating in its humanistic value. It is important for us to note that this statement comes primarily as a critical response to three other claims: cultural preservationism, cultural imperialism, and neo-fundamentalism. While cultural preservationism rigidifies cultural representations into fixations and blocks their development, the fight against cultural imperialism often enters the pitfall of prioritizing socio-political agendas over cultural analysis. Neo-fundamentalism, on the other hand, imposes exclusive values in the name of universal truth upon communities and individuals. All three claims tend to overlook or distort the individual will for their own ideological ends. With its acknowledgment of cultural interactions and its allowance for plurality of values, contamination therefore carves a respectful space

for individual voices.

However, the pitfall that Appiah enters in endorsing individual agency is that he confuses moral concern anchored in the individual with complete personal autonomy in addressing cultural differences; correspondingly, the cosmopolitan ideal of contamination relies entirely upon individuals of different cultural backgrounds “get[ting] used to one another” (Appiah). Having acknowledged the individual will, this claim still fails to take into account the multiplicity of contexts in which the individual is situated and whose influences they often internalize. In fact, the decisions that individuals make towards new and old cultures do carry cultural imprints in the past and inform ongoing cultural dynamics, and therefore must not be treated as random, personal choices alone. Positioning individuals “as the proper object of moral concern” does not mean that we completely dismiss the roles of “nations, tribes or ‘peoples’”; instead, communities and groups as such are essential clues for us to comprehend and evaluate the choices that individuals make, to unpack the broader socio-cultural transformations in place, as well as the challenges they bring to individual lives. Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism wipes off this contextual analysis in place of a plurality of autonomous choice-making actions on the individual level.

Beneath this interpretation lies a universalist approach that I want to place on alert. Note that Appiah himself does distinguish cosmopolitanism from the “intolerant universalism” of neo-fundamentalism, whose members share a faith containing particular values that exclude others. In refinement, he affirms a faith in “universal truth,”

yet also claims to be “less certain that we already have all of it” (Appiah). The universalism that I intend to pinpoint, however, alludes less to the principles and values that Appiah conceives of tentatively and more to the conceptualization of individual participants who live with these values, which is that individuals in the cosmopolitan vision of contamination exist as abstractions, homogeneously possessing the attributes of autonomy and independence. We have seen Appiah’s refutation of the “blank slate” presumption, where individuals are seen as susceptible to the graffiti of global capitalism and neo-colonialism; yet ironically, by undermining the complexity of social impacts, Appiah envisions a form of cultural interaction that potentially formulates “blank slates” of another kind—an imagined, depersonalized individual as a pure social member, perpetually cut off from specific cultural contexts, and forever unmarked by any historical imprints.

To clarify, this abstraction does not mean that Appiah fails to take individual experiences into account; in fact, the entire investigation is predominantly anchored in individual perspectives, from his personal observation of the modern-traditional juxtaposition in the old Kumasi Royal Palace to the exemplification of ordinary television audience in Kumasi. What I want to call into question is his theorization of personal responses to cultural phenomena. Rather than preserve them as individual representations of diverse socio-cultural dynamics, Appiah attributes these responses to a generic and homogeneous attribute of individual will, the authenticity of which, as we have discussed above, remains at stake. This totalizing theorization, as Douthat expresses, can oftentimes make the “experience of genu-

ine cultural difference [become] far more superficial.” Put differently, unifying cultural responses into an imagined political mechanism of individual freedom risks erasing cultural complexities and their rich expressions.

Concerned with this potential cultural erasure, Douthat challenges us to “disappear into someone else’s culture”—to look more closely into individual responses and uncover the embedded socio-cultural signals in broader social contexts. To exemplify, Douthat particularly includes his own peaking cosmopolitan experiences at age eleven, “attending tongues-speaking Pentecostalist worship services” and “playing Little League in a working-class neighborhood.” Different from Appiah, however, Douthat does not make any theorizing move in these experiences; he leaves these experiences to speak for themselves. Behind this strategic disposition, I would argue, lies Douthat’s alternative conceptualization of cosmopolitanism in a broader sense. Instead of systemizing varied cultural experiences and encounters into a universal explication, Douthat prompts us to analyze culture with the approach of “disappearance,” where the explorer is “ready to be transformed by what it [the cosmopolitan attitude] finds.” In one way, this statement finds common ground with Appiah’s affirmation of pluralism. Yet, by “disappear,” Douthat highlights an irreducible intertwinement between individual representations and the cultural contexts in which they are immersed. Disappearing into one’s culture, accordingly, accentuates the cultural conditions as much as the individual lens. This irreducible intertwinement is what Appiah’s project lacks. When Appiah’s contamination model detaches individuals from their

cultural contexts to better enact cultural accustoming, Douthat parts company to argue that individuals are never apart from cultures. Symbolically speaking, individuals are their cultures: they carry, represent, and receive deeply-imprinted impacts from their cultural surroundings. Hence, a cosmopolitan vision that values humanity, that claims “every human being has obligations to every other,” must not reside in the human individual level alone, but dig deeper into the specific socio-cultural forces that both empower and restrain the individual (Appiah).

As we have discussed, Appiah’s contamination model of cosmopolitanism fails to capture the inseparable correlation between individuals and the collective entities that they embed themselves in. Douthat’s cosmopolitan critique, from this perspective, revises our understanding of cosmopolitanism by positioning individuals and cultural contexts as an organic whole. This revision attains significance in that it manages to acknowledge and manifest the struggles facing every individual in complex cultural conditions; at the same time, the vision does not sacrifice this individual locus, but ultimately lands upon a unique perspective by bringing cultural dimensions to one’s individual identity.

This vision has yet to achieve perfection. Conflicts such as the one that Appiah raises about “liberty and diversity” remain unclear: having acknowledged the other culture and understood individuals within that culture, we may still face fundamental moral conflicts embedded in cultural differences. Do we decide, then, to respect or to abandon that cultural representation? Is there a third alternative to

cope with the conflicts? Can cosmopolitanism offer a linear answer or solution? These questions may pertain to the study of cosmopolitanism with broader indications about human empathy in the globalized-yet-fragmented contemporary era.

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Faculty Introduction

This essay represents an ambitious attempt to deepen our thinking about a significant debate in medical ethics. Madison submitted this paper as her final research project in *Writing as Inquiry (Writing II)*. The assignment asked students to use either Kant or Mill to enhance our thinking about a contemporary moral problem or ethical debate. It also required them to work with a range of sources to advance their chosen line of inquiry. Madison accomplishes both of these tasks rather effectively. Her use of source material is particularly impressive as she develops and deepens her analysis. I also admire her attempt to adapt (rather than merely apply) a Kantian framework to help us see this debate from a new perspective. Taking up an approach, as Madison attempts here, is one of the more challenging moves we all face as academic writers.

Paul Woolridge
Lecturer in the Writing Program

THE PARTICIPATION OF IMPOVERISHED PEOPLES IN PLACEBO-CONTROLLED PHARMACEUTICAL TRIALS: SCIENTIFIC INNOVATION OR NEOCOLONIAL EXPLOITATION?

MADISON E. PELLETIER

Royal Navy Doctor James Lind is credited with conducting one of the first known placebo-controlled trials. In 1572, he divided a group of his scurvy-ridden sailors into six sections, each receiving a different treatment, ranging from citrus fruits to seawater. Two treatments were proven effective; the remaining four were fatal (Lemoine 1). Thus began a long and controversial discourse. A placebo treatment, in this case seawater, is described as a substance with “no specific therapeutic effect on a patient’s condition, but believed by the patient to be therapeutic” (*OED*). The randomized, double-blind placebo-controlled trial, wherein neither patients nor doctors know whether the administered treatment is inert, is considered the paragon of research methodology. Ethically, however, physicians seem to stand in violation of their Hippocratic duty to “do no harm” by randomizing

their patients to placebo, particularly if those patients are harmed by their lack of treatment—if they die of scurvy, for example (Tyson). Despite the modern prevalence of placebo-controlled trials, it was not until 2008 that their official allowance was written into the Declaration of Helsinki, the foremost governing document for medical and research professionals. Article II.3 of the Declaration, in its most current form, declares, “In any medical study, every patient—including those of a control group, if any—should be assured of the best proven diagnostic and therapeutic methods” (World Medical Association). The debate has thus arisen: is it possible to simultaneously possess a control group and provide the “best proven diagnostic and therapeutic methods,” or has the West simply grown complacent in the face of immorality, because the trials are no longer conducted on its soil? When we examine placebo trials through the lens of Kantian moral philosophy and historical medical ethics, it becomes apparent that the speed of scientific progress has outstripped the development of societal values, both individually and internationally.

The utilitarian case for placebo-controlled trials is clear cut: if lessening the quality of treatment for a minority of test-subjects increases the likelihood of advancing medical knowledge, thus helping the majority, it is permissible. Furthermore, if a drug cannot be proven to be more effective than a placebo within a clinical trial, then it ought not be sold. Some supporters go so far as to suggest that, given the primary role of the physician as an alleviator of patients’ suffering, it does not matter whether a person is receiving a proven drug or an inert substance; a treatment is morally permissible so long as it improves

the comfort of the patient (Specter). Opponents of the practice, however, point to studies proving that even when suffering is reduced under administration of a placebo, the patient's physical health does not improve (Wechsler 124). This contradicts the assumption that the placebo effect can stand in place of a proven treatment. Internationally, the debate hinges on what is possibly humanity's most enduring moral dilemma: ethics versus economy. By hosting trials in developing nations, pharmaceutical companies assert that they are able to both keep costs low and provide medicine to underprivileged regions. Opponents point out that Western standards of informed consent are all but impossible to uphold in such trials (Miller). Critics also cite countless failed experiments as evidence that corporations cannot be trusted with the lives of the world's vulnerable populations. Public moralists and developing nations fear the worst, envisioning an unstoppable era of pharmaceutical neocolonialism.

The core principles of Kantian morals and medical ethics have long been intertwined. At the heart of each philosophy rest the concepts of autonomy and beneficence. Kant bases his autonomy on the fundamental belief that every human is a rational being deserving of dignity and respect from others. Because this reason is what gives value to all other things, it is, in and of itself, invaluable. This principle lays the groundwork for the Formula of Humanity as an End, which dictates that a human being "is not a thing and hence not something that can be used merely as a means" (Kant 4:430). Within a Kantian framework, a decision does not possess moral worth unless it is made autonomously, meaning that it is based only upon the rationality of its

maker. If coerced by another, the decision-maker is rendered merely a means to achieve that other person's end. Kant goes on to further qualify this principle, noting the difference between choices made autonomously and those made "heteronomously" (Kant 4:434). Heteronomous choices are influenced by outside forces, be they base, physical need or the coercion of another (Kant 4:435). A decision founded upon fear for one's safety, need of money, or misinformation cannot be autonomous, as each of these requires the suppression of reason in favor of some other physical or mental faculty. Within medical ethics, Kantian autonomy is honed into the concept of informed consent. This requirement is written into the Declaration of Helsinki, which states, "After ensuring that the potential subject has understood the information, the physician or another appropriately qualified individual must then seek the potential subject's freely-given informed consent, preferably in writing" (WMA). Within both frameworks, ends reached through the coercion or deception of another are categorically impermissible.

The concept of medical beneficence, though not as clearly outlined, is equally indivisible from Kantian morals. This principle stands at the heart of medical ethics; the Declaration of Geneva of the World Medical Association declares on behalf of physicians, "The health of my patient will be my first consideration," and the International Code of Medical Ethics dictates that "a physician shall act in the patient's best interest when providing medical care" (WMA). It is the fundamental role of doctors to care for their patients, and it is this role that links the principle of beneficence to Kant's categorical impera-

tive. Within the imperative, each citizen is ordered to act only upon a maxim which she would will to become universal law. If the universalization of the maxim would result in its own invalidation, the maxim is impermissible (Kant 4:423). When examined against this formula of universal law, the necessity of beneficence stands. Citizens place both their trust and their bodies in the hands of physicians, who are expected to “promote and safeguard the health, well-being, and rights of patients” (WMA). If it were to become universal law that these so-called caregivers acted against the best interest of their patients, the people would no longer employ their care, and the profession itself would cease to exist. It is with these two core values that each question within the bioethical discourse must be considered, and the debate surrounding placebo-controlled trials is no exception. By administering an inert substance in place of a proven therapy, physicians may be advancing medical knowledge, but by doing so, they render their patients as mere means to scientific discovery, as opposed to rational beings deserving of care in their own right.

To begin discussion of the moral application of the placebo effect, one key misunderstanding must first be addressed. The placebo effect is the phenomenon observed when patients given inert substances, such as sugar or saline, report the same lessening of symptoms as their counterparts receiving the trial’s active drug. It is generally accepted that the placebo effect is a part of the body’s natural response to medication—when the brain believes it will soon receive a painkiller, for example, endorphin production begins independently in order to prepare for the effects of the medicine (Specter). Where pub-

lic perception falls short of fact, however, is in equating subjective relief to objective medical benefit. In a groundbreaking study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers found that placebo treatments were highly effective in the reduction of symptoms, yet showed no ability to cure the underlying medical issue causing those symptoms. This study was performed on participants with mild to severe asthma. Of the four trial arms, one received no treatment of any kind, one was given placebo acupuncture, one a placebo inhaler, and one group received an inhaler with active Albuterol, the most common treatment for asthma patients in the United States. Though both placebo groups reported roughly the same comfort-level as those given Albuterol, their lung function—measured by their performance on an FEV exhalation test—was not improved (Wechsler 123). This study highlights an important fallacy within the debate: that a patient's increased comfort level necessarily means that they are healing. Proponents of placebo-usage argue that the health of a patient in the control group is improved by the placebo effect, thus absolving themselves of the moral responsibility to treat illness. The effect is not a miracle cure, however, and a saline injection will not treat hypertension any more than a sham inhaler improves asthmatic lungs. The doctors who administer these treatments cannot claim to fulfill their duty of beneficence, as a placebo group is not receiving the best care available. With this in mind, the debate becomes one of scientific detachment versus medical responsibility.

Western pharmaceutical corporations have, by and large, shipped their trials overseas, where both the cost and risks are lower.

Corporate officials claim that Western standards of informed consent are upheld within the trials, but critics point out the sheer improbability of that statement. In a recent interview, Dr. Arthur Kaplan, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Bioethics, noted that pharmaceutical trials can no longer find sufficient participation for trials held in the West, because citizens simply "don't want to be randomized to placebo" (Miller). Despite the unwillingness of their Western counterparts, pharmaceutical companies claim that each of their trial participants has given their own fair consent, with full knowledge of the trial's methodology and potential treatment plans. Dr. Arand Rai, who was fired from his job at a hospital in Indore, India for raising ethical concerns, contests this statement. According to Rai, the doctors at his hospital specifically chose "poor, illiterate people who do not understand the meaning of clinical drug trials" to participate (Lloyd-Roberts). When a person in a developing nation is offered the opportunity to participate in a Western drug trial, it may very well be their only way to receive treatment for their condition. These people do not have the choice between participating in a potentially high-risk, experimental trial or going to their local doctor to purchase a proven treatment. They are at the mercy of the trial. Dr. Kaplan poses the question: "are [the participants] really giving you informed consent or will they sign up for anything that you show up with because they are desperate and have an overwhelming faith in anybody in a white coat?" (Miller). Again, consent that is gained through coercion and misinformation fundamentally cannot be autonomous; these patients, most of whom are poor, ailing, and scared, are acting upon their heter-

onomous, physical needs, and the abuse of such a situation is morally impermissible. Proponents of these trials have offered many solutions to this methodological failing, going so far as to propose a system of “community consent” wherein local leaders are tasked with both informing and consenting for their community (Weijer). This system, however, which seems to put poor women at disproportionate risk within male-dominated developing nations, would not increase the subjects’ autonomy but detract from it. In her review of the oft-criticized maternal-fetal HIV transmission trials of the 1990s, researcher Paquita de Zulueta of Imperial College London notes the failings of such a system and argues that “if individuals’ competence is vitiated by a lack of understanding, they should be afforded greater protection, not less” (304). If a patient’s ability to exercise their autonomy is compromised, it is the duty of the physician to bridge the ethical divide by acting beneficently on behalf of the patient, not the corporation.

Pharmaceutical companies may be in the business of saving lives, but they prioritize the success of that business above all else. It is failingly idealistic to expect that a multibillion dollar corporation will act according to the well-being of their trial participants when it is opposed to their pocketbooks; providing healthcare to the poor, though noble, is not inexpensive. The fifth version of the Declaration of Helsinki, released by the World Medical Association in 2005, had even expressly “prohibited the use of placebos in situations of local scarcity if the ‘best current method’ exists elsewhere” (de Zulueta 307). Since the Declaration’s revision in 2008, however, the use of placebo-controls has skyrocketed, and supporters argue that their obligation rests

only in providing “the highest standard of care practically attainable in the country in which the research is being carried out” (Perinatal HIV Intervention Research). By this measure, the responsibility to provide care for participants in some of the world’s poorest regions is all but nonexistent. Vindicated by this line of thinking, administrators of pharmaceutical trials feel no responsibility to care for a community that is no longer profitable. De Zulueta notes the prevalence of HIV trials that, upon completion, leave their participants ostracized without treatment, without prospects, and without a cure (de Zulueta 290). Once these participants have served their purpose, they are worthless. In 2003, a trial of the mania drug Risperdal came under fire for its abuse of international health standards. The trial, conducted on poor citizens of Gujarat, India, took psychiatric patients off of their existing medicine, placing them into groups receiving either risperidone or a placebo drug. The placebo arm of the trial possessed 145 patients (Weyzig and Schipper). Given the high instances of acute and long-term morbidity associated with untreated mania, sources, such as the *British Journal of Psychology*, have called the trial “unethical and inhumane,” suggesting, “All future trials concerning the efficacy of a medication for acute mania should use an arm with one of the proven medications as a comparator and not include a placebo arm” (Basil). A similar trial was conducted, with joint sponsorship from the UK Medical Research Council (MRC), Rockefeller Foundation, DfID (Uganda), GlaxoSmithKline, Gilead, and Boehringer-Ingelheim, in Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Côte d’Ivoire from 2003 to 2005. The trial, which tested Anti-Retroviral Therapy—used to slow the progress of the HIV

virus—forced a group of patients off of their medication in order to test the effects of intermittent treatment. Though concerns were raised during the trial, attempts to re-administer ART drugs failed, and several members of the interruption group died (Weyzig and Schipper).

Trials such as these—and unfortunately these are only two of many examples—breed distrust of foreign entities abroad, making the work of truly beneficent groups all the more difficult. When administrators of these trials deny patients their life-saving medicine in order to satisfy the curiosity of Western scientists, the Hippocratic principle of nonmaleficence is all but disregarded and human lives are treated as nothing more than a means to medical discovery and financial gain (Tyson). This is not because corporations actively wish to do harm, but rather because they can afford to not do good. For every settlement a corporation must pay, such as the \$175,000 payout Pfizer recently made to four of the eleven families whose children they killed in a clinical drug trial in Nigeria, they stand to gain millions from the development of a successful new drug (“Pfizer: Nigeria Drug Trial Victims Get Compensation”). It is clear that pharmaceutical corporations cannot be relied upon to “do no harm” to the more vulnerable patients they test (Tyson). With this in mind, it is of the utmost importance that regulatory bodies, be they federal or non-governmental, take a stand against the abuse of vulnerable populations and force these corporations to incorporate beneficence into the caregiving process once more.

It is impossible to host a placebo-controlled trial abroad with-

out violating the core ethical values of autonomy and beneficence. The Declaration of Helsinki's "best proven diagnostic and therapeutic methods" are never given, and often even standard, local medical care is denied to participants. The myth of informed consent is little more than the abuse of a people who hold "the implicit assumption that health care professionals will always protect patient's best interests, and provide effective treatment" (de Zulueta 310). These people are not in a position to make autonomous decisions; instead, their rationality is suppressed and their physical health exploited to ensure their enrollment in potentially dangerous medical experiments. Not only do the trials take advantage of this assumption of beneficence, but they fail to deliver even the most basic care inherent in that duty. Multinational pharmaceutical corporations have been caught time and again disregarding the health, safety, and dignity of their patients in order to maximize their profit margins. Within the framework of both classic Kantian morals and the modern medical ethic, it is clear that the use of placebo-controlled trials in the developing world is an impermissible abuse of vulnerable populations. The lives of the world's poorest citizens cannot be used merely as a means to provide a product for their Western counterparts. They are humans, and they deserve better than what has been forced upon them.

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Faculty Introduction

Cindy Wang's lively essay, written for her Spring 2017 *Writing as Inquiry (Writing I)* class with Dr. Emily Murphy, takes as its object of investigation China's increasingly popular live house culture. What is happening in this particular community of musicians and their fans—who wear Hanfu and sing about lamb noodles—and how do these happenings relate to larger questions of national identity and globalization? Using theoretical texts from literature and the social sciences, Cindy argues that Chinese live house culture offers a new way of constructing Chinese identity, one that is both local and global. This is precisely the kind of intellectual project we hope our NYU Shanghai students will pursue: What do they encounter within and beyond campus, and how do the theorists they read for our courses help them to better understand these encounters? In “A New Dimension of Chinese Identity: An Emerging Live House Culture in China,” Cindy skillfully addresses these questions on the page.

Jennifer Tomscha

Associate Director of and Lecturer in the Writing Program

A NEW DIMENSION OF CHINESE NATIONAL IDENTITY: AN EMERGING LIVE HOUSE CULTURE IN CHINA

王新语 (CINDY WANG)

Every night, nearly a hundred music lovers huddle together and shake to the rhythm of the bands. In a secluded and tiny live house in downtown Shanghai, these independent young artists wear Hanfu, the national costume of Han people, and use traditional props such as folding fans, which contrast sharply with the highly modernized night view of the cosmopolis. The lyrics of the songs have very strong regional characteristics; they reflect local history and incorporate words and phrases from local dialects such as *momozi* 沫沫子, “procrastinator” in Lanzhou dialect. These heartfelt attachments to the native culture are, in fact, expressions of indignation and criticism of the cultural globalization. In response to this irresistible trend of globalization, rather than passively adapting to foreign cultures, live house artists and their followers have formed a unique culture in which a new dimension of Chinese national identity is coming into being.

After almost four decades of China's reform and opening up, Chinese culture has gradually moved away from blindly absorbing foreign cultures to reconstructing its own cultural space as a part of global culture; it is becoming increasingly influential in shaping global trends. Although it seems that Chinese culture, in order to expand its territory, is undergoing a process of reinventing itself to be more international, open, and inclusive, the reality is not a one-sided adaptation but rather a negotiation between global and native culture. This negotiation is best reflected by the emerging live house culture in China, which utilizes global marketing strategies to let the world rediscover the vitality of China's age-old culture. Behind the adoration of Chinese civilization is, however, a sense of insecurity about losing the nation's roots in its culture. To cope with such an identity crisis, pioneers of the live house culture in China are experiencing a process of concretizing Chinese national identity in which they intensify and reassert the notion of being Chinese.

To defend and strengthen Chinese national identity, live house culture constructs a new conception of being Chinese that is free from the restriction of nationality and ethnicity. Chinese national identity can be read in different dimensions. One is as the identity of the People's Republic of China, the political foundation on which Chinese nationalism and the "Chinese dream" have been built (He 55-57). This interpretation is closely associated with China's "century of humiliation" and its rise to great power status in today's international arena. According to scholar Honghua Men, another approach to defining Chinese national identity is based on ethno-cultural identity, as nation-

al identity is essentially a consensus on a specific system of values that is deeply rooted in a nation's history and culture (190).

Extending beyond these two visions of Chinese national identity, the new live house culture conceptualizes and simplifies Chinese national identity in symbolic cultural, historical, and religious elements. One example is the lyrics from a folk song called “兰州 兰州” (“Lanzhou Lanzhou”) performed by 低苦艾 (Low Wormwood), a band from Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province: “兰州～淌不完的黄河水向东流／兰州～东的尽头是海的入口。” (“Lanzhou, the endless Yellow River runs to the east/ Lanzhou, the end of the east is the entrance into the sea”) (line 11-12). These lyrics express connection to the city Lanzhou and resonance with Chinese national identity because the Yellow River is China's mother river and the cradle of Chinese civilization. This song turns Lanzhou and the Yellow River into symbolic images of one's love for this nation, which is powerful in terms of recalling people's national identity. Another example is Sun Wukong (also known as the Monkey King), one of the main characters in a 16th century Chinese classical novel *The Journey to the West*. Over time, Sun Wukong developed into an icon of loyalty, love, courage, and resistance. The figure of the Monkey King is loved by many music lovers who are fond of live house culture because they think this character can best represent their attitudes toward music as well as life. The positive qualities of this mythological figure are a part of Chinese identity. In this way, both Chinese and foreigners who are fascinated by this culture can express their Chinese national identities by simply wearing a T-shirt with the figure of Wukong on it. Similarly,

one without much knowledge of Chinese culture can display one's self-identification as Chinese or craze for Chinese culture by wearing Hanfu or tattooing Chinese characters on one's body. These practices of concretizing and simplifying Chinese national identity make it easy and straightforward for people, despite their nationalities and ethnicities, to express their affinity for "Chineseness."

Such illustration and expression of the Chinese national identity is not a product of an isolated development of the notion *per se* but a result of the global and local conflict in the course of globalization. Anna Katrina Gutierrez, a researcher on the concept of glocalization, argues that there exists a "glocal heterotopia" in which "the threat of global homogenization and the fear of local isolation seek resolution through the establishment of a middle ground" (20). This claim suggests that globalization is a two-way communication in which global and local spheres agree, disagree, and compromise with one another. Although Gutierrez provides insights into this phenomenon of "glocal" by arguing that glocal areas raise the possibility of possessing "multiple identities" or "multiple dimensions to national identity," she does not address how those new dimensions of national identity have intensified the original national identity (23). In this case, the seemingly rebellious practices of the live house artists keeping to tradition and resisting cultural assimilation are, in fact, an outcome of mixed emotions composed of feeling tired of cultural homogenization and numbness in cultural interchange. For instance, 布衣乐队 (Buyi Band), a band that has been active for more than twenty years in the live house community, produced the song "羊肉面" ("Lamb Noodle

through telling a story about lamb noodles, one of the most popular snacks in China:

幸福究竟是什么	(What on earth is happiness
妈妈最幸福的就是看你吃的样子	For me, the happiest thing is to watch the way you eat, my son
你回家吧 困难的时候	Go home when you are in trouble
回家妈妈给你做最喜欢的呀	When you come home, Mom will cook you your favorite
你回家吧 困难的时候	Go home when you are in trouble
回家妈妈给你做你最喜欢的呀	When you come home, Mom will cook you your favorite
羊肉面。(9-15)	Lamb noodles.) (9-15)

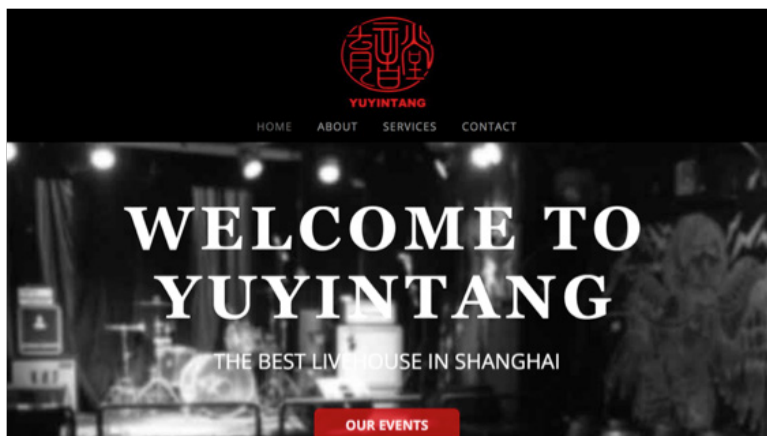
This song demonstrates what it means to be happy for an ordinary family in China, which reasserts Chinese traditional ideology and, at the same time, implies a disapproval of the outside world where there are chain stores of American fast food but no authentic lamb noodles.

This pride in local flavor implies an anxiety over and distaste for cultural homogenization perpetuated by standardization in the progress of globalization. As Douglas Blum, a professor and expert specializing in globalization, reveals, “[B]eing modern per se is also a palpable wish, one which in part reflects the internalization of a new, materialistic standard of ‘civilization’” (78). By applying Blum’s claim to today’s cultural development, it becomes clear that cultural

homogenization is one prominent form of standardization, but people's appetites for global culture also reflect psychological internationalizations of a standardized culture. In fact, some would argue that since live houses originated in Japan, this new live house culture in China precisely confirms the charge that Chinese national identity has been homogenized by the global culture. Although this claim seems plausible because there are indeed many foreign bands who have performed or will perform in these live houses, I would argue that this is just one example of how the emerging live house culture in China utilizes the opportunities and benefits of globalization to reinforce and promote Chinese national identity. Instead of getting lost in multiple dimensions of national identity, the live house culture in China returns to the bedrock of Chinese cultural elements, searches for salvation in tradition, and further sets a new trend of *chinoiserie*. By using lyrics with strong regional characteristics such as Lanzhou, the Yellow River, and lamb noodles, these live house artists convert Western musical genres into Chinese style.

This process of reconstructing Chinese national identity is not about simply denying all the newly-added dimensions of national identity and standing against the trend of globalization; it is a process of returning to the authentic by negotiating the global and local and then making globalization work for national interest. Introducing foreign bands is a form of marketing to attract foreign and Chinese music lovers in the first place. These live houses have special official websites in English only, as well as Facebook websites. By seizing the opportunities provided by globalization and with the help of marketing,

foreigners have become a large proportion of the regular live house customers and are exposed to and influenced by the local culture. The increasing number of followers enables Chinese culture to play a larger role in the progress of globalization.



Wang, Cindy. “The English version of the official website of Yuyintang—a live house in Shanghai.” Screenshot. May 16, 2017.



Wang, Cindy. “Yuyintang livehouse’s Facebook.” Screenshot. May 16, 2017.

A new dimension of Chinese national identity is developing through the live house culture in China. Such practices of conceptualizing and simplifying markers of Chinese national identity not only reassert identity among Chinese people but also make it easier to blend with global culture. Moreover, Chinese national identity has been enriched by the “glocal heterotopia,” which has caused great impact on the local culture by adding new dimensions of national identity. Even more importantly, glocalization has highlighted and intensified the original dimensions of Chinese national identity. Instead of seeing globalization as a threat to the native culture, this emerging live house culture employs it as a marketing approach to promote Chinese national identity. By reconstructing Chinese national identity on one hand and utilizing the global market on the other, Chinese culture is able to better cope with the trend of globalization and leaves its own mark on the world course.

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Faculty Introduction

I congratulate Bai Xiao on the inclusion of her essay “Making It New: Ezra Pound’s ‘Luminous’ Mythmaking of China” for publication in our writing journal. She wrote this essay for the *Perspectives on the Humanities* course titled “Sino-Western Literary Exchanges” that I taught in the Fall of 2016. It is an extremely ambitious project, stretching over Pound’s entire career as a poet-translator, from his initial encounter with the Fenollosa manuscripts to his tragic years after World War II, and covering a stunning array of texts and ideas, from *Cathay* through the *Da xue* or, as Pound rendered it, *The Great Digest* to *The Cantos*, from the nature of the Chinese language through the social and economic problems in the interwar period to the moral and political teachings of Confucius. In ranging back and forth among this plethora of materials, the essay deserves credit for not losing sight of its argument: namely, Pound’s China is an imaginary construct invented as a cure for the crises facing the Western world in his day. I recommend the essay for its many insights, its exuberant ambition, and its value as a case study of cultural exchange.

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EZRA POUND'S "LUMINOUS" MYTHMAKING OF CHINA

白焜 (BAI XIAO)

As an influential figure in the history of Western literature, Ezra Pound marked the epochal transformation of English poetry at the beginning of the 20th century. Besides his pioneering theory of imagism, Pound is also known for his bold translation of ancient Chinese poetry and Confucian classics, through which he presented a highly positive and even glorious image of "China" to the Western world. Although many of Pound's contemporaries belittled China only as "a vast potential market for American goods, American culture, and American democracy," Pound's unusual enthusiasm for the Orient helped usher in the second taste for China in the West after the Enlightenment (Divine 25). However, instead of presenting China in its true sense, Pound's "China" is rather a myth created by the author himself. Pound's works translating Chinese literature to English, notably the Confucian classics and *Cathay*, are more than a collection of involuntary inaccuracies mixed with intentional manipulations; more intriguingly, considerable assimilation and metamorphism of the Chinese ideology, submerged under the surface of his Chinese-related texts, distinguish his works from any conventional translations. To

be more exact, Pound's creative image of China in his "translations" shapes an effective myth of China, which he proposed as a medication to save the Western world from serious crises and degradation in the 20th century and to lead the West to a brighter future.

Studying China persistently for more than forty years, Ezra Pound spares no efforts in eulogizing China's culture and ideology, fundamentally Confucianism, in his most exemplary works such as *The Cantos*. His interest in China was largely kindled by orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, who, in his "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," expressed hearty admiration of China:

Their type of cultivation has been high. Their harvest of recorded experience doubles our own. The Chinese have been idealists and experimenters in the making of great principles; their history opens a world of lofty aim and achievement, parallel to that of the ancient Mediterranean peoples. (42)

It is noteworthy that at the root of this effulgent civilization, Confucianism became the cardinal representative of Chinese philosophy and ideology in Pound's mind, with all the meritorious essence of Chinese wisdom aggregated in the Confucian canon. Confucianism constituted one of the major pillars in Pound's prolonged development of *The Cantos*—from Canto XIII written as early as around 1920, which combines several important flashes of Confucian thought into one piece, to Canto LIII, the finale of his China cantos, which vigorously concludes the first 2000 years of recorded Chinese history with an allusion

to Confucius's honorable lineage.

Pound's attachment to Confucius was not only intellectual but also personal. During those most gloomy days when he was confined at St. Elizabeths, he had James Legge's translation of Confucian odes with him. Angela Palandri quotes Pound as saying, "This little book has been my bible for years, the only thing I could hang onto during those hellish days at Pisa. . . . Had it not been for this book, from which I drew my strength, I would really have gone insane" (qtd. in Flack 124n44). Here, we see the first glimmerings of Confucianism as a kind of medication, first for Pound himself, and, as he would later propose, one which could radiate healing throughout the West.

Although Pound appreciated China and made profound contributions in introducing China to the West throughout his life, his presentation of China largely remained a deficient myth due to his peculiar ideogrammic interpretation of the Chinese language. One of the biggest problems with Pound's "China" was his lack of knowledge of Chinese, which caused him to deviate from the true meaning of original texts from time to time. An interesting moment in Pound's journey of studying Chinese sheds light on his maverick view: when reading James Legge's bilingual edition of the Four Confucian Books without a glossary in 1937, he professed, "When I disagreed with the crib or was puzzled by it I had only the look of the characters and the radicals to go on from" (Sun 111). Without knowing sufficiently the meaning of Chinese characters as organic entirety, he often focused on their graphic components. What became the paradigm of his ideogrammic approach was the juxtaposition of unrelated particulars to arrive at

an imagined abstract meaning. However, subjective assertions about the Chinese language actually overemphasized the apparent forms of Chinese characters while neglecting the inseparability of all integrals in a character to convey abstract concepts. Pound's approach incurred the illusion that someone without any knowledge of Chinese would be able to access the meanings of characters instantly by simply looking at these "semi-pictorials" (Fenollosa 43).

Such a subjective approach explains why Pound made mistakes in his translation of *Da xue*, commonly translated as *The Great Learning* but what Pound called *The Great Digest*. For instance, from his selected terminology before the text, he dismantles *shen* 慎 into its radical on the left, *xin* 心, meaning "heart," and a fragment of its right segment, *mu* 目, meaning "eye," which results in the interpretation of the whole character as "the eye (at the right) looking straight into the heart" (Pound, *Great Digest* 21). However, not only does he fail to recognize that the so-called "eye" is only a fraction of the right part 真 ("truth"), but he also distorts the meaning of the whole character, which should denote "cautiousness." In contrast to Pound's ideogrammic analysis of Chinese, "Chinese characters, at least the vast majority of them" are "morphosyllabic—a heavy (if rather clunky and esoteric) term intended to convey the dual semantic-phonetic nature of the majority of the Chinese characters" (Williams 158-159). That is to say, most Chinese characters should not be taken as purely "ideograms," but Pound might not have identified the phonetic segment of a character and imposed the meaning conjectured from the partial form to the overall understanding instead. Even if Pound did not bungle every

Chinese character in his works, many of his cognitions about China are actually problematic, as a result of his unfamiliarity with unique characteristics of the Chinese language.

In fact, Pound's ideogrammic myth of the Chinese language gives rise to his idealization of the Confucian ideology, which became a luminous component of his mythmaking. Let us take Pound's interpretation of one key character in Confucian writing under scrutiny: *de* 德, which is usually paraphrased as all kinds of virtue a human could possess in line with Confucian morals, including benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, sincerity, and so on. According to Pound, *de* refers to "the action resultant from this straight gaze into the heart" ideographically, and thus revealed specifically "the 'know thyself' carried into action" rather than general virtue (*Great Digest* 21). Strikingly enough, here Pound emphasizes the significance of self-knowledge, namely "know thyself," over all the other qualities embedded in *de*, while there is no evidence at all that self-knowledge was given such a priority in the original meaning of the character. Though it might appear unintelligible at first sight, this uncommon illustration uncovers how Pound's ideogrammic interpretation was subtly colored by the Confucian ideals. On the one hand, aligned with Pound's translation of *The Great Learning*, Pound deemed Confucianism as a morally and ethically virtuous system that vitalized human nature through self-reflection and self-cultivation; on the other hand, Pound identified in *The Great Learning* that the ultimate catalyst of self-knowledge was rooted in *gewu* 格物, "sorting things into organic categories" in his own words, which resonated with knowledge of the laws of nature (*Great*

Digest 31). Inspired by the Confucian classics he was working on, his ideogrammic method with a biased focus on specific components of characters helped further consolidate his Confucianism as a “totalizing philosophy” where Heaven (“nature”) went hand in hand with humanity (Zhu, “One-Principle Text” 397). His complimentary presentation of the harmony of Confucianism—both pointing inwardly towards the bottom of the heart and stretching outwardly toward prodigious nature—significantly burnished his mythmaking of China.

For Chinese readers, Pound’s flawed image of China might seem quite bizarre; however, as Pound’s works on China were intended for his Western audience, this oriental myth functioned surprisingly well. Eric Hayot points out in his book *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* that there have been long-term effects of Pound’s works on the Western view of China in so far as that “everything after him has to look like his work to seem ‘Chinese’” (21). Even though Pound was vulnerable to potential criticism on his deficient knowledge of China, the Western audience at his time was even more ignorant of China than he was. That is to say, “Pound [could] imitate and persuade with utmost economy not because he or his reader [knew] so much but because both [concurred] in knowing so little” (Steiner qtd. in Hayot 21). Considering the existing knowledge gap between the West and China, Pound ingeniously sorted out the most conspicuous elements closely related to the image of China—those luminous details “whose strangeness needed no explanation” for Western people (Hayot 23). His colossal handwritten Chinese characters standing out abruptly in his *Cantos* were among the best examples to render such percussive

oddness. It is exactly the “cultural shorthand” “easily recognizable as ‘Chinese’” in Pound’s works that eventually “established the authenticity of the Eastern setting,” resulting in an enduringly appealing impression of China in the Western view (Hayot 21). By taking advantage of such a stylized conception of China from the Western perspective, Pound laid the foundation for effectively utilizing the myth to make his prescription later for what he perceived to be a degraded modern Western society.

Entangled in the turbulence of the 20th century, Ezra Pound’s advocacy for China was deeply rooted in the social environment of the Western world at that time, which galvanized his pungent depression and anxiety. It is quite noteworthy that among the tens of thousands of surviving ancient Chinese poems on various topics, the fourteen translations in Pound’s *Cathay* seem to be purposefully selected, concentrating on only a few themes such as war, exile, lovesickness, unwilling farewell, and nostalgia. The pervasive inner bitterness and loneliness shared by these motifs underscore Pound’s Chinese poetry with subtle pathos and mirror the poet’s torment during a desperate quest to salvage Western society.

From Pound’s point of view, the cardinal cause of Western society’s sickness was economic breakdown. With the cruelty of World War I still carved in mind, “Pound came to the conclusion that poverty and war result from the inequitable distribution of consumer purchasing power in a capitalist economy” through the control of credit from international private banking and usury (Farahbakhsh 1450). In other words, “the evils of unchecked capitalism,” featured in vicious rivalries

of international capitalists, accompanied by recessive monetary policy and heavy taxes, was the culprit to blame for the severe disorder in the western society (Farahbakhsh 1450). In Pound's Canto XLV, the repetition of sentences beginning "with usura" demonstrates Pound's sharp denunciation of usury, a "sin against nature" and "CONTRA NATURAM" (229-231). Although he seems to hold his discussion in the context of fifteenth century Italy and northern Europe, it was exactly usury, this determinant for the failure of the authoritative Medici bank, that was eroding modern Western society again. Such a pessimistic outlook on the economy also found its way to the Chinese cantos. When Pound describes the Spring and Autumn period in Chinese history in Canto LIII, he highlights, "Usurpations, jealousies, taxes / Greed, murder, jealousies, taxes and douanes," which might be regarded as a vividly realistic portrait of the 20th century here—a startling metaphor of troubled times (274). This premonition of chaos made Pound perceive an urgent need for peace, welfare, and order, through which he aspired to "prevent a second international war" (Farahbakhsh 1451). However, this aspiration was difficult to achieve without the presence of strong leaders.

Pound re-discovered "China" from ancient legacies and found that its honored Confucian philosophy "offered the best hope for an enduring and just social order," which turned out to meet exactly his needs (Farahbakhsh 1451). The idea of order and good national governance took up a key position in Pound's image of China according to Confucian values. In Canto LIII, the tyrants who ruled by misdoings, like King Wang who intended to vary the currency "against council's

opinion, / and to gain by this wangling,” are all punished by anomalies from the wrath of heaven, for example, “never were so many eclipses” (273). In sharp contrast, those virtuous emperors who followed Confucian teachings and governed with wisdom all achieve great success in their administrations, and are held in awe and commemoration by the people. For example, Pound sings his praises to one of the benevolent emperors explicitly:

Honour to Chao-Kong the surveyor.

Let his name last 3000 years

Gave each man land for his labour

not by plough-land alone

But for keeping of silk-worms

Reforested the mulberry groves

Set periodical markets

Exchange brought abundance, the prisons were empty.
(LIII/268)¹

From this hymn, we can clearly assess that Pound witnesses, or rather “realizes” his propositions of a well-governed and prosperous economy in his representation of China. The gracious images of those wise emperors in ancient times also embody his other ideals of the

1 In keeping with citation practices by some Pound scholars, the citations here reflect the Canto number in Roman numerals, followed by the page number on which the cited verse can be found in the New Directions edition of *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound.

right form of governor by “keep[ing] down taxes” (LIII/267), “fitting words to their music” and ritualistic odes (LIII/262), giving people freedom to “make verses” and “play comedies” (LIII/270), and reigning by righteous law “of the just middle, the pivot” (LIII/269). More importantly, he makes his powerful appeal for the stability of the state and the well-being of the people through Tching-ouang’s weighty testament: “[T]his is my will and my last will / Keep peace / Keep the peace, care for the people” (LIII/267). Having suffered heartbreaking devastation after war, Pound believed he could turn to Confucius for remedies, in a similar way that he looked to the *Odyssey* in Canto I “in order to heal the wounds opened by the Great War” (Flack 105).

Order, calibrated to the Confucian teachings and beginning at the level of the individual, appealed to Pound. Confucius’s recurring reference to “order” underlines its significance:

If a man have not order within him

He can not spread order about him;

And if a man have not order within him

His family will not act with due order;

And if the prince have not order within him

He can not put order in his dominions. (XIII/59)

The uniqueness of “order” here consists in “the Confucian emphasis on the individual as the origin and expression of a society’s values,” with the on-going spiral of cultivation toward perfection originating

from the individual and then extending to the sphere of family and society (Flack 106). This emphasis on individualism is further expounded in *The Great Digest*: “[F]rom the Emperor, Son of Heaven, down to the common man, singly and all together, this self-discipline is the root” (Pound, *Great Digest* 33). Everyone, whatever identity and social status he or she enjoys, must carry out a responsible surveillance of himself or herself first and foremost. Confucius’s call to establish order through good rulers first from internal strengths of individuals turns out to be the best and the most innovative solution to external disorders and conflicts in the Western world, as Pound longed for effective “ideas which are intended to go into action” (*Guide to Kulchur* 34).

Apart from war and social disorder, the Western world was experiencing a profound spiritual degeneration at the turn of the 20th century as well. Under the intensive impact of industrial civilization and the age of machines, there was an increasing concern that human beings would gradually be alienated from nature by their materialistic desires and the fast-paced lifestyle of modern society. Pound was determined to summon human “nature” back with the help of Confucian China. According to Alireza Farahbakhsh, Pound strongly resisted the “debasement of human life within the contemporary conditions of bourgeois economics,” which “distorted the nature and purpose of work, time, and wealth” (1452). To tackle the predicament, “Confucius offers a way of life, an Anschauung or disposition toward nature and man and a system for dealing with both” (Pound qtd. in Zhu, “Pound’s Confucianism” 58). From the Confucian Chinese culture and values rooted in agricultural civilization, Pound attained a

clean cut from what he thought of as the rotten industrial society and warmly embraced the beauty of simplicity and the charm of primitivism. In Canto XIII, when commenting on his pupils' answers on how to become known, Confucius makes a perfect response: "They have all answered correctly, / "That is to say, each in his nature" (58). Here Pound actually adapts Confucius's sayings to express his enthusiasm for the natural, unstained state of soul. Similar to what Tian gracefully describes in Canto XIII—going swimming, flopping off planks, and playing mandolins in the underbrush—Pound's ideal headed for a nobler mode of harmony, where edification was as gentle "wind over grass" (LIII/266). Sharply different from "the 'stupidity' of extreme asceticism born of hatred of the body" in Christianity, Confucian teachings on nature and spiritual life made good sense to Pound, giving him the useful treatment for curing the inward disease of the Western world (Romer).

Of course, it is no coincidence that Pound looked to China, particularly ancient China, for his prescription for the Western world. Ultimately, this choice of "medicine" reflects the thinking behind his famous command to "make it new." In Canto LIII, among all the Chinese characters Pound appended to his text, he places Confucius's name, *Zhongni* 仲尼, between two *zhou* 周, meaning "Zhou Dynasty." It is true that there were exactly two Zhou Dynasties, the Western and the Eastern Zhou; Confucius lived in the restless Eastern Zhou. In his paper "Pound's Quest for Confucian Ideals: The Chinese History Cantos," Hong Sun raises the thought-provoking observation that "although the master himself lived in the Eastern Zhou dynasty, his

heart went back to the good old days of King Wen's Western Zhou and often lamented the demoralization of his contemporaries" (115). Pound's romantic, nostalgic application of Confucianism to his time and place mirrors Confucius's own nostalgia for a better, wiser society. Just like Confucius, Pound was anxious to give appropriate treatments for almost all social problems at his time, but "what he was seeking was not so much a revolution as 'a renewal, a revivification of an old tradition'" (Firchow qtd. in Sun 116). Pound's declaration of his looking to "an American renaissance" in "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" further proves his standpoint—"renaissance" instead of radical and thorough transformation. Interestingly enough, if we recognize that Greek and Roman antiquity served as the paradigm for reviving Western culture during the Renaissance in the 14th through 16th centuries, we can see the essence of Pound's "renaissance" actually remained the same, except with "China" as the tool this time.

Through the lens of Pound's works on China, it can be clearly seen that his presentation of China derives from his way of viewing "others" and the "self." The mythicized image of China provided Pound a valuable opportunity to conscientiously reflect on the severe crises in the Western world during the 20th century. Some people may attack Pound's distortion of China in his translations of Chinese classics, criticizing him as a bad translator; however, Pound never wanted to be treated as a literal "translator." It is true that he may not have been a good or even qualified translator because of his lack of knowledge of the Chinese language, but he was definitely an excellent preacher

of China and a voluntary ambassador of ancient Chinese legacies to the modern West; he made great efforts to bring “China” closer to Western people, though his image of China is still confined to an effective myth. Pound longed to “make it new”—a vigorous “remaking of the old” to catalyze the process of renewal of the West, and he was successful (Firchow qtd. in Sun 116). He would not feel satisfied to become only “a passive reflector of light from another culture”; instead, he took the mission of Prometheus, “an active agent not simply carrying forward the light of Chinese philosophy, but rejuvenating Western poetry with its ideals” (Sun 96). History is sometimes strikingly similar: from Voltaire during the Enlightenment period to Pound in the 20th century, the West always stumbled on its way to getting to know China, starting from myths and misunderstandings, but Pound clearly tries to initiate a leap. His mythmaking is an ambitious construction of his own world of China—a luminous one to make the Western world new with the flame of hope.

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Faculty Introduction

The directors of the documentary film *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* “join a battle” for the meaning of June 1989, writes Claire Ren in this *Perspectives on the Humanities* essay. In writing a critical response to the film, Claire joins this battle too. Driven by her fascination with the film’s complexity and her skepticism of Western reports about the events, Claire developed a research inquiry which situated the film in the context of American media narratives. Her inquiry progressed through cycles of immersion and refinement: from an in-depth reading of the film to a project proposal, from hours of research to an annotated bibliography, from several drafts to a submitted essay. The final submission is a powerful act of criticism, through which Claire adds her voice to the debate over the film’s significance and legacy.

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1989: TAILORING CHINESE DISSIDENTS FOR AMERICAN CONSUMPTION

YIXIN “CLAIRE” REN

“Events do not deliver their meanings to us. They are always interpreted.”

– *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*

While the 1989 student movement remains a topic of heated discussion in the West, in China it is forced into national amnesia because discussion of and retrospection on the event have been strictly censored in the mainstream media, if not outright banned. Details of the crackdown on June Fourth have not been disclosed to the public since its occurrence, and the divergent yet individually coherent Eastern and Western interpretations of the historical mystery suggest that there are multiple possible truths at work. Six years after the student demonstrations gripped global attention through massive media coverage, the release of *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (hereafter abbreviated as *The Gate*) in 1995 brought back painful memories of the seven-week-long student movement in China. In the face of China’s denial of the massacre and U.S. reluctance to endanger

business interests and diplomatic ties, the directors Carma Hinton and Richard Gordon join the battle for the meaning of these events and self-consciously engage in the writing of history (Taylor). Interweaving videotaped scenes of the demonstrations and conversations with participants and eyewitnesses, *The Gate* provides a detailed chronicle from mid-April 1989, when the public mourning of pro-democracy party leader Hu Yaobang provoked demonstrators' expression of long-standing frustration with the lack of political freedoms, to June Fourth, when the sequence of protests culminated in a government crackdown.

Upon its premiere at the 1995 New York Film Festival, *The Gate* received wide acclaim. Hinton and Gordon amassed over 250 hours of archival footage from nine different countries and conducted lengthy, thoughtful interviews with intellectuals, workers, former government officials, and Chinese student leaders (Lee 134; Litzinger 837). Critics applaud that by including a multiplicity of different voices and a detailed historical background, “[the film] escapes the sensationalism that informed much of the media coverage” and “presents a balanced and ‘dialogical’ perspective on the Tiananmen protests” (Litzinger 828, 837). Acclaimed film critic Charles Taylor remarks that it has “the richness, clarity, and complexity that only the best documentaries afford,” and another critic goes further, saying “[s]uch richness of material is perfect for classroom teaching at the university level” (Lee 134). *The Gate* is also praised for its masterfully designed web page, a comprehensive digital collection of posters, photographs, music, videos and scholarly works that together explore the underlying themes of the

student occupation, such as nationalism, human rights, reform, and revolution.

Situating the 1989 student movement in a larger historical background and analyzing it through the lens of political culture in China, *The Gate* achieves contextualization and demystification of the June Fourth events which other narratives—particularly those in the U.S. news media—fail to accomplish. By rejecting the dominant anti-communist rhetoric of those narratives, the film does not make the event an ideological commodity but an object of critical debate and meaningful commemoration. However, *The Gate*'s subtle argument that demonstrators had been socialized in a political culture from which they could never escape causes the film to diverge from a completely distanced, objective account of June Fourth. Though subtle, the negative portrayal of radical students and the ideological reading of the conflict between radical and conciliatory camps inadvertently reinforce the “alienatingly different” image of China from the freedom-granting democracies of the West (Chen 18).

June Fourth in the American News Media: Decontextualized and Mystified

Back in 1989, the U.S. news media domesticated June Fourth for the American audience by media broadcasts that were refracted through the lens of democracy promotion. Among all the iconic images that appeared in the news coverage, Tank Man is the most memorable—alone and unarmed, an ordinary Chinese man standing

motionlessly in front of a battalion of armored tanks, which rolled to Tiananmen Square in response to the Chinese government's martial law. Cut from a video, Tank Man is condensed and mythologized into a single frozen image and has been generally understood to represent a bold defiance of inhumane state machinery and a heightened and unsolvable tension between an authoritarian state and powerless citizens. A shockingly wide dissemination of the Tank Man image in the U.S. media and the image's entrenchment in collective memory are indicative of the prevailing anti-communist rhetoric of the Western discourse on the June Fourth events. Tank Man also appears in *The Gate*, but the directors present him in a meaningfully different way that undermines the validity of the established American interpretation.

Yasmin Ibrahim, an extensive publisher on international communications, uses Tank Man as an example to reflect on the problematic role of popular news images in representing events. The recurrence of Tank Man, in both media coverage then and anniversary commemorations in the following decades, affirms his "indexicality" to the June Fourth events (Ibrahim 583). Recalling and retrieving the events of 1989 through the Tank Man, a single evocative image, inevitably results in "collapsing complex events into image narratives and delimiting political analysis into a trope of pro-democracy struggles" (Ibrahim 583). In the process of recirculation, the Tank Man image is "disembedd[ed]" from the original complex historical background, obfuscating the history; meanwhile, it gets "relocat[ed] in popular culture" and consumed within the changing contexts dictated by dominant cultural values and political ideologies (Ibrahim 586). This process

of “disembedding” and “relocation” causes decontextualization, and the discourse power of the news media reinforces the anti-communist rhetoric that surrounds the June Fourth events.

Ibrahim’s view is echoed by Lee, Li, and Lee’s criticism that editorial news oversimplifies complex events according to pre-packaged ideology. In their article “Symbolic Use of Decisive Events: Tiananmen as a News Icon in the Editorials of the Elite U.S. Press,” Lee et al. examine references to June Fourth in the editorials of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* over time, in an attempt to show that the meaning associated with the event has changed along with the evolution of U.S.-China relations in the past two decades. From 1989 to 1992, the descriptive lexicon employed in the editorial discourse is “killing,” “slaughter,” and “massacre,” revealing strong moral condemnations (Lee et al. 342). At the end of the Cold War, the elite U.S. press still viewed China as a communist threat from the East and solidified the image of Tiananmen as a symbol of inhuman authoritarianism in the minds of American people. As the mouthpiece of American political ideology, the press turned June Fourth into a tool to stoke anti-communist sentiment, which in turn strengthens the might and righteousness of American liberalism. In this sense, the “[s]ocial memory” of June Fourth is “stripped of context” and becomes “unstable at the level of information” but “stable at the level of shared meanings” (Ibrahim 589). June Fourth in the editorial discourse, therefore, became less of a complex historical event full of nuanced information than a means to propagate the dominant political ideology.

Lee et al. also show that the meanings associated with June

Fourth have been reenacted “through the process of continual recirculation” (337). In the second period from 1993 to 2000, Tiananmen “evolved from a sweeping symbol of authoritarianism and Communist dictatorship into a more concrete and specific symbol of human rights abuse” (Lee et al. 345). Into the 2000s, U.S.-China relations took a friendlier turn because of strategic reciprocity: America declared war on terrorism for which China’s alliance was important; China needed America’s support to enter the World Trade Organization. The focus of *The New York Times*’ and *The Washington Post*’s editorials shifted to the personal stories of Chinese dissidents and activists, and the use of Tiananmen was less condemnatory than commemorative (Lee et al. 348). Over time, June Fourth has evolved artificially from a catch-all symbol of dictatorship to an allusion to Beijing’s indifference to human life, and finally to an entry point for the press to comment on the current repressive political climate in China. Different generations of audiences are provided various versions of the story, causing them to perceive the same event in manipulatively different ways. The negative consequence is that June Fourth has been mystified over the course of circulation. In light of the persistence of journalistic accounts to either condense the sequence of events in 1989 to evocative images of debatable meaning such as the Tank Man, or to impart different symbolizations to a foreign event, it becomes easier to understand why the coherence of the global collective memory of June Fourth continues to be undermined by the discrepancies between various accounts of the story that correspond to changing national interests and cultural repertoire.

The Gate: An Attempt to Restore Historical Complexity to June Fourth

In contrast to the decontextualizing and obfuscating tactics utilized by other narratives to project self-serving ideologies, *The Gate* distinguishes itself by giving historical complexity back to June Fourth and narrating the event with distanced objectivity. The film succeeds in subverting, at least partially, the undercurrent of anti-communist sentiment that underlies most of the dominant American accounts. The first meaningful move that the film takes is to provide the video version of Tank Man early on, counteracting the misleading message sent by the popular motionless version. In the static image, it seems as though the tank is about to crush the innocent young man, which tempts the viewer to condemn the overpowering state. The photograph has become a cultural symbol of resistance. In contrast, the video clip in the film shows that, in fact, the tank changes its advance to back off from the man; it is the man who harasses the tank and even climbs up on it to flaunt his defiance. By providing the original videotape of Tank Man, the film argues that the military is not the callous authoritarian state machine that we have always assumed, but one that is capable of restraint and compromise. This argument sets the groundwork for the rest of the film to dissolve a series of misinterpretations that revolve around June Fourth.

Instead of directly delving into the events in 1989, the first thirty minutes of the film provide a fleshed-out account of decisive social transformations that China has undergone since the 20th century, from the May Fourth Movement, to the People's Republic of China

under Maoism, to the Cultural Revolution, to Deng Xiaoping's rise to power, and finally, to the successes and ramifications of his economic liberalization initiatives. This lengthy recollection, which helps to provide insight into the historical roots of the event, orients the viewer to a larger historical context.

The recounting of recent Chinese history is an important contextualization strategy: instead of isolating June Fourth in a confined time span, which may very likely lead to simplistic conclusions due to a lack of context, the film equips the audience with the historical background necessary to understand the final crackdown in light of China's inherited political radicalism. As Ralph Litzinger, Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University, points out, "The time the viewer is asked to inhabit is not only the chronology of events traced through April, May, and June 1989 but extends as well to the last imperial regime and the birth of twentieth-century Chinese nationalism and Maoist socialism" (838). Cutting back and forth between videotaped scenes of former historical events and student demonstrations in 1989, this film strategy places "student actions, comments, and reflections in the context of a history of student radicalism" (Litzinger 837). The viewer is invited to understand students and their movements "as products of their own culture and time" (Litzinger 383).

While other narratives, particularly those in the news media, tend to frame June Fourth as a bilateral confrontational drama between the students and the government, *The Gate* highlights the Chinese government's multiple concessions and its willingness to cooperate with the dissidents. In the film, every time the government conducts dia-

logue with student representatives, the voice of radical students always drowns out that of reform-minded students. The hope of reconciliation is repetitively ruined by student extremists' demand that transformation into a liberal democratic state be completed overnight. Thus, "the conflict of the movement was not just between the students and the government, but between the students and an older, more cautious generation of intellectual dissidents, and within the student organizations themselves," writes Charles Taylor. "[T]he tragedy was even deeper than we assumed, a result of missed opportunities, past demons, and unyielding positions on both sides" (Taylor). A simplistic characterization of the Chinese government as bigoted and repressive is the very foundation upon which anti-communist narratives are based. By exposing the audience to the unrecognized moderate side of the state, *The Gate* challenges those biases at a fundamental level and brings a more balanced appreciation of the Chinese government.

Regretfully, the historical richness of *The Gate* that is "perfect for classroom teaching at the university level," as one critic terms it, does not yield much discourse power due to its confined circulation among liberal scholars in the West (Lee 134). Lee gives insight into the reason why the mass media has monopolized the power in giving meaning to June Fourth:

The overall effect [of the film] is overwhelming and perhaps more than a little confusing for the average television viewer in the West, whose viewing habits have been shaped by countless smooth, quick-cutting Hollywood movies and the fast-moving linear narrative mode of television news pro-

grams that do not require long attention spans. (134)

This statement can be corroborated by the fact that *The Gate* has reached a relatively small group of viewers compared to other documentaries. The film has not reached a large enough audience to exert otherwise considerable influence on the public discourse on June Fourth.

***The Gate* Ultimately Joins the Meta-Narrative of Democracy and Freedom**

The Gate satisfies many of the demands we have placed on documentary films, and the audience is given the opportunity to engage with the wider significance of the events in 1989. But it is a dubious practice to uncritically laud the film's historical realism without also interrogating the ways in which it inadvertently joins the larger Western discourse that attempts to code the series of 1989 events as a failed experiment of democracy in the distant Communist East. *The Gate's* strategic treatment of U.S. journalist Philip Cunningham's interview with Chai Ling speaks to the ideological force of the film's underlying argument that student demonstrators had been radicalized by the very political atmosphere they intended to transform.

Chai Ling was the self-proclaimed commander in chief of the Tiananmen occupation, throughout which she insisted on uncompromising antagonism toward the state government even when there were chances for reconciliation. The film returns to the interview in bits and

pieces more than fifteen times, juxtaposing Chai's stinging denunciation of the government and fanatical appeal for violent insurrection in stark contrast with other interview subjects, who chiefly speak with reasoned reflection and advocate less confrontational means of political organizing. Litzinger observes an interesting tension between the film's overall complexity and its over-reliance on Chai's dramatic account; he writes:

What is striking to me is how the film, on the one hand, is so intent to show the complexity and deep historical roots of the tragedy, while on the other hand, it draws so much dramatic attention to the figure, words, and performance of the Chai Ling interview, which was, in fact, a very small part of the overall event. (842)

Geremie Barmé, an Australian sinologist as well as one of the screenwriters for *The Gate*, builds on Litzinger's observation that the film is disproportionately devoted to the Chai interview, saying "[Chai] is seen as embodying, in a metonymic way, the Maoist State itself" and "[she is] forced to occupy the space of the incommensurable other" (qtd. in Litzinger 843). In the interview, Chai reflects on the bitter divisions between moderate and radical student factions, reiterates the importance of taking extreme approaches unyieldingly against the corrupt hardline state, and repeatedly identifies bloodshed as the only means to awaken the Chinese to overthrow the brutal regime. All of her discussion of life and death, class division, and the red battle is reminiscent of the Maoist revolutionary rhetoric. The depiction of Chai—a gallant rebel speaking the very language of the Party that she seeks to dethrone—is

consistent with the film's underlying argument that these passionate, young political activists, despite their best intentions, may never escape the political culture that has shaped their actions.

In addition to Chai Ling, there were numerous other students and intellectuals who went to the extreme to defend their political beliefs. Demonstrators broke up into two opposite camps, reform-minded or revolution-inclined, and acute tension rose between them. As the movement proceeds, “[t]hey try to stifle alternative positions, accuse their opponents of being traitors, and attempt to manipulate events to their advantage to maintain power,” writes Gina Marchetti, a critical theorist on cultural studies at University of Hong Kong (223). “Perhaps even more than the old men in power, the demonstrators are ‘children of Mao,’ and they exhibit the legacy of Mao’s romantic revolutionary idealism” (Marchetti 223). A cruel irony thus operates in the film: the protesters, in their quest for democratic representation, are portrayed as having adopted the very instruments of oppression that they were seeking to eradicate. The political infighting among demonstrators parallels the state’s suppression of dissenting views and persecution of opponents. *The Gate*, by presenting this striking resemblance—not in words, but in its methods of reenactment—turns our attention again to the Chinese political culture that looms large in the background and which has been incredibly powerful in molding the behaviors of both sides.

Moreover, *The Gate*'s portrayal of the idiosyncratic political culture in China joins the meta-narrative that promotes the most salient elements—democracy and freedom—of American national iden-

tity. Pauline Chen, a *New York Times* columnist, examines how the film creates an “alienatingly different” image of China:

For most Americans, the images of the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement offered a vision of the Chinese people as reassuringly similar to ourselves. . . . In the subsequent brutal crackdown by the Chinese government on June 4, 1989, the illusion of similarity receded, and we again saw China as alienatingly different. (18)

Presented with the painful disjunction between these two sets of images, the viewer is reminded anew that democracy and freedom, which are pivotal to American national identity, are still very far from being achieved in China. The audience, therefore, is invited to interpret June Fourth as a failed episode of pursuing democracy, a tale about how political freedoms and participatory democracy are still lacking in a monolithic state ruled by an outmoded socialist system. The way in which the film subtly encourages the use of political stereotypes about China has an actual effect of valorizing the values underpinning American liberalism. *The Gate* intensifies the United States’ ideology of seeing itself as the benchmark for and beacon of democracy and freedom. Hence, sadly, the film ends up joining the larger news media discourse that tries to peddle this ideological commodity, just like the strategic reenactment of Tank Man.

The Gate of Heavenly Peace ultimately participates in the dominant Western ideological discourse due to its problematic portrayal of Chinese demonstrators through the editing of interviews, its drawing

of an analogy between protesters and the state to emphasize ingrained political radicalism and revolutionary idealism, and its subtle construction of an idiosyncratic image of China that stands in stark contrast to paradigmatic American ideals. Nevertheless, it will be unfair if we dismiss the film's bold challenge of authoritative narratives of June Fourth in the West. *The Gate* has outstripped its numerous counterparts, primarily in the U.S. news media, by providing an objective reading of Tank Man, underscoring the moderate line within the Chinese government, and uncovering the complicated historical and political situations that led to June Fourth. Through making sense of June Fourth in light of the larger historical context and inherited political culture in China, *The Gate* is a successful attempt to restore historical complexity to the event. The film's astute and thoughtful reading of Chinese society interrupts the interpretive coherence constructed by the U.S. news media which largely oversimplifies and condenses June Fourth into an ideological package.

Viewed from this perspective, *The Gate* has a dual interpretive identity: on the one hand, it tries to recover the causes, consequences, and historical truth of June Fourth; but, on the other, through igniting political stereotypes, it also successfully propagates American-flavored ideas of democracy and freedom. At the end of the day, the film does not escape the curse of the limit of representation—it was produced in a cultural environment that is imbued with stereotypical generalizations about June Fourth and about China, and it eventually joins the meta-narrative from which it intended to depart.

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