

Advocating world cinema's multipolarization

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Abstract

Globalization has long had a westernized and westernizing meaning. The word "globalization" itself represents an enduring modern conflict among major Kulturkreise (cultural circles). Today, another major "non-western" major Kulturkreis, East Asia, or more specifically, China (which both suffered and benefited from a radical westernization), has reached its economic summit to become a potential new pole confronting the western world's cultural domination. Cinema, like most fields, is of western-origin and western-dominant in most of its senses. The universality of world cinema seems to be equal to a homogeneity under western or western-origin dominance, while visual anthropology, also of western origin, can offer a self-reflexive critique for the sake of pluralizing world cinema. The author argues that a fairer solution, both for the western world and some other eventual and emerging dominant cultural powers, would be that the western world itself gives up its Eurocentric dominance while helping other main Kulturkreise establish their own poles. This could in turn maintain the western world's importance, while ending the Euro- or Occido-centrism in the field of cinema. If (un)translatability is the reason for further globalization of world cinema, its eventual domination by which power being unknown, this essay would hence advocate for the decategorization of cinema. That is to say, to loosen its boundary and understand it as part of a "logic" within a specific (cross-)cultural background in which a film is made.

Keywords: Globalization, westernization, multipolarization, Eurocentrism, non-West

Fabricating a West

God is not dead, or God has never been dead.

It seems that this is an English text here, but it is a smokescreen. It is a text in my Pan-European language. Nationalistic aspects of a European language and the popular traditions that persist in this language are somehow intentionally ignored here. It should then also be read as a text in a Pan-Western language.

My own Western map is an empiricist one: a Belgo-German piece of Central Europe, with a nostalgically distant Portugal. This, however, is merely a reluctant imagination. In fact, my West is scarcely just some streets and buildings under the names of Berlin, Brussels, Coimbra, Lisbon, Namur or Stuttgart, spoken in several variants of Dutch, French, German and Portuguese - some isolated islands where I lived and where I created my own European islands, and which I named archipelago, under the belief that it is Europe.

This is my version of a Europeanized Europe as the old Continent of the whole Western world, now reasonably reduced to some desolate islands - or even more properly, reefs and shoals. It is simply up to me if I should euphorically add the rest as a factual geographic land, to satisfy the conventional need of truth, even though the West is actually a network of pinpointed elitist heads, existing to fulfill the historical need to engage with their happily imagined non-Western worlds.

On these islands, or even more exactly, in these pinpointed heads, God is still very alive. Whether it is a God said with a Germanic word or a Dieu with a Romanic one, here God is more like a Monarch, who partially ceded His absolute Power to create a non-God yet Divine and omnipresent Belief, a Science-led Civilization, called "co-God" here.

This new co-God has been validating Himself by expanding to and conquering foreign heads. Conversion to a new religion as something beneficial to human beings is nothing new, it has been happening for thousands of years. Very naturally, human beings doubt when any new God fails to show the complete absoluteness of His Power, and especially when, after having been converted for centuries, we find alternatives or possibilities of other co-Gods - the old *illegitimate* Divinities of their own, increasingly well presented and showcased as commodities.

When fire was first used by human beings with the help from the good old God, one might dare to say He invented it, without being conscious that there would be other human beings who were also able to *invent* fire with their own good old Gods. But this time, the good and new co-Gods were much more powerful: they helped the people on the islands to create cinema and were fast enough to spread this technology and art in their *worldwide* expedition.

However, both old God and new co-God are aware of any potential betrayal from their believers.

If the new co-God is still an expansionist and conquering one, that one might be called "globalization"; if the old good God was an expansionist and conquering one, that one might still be content to call itself "The West".

Then, "The West" is nothing geographical but an ideal. Even if we exchange the words: if "West" meant "East", or "South" were "North". It seems that it would just stay the same: "West" would still be the legitimate Power. Exchanging its location or not, meaning or not, it does not matter.

Today, "West" is an alliance, guided by a new co-God, who is interpreted in many ways, within and without. Its religiously fervent founding members - sons and daughters and children from several dissolved empires claiming their own legitimacy as representatives - and its opportunistic converted believers reinvented the same absolute Power that the new co-God granted to them. Among these opportunistic converted believers, some are strong enough to rebuild their own Idols, others are still subject to their Power.

The fact that all founding members - sons, daughters and children - hold their own legitimacy as descendants from the old empires from which the West originates makes this West not just a very diverse but also a very loosened collective network of interests. Some of them have compromised, some of the others have been strong enough to insist on being themselves in their own ecosystems and on continuing their expansionist projects.

West is a lucky Germanic word, as it seemingly does not cause much intrigue. I failed to find its etymological meaning: apparently it just indicated a direction from a compass. Here, the text becomes English and no longer Pan-European or Pan-Western: I have not used the word "Occident" until here/now.

If the word "occidens" ("sunset" in Latin) has as its polar opposite the word "oriens" ("sunrise", the origin of "Orient") then there should be a mental and physical center which legitimates the invention of these two words: one saw and sees the "sunset", one also saw and sees the "sunrise", from one's very own center.

Very obviously, what we have seen over the last centuries is how this sunset has been expanding much more beyond any sunrise lands, islands or pinpointed heads.

It is very natural that any kind of Omnipotence expands its Power beyond and until any possible lands, islands, or pinpointed heads. Civilizations always rose and collapsed. Civilizations conquered and were conquered.

When an Omnipotence always only expands and refuses to co-exist - when other forgotten Omnipotences, which have absorbed enough from their conquerors, rise again and conquer again and expand and refuse to co-exist again... I have no idea what will happen at the end. I just keep watching TV news and documentaries in languages that I know, both "Western" and "non-Western".

Fabricating a non-West

"Non-West" sounds like an unreasonable (if not unbearable) and monstrous Eurocentrism, or at the very least, fetishization from a scary aspiring intellectual World-conqueror. I can imagine no one would like to be labeled "non-Eastern" (a European), "non-banana" (an

apple) or non-anything whatsoever. Somehow happily, to my knowledge, it seems more to be an academic, elitist fetish rather than a general global trend. I do defend any kind of centrism, including Eurocentrism or Occido-centrism, since, as in my belief, bias, prejudice or even light racism are very humane and deep-rooted in human nature. But exactly as human beings - not only as academic World saviors - one of our daily life's main tasks is to fight against all these.

Today, most of the World's categorizing systems derive from the "West". So if I am writing here in English while following some Western conventions, it is just to make my life a bit easier - so that I would not need to fabricate an artificial (fake) classical Chinese scholarship, nor am I able to invent a whole new thinking system. Intellectual decolonization is like an endless natural resource: we should not be jobless as there is always something to be done with it.

This non-West has been fabricated, in order to justify the legitimacy of the expansionist and conquering co-God fabricated from and in the West, since the rest of the World has forcibly adopted a West-derived system in order to be able to work with the West itself. Intellectual colonization as a civilizing mission has never ceased to be as it is now: only the wording is new.

Any kind of oppression from a foreign intellectual power is not at all something new to mankind. However, this time it has been happening on a world-scale, from the West to the non-West, both as imaginary cosmos and it is too recent — it is about if the *whole* World would finally become a single civilization.

Intellectual decolonization is a Worldwide initiative, again, from the West. What seems very interesting - to avoid saying ironic - is the fact that just by creating a West and non-West dualism, one sees a very hypocritical or rather naïve engagement: some ten years ago, my ex-girlfriend from Macau, each time before having French fries, would use a tissue to absorb as much as oil as possible. But, once all the oil is gone, there are no more French fries.

Myself being a "non-Westerner" or non-whatsoever, it sounds that I am very negative about the current process of intellectual decolonization. No. On the contrary, I am very positive about it and see this effort, though weird, as something very important for the intellectual globalization (or Westernization).

Of course, on the other side of the West, lies the non-West, which has been so happily fabricated for its academic purpose as part of the World's, or better say, West's capitalist pleasure. There are Kulturkreise that are big enough to balance with the West, like China, who have been aware, for political or cultural reasons, of their saturation of Western culture. It seems to be that, in this New-World intellectual and cultural ecosystem, every component is able to readjust itself

after a long-term absorption of or imposition from an alien element or elements.

At the same time, the West's own initiative to offer solutions, for its own sake, to de-Eurocentrize, de-Occido-centrize and decolonize itself as a very loose whole of many legitimately representative cultures or Kulturkreise, seems to be something more than an ecological auto-adjustment. It is a conscious and defensive initiative. Although it is not too effective or efficient enough, it is actually very wise and important for the West to reposition itself to retain its minimum importance before its general decline worldwide, which is exactly what has been happening, especially since China's visible economic (and thus also political and cultural) reascension.

Writing until here, my dear wise readers might discover by themselves that I am the one who is fabricating a West-non-West dualism. Yes, and no. Yes, because I do follow some conventional thoughts to represent this dualism, which only very ironically contributes to Occido-centrism or Eurocentrism. No, because I, very utopianly, if not naively, advocate a rhizome-like and dehierarchized Multiculturalism.

Elitist and authoritarian political and cultural categorizing forces determine what is a culture within borders or boundaries in any possible sense. Today, as an aspiring *single* civilization it is enough to rethink how to preserve maximum diversity. A rhizome would certainly be too utopian, but multicentrism might not be achieved if it is used by hierarchical expansionists: while above one strives to conquer the center, below one homogenizes in order to better centralize and strengthen itself.

The World's political circumstances cause the very hierarchical and hierarchized levels of culture and any subculture of it, in the West, or in any non-Western Kulturkreis to co-exist as they are. It seems even more utopian, naïve and even stupid to recreate scholarships that do not exist any more. There are, however, domains that are less westernized than others. In today's highly westernized academia, dominated by currents of thoughts of or from Western universities, a cross-disciplinary approach will certainly offer a good chance to flee a bit from this very Occido-centric or Eurocentric elitistic world.

To calm the conservatives, this Western and westernized academia is strong and solid enough to "correct" any distraction and only accept the judged justifiable deviation. The academic World is the first part of the whole Globe to achieve a worldwide assimilation, since it is dominated by small groups of elitists from text-based cultures, which means a large part of the non-assimilated World is still vivid and yet to be conquered. Again, if the West can create their new co-God or co-Gods, it means any other non-West, which are saturated from their Westernizing projects,

can also create their own new co-Gods. This is nothing new to mankind's history.

Fabricating an advocacy

In order to fabricate an advocacy in such a dualism between an egocentric West and a centric non-West, both - as I follow some happy conventions - fetishized, I had to fabricate first my own West and my own non-West, both happily conformist.

I might sound a bit dramatizing by creating such a setting, but, echoing another essay of mine also published in this volume "(Re-)nostalgização: o cinema de Macau enquanto construção da identidade" (2021), I tell my own stories not only textually and con-textually, but also in the way and act of constructing such a text. Continuing that echo, I, as someone from Macau turning from an undecolonizable non-colonized to an ex-colonized (see also Cheong and Schmidt 2020), was less trained to be a professional visual anthropologist but first of all a happily rebellious self-victimizing subject, to be part of a global (globally Western) decolonization of the (ex-)colonizers.

To those who are not familiar: Macau was officially declared a "Chinese territory under Portuguese administration" between 1976 and 1999, but the Portuguese settled there already in the mid-sixteenth century and gained complete control of the present Region in the nineteenth century. Today, Macau is a self-governing Region under the promise from both China and Portugal to keep its status quo unchanged - which has been already largely changed, until 2049, with a similar political status as that of Hong Kong.

My own practice as an Op-Ed columnist - actually more like a paid technical visual anthropologist plus translator to tell some *interested* stories - has largely transformed my vision towards writing as an immediate textual consumption of information and necessarily a convenient communication. It is not much about freedom of expression, it is more about creativity to survive in the scene.

In this sense, this present essay, as I have already so said in Portuguese in "(Re-)nostalgização" (2021), is a very precious piece of freedom for me to fabricate advocacy of something, even when it is in exchange for sacrificing some academic credibility: my biggest wish is to serve readers always with the same writing, be it for scholars or "ordinary" readers. As from what I understood, we - here a purely imagine pronoun - as victims, as ex-colonized, as non-Western, we must fight for an intellectual decolonization, in the service of decolonizing the West itself, to help the West to get rid of its colonial past.

I was a religiously fervent believer in this trick. However, my year-long distancing with visual anthropology and its theories gave me a place to rethink about this completely invisible piece of land

- invisible in the theories, invisible in the media, invisible in any private small talk. We are not victims, although we might have been ex-colonized - since the manipulation of the politico-legal term “colony” in the history of Macau and in that of East-West exchange just gives one too much room to explore.

Our Westernization has been much more subtle than any direct colonization could bring: Westernization of the written Mandarin language, which became what we learn (Portuguese was out of the question long before I started to go to school) as “China’s national writing”, went through its forcibly voluntary process almost a century before I learnt to read the first Chinese characters. The fact is, modern written Mandarin, as the formal written language for us as native Cantonese speakers, was enormously dramatized by myself with what I understood from visual anthropology in Berlin: emotionally I suffered from my own undecolonizable languages, and turned to French and German completely, to flee, at the same time, from English and Portuguese. I told a group of academics in a Paris conference some years ago: either when I speak, or even only think, I feel colonized.

After fabricating some background and personal experience (along with some auto-ethnographical details), this more or less conscious deviation of topic has completed somehow its mission: it is a banal mixture of academic conformism and visual-anthropology-informed rebellion in text. Moderate provocation was, or at least seemed to be what I should claim to be proud of from what I learnt and understood from visual anthropology at the Freie Universität Berlin, some seven years ago.

Fabricating an advocacy here or not does not seem to be meaningful anymore. Or, if I take out the word fabricate or not, inserting “auto-ethnographical” details or not, it makes no difference. Days after days as I keep a good distance with visual anthropology, any kind of elitist systems of knowledge production frustrates me. If it is a text, then it is a means of communication, it is to be read. Writing itself is already an advocacy, advocating to exchange, to intrigue, to provoke, to reach people, to be reached.

I know very well that my text, if it has the very honour to be so considered as academically useful, serves or aspires to serve the very Occido-centric or Eurocentric fetishism of knowledge production for a very small group of West-non-West dualists. At the same time, my need to write until here has also its origin from the capitalist academic business. But I still strive to arrive at my ideal that texts are written for all.

Voilà, it is my catastrophic fabrication of an advocacy, written in a very hurried and turbulent time. In the margin of a long and conservative tradition, reversing this tradition is not my aim here, nor it is minimally within any of my capabilities. It is in the hope that by breaking norms, by imputing new forms of narratives

- textual or not -, by fabricating the fabrications here, norms can be further completed and renewed, forms of narratives can be broadened and fabrications (with some minimal consciousness) can make truths truer.

Final note

I have fled from these proposed topics until here: cinema and blurring its boundaries and translatability, while fabricating euphorically my own Weltanschauung of a West-non-West dualism. Although I do emphasize the several important points around some similar topics in “(Re-)nostalgização” (2021), which, even in Portuguese, I do not wish to repeat here, this text serves here at the end an extremely small group: this collection of thoughts drafted in two days aims at my more or less private discussion with interested readers for several to-be-developed articles and a new experimental visual ethnography. Despite the fact that the present text is much deviated from the original proposed abstract, I leave it here to be as it was. I was reluctant to fabricate the originally proposed advocacy, since I see, and also hope, that we as human beings are wise enough to safeguard the World’s diversity. If I were here to insist the topic of cinema, it would make no difference if I talked about other topics: the West’s influence is in every major system and domain. It is a fact. It is just a bit too surprising to see both inside and outside academia that it seems so much unaware.

If you read until here, I should buy you a drink.

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Bibliography

Cheong, Kin Man, Schmidt, Charlotte, 2020. “Dekolonialisierung des Undekolonialisierbaren durch Bewegtbild: Macau”, in *matics* 101:28-31.

Cheong, Kin Man, 2021. “(Re-)nostalgização: o cinema de Macau enquanto construção da identidade” in *AVANCA | CINEMA* 2021.

Annex

Cheong, Kin Man, 2017. “Uma Ficção Inútil / A Useless Fiction, the textual (in English)” in *AVANCA | CINEMA* 2021, 350-358.

Confused, frustrated but encouraged, he puts his whole “him” into this film. The filmmaker approaches his life struggles as a dilemma between the filmed and the non-filmed, the translation and the impossibility of communication, the voice-over and the subtitles. As a fan of Kon Ichikawa and Yasunari Kawabata, and a lover of Michio Takeyama’s novel *Harp of Burma*, he tries to express that complexity in a series of multilayered fictive/true stories through visual, aural

and, especially, textual manipulations while questioning the power structure of image quality. Mixing his banal daily life, his past, and the filmmaking process, the filmmaker raises several anthropological and life questions on nature, origin, language, non-existence, identity, visual media and dominant cultures. He strives to find answers in a circle of interpreting himself in a conflict between oppressed and powerful languages, retranslating what is translated and letting others reinterpret him from both within and without the film. Everything becomes useless when one transcends boundaries inside the mind.

Cheong, Kin Man, 2020. “Le rôle des médias culturels subalternes chez les peuples indigènes du monde sinophone : analyse sémantique, enjeux et traductions.” in AVANCA | CINEMA 2020, 18-27.

The paper aims to discuss the role that visual anthropology and subaltern cultural medias play among the considered indigenous peoples in the Chinese speaking world, and particularly in the four cross-Strait territories of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. This paper suggests a semantic and historic analysis of the terms of indigenous, while retracing the arrival of these western concepts in Greater China as well as the manipulations and translations along history which are subjects of the present research. The western discipline of visual anthropology, together with cultural medias find their equivalences in these Chinese speaking territories, and are used for multiple purposes, which are not always clear. An analysis of their presence and use in these four territories by their respective administrations or by the indigenous themselves may allow us also to have a more precise understanding of the ties that each of these governments maintains with its constitutionally and potentially indigenous peoples. Finally, it will be stressed the fact that the reappropriated western labeling of the indigenous may not necessarily work in the specific theoretical context of the Chinese speaking world while attention should be paid to potentially subaltern groups in individual cases.

Cheong, Kin Man, 2020. “Une identité réinterprétée: Notes sur un vieux documentaire et recherche[s] autour de l’identité macanaise” in AVANCA | CINEMA 2020, 18-22.

The present paper, originating from its author's innocent search for his identity in his twenties as a postcolonial yearning for an emotion-driven, if not unconsciously voluntary, cultural self-colonization, appears ten years later as a self-reflexive and self-critical essay. It can be read as a piece of postcolonial literature apart, or as a commentary to his documentary *Ou Mun lan, Macaenses* (2009) and its textual research (2010). This quest, if not construction or invention of identity, resonated with a cross-epochal public discourse which transcended Macau's last colonial years and its first postcolonial

decade, that Macau was never a colony but a unique result from a China-West exchange. Originally to mark the tenth anniversary of the postcolonial Macau, between 2008 and 2009, the author, who was a great yet naïve admirer of the domestic exoticism and the colonial nostalgia of the mix-blood Portuguese Macanese, travelled across Portugal, Canada, US and Brazil to create a project from filmed interviews in the diaspora, in a government-sponsored adventure which let to the author's self-discovery. This very amateur thirty-three-minute documentary largely shaped the author's earlier belief in his uncolonizability and his later extended search and creation of his multiplying beliefs inside an Eurocentric expansion of an European universe.