1 **CHINESE DREAM(S): HOPES AND FEARS UNDER XI JINPING**

Dr. Federica Mirra
Professor Daria Berg, DPhil (Oxford)
NIAS CONFERENCE – 22 August 2022

2 **AGENDA**

- Xi Jinping's China Dream
- Visual analysis of:
  - Jiang Zhi's *Rainbow*
  - Chen Wei's *One Dream*
  - Cao Fei's *Nova*
- Conclusion

3 **THE CHINA DREAM (中国梦)**

- 'Realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (Xi 2012)
- President Xi: a man with a dream
- The China Dream selects contradictory aspects of socialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism
- It shapes China into a superpower whilst celebrating its ancient tradition

4 **THE CHINA DREAM**

- It is vague and ambiguous:
  - It encourages collective and individual dreams
  - It is more easily understood compared to previous slogans (Lam 2015, 84)
  - It responds to different social groups in China (2016, 295)

5 **CHINESE DREAMS**

Different ambitions before Xi's Dream:

- 3000 years ago: concept of *tianxia* (all under Heaven)
- 2008: Beijing Olympics, motto 'One World, One Dream'
- 2021: centenary of the CCP

6 **WHAT ABOUT CHINESE NIGHTMARES?**

7 **DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES**

- Visual arts can help grasp the current Chinese dreams and nightmares
- They bring forth unofficial discourses from different social groups

8 **SELECTED WORKS**

Jiang Zhi – *Rainbow* (2006-19)
Chen Wei – *One Dream* (2016)
Cao Fei – *Nova* (2019)

9 **SELECTED WORKS**

Same strategy inherent within Xi's China Dream:

- imagination
- speculation

10 **SELECTED WORKS**

The night, darkness, and dream as triggers to amplify possibilities, ambiguity and imaginings

11 **JIANG ZHI**

蒋志

(b. 1971, Yuanjiang, Hunan)

The rainbow features in several projects:

- *Rainbow series* (2006)
- *Rainbow – Out of Service* (2008)
- *Rainbow in between the world* (2008)
- *The world is yours, as well as ours* (2018-19)

12 **RAINBOW**

- Chinese oracle bones: a curve terminating with two dragons' head
- Chinese word: 虹 (*hong*) – contains the character for 'insects/reptiles'
- Rainbow as 'the herald and the cause of the cessation of rain and the return of clear skies' (Hopkins 1931, 604-6)
-

* See Eberhard 1986 for more on rainbow in China's ancient tradition

13 **A BAD OMEN**

- Rainbow associated with adultery
-

(Mirra's in-person interview with Jiang Zhi, artist's studio, 1 May 2019)

14

15 **A NEON RAINBOW**

- Neon signs and ads: Hong Kong's national emblem, McDonald's, KFC, Adidas, 'MADE IN CHINA'
- Critique to the material desires of a growingly capitalist society and commodified urban life in China

16

A crescendo of clouds, darkness and urban density

17

18 ***RAINBOW IN BETWEEN THE WORLD* (2008)**

The rainbow bridges two different worlds:

- The ambitious skyline → China Dream
- The decaying flat → back scene of this urban spectacle

19 **JIANG'S RAINBOWS**

- Reveal the cracks of this manmade spectacle
- Reflect on the contradictions, fears and doubts inherent within the China Dream

20 **CHEN WEI**

陳維

(b.1980, Wenzhou)

- Based in Beijing
- Attended Zhejiang University of Media and Communications and interested in experimental music
- Now, internationally renowned artist
- His photos are *mise-en-scene* of urban settings

21 ***ONE DREAM* (2016)**

- Image from an advertising poster of the Beijing Olympics (Wang 2017)
- An entrance/exit into a vibrant, exciting realm
- The image is small, looking inwards, fenced
- It suggests the exclusivity of this dream

22 **CHEN'S WORK VISUALISE THE BACKSTAGE OF THE CHINA DREAM**

23 **CAO FEI**
曹斐

(b. 1978, Guangzhou)

- Based in Beijing
- Both parents are artists
- Trained as visual artist
- She responds to the Pearl River Delta's extraordinary transformations
- Video work – *Nova* (2019)

24 **HONGXIA THEATRE**

- 1950s: developed with the aid of the Soviet Union in Jiuxianqiao factory district, Beijing
- 2000s: closure due to the Beijing Olympics (2008)
- 2015: Cao Fei's studio
-

25 ***NOVA* (2019)**

The film develops across two parallel dimensions:

- 1950s – 70s: romance between two computer scientists, a Soviet Union woman and a Chinese man
- Timeless dimension with post-apocalyptic scenario

26 **TIME & PROGRESS**

Different understandings:

- 1950s – 70s → enthusiasm over technologies and progress
- Timeless realm→ the future is already there, but sense of disillusion and abandonment

27 **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

1 JIANG ZHI

- Critical of the urban spectacle, globalisation and consumerism, which characterised the late 1990s - early 2000s

- Use of neon signs and rainbow to pose an indirect critique to China's official masterplan

2 CHEN WEI & CAO FEI

- They use fluorescent lights and the idea of the theatre stage
- They provide non-linear, pessimistic understandings of time

28 **CONCLUSION**

- Artworks offer alternatives to the overly positive and linear visions of the Party
- The fluorescent lights allude to the dismay of technological development, commodification, elitism, and capitalism
- The night allows mental wandering and independent imagining

29 **THANK YOU**

Dr. Federica Mirra
Federica.mirra@unisg.ch
Research Fellow, University of St.Gallen, Switzerland
Research Associate, CCVA, Birmingham City University

Professor Daria Berg, DPhil (Oxford)
daria.berg@unisg.ch
University of St.Gallen, Switzerland

30