1 **The Art of Utopia and Anti-Utopia:**

Online poetry and visual art from China and Taiwan on Russia's War against Ukraine

Daria Berg & Qian Cui
(University of St.Gallen, Switzerland)

University of Vienna, 16 April 2026

2 **To explore today…**

1. Introduction: Three Dreams
2. Nightmares & Three Factors -> Taiwan the new Ukraine Scenario?
3. China's Mediasphere: Official & Vernacular Cultures
4. Parrhesia
5. Utopia
6. Voices from Taiwan: Han Chinese, Indigenous, Ukrainian
7. Voices from China: Chinese Artists & Poets
8. Conclusion

3 **I.**

INTRODUCTION:

DREAMS

4 **RESEARCH QUESTION & AIMS & SOURCES & METHOD**

Vernacular Voices in the Sinophone Mediasphere

- Research Questions:
  - How do netizens/citizens in China and Taiwan express unofficial perceptions of Russia's war against Ukraine?
  - What are their dreams, hopes, fears and nightmares?
  - How do they speak truth to power?

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  -

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- Sources: Sinophone Mediasphere
  - Print & digital media
  - Visual art
  - Chinese & Sinophone social media: WeChat, Weibo, Instagram, X
- Method:
  - Analyse utopia & anti-utopia in visual art & poetry
  - Dreams & nightmares
  - Analyse voices that 'speak truth to power' (parrhesia)

8 ☐ **Three Dreams**

9 ☐ **1.1**

Trump's Dream

10 ☐ **1. Trump's MAGA**

But: American Dream -> Chinese Dream

11 ☐ **1.2**

Putin's Dream

12 **2. Putin's Dream of Neo-Soviet Imperialist Expansion—or, Peter the Great 2.0**

- Carl de Keyzer, "Putins Dream"

13 **1.3**

Xi Jinping's 'China Dream'

14 **Xi's 'China Dream' (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦)**

29 Nov 2012

- Xi Jinping:
  - speech at Exhibition in National Museum, Tiananmen Square
- 'Great revival of the Chinese nation'
  - National humiliation 19C
  - Opium Wars

15 **The China Dream**

- New Leaders' Slogan
- Vision of China as 21st Century Superpower
- Imperial reign eras had mottos
- President Xi Jinping
  - 2013-for life

1. Government's dream?
2. Other dreams?

16 **Xi Jinping's Belt & Road Initiative: Greatest Mega-Project in Human History**

•Mega-Project -> 60 countries

•Tianxia:

•"All under Heaven"

•Utopia: Prosperity for all

•-> A new world order

17 **II.**

NIGHTMARES

18 **"Falling Matryoshka © Cao Fei 2022**

Cao Fei, Instagram, 25 February 2022: The day after Russia's invaded Ukraine:
"Falling Matryoshka © Cao Fei 2022. Photo from the border of China and Russia. Project commissioned by @garagemca."
Collaboration Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Jan 2022.

19 **Matryoshka in Russia & China**

- Russia: tradition since 1890

- Japan: Honshu doll, daruma doll (but not nested)
- China: traditional roly-poly toy: 'tumbler' (*budaoweng* 不倒翁)
  - Drinking game since Tang dynasty
- Cao Fei: The doll that cannot fall has fallen

20 **Tumbler in Modern Chinese Culture**

Tan Wenrui 谭文瑞 (1922-2014)

- Journalist, *People's Daily* editor-in-chief, satirical poet

"The Tumbler Has Fallen" 《不倒翁倒了》

Sometimes bad luck comes,
and the tumbler falls over.
时来厄运到，不倒翁倒了。

21 **Three Factors**

=> Nightmares

22 **2.1**

Russia-China 'No-limits Friendship'

23 **China's Geopolitics & the Opening of Beijing Winter Olympics**

4 Feb 2022: Beijing Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony,
China & Russia pledge 'no limits' friendship

24 **"One World, One Dream"**

Beijing Olympics 2008: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jA78Kf1vbM

25 **1. Joint Statement: No limits Friendship & Media Mirroring**

26 **National Radio & TV Administration 国家广播电视总局 (2018)**

- 2021 NRTA under Central Propaganda Dept of CCP
  - Additional agreement with Russia's Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media: Chinese media to repeat & amplify Russian propaganda
- Since Feb 2022: converging media narratives Russia / China
  - China amplifies Russia's fake news: Ukraine prepares biological warfare (cf. Hvistendahl & Kovalev, 2022)

27 **2.2**

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

28 **2: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine**

- Badiucao, 2022

29 **2.3**

US Realignment

30 **@badiucao, X.com**

1 • @badiucao
• X.com
• 1 March 2025

31 **Above 3 Factors**

=> Taiwan the 'new Ukraine'?

32 **III.**

CHINA'S MEDIASPHERE

33 **China's Mediasphere**

- 'Mediasphere' (Debray, 1991)
- := 'Cultural production in the visual and textual fields characterised by endless expansion'
- Our sources:
  - Online literature
  - Online magazines
  - Visual art & literary websites
  - Weibo 微博 (Sina Weibo)
  - WeChat / Weixin 微信

34 **3.1 Official Discourse on China's Mediasphere**

- Social media / Weibo, WeChat — February & March 2022:
  - Pro-Putin, Pro-Russia, Anti-Ukraine
  - 'Glorious Russia! Glorious Putin! They have politicians in the West, but Putin, he is a great political player who will go down in history!'
  - 'I support the disintegration of NATO! I support Russia, because when Russia falls, China is next!' (Weibo, 2 March 2022).
  - 'Russia has done a beautiful job!'
    - (Cf. Bandurski, 2022)

35 **3.2**

Vernacular Culture & Unofficial Discourse in Mediasphere

36 **On China's Vernacular Culture**

- Glen Dudbridge, *China's Vernacular Cultures: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 1 June 1995*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Glen Dudbridge, *Books, Tales and Vernacular Culture: Selected Papers on China*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2005.
- Glen Dudbridge,*Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's*

"Kuang-i Chi." Cambridge University Press; 1995.

37 **IV.**

PARRHESIA

38 **4.1**

Parrhesia in West

39 **Parrhesia in Western Culture**

- Greek παρρησία — first in Euripides (c.484-407 BC)
  - Literally: 'saying everything one has in mind'
  - Speaking truth to power, freedom of expression, transparency, duty, idle talk, gossip.

40 **Parrhesia in Western Culture**

- Foucault, 1983:
  - Condition: truth-tellers face risk or danger for them in telling truth
  - But they feel bound by duty to muster the courage and do so.
    - Foucault, Michel, 'Discourse and Truth: The Problematisation of Parrhesia', Six Lectures given at Berkeley, 1983.

41 **4.2**

Parrhesia in East

42 **Parrhesia Tradition in China**

- Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r.685-643 BC) established office of 'admonition officers' (*jian guan* 諫官) to speak truth to power—until Liao dynasty (916-1125).
- Praised by China's e-government today: He Jing 何静, website of Audit Bureau of Guilin City, Guangxi 广西自治区桂林市审计局.

43 **Parrhesia Tradition as the Intellectuals' Mission**

- Roaming scholars s*hi* 士 in pre-Qin China
  - Confucius 孔子
  - Mencius 孟子
- Roam from kingdom to kingdom
- Offer advice on good government to the ruler

44 **Parrhesia Risks**

- Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 BC) & Grand Historian to Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141- 87 BC)
  - Sima Qian defended defeated general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BC)
  - Death sentence

    - Commuted to castration and 3 years in prison after
- Tradition of *xiaoshuo* 小说 — idle talk, gossip — history rather than fiction
- Political critique — often indirect

45

V.

UTOPIA

46 **'Martyrs' ('Xundaozhe' 殉道者),**

Liao Weitang 廖伟棠

为什么这乌克兰的微笑似曾相识
原来他也曾属于那个西藏男孩。

就像一朵桃花那样的微笑。

她珍爱生命，去拯救被人类放弃的
他珍爱自由，放弃生命去喊出它。

地球没有放弃你们，山和水奔走相告
在炮弹开始流亡的时候， 你们

只有你们知道回家的路。路也追随
你们，渐渐涌起巨浪来。

温柔的，坚定的，一亿朵桃花那样。

47 **Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

- b. 1975 Xinxing county 新兴县, Guangdong
- 'Left behind child' in rural area
- Moves to Hong Kong (Cantonese name: Liu Waitong, pun on *liuwang aitong* 流亡哀痛, 'Grief in Exile)
- Poet, photographer, writer, magazine editor, bookshop manager
- Literary prizes in HK, Taiwan, abroad
- Assoc. Prof. National Taipei University of the Arts 國立臺北藝術大學 (Literature Dept.)

48 **China's Utopia: *Locus Classicus***

Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365-427)

'Record of the Peach Blossom Spring' ('Tao hua yuan ji' 桃花源记)

49 **1. *Utopia* (1516)**

1 • Neologism
- Thomas More (1478-1535)
- Pun on Greek
  - 'good place' (*eu topos*)
  - 'nowhere place' (*ou topos*)
- = ideal place that exists nowhere.

50 **5.1**

Utopia in China

51 **Utopia in China**

- *Wutuobang* 乌托邦
- *Lixiangguo* 理想国
- Utopia has long indigenous tradition in China
- ➔ pre-imperial times
  - Spring and Autumn era, 770-476 BC
  - Warring States era, 475-221 BC
- Fig: Illustration for the first 1516 edition of More's *Utopia*.

52 **2. Dreams & Nightmares:**

"Whose Utopia?" (2006)

- Cao Fei (b. 1978)
- Video, 2006
- Siemens OSRAM light factory, Guangzhou

53

54 **'My Future is not a Dream'**

- Video clip - Whose Utopia? + interview: https://youtu.be/zB9NFRWREec?t=7m28s
- >> from 7:28 until 8:42

55 **Ancient Confucian Utopia**

■ Great Sharing (*da tong* 大同)

■ *Li ji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*), 21.3a/b

56 **Ancient Daoist Utopias**

- Daoist 'Supreme Harmony' (*tai ping* 太平)
- *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 (*Spring and Autumn of Lü Buwei*), 1.44-45.
- *Zhuangzi* 莊子, 13.471.

57 **5.2**

Anti-Utopia in China

58 **Anti-Utopia: The Deluge**

- Dystopia: Inversion of Utopia
- Under legendary ruler Emperor Yao: Water flows upstream ➔ Deluge floods central states
- 'Snakes and dragons appear, disturb humans.' Mengzi, 3A.4; Lau, 1987, 102.

59 **A Confucianist's Dystopia**

- Xi Zhou sheng 西周生 (fl. 1630s/40s) (Scholar of the Western Zhou) / Late Ming
- *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻缘传 (*Marriage Destinies that will Bring Society to its Senses*)
  - -> Berg, *Carnival in China*, 2002

60 **Apocalypse & Post-human Anti-Utopia: 'Haze and Fog'**

1
- Zombie horror-movie
- Part of Cao Fei's Post-human Trilogy
  - 'Mirror', 2007
  - 'La Town', 2014

2 By Cao Fei, 2013

61 **VI.**

VOICES FROM TAIWAN—

ON RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

62 **6.1**

Han Chinese Voice:

yAnG xiaObiN 杨小滨:

63 **yAnG xiaObiN 杨小滨: 'Post-Epitaph Quatrain: On the Steps of Odessa' (Hòu juéjù: Áodésà táijiē shàng 後絕句：敖德薩台階上), Instagram**

你不是刺刀下的第一個死者，也不是最後一個反抗者。

你不是滑落台階的第一個嬰兒，也不是滾下的最後一顆頭顱。

你不是第一個驚恐的母親，也不是最後一個美少女戰士。

你不是第一個轟然倒塌的雕像，也不是歷史懸崖下的最後一個瘋子。

64 **'Post-Epitaph Quatrain: On the Steps of Odessa'**

- Title: Lament / Post-Epitaph - Jueju 絕句: in classical Tang poetry 4 lines, 5 or 7 characters, rhyme, strict tonal pattern.
- but explodes rules: more & irregular number of characters, no rhyme
- 'Post': frames poem not only as a eulogy for a single event or individual, but a meditation on pattern of suffering and resistance.

65 **yAnG xiaObiN: 'Post-Epitaph Quatrain: On the Steps of Odessa'**

- *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) dir. Sergei Eisenstein.
- Fictional massacre of civilians

66 **Allusion to Potemkin Stairs, Odessa**

- iconic for their role in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*.

67 **yAnG xiaObiN: 'Post-Epitaph Quatrain: On the Steps of Odessa'**

- *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
- including the image of a baby carriage tumbling down the steps.

68 **yAnG xiaObiN: 'Post-Epitaph Quatrain: On the Steps of Odessa'**

- *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)
- Stairs as a symbol of: revolution, martyrdom, state violence, cinematic myth-making.

69 **yAnG xiaObiN 杨小滨**

- Poet & Artist, born in Shanghai
- 1980s studied & joined avantgarde movement in Beijing
- 1985 BA Fudan University, Shanghai
- 1985-89 Researcher, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences
- 1996 PhD Yale in Chinese Literature
- 1998-2004 Professor, University of Mississippi, US
- 2006- Research Professor, Academia Sinica, Taipei

70 **6.2**

Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples' & Ukrainian Voice: Iverson Rangi & Yana

71 **PICTURE 3: Iverson Rangi (b. ca.1990s, Taiwan) & Yana (Ukraine)**

72 **PICTURE 3: Iverson Rangi (b. ca.1990s, Taiwan) & Yana (Ukraine)**

'Ukrainian Lion & Taiwanese Bear', Fundraising Exhibition for Ukraine, Epic Taipei Nightclub, Taipei, Jul-Aug 2022

73 **Iversøn Rangi**

- Iversøn Rangi Miciq
  - indigenous artist from the Taroko (Truku) tribe in Taiwan;
- Yana
  - Ukrainian artist, affiliated with LBWS a Ukrainian artist group

- Picture: Iverson Rangi Instagram

74 **3 layers of subjugation & identity struggles**

Both artists emphasize the maintenance of their own identity and independence. And they together bring a message of solidarity between the Taiwanese and the Ukrainians. The Ukrainian word 'support' and the Chinese word "团结" (unity) jointly demonstrate the mutual solidarity between the artists, and between Taiwan and Ukraine, too.

75 **3 layers of subjugation & identity struggles**

In view of Beijing's one-China ideal and Russia's view of post-Soviet states still belonging to Russia, the painting acquires an ironic message. It appears to mock the emphasis on unity that Putin and Xi put on the ties with Ukraine and Taiwan by reclaiming the term and applying it to Ukrainian-Taiwanese solidarity instead.

76 **Formosan Black Bear:**

3 layers of subjugation & identity struggles

The infinity symbol, a figure eight on its side, signifies the concept of limitlessness or eternity. It has been widely used as a metaphor for eternal love.

77 **Taiwan Government Support**

- Support from the government:
- The deputy mayor of Taipei participated
- Popular discourse in line with government's official discourse
- The medium of graffiti = protest against authority, street art

78 **To Promote Solidarity Taiwan-Ukraine**

Rangi said that the fist bump symbolizes the mutual support and solidarity between the two countries and promotes ideas of love and peace, which are also the "spiritual core of hip hop culture."

79 **6.3**

Photography Art from Taiwan & Ukraine: Sean Wang & Mariia Kazanets

80 **Collaboration between photographer Sean Wang and painter Mariia Kazanets, Ukraine**

Art exhibition

- "There is no war here"
- Taipei
- 3–31 May 2025

81 **Sean Wang & Mariia Kazanets**

Art exhibition

- "There is no war here"
- Taipei
- 3–31 May 2025

82 **Sean Wang & Mariia Kazanets**

83 **Sean Wang & Mariia Kazanets**

"For me, this project is about how we perceive information – how many filters an image passes through before it reaches us, and how that ultimately affects our emotional state. I observe how our daily exposure to violent scenes desensitises us, perhaps making us feel detached, and forces us to adapt so as not to be in a constant state of shock.

For this project, I was asked to take Sean's photographs and recreate them in a painterly style. I was interested in transforming these images into highly abstract forms and depersonalising them so that they contain as little emotional charge as possible." — Mariia

84 **2025 Interview with Sean Wang**

- Interview,
- Taipei,
- Sep. 2025
- Photo: AI-generated artwork, Sean Wang, 2025

85 **Sean Wang / Wang Cheng-Hsiang**

- *Taipei
- Master's degree in History, National Taiwan University
- Master's degree in Art Practice, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (unfinished).
- Macular degeneration since birth: his left eye is almost completely blind, and his right eye has been deteriorating progressively over the years.
- He does not know if or when he will lose his sight – yet this limitation has not prevented him from pursuing a career in photography.

86 **Sean Wang**

- photo-conceptual artist
- As a visually impaired photographer
- -> Work as a construction of vision
- Explores the boundaries between:
  - Visible / Invisible,
  - Art / Non-art.
- Post-conceptual photography, institutional critique, everyday technologies.

87 **Sean Wang: Collaboration with Mariia Kazanets**

"During my collaboration with the Ukrainian artist Mariia Kazanets, I had a strong feeling:
that we are unable to truly express how we feel about the war.
Perhaps it is because there is no war yet where we are;
perhaps out of fear of causing controversy; or perhaps because we do not know how to describe it.
But regardless of the reasons, our language about the war ultimately always led to a delay." (Sean Wang)

88 **Sean Wang**

89 **VII.**

VOICES FROM CHINA—

ON RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

90 **7.1**

Huang Rui 黃锐

91 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- Art Basel
- 2022
- Oil on canvas, 88 x 99 cm

92 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- 'Together for Peace': Exhibition by Ukrainian & Polish Embassies, Beijing, 12 March 2022
- *Dao de jing* 道德經 inspiration
- *Yi jing 易經Book of Changes*

93 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

94 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- Paused his other projects to dedicate himself to a anti-war work about Ukraine after hearing the news of its invasion on February 24.
- 'Absence of Black Moon'
- Finished 3 days later
- Presented at Ukrainian and Polish embassies in Beijing
- Ukrainian flag sliced into quarters by lines of red and white = Russia.

95 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- *1952, Beijing
- 1978 co-published Jintian 今天 Today literary magazine
- 1980s Co-founder & member of Stars Group 星星画会
- Exhibitions in China, Europe, USA

96 **7.2**

Liao Weitang 廖伟棠

97 **'Winter on Fire', Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

Winter on Fire

二二八連假前夕

我坐在路邊

用手機看紀錄片

Winter on Fire:

Ukraine's Fight for Freedom

98 **'Winter on Fire', Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

Winter on Fire

二二八連假前夕
我坐在路邊
用手機看紀錄片
Winter on Fire:
Ukraine's Fight for Freedom

99 **'Winter on Fire', Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

100 **'Winter on Fire'**

我想截圖給我防火牆內的朋友看
但只截下來字幕
圖像變成一片漆黑只剩下:

101 **'Winter on Fire'**

「我的朋友和我
開始搖響所有的鐘」
「聖米迦勒修道院的人
正在阻止這件事發生」
「上一次這些鐘敲響
是在1240年蒙古韃靼人
入侵基輔之時」
我不確定他們能否猜到什麼回事

102 **'Winter on Fire'**

而我住在基輔、第聶伯的朋友
鐘聲盈耳，無暇寫詩
她們忙於撬開
十字架之上
針孔一般狹窄的天空
就像我住在九龍、港島、大嶼山
每天都經歷著二二八前夕
的朋友一樣

103 **Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

- b. 1975 Xinxing county 新兴县, Guangdong

- ‘Left behind child’ in rural area
- Moves to Hong Kong (Cantonese name: Liu Waitong, pun on *liuwang aitong* 流亡哀痛, ‘Grief in Exile)
- Poet, photographer, writer, magazine editor, bookshop manager
- Literary prizes in HK, Taiwan, abroad
- Assoc. Prof. National Taipei University of the Arts 國立臺北藝術大學 (Literature Dept.)

104 **7.3**

Cao Fei 曹斐

105 **Cao Fei on Instagram**

106 **Cao Fei**

1 • February/March 2022
- “Found daily colours to support Ukraine”
- Echoes of Ukraine found in China…

107 **Cao Fei**

Master of the Art of Indirect Critique
Cao Fei: ‘Comments on China’s society, not criticism’ (NYT, 2015)

108 **Cao Fei**

- Conform to the System
- Avoid direct confrontation with authorities
- Mix art, political & commercial culture
- Design alternative worlds without CCP, new utopias
- In her video artwork ‘Whose Utopia?’
- ‘My future is not a dream’ 我的未来不是梦

109 **Cao Fei**

- Photographer
- Film maker
- Video artist
- Script writer
- Composer
- Sculptor

110 **Multi-media artist CAO Fei 曹斐 (b. 1978)**

111 **VIII.**

Concluding Remarks

112 **Concluding Remarks**

- In sum: Three Grand Geopoliltical Dreams & Multiple Nightmares
  - Multi-ethnic, across Taiwan Strait, Transcultural

- Experimenting in mediashere with different strategies of direct & indirect styles of critique & comments on war
- Anti-/Utopian visions deconstruct China Dream into a series of dreams & nightmares
- Shed light on perceptions of the Russo-Ukrainian war from unofficial perspectives
- Provide insights into vernacular culture & new mediasphere
- = Contesting voices in a network of social and cultural negotiations and exchanges.

113 ***Thank you!***