

Letter from the Editor

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After much wider geopolitical and geocultural coverage in our inaugural issue, the second issue of *Global Storytelling* narrows its focus on aspects of storytelling in East and Southeast Asia.

In her essay “Consuming the Pastoral Desire: Li Ziqi, Food Vlogging, and the Structure of Feeling in the Era of Microcelebrity,” media scholar Liang Limin zeroes in on the case of Li Ziqi, whose videos celebrating bucolic life won her popularity in China and overseas. Liang examines how the new cultural form of food vlogging engages the perennial debate on tradition and modernity. Her study of the production and reception of Li’s videos reveals the role played by the market and the state in appropriating and managing contemporary Chinese urbanites’ desire for, and consumption of, the pastoral for the construction of “modern identities”—both individually as a consumer and collectively as a nation. Liang posits that if the market promotes a narrative that caters to the “aesthetical turn” in everyday life in a consumer society, the state’s validation and appropriation of Li points to a “cultural nationalism” that departs from political nationalism and is more commensurate with consumerism. Liang points out further that the Chinese state also tries to transcend the market discourse by positioning itself as an integrative force that bridges the urban-rural gap. In Liang’s telling, by making Li Ziqi a social media phenomenon, the market uses the rural as a resource to meet the urban desire for authenticity, while the Chinese state reappropriates the icon of marketized media in its “rural rejuvenation” campaign to help the disadvantaged rural other regain its agency.

Also focusing on media practices in Mainland China, in her essay “This Is Not Reality (Ceci n’est pas la réalité): Capturing the Imagination of the People Creativity, the Chinese Subaltern, and Documentary Storytelling,” media scholar Paola Voci zooms in on documentary narratives by and about the creative subaltern originating from China’s so-called cool cities, a

celebratory and romanticized idea of prosperous and creative urban spaces that embrace skilled mainstream creative practitioners. Voci points out that documentaries by the creative subaltern have played an important role in shaping the discourse on the subaltern as a creative subject. Voci holds firm that nonplot-driven narratives of many such documentaries are capable of reconciling imagination with reality by capturing the complexity, heterogeneity, and contradictoriness of the subaltern condition.

Moving to Hong Kong SAR, the veteran film scholar Gina Marchetti takes up the film practice of Ann Hui, one of the most celebrated female directors in Hong Kong, as an exemplary case study of the role film festivals have played in shaping the career of Hong Kong female directors. By tracing the circuitous paths women filmmakers follow to tell their stories on transnational screens, the article reminds us how narratives of the film festival frame one's creative identity and thus shape one's filmmaking trajectory.

Ruepert Cao's essay, "'Retweet for More': The Serialization of Porn on the Twitter Alter Community," takes us to the Philippines in Southeast Asia and to the virtual platform of Twitter. Cao examines the notion of seriality and storytelling in the context of the Filipino alter community, a network of Twitter users who produce, distribute, and consume pornographic images. Cao argues that the short Twitter platform and real-time content generation foster a particular kind of seriality, and that serial pornography is instrumental in satisfying both the present and long-standing affective, sexual, and social needs of gay men. These needs, as Cao articulates, stem from a long history of minoritization of homosexuality. Cao proposes further that serial porn images are strategically constructed narratives of sexual encounters that aim at garnering higher social engagement and validation. Cao's research contributes to an understanding of how pornographic images and serial narratives fit into consumerist culture and how platforms exploit long-standing affective needs of sexual minorities to ensure extended production and consumption of contents.

To cap the East and Southeast Asia focused essays in this issue, our book review column features Harriet Evans's review of Margaret Hillenbrand's research monograph *Negative Exposures: Knowing What Not to Know in Contemporary China* and Min Hui Yeo's theme-based review of Gerald Sim's book *Postcolonial Hangups in Southeast Asian Cinema: Poetics of Space, Sound and Stability* and *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945–1998)* edited by Gaik Cheng Khoo, Thomas Barker, and Mary Ainslie.

In this issue, our journal is happy to launch a film review column with a review of *Nomadland* (Chloe Zhao, 2021) by Ying Zhu, which situates the Oscar-winning film at the center of an evolving Sino-US discourse, and a review of *Mank* (David Fincher, 2021) by the renowned expert on Hollywood studio systems, Thomas Schatz that illuminates the formation of Hollywood's "creation tale."

And speaking of "creation tale," in a theme-based film review, "Superheroes: The Endgame," veteran film critic and perennial biographer of Hollywood, Peter Biskind, laments the passing of a bygone era when superheroes were endowed with superhuman strengths and tricks. As Biskind charges, unlike the superheroes of the 1980–1990s (Batman and Superman) who were more posthuman/antihuman, modern movie superheroes are all "too human" in their propensity to showcase feelings and emotions, albeit often pitched as a weakness. The humanity that traps the new breed of superheroes, seen by Biskind, is the continuation of World War II-era comic books that subjected heroes to ordinary, petty human squabbles. In offering his thought-provoking assessment that "the effect of humanizing superheroes, abandoning post-humanism, and sentimentalizing the family is paradoxically to move an historically left-leaning franchise to the right," Biskind calls to our attention superhero movies' dialectic relationship with humanity, posthumanism, and "antihumanism." The inclusion of Marvel's *Black Widow* makes his analysis all the timelier.

Moving from film review and criticism to film pedagogy, Christopher Rea's autoethnographic essay applies global storytelling as a framework to

reflect on his decade long research-based practice of teaching Chinese film classics at a university in Canada. Rea explores how filmmaker, translator, educator, student, and the online public intersect, particularly during the period of pandemic lockdown, shape the evolving dialogue concerning Chinese film classics.

Our issue 1.2 ends with a report on, “Narrating New Normal,” a post-graduate student symposium hosted by the journal in the spring of 2021, which interrogates the notion of “new normal” in a COVID-ravaged pandemic world, yet another timely concern.