



Working Papers

***LUST/CAUTION* in IR:
Democratising World Politics from Postcolonial Asia**

Boyu Chen
National Sun Yat-sen University

Ching-Chane Hwang
National Sun Yat-sen University

L. H. M. Ling
Graduate Program in International Affairs
The New School

International Affairs Working Paper 2008-10
December 2008
(revised January 2009)

Paper presented at the *Millennium* conference on 'Interrogating Democracy in International Relations', London School of Economics (LSE), 25-26 October 2008; to appear in *Millennium: Journal of International Affairs*.

Copyright 2008 by Boyu Chen, Ching-Chane Hwang and L. H. M. Ling

***LUST/CAUTION* in IR:
Democratising World Politics from Postcolonial Asia**

Boyu Chen
National Sun Yat-sen University

Ching-Chane Hwang
National Sun Yat-sen University

L. H. M. Ling
Graduate Program in International Affairs
The New School
lingl@newschool.edu
www.gpia.info

International Affairs Working Paper 2008-10
December 2008
(revised January 2009)

ABSTRACT

International Relations (IR) needs democratising. Currently, IR theorising remains under the hegemony of a singular worldview ('war of all against all') with a singular logic ('conversion or discipline') for all actors and activities. This top-down, state-centric, and exclusivist approach is fundamentally anti-democratic for a field of inquiry and practice crowded with multiple worlds. The Humanities, we propose, will help to mitigate these totalitarian tendencies by expressing and examining what hegemonic IR cannot but must: that is, a richness of being in global life. We present Ang Lee's 'Lust/Caution' (2007) as an example. If seen as an allegory for Taiwan-China relations, this film shifts attention from the national security state, a defining concern for hegemonic IR, to the trans-national solidarities that bind peoples and societies despite inter-state conflicts, thereby offering a way out of the statist impasse that incarcerates the region. This approach extends beyond recent calls for a 'linguistic' or 'artistic' turn in IR. Culture, we argue, can serve as a method.

LUST/CAUTION IN IR:

Democratising World Politics with Culture as a Method

Boyu Chen

National Sun Yat-sen
University

Ching-Chane Hwang

National Sun Yat-sen
University

L.H.M. Ling

The New School

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of International Relations (IR) needs democratising.¹ IR theorising remains under the hegemony of a singular worldview ('warre of all against all')² that produces a singular logic ('conversion or discipline') for all actors and activities in world politics.³ This exclusivist approach not only ensures Hobbesian rounds of competition and conflict in world politics but it is also fundamentally anti-democratic given the

¹ We thank Adriana Abdenur, Bertha Kadenyi Amisi, Mark Chou, Gavan Duffy, Zachary B. Hall, Patricia Robertson, and one anonymous reviewer, as well as the editors of this special issue, for their comments and contributions to this paper. Nonetheless, the authors assume all responsibility for the contents herein. A note on style: we list the names of scholars from Taiwan and China in both Chinese (i.e., surname first) and English formats (i.e., surname last), depending on how they list their names and the venues of their publication. For Taiwanese authors, names with a hyphen indicate the given name; accordingly, the name preceding them is the surname. For authors from China, the last name is listed first in Chinese publications but listed last in English publications.

² See, for example, Pinar Bilgin, 'Thinking Past "Western IR"?' *Third World Quarterly* 29 no. 1 (2008): 5-23; and Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, 'Why is there no Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7 (2007): 287-312.

³ See, for example, L.H.M. Ling, 'Neoliberal Neocolonialism: Comparing Enron with Asia's "Crony Capitalism"', in Dirk Wiemann, Agata Stopinska, Anke Bartels and Johannes Angermüller (eds), *Discourses of Violence - Violence of Discourses: Critical Interventions, Transgressive Readings and Postnational Negotiations* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 93-105.

‘multiple worlds’ that crowd our lives.⁴ Multiple worlds refer to the various, *entwined* legacies of worldviews, traditions, practices, institutions, and norms that have interwoven peoples, societies, and civilisations for millennia, making world politics what it is.

To democratise IR, then, means more than transplanting domestic institutions like representative government or elections to the global arena. Exhibiting diverse schools of thought like feminism and constructivism alongside realism/liberalism is a welcome but also limited gesture. Rather, democratising IR requires a larger endeavour: that is, opening up ontological space to the hybridities that drive our worlds, especially at those sites that convention deems ‘peripheral’. Some moves are underway: e.g., acknowledging the voices, visions, and contributions of Others,⁵ ‘decolonising’ IR,⁶ marking ‘difference’,⁷ recognising the dynamics of ‘West’ and ‘non-West’,⁸ and the rise of Other schools of thought or paradigms for and in world politics.⁹

⁴ Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁵ See, for example, J. Ann Tickner, ‘On the Frontlines or Sidelines of Knowledge and Power? Feminist Practices of Responsible Scholarship’, *International Studies Review* 8 no. 3 (September 2006): 383-395; John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Steve Smith, ‘Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11’, *International Studies Quarterly* (September 2004): 499-515.

⁶ Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁷ Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York/London: Routledge, 2004).

⁸ Bilgin, ‘Thinking Past “Western IR”?’.

⁹ See, for example, Binod Kumar Mishra, ‘Articulating an Asian Epistemic Community: Presenting the *Other* Worldview’, paper presented at an international conference on ‘Democratizing International Relations’, at National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 11-12 March 2009; and Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Conclusion: On the Possibility of a Non-Western IR Theory in Asia’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7 (2007): 427-439.

We seek to further this momentum. Building on recent calls for a ‘linguistic’ or ‘artistic’ turn,¹⁰ we push for a more comprehensive approach: that is, the integration of the Humanities with IR. Only the Humanities, we argue, can help IR express and examine the complexities of subjectivity that comprise global life. These have been lost with IR’s submergence in empiricist/positivist social science where it is presumed that a ‘unified logic of inference [can] appl[y] equally’ to all forms of scholarship and inquiry, regardless of question or subject-matter.¹¹ Such scientific abstraction, Christine Sylvester cites the late Paul Feyerabend, robs us of a ‘richness of being’ even though the best scientific pursuits have always drawn on ‘diversity’ and ‘abundance’, conducted by what he called ‘scientific-artisans’.¹² ‘It is not that abstraction per se is the devil chasing diversity and abundance from analysis’, adds Sylvester. ‘It is the type of abstraction that eviscerates the old and the contemporary, as well as the maze of details in-between, that should be the concern’.¹³ A ‘masculinist social science’ emerges, featuring ‘wild and free men...[to] risk and adventure’ in a (neo)realist ‘state system and its relations of violence’.¹⁴ Left to pick up the pieces, as usual, are all those Others not privileged to ‘risk’ and ‘adventure’ at will.¹⁵

¹⁰ See, for example, P.K. Rajaram, ‘Dystopic Geographies of Empire’, *Alternatives Global, Local, Political* 31 no. 4 (October–December 2006): 475-506; Nevzat Soguk, ‘Splinters of Hegemony: Ontopoetical Visions in International Relations’, *Alternatives* 31 (2006): 377-404; Christine Sylvester, ‘Art, Abstraction, and International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30 no. 3 (2001): 535-554; C. Constantinou, ‘Poetics of Security’, *Alternatives* 25 no. 3 July-September (2000): 287-306; Roland Bleiker (ed.), ‘Editor’s Introduction’, *Alternatives* 25 no. 3 (2000): 271-272.

¹¹ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), i (Preface).

¹² Feyerabend quoted in Sylvester, ‘Art, Abstraction, and International Relations’, 540.

¹³ Sylvester, ‘Art, Abstraction, and International Relations’, 542.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 543, 547.

¹⁵ See, for example, Payal Banerjee and L.H.M. Ling, ‘Hypermasculine War Games: Triangulating US-India-China’, paper presented at the Institute for Malaysian and International Affairs (IKMAS) (Kuala Lumpur), Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) (Singapore),

Democratising IR thus also entails restoring art to science, abundance to abstraction, a richness of being to knowledge production. At minimum, such restoration enables IR to expand the range and registers of voices, visions, desires, and positionalities that are *already* involved. Their interactions necessarily instill a sense of and venue for self-reflexive interrogation.

Here, culture serves as a method. By this, we do not refer to previous treatments of culture as essentialised traits assigned to a ‘sample population’ by an ‘objective’, ‘rational’ analyst. Our culture-as-method, instead, considers subjects on their own terms and in their own voices. These voicings do not simply tell about the self. They also reflect, sustain, derive from, and define structural, material, and physical imperatives. Context matters equally with content. Confronting one with the other, we gain unexpected innovations and insights, generating an emancipatory moment, that will thaw us, finally, from that Siberian winter of no options.

We aim for no less when juxtaposing Ang Lee’s 2007 film, ‘Lust/Caution’, with the context of Taiwan-China relations. Given its Cold War origins, the US must count as a central participant also. As this paper will show, this juxtaposition helps us envision possibilities beyond the Cold-War impasse that has locked the peoples and societies of Taiwan, China, and the US for the past sixty years. And in so doing, we begin to democratise IR, both practically and intellectually.

This paper proceeds accordingly. We begin by demonstrating the hegemony of the Cold War and its principal agent, the national security state, for cross-strait relations. Though seemingly fixed and absolute, these statist preoccupations have not deterred

trans-national ties – ‘borderlands’ – to thrive between Taiwan and China. Postcolonial scholars in Taiwan take such ‘borderlands’ life as a premise, highlighting the need for an alternative security discourse. Ang Lee’s ‘Lust/Caution’ shows us why. We conclude with the implications of this analysis for Taiwan-China relations, in particular, and IR theorising, in general.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE:

(Taiwan vs. China) US

Typically, Taiwan and China are divided into two camps, each a sovereign antithesis of the other. Policy bifurcates into two diametrically-opposed and impossible goals: unification with China or independence for Taiwan. Since either would mire the region in violence and destruction, impasse becomes the only acceptable interim, with the US receiving credit for the ‘peace’. It was US President Harry Truman, after all, who ordered the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan in 1949, thereby preventing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from pursuing Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang (KMT) regime to the island, where he retreated in defeat. For conventional analysts, inter-state politics directed by the US necessarily supercedes any other considerations, local or otherwise.

This line of thinking endures. In 1996, for example, *The China Journal* held a forum on cross-strait relations with leading experts from Australia, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the US. This forum was motivated by China’s military ‘exercises’ across the Taiwan Strait in March of the same year when Taiwan held its first, democratic

election for President. The journal's leading experts considered the event a 'crisis' and debated heatedly on the future of the region.

An expert from the US spearheaded the discussion. China fired those missiles, he asserted, to 'deny Taiwan to others' due to fears of US containment, Japanese rearmament, and the impact of Taiwanese independence on Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia.¹⁶ A second US expert agreed, citing complex triangulations between Beijing-Taipei-Washington.¹⁷ Two experts from Australia further emphasised the role of the US.¹⁸ Speaking as if singly, one observed that 'the confrontation in the Taiwan Straits was more about a contest for strategic dominance in East Asia',¹⁹ than Taiwan or China *per se*; accordingly, the other concluded, 'greater weight [should be given] to the impact of the policy and rhetoric of the United States'.²⁰

The experts from China stressed their country's national sovereignty and territorial rights, especially in light of US hegemony.²¹ 'The key point of China's actions is that this is a principled issue of national unity, sovereignty, and territorial integration of China. This concerns the most fundamental of China's national interests and Chinese national feeling'.²² For one expert, China's rise as a world power factored in the

¹⁶ Andrew J. Nathan, 'China's Goals in the Taiwan Strait', *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 87-93.

¹⁷ Jonathan D. Pollack, 'China's Taiwan Strategy: A Point of No Return?', *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 111-116.

¹⁸ Peter Van Ness, 'Competing Hegemons' and Stuart Harris, 'The Taiwan Crisis: Some Basic Realities', *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 125-128 and 129-134.

¹⁹ Van Ness, 'Competing Hegemons', 125.

²⁰ Harris, 'The Taiwan Crisis', 129.

²¹ Chu Shulong, 'National Unity, Sovereignty, and Territorial Integration', and Jia Qingguo, 'Reflections on the Recent Tension in the Taiwan Strait', *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 98-102, and 93-97.

²² Chu, 'National Unity, Sovereignty, and Territorial Integration', 98.

leadership's attitude toward a liberalising and democratising Taiwan;²³ another, from Hong Kong, dissected CCP factional disputes regarding Taiwan.²⁴

Taiwan has 'intrinsic' sovereignty!, one expert from Taiwan fumed.²⁵ The real problem, according to him, is Chinese hegemony and expansionism. But he later conceded that Taiwan needed the US as its ultimate guarantor – and China should pay heed. '[T]he US is no paper-tiger.'²⁶

This exchange exemplifies hegemonic IR. Not only does the state serve as the primary actor, but it is also anthropomorphised into a contemporary version of Hobbesian man, constantly looking over his shoulder. One commentator, for example, characterised China as feeling 'tricked' by Taiwan (how or why not explained) and predicted that the US 'cannot allow further ambiguity in US-Taiwan and US-China relations'²⁷ (as if contending interests did not complicate US foreign policy²⁸ and clarity a virtue in international diplomacy).

From this narrow perspective, only one conclusion could ensue: impasse. The experts concurred: None of the parties involved – Taiwan, China, US – can or should change the *status quo* for it would destabilise the region. Good thing the US is in the region, the two Australians commended, to make sure the impasse stayed in place! Of the three states, Taiwan was seen as the most constrained. Its small size, military

²³ Jia, "Reflections on the Recent Tension in the Taiwan Strait," 94.

²⁴ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, 'The Factional Dynamics in China's Taiwan Policy', *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 116-118.

²⁵ Parris H. Chang, 'Don't Dance to Beijing's Tune', *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 103-106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁸ Such as, for example, differences in interest between the State Department, Pentagon, and Treasury.

capability, and political value rendered the island necessarily dependent on others for protection.

One expert, who happened to be from Taiwan, deviated from this national security script.²⁹ If security were China's main concern, he asked, why wouldn't it simply sign a security pact with Taiwan? Why would China continue, instead, to claim sovereignty over Taiwan, causing it to purchase more weapons from the US thereby heightening China's own sense of threat? Forcing Taiwan to 'capitulate' would contradict, also, China's seemingly 'negative' strategy of denying Taiwan to others. Lastly, the Chinese have never been obsessed with territory. 'The Chinese could easily give up territory they had taken during victory and refuse to surrender even having lost a great deal of land. *Security in territorial terms is intrinsically a Western notion*'.³⁰

Nonetheless, this expert from Taiwan retained the national security state as a central concept. It is the psychology of nationalism, he explained, that accounts for Taiwan-China relations. Just as Beijing would never release Taiwan due to nationalist pride, he stated, so Taipei would occasionally jab at China to shore up Taiwan's own sense of nationalism. Impasse remains the order of the day.

Thirteen years and four presidential elections later, the 'crisis' of 1996 has passed on in hazy memory. China did not invade, Taiwan's elections prevailed, and the US turned its attentions elsewhere.

²⁹ Chih-yu Shih, 'National Security is a Western Concern,' *The China Journal* 36 (July 1996): 106-110.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 107, our emphasis.

Yet the national security state remains hegemonic in cross-strait discourse.³¹ Such intellectual and policy resilience reflects the conflict's underlying, Cold-War structure now intensified by the US-led 'global war on terror'.³² For Taiwan in particular, notes Muto Ichiyo, this Cold-War/War-on-Terror setting invariably conflates the domestic nature of cross-strait relations with international power politics. Taiwan, he writes, has become 'a territory contested between Washington and Beijing-Moscow, not just between [the] KMT and CCP'.³³

Abundance and diversity disappear in this reduction of power and politics into the national security state. Feminists have long noted that the Cold War not only divided states but also families, branding both with inchoate fear and longing. *Realpolitik*, they point out, gendered the state and its social relations (e.g., what does 'denying Taiwan to others' turn China, the US, and Taiwan *into*?) as well as the consequences to such gendering. Yumiko Mikanagi³⁴ and Katharine S. Moon,³⁵ for example, point to the national security state's willingness to prostitute its own men and women, especially if considered 'dispensable', to serve what Payal Banerjee and L.H.M. Ling call 'hypermasculine war games'.³⁶ 'One could almost see the cigar smoke and smell the

³¹ See, for example, Yongnian Zheng and Lye Liang Fook, 'China's New Nationalism and Cross-Strait Relations,' *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* (2007) 7: 47-72; and Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Rosemary E. Shinko, 'Discourses of Power: Traversing the Realist-Postmodern Divide,' *Millennium* 33 no. 1 (2005): 637-664.

³² Liz Fekete, 'People's Security vs National Security (Commentary)', *Race & Class* 44 (2003): 78-84.

³³ Muto Ichiyo, 'The Cold War and Post-Cold War Dynamics of Taiwan and East Asia in People's Security Perspective', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 3 no. 1 (2002): 28.

³⁴ Yumiko Mikanagi, 'Okinawa: Women, Bases, and US-Japan Relations', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 4 no.1 (2004): 97-111.

³⁵ Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

³⁶ Banerjee and Ling, 'Hypermasculine War Games'.

cognac fumes amid the gentlemanly laughter in [the] posh, realist club'.³⁷ For Christine B. Chin, these gendered relations of power, with their connotations of race and class, do not stop at the water's edge but infiltrate domestic social relations from the household to the factory to the brothel, ensconcing an international hierarchy of 'service' and 'servitude.'³⁸

A familiar division of labour emerges, patterned after colonial demarcations of race, gender, class, and nationality.³⁹ Yet the national security state still partakes in this international division of labour, some institutionalising it by exporting citizens as migrant workers. Their substantial remittances help to remedy crippling debts owed to international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF),⁴⁰ so the national security state could pretend, at least in name, to 'sovereignty' and 'security.'

Despite (or perhaps because of) such impositions from above, an alternative matrix of relations and subjectivities persists. Going beyond, inside, under, and around the national security state, this matrix spreads like a weed precisely because it is locally seeded, nurtured, and harvested. Relations across the Taiwan Strait provide an apt example.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ Christine B. Chin, *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian 'Modernity' Project* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

³⁹ Kimberly Chang and L.H.M. Ling, 'Globalization and its Intimate Other: Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong', in Marianne Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan (eds) *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites, and Resistances* (London: Routledge, 2000), 27-43.

⁴⁰ Jason DeParle, 'Migrant Money Flow: A \$300 Billion Current', *The New York Times* 18 November 2007. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18/weekinreview/18deparle.html>) (Downloaded: 17 July 2008).

BORDERLANDS:

Taiwan-China Entwinements

The concept of 'borderlands' refers to those spaces in-between territories. In 'borderlands', life, work, languages, religions, and ideologies mix beyond the reach of sovereign control.⁴¹ Unlike 'frontiers', 'borderlands' does not connote a lawless no-man's-land; instead, it signifies a way of being and relating to Others under conditions of sustained interaction, multiplicity, and complexity that requires negotiation, not domination, to resolve problems and conflicts. 'Borderlands', in short, underscore the connections between so-called die-hard opposites even while recognising their durability.

With the end of martial law in Taiwan in 1987, 'borderlands' have flourished across the Taiwan Strait. They are transforming and shrinking the geopolitical space between Taiwan and China.

Note these recent developments:

1. Trade and Investment. In 2007, China became Taiwan's largest export market, accounting for almost 25% of all Taiwanese goods valued at over \$62 billion.⁴²

Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs estimates that, in March 2008, total Taiwanese investment in China amounted to approximately \$66 billion; for the same year, 55% of foreign direct investment and 21% of total trade went across the strait to China;⁴³

⁴¹ L.H.M. Ling, 'Borderlands: A Postcolonial-Feminist Approach to Self/Other Relations under the Neoliberal Imperium', in Heike Brabandt, Bettina Rooss, and Susanne Zwingel (eds), *Mehrheit am Rand? Geschlechterverhaeltnisse, globale Ungleichheit und transnationale Loesungsansaeetze* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), 105-124.

⁴² 'Statistics on Bilateral Trade' (2008), Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taipei, Taiwan (http://twbusiness.nat.gov.tw/xls/roc_exp.xls) (Downloaded: 31 July 2008).

⁴³ *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly* no. 184 (2008): 26, 31, Mainland Affairs Council, Taipei, Taiwan.

2. Transportation and Tourism. In July 2008, China and Taiwan announced direct weekend flights after nearly 60 years of prohibition.⁴⁴ Governments on both sides are considering further liberalisation of such direct links. In 1979, 5 million Taiwanese visited China; in 1993, this number reached 47 million.⁴⁵ Chinese visitors to Taiwan peaked in 2007 with almost 82,000, compared to nearly 54,000 in 2008; however, the ‘mini three links’ policy of ‘direct mail, transportation, and trade’ has more than offset this drop;⁴⁶

3. Popular Culture. Taiwan’s cultural and media products like music, novels, soap operas, and films are wildly popular in China.⁴⁷ In 2000, Taiwan’s aboriginal singer, A-mei, was listed among the 50 most popular figures in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong combined.⁴⁸ Similarly, audiences in China and Taiwan idolise the same film stars, singers, and other media celebrities, regardless of national origin. In 2001, a soap opera from Taiwan, ‘Meteor Garden’ (*Liuxing huayuan*), was one of China’s most watched dramas

⁴⁴ *Asian Economic News* 7 July 2008 (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDP/is_2008_July_7/ai_n27971965) (Downloaded: 31 July 2008).

⁴⁵ *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, Mainland Affairs Council.

⁴⁶ See, for example, (http://www.taiwansig.tw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=837&Itemid=117) and (<http://www.nownews.com/2008/11/28/301-2372584.htm>) (Downloaded: 1 January 2009) and the official website of Taiwan’s National Immigration Agency (http://www.immigration.gov.tw/aspcode/allinfo_97.asp) (Downloaded: 1 January 2009).

⁴⁷ Nicholas Kristof, ‘A Taiwan Pop Singer Sways the Mainland’, *New York Times* 19 February 1991 (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D0CE4DD153CF93AA25751C0A967958260>) (Downloaded: 27 September 2008); Jianying Zha, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers Are Transforming a Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1996); and Eric Lin, ‘The Cross-Strait Entertainment Industry: Competition or Complementarity?’ *Taiwan Panorama* 27 no.12 (2002), 68-76.

⁴⁸ ‘Jackie Chen, A-mei Among Influential Cross-Strait Figures’, *Asian Economic News* 7 August 2000.

on television.⁴⁹ Audiences in Taiwan also routinely watch soap operas produced in China, especially historical dramas like ‘Yong-zheng Dynasty’ (*YongZheng wangchao*), ‘Kan-xi Dynasty’ (*Kanxi wangchao*) and ‘The Family’ (*Da zhaimen*). ‘Yong-Zheng Dynasty’ replayed six times in Taiwan yet its ratings continued to rise; ‘Kangxi dynasty’ reached 2.8% of the audience qualifying as the ‘king of mainland dramas’. In comparison to the 1960s-1970s, shows from the US have declined;⁵⁰

4. Family Ties. Since 1987, over 2 million Taiwanese have moved to the mainland, including 750,000 Taiwanese businessmen.⁵¹ Many mainlanders now also live in Taiwan primarily through marriage to Taiwanese citizens. Marriages across the strait have increased over 40% per year.⁵² Today, 65% of all ‘foreign spouses’ (*waiji peiou*) in Taiwan come from China, far exceeding marital unions with other nationalities.⁵³

Kinship ties mattered when the Sichuan earthquake hit on 30 August 2008. With nearly 70,000 deaths and 19,000 people still missing,⁵⁴ ordinary citizens and other civic groups from Taiwan sent more than 1 billion *renminbi* worth of goods and money to China. Before the earthquake, President Ma Ying-jeou (then a presidential candidate) had reprimanded China’s repression of Tibet during the riots of March 2008. He branded

⁴⁹ In November 2002, the F4 (a group from the show) held a concert in Shanghai with nearly 80,000 fans packing the Shanghai Stadium. The concert was held at the same time as the 16th Communist Party National Congress. Some 3,000 public security officers and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers couldn’t suppress the fans’ enthusiasm, their hysterical screams echoing loudly in the stadium. Lin, ‘The Cross-Strait Entertainment Industry’, 68-69.

⁵⁰ Yian Jing, ‘*Shaopian Taiwan de dalure*’ (‘Mainland China Fever in Taiwan’) (2008) (http://www.shtwo.gov.cn/gb/newscontent_big.asp?id=443) (Downloaded: 4 July 2008).

⁵¹ *China Times* 12 November 2007.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Zhuang Yu-xia, ‘*Jing ershinianlai liangan tonhunmoshi de lanjing ji chushi tansuo*’ (‘An Analysis of Intermarriage between Mainland China and Taiwan Over the Past Twenty Years’), *Nanfang Zhenkou* 22 no. 6 (2007): 23.

⁵⁴ <http://www.epochtimes.com.au/b5/8/7/4/n2178988.htm> (Downloaded: 28 September 2008).

China's Premier Wen Jiabao a 'barbarian' who was 'arrogant and stupid' in handling the Tibet crisis.⁵⁵ After coming to office, Ma named Lai Shin-yuan, a long-time advocate of Taiwanese sovereignty, as Chair the Mainland Affairs Council. These moves irritated the CCP government and shadowed what had seemed promising relations across the strait given Ma's election to the Presidency. In light of Taiwan's generous and genuine outpouring of aid and public sentiment, however, the Chinese government softened its stand against Ma and granted requests for negotiating the weekend charter flights and other more open policies;

5. Religious Bonds. Though officially not allowed, the people of Kinman/Matzu (islands belonging to Taiwan) and Fujian (a province in China) have interacted with one another through small-scale fishing trade and commerce for decades.⁵⁶ (Kinman and Matzu are located off China's southern coast, near Fujian province.) Today, the 'mini three links' policy merely formalises what had been common practice between the two sites.

The first to sail directly from Matzu to Meizhou in Fujian in January 2002 were pilgrims of the 'Mazu' religion, common to both Fujian province and Taiwan. (Many Taiwanese claim ancestry from Fujian.)⁵⁷ These pilgrims sought to visit Meizhou, birthplace of the Mazu Sea Goddess. In 2002, over 100,000 pilgrims traveled from

⁵⁵ See (<http://www.nownews.com/2008/03/19/301-2247523.htm>) (Downloaded: 24 September 2008).

⁵⁶ Tsai Horng-ming, '*Xiaosantong duei liangan hudong de yingxiang*' ('The Impact of Mini Three Links on the Interactions across the Taiwan Strait') *Yuanjing Jikan* 2 no. 2 (2001): 135-161.

⁵⁷ There are more than 3000 Mazu temples scattered throughout Taiwan. See, Song Quan-chung, '*Mazu Xinyang zai Taiwan*' ('The Mazu Belief in Taiwan') *XunGen* 4 (2007): 4-11.

Taiwan to Meizhou to pay homage, despite government prohibitions.⁵⁸ The sheer number of pilgrims involved, however, convinced the Ma administration to relax these restrictions;

6. Academic Exchanges. Academics from Taiwan and China routinely lecture and conduct research at each other's universities. Students at both undergraduate and graduate levels also participate in exchange programs across the strait. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council reports that scholarly exchanges across the strait in 2007 increased 1000 fold since such visits were first permitted just a decade before;⁵⁹ and,

7. Revival of Confucianism. Confucianism is returning to post-Mao China.⁶⁰ This millennia-old tradition, once reviled during the Cultural Revolution, is enjoying a popular revival.⁶¹ Even the CCP is resorting to Confucian rhetoric and concepts. President Hu Jintao now touts a policy line, 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*), based on the Confucian precepts of unity, morality, and respect for authority.⁶² Most recently, Chinese foreign policy offers another Confucian notion, 'harmony with difference' (*he er*

⁵⁸ Li Ling-xia, 'Cong Tianshang Mazu dao Zhunghua Mazu' ('From Heavenly Mazu to Chinese Mazu') *Taiwan Yuanliou* 41 (2007): 129-140.

⁵⁹ See, for example, the graph on cross-strait scholarly exchanges produced by the Mainland Affairs Council, Taipei, Taiwan, on its website: (<http://www.mac.gov.tw/english/index1-e.htm>) (Downloaded: 27 September 2008).

⁶⁰ Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶¹ See, for example, (http://www.zgrj.cn/p_info.asp?PID=2465) (Downloaded: 31 December 2008).

⁶² See the Chinese government's website on *hexie shehui* (<http://news.sohu.com/s2006/hexie2006/>) (Downloaded: 31 December 2008).

bu tong),⁶³ to deflect anxiety, especially in the West⁶⁴ about a newly resurgent, ‘muscular’ China.⁶⁵

China’s return to its Confucian roots signals the greatest potential, so far, of cultural solidarity with Taiwan. The latter reveres Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder of China’s republican government that overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1911.⁶⁶ Dr. Sun explicitly built Chinese republicanism and its tricameral form of government on a synthesis between Confucian norms and liberal ideals drawn from his schooling in Hong Kong and the US. Sun modeled his ‘three principles of the people’ after Lincoln’s famous decree of ‘government by the people, for the people, of the people’. He also echoed Confucian and Mencian teachings about *minben* (‘people as base’) as the foundation of benevolent rule.⁶⁷

‘Borderlands’, in brief, constitute a vital and intimate part of cross-strait relations.

⁶³ Qing Cao, ‘Confucian Vision of a New World Order?’, *International Communication Gazette* 69 no. 5 (2007): 431-450.

⁶⁴ See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, ‘The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?’ *Foreign Affairs* January/February (2008) (<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080101faessay87102/g-john-ikenberry/the-rise-of-china-and-the-future-of-the-west.html>)

⁶⁵ Jisi Wang, ‘China’s Search for Stability with America’, *Foreign Affairs* September/October (2005) (<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050901faessay84504/wang-jisi/china-s-search-for-stability-with-america.html>).

⁶⁶ For instance, a public plaza in Taipei still commemorates the memory of Dr. Sun whereas a similar site for Chiang Kai-shek was renamed two years ago but regained its original name after Ma came to the presidency.

⁶⁷ For more on this concept and its contemporary usage in Taiwan, see L.H.M. Ling and Chih-yu Shih, ‘Confucianism with a Liberal Face: The Meaning of Democratic Politics in Contemporary Taiwan’, *Review of Politics* 60 (1) January 1998: 55-82. For a Chinese version, see Shih Chih-yu and Ling Huan-ming, ‘*Taiwan minzhuhualichengzhongde “xianren” qida*’ (Expectations of the ‘Wise Man’ in Taiwan’s Democratization Process) *East Asia Quarterly* 28 no. 3 (July 1997): 124-140.

POSTCOLONIAL TAIWAN

Postcolonial scholars in Taiwan take these developments as given. For them, Taiwan has always been a mix of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, ‘democratic debate’ and ‘authoritarian rule’, ‘patriarchy’ and ‘feminism’, rather than the singular, self-enclosed entity presumed by the national security state.⁶⁸

Indeed, Taiwan abounds in multiple worlds. A former Japanese colony whose elder generation (including former President Li Teng-hui) speaks Japanese better than Taiwanese or Mandarin,⁶⁹ the island under KMT rule also ‘Americanised’ under US tutelage during the half century of the Cold War. At the same time, the KMT claimed a ‘Chinese’ identity for the island, at the expense of an ‘indigenous’ one, despite a sizable aboriginal population (*yuan zhu min*). ‘Taiwan’, for these postcolonial scholars, has never been exclusively ‘Chinese’ or ‘Japanese’ or ‘American’ or, even, ‘indigenous’ but an amalgam of all these ethnicities, histories, politics, and languages.

Chiu Kuei-fen notes, for example, the polyglot nature of Taiwan’s spoken vernacular. Taiwanese Mandarin, unlike its mainland counterpart, is immersed in Fukienese, Hakkanese, Minnanese, Japanese, and English. The grammatical structure of Taiwanese Mandarin differs also. Chiu cites from a 1984 Taiwanese novel, *Rose, Rose, I*

⁶⁸ Even patriarchal, Confucian family relations are transforming in Taiwan, as women have made impressive gains in all walks of life in recent decades. According to the UN’s *Human Development Report* (2007-08), Taiwan ranks 52 in the world with women comprising 21.4% of all legislators, a higher percentage than Japan or South Korea. Women in Taiwan also account for 59% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, ranking 59 in the world. Taiwan’s GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) is 19, a much higher performance than Japan or South Korea which rank at 55 and 65 respectively. Directorate-General of Budget (2008), Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, Taiwan (<http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=835&ctNode=3259>) (Downloaded: 1 September 2008).

⁶⁹ Triumphant from the Sino-Japanese War of 1898, Imperial Japan demanded Taiwan as a colony from the deteriorating Qing dynasty at the Treaty of Shimonoseki.

Love You (Meigui, meigui, wo ai ni).⁷⁰ The novel's protagonist, a PhD in English trained in the US, returns to Taiwan with many Americanisms in her speech. She rattles off in Mandarin an almost direct transplant of American colloquialisms such as '*duome hushuo!*' ('what a lot of nonsense!'), '*wuo hen gaoxing ni gen wuo tongyi*' ('I'm very glad you agree with me'), '*zhe shi wuode renwei*' ('this is my view').

Such diversification continues with 'foreign spouses' and migrant workers in Taiwan. Today, almost one in five registered spouses in Taiwan come from another country, primarily Vietnam and Indonesia. Migrant workers in Taiwan have increased also, rising nearly 6% from 2006-2007 with the majority from Indonesia (32%), followed by Thailand and the Philippines (24% each).⁷¹

Asia as Method

Multiple nodal points (*zhidian*), writes sociologist and cultural studies pioneer Chen Kuan-Hsing, criss-cross Taiwan. These emerge from overlaps in and intersections among various life networks (*wangluo*): e.g., 'local Taiwan' (*taiwan zaidi*) within 'cross-strait relations' (*liang an guanxi*) within a 'Mandarin international' (*huawen guoji*) within an 'Asian region' (*yazhou quyue*) within a 'globalised region' (*quanqiu quyue*).⁷² Taiwan is a part of Asia and should locate itself explicitly so, Chen argues. From this basis, Taiwan should normalise relations with China. For too long, he writes, Taiwan has

⁷⁰ The title is drawn from a 1940s mainland song later turned into a hit in English in the 1950s. See, Chiu Kuei-fen, "'*Faxian Taiwan*": *jiangou Taiwan houzhiminlunshu*' (Discovering Taiwan: Constructing Taiwan's Postcolonial Discourse), in Zhang Jing-yuan (ed.), *Houzhimin lilun yu wenhua rentong* (Postcolonial Criticism and Cultural Identity) (Taipei: Rye Field Publisher, 2007), 169-191.

⁷¹ Department of Statistics (2008), Ministry of Interior, Taipei, Taiwan (<http://www.moi.gov.tw/stat/>) (Downloaded: 1 September 2008).

⁷² Chen Kuan-Hsing, *Qudiguo: Yazhou zuowei fangfa* (Towards De-Imperialization: Asia as Method) (Taipei: Flaneur Publisher, 2007), 47.

demonised China while remaining an intimate relation like an estranged family. He is reminded of the wrenching human cost of such estrangement when, by chance in Seoul in mid-August 2000, he witnessed families from North and South Korea reuniting for the first time in forty years:

In both instances, North and South Korea, Taiwan and China, the ‘national’ and the ‘personal’ historical experiences are clearly intersecting. For the encountering subjects, the emotional plane of affective desire seems to be at the forefront, overshadowing any other aspects of these ‘reunions’, no matter how imaginary or real the *bodily experience (ti-yan)* can be.⁷³

Asia, Chen declares, serves ‘as a method’. He attributes this phrase and concept to Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977), a Japanese scholar who admired the Chinese revolutionary writer, Lu Xun (1881-1936).⁷⁴ Lu was a leader of the student-based May Fourth Movement that vernacularised Chinese literature, thereby democratising public discourse and political participation in China.⁷⁵ Takeuchi skewered modern Japan for unreflectively emulating the West like an ‘honor student’ grubbing for grades, then passing itself off as a model of superiority to ‘backward’ others less inclined to this ‘slave’ mentality.⁷⁶ In contrast, Takeuchi argued, China’s intellectual giants like Lu Xun turned to others within Asia who had endured similar oppressions and humiliations from the West but who could still articulate a sense of self. As an example, Takeuchi cited the difference in response between Japan and China to one such voice: i.e., India’s Tagore. While Chinese intellectuals embraced Tagore as an intellectual and political comrade,

⁷³ Kuan-Hsing Chen, ‘Why Is ‘Great Reconciliation’ Impossible? De-Cold War/Decolonization, Or Modernity and Its Tears (Parts I-II)’, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 3 nos. 1 and 2 (2002): 79, original emphasis.

⁷⁴ Yoshimi Takeuchi, *What is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ See, for example, Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁷⁶ Takeuchi, *What is Modernity?*, 68.

Japanese elites dismissed him as ‘a poet of a ruined nation, whose poetry represented the grievances of the weak’.⁷⁷

‘Asia as a method’ thus means learning reflexively from oneself and others in comparable conditions, rather than blindly copying a hegemonic power like the West/US. For Chen, this analytical starting point leads to a dialectics between the international and the local, constituting what he calls a ‘new international-localism’ (*xin guoji difang zhuyi*) that is ‘non-essentialising’, ‘non-valorising’, and ‘non-anti-Westernising’ (*fei benzhi hua, jiazhi hua, kangxi hua*).⁷⁸ This ‘new logic’ (*xin luoji*) is premised on the hybridities (*hun za ti*) and other new social forms (*xin xingshi*) that emerge from systemic encounters. These dismantle the sovereign binaries of Self vs Other and resultant policy outcomes like ‘unification’ vs ‘independence’, thereby helping us to ‘de-colonise’ (*qu zhi min*), ‘de-imperialise’ (*qu di guo*), and ‘de-Cold War’ (*qu leng zhan*).

He explains:

To de-Cold War, at this point in history, does not just mean to be rid of Cold War consciousness or to forget that episode of history and to look towards the future, as all the state leaders and politicians have called for. *It means to mark out a space, beginning to re-open the unspoken histories and stories, to recognise and chart out the historically constituted cultural-political effects of the Cold War.* Thus, the task to de-Cold War is, in the similar sense, parallel to and connected with the historical project of *decolonisation* on various levels of abstraction in the Third World.⁷⁹

Culture as Method

We extend Chen’s model of ‘Asia as method’ to ‘culture as method’. ‘Culture’ substitutes easily for ‘Asia’ not because, as Orientalists would have it, the latter mires in Culture, ancient and contemporary, in supposed contrast to the West which charges on

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁷⁸ Chen, *Qudiguo*, 359, our emphasis.

⁷⁹ Chen, ‘Why Is ‘Great Reconciliation’ Impossible?’, 80, our emphasis.

with Science and Technology.⁸⁰ Rather, we make the substitution because what Chen identifies as ‘Asia’ generally applies to ‘culture’, at any site of change and development. Indeed, culture is that which multiple nodal points create and hook onto as they link the local with the global. Culture also accounts for the real-ness or imaginary nature of bodily experiences as, when Chen observed in Seoul, former spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and dear friends rediscovered one another after a lifetime of separation only to affirm they had never left in the first place. Culture, in this sense, inheres with a reflexivity that calls for mutual learning even from sites that convention deems ‘peripheral’, rather than blindly copying the ‘center’. In ‘re-opening the spoken histories and stories’ of ‘historically constituted cultural-political effects’ like the Cold War and its national security state, the logic of hybridity and its ‘new local-internationalism’ enables culture-as-method to ‘non-essentialise’, ‘non-valorise’, and ‘non-anti-Westernise’, thereby leading to ‘de-colonising’, ‘de-imperialising’, and ‘de-Cold War’.

Feyerabend can rest his lament. Culture-as-method restores abundance, diversity, and the richness of being to knowledge production.

Now let us turn to Ang Lee’s ‘Lust/Caution’. Transporting us to the national security state of the 1940s when Imperial Japan occupied Shanghai, the film presents a provocative and evocative allegory for today’s cross-strait relations. We learn what happens when the national security state prevails and why we need to go beyond it.

⁸⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

LUST/CAUTION:

An Allegory

Eileen Chang never lived in Taiwan but she has been hailed as ‘a Taiwanese author’. For Chen Fang-ming, Chang voiced a triple marginality that speaks to Taiwan’s historical passages.⁸¹ Like Chang’s Japanese-occupied Shanghai, Taiwan faced hegemony from imperial Japan and Cold-War US; like Chang’s underworld, Taiwan’s ‘dark side’ was covered up by a glossy and removed Confucian elite; and like Chang’s women characters, Taiwan was yoked by Confucian patriarchy compounded by Japanese and later US patronage. Yet Chang also upset this hegemony with an unexpected source: woman’s sexuality. Wang Chia-Chih, the female protagonist of ‘Lust/Caution’, observes in the novel that ‘[the English say] that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach... [A] well-known Chinese scholar was supposed to have added that the way to a woman’s heart is through her vagina’.⁸²

Here, Chang interplays fantasy with reality. She suggests that a fantasy (‘catching’ a man from a woman’s perspective) is sometimes more real than reality (‘capturing’ a woman from a man’s perspective), and reality a mere whisper of fantasy (who doesn’t want to fantasise about love?). In juxtaposing reality (woman = vagina = love) with fantasy (man = food = love), Chang shocks us to reconsider both (what does love *mean* anyway?).

⁸¹ Chen Fang-ming, *Houzhimin Taiwan: wenxueshilun jiqi zhoubian* (Postcolonial Taiwan: Essays on Taiwanese Literary History and Beyond) (Taipei: Rye Field Publisher, 2002).

⁸² In the original Chinese, the novel is less than 40 pages; in English translation, it is less than 50 pages. Chang started *Lust/Caution* in the 1950s but didn’t publish it until the late 1970s. She mentioned returning to the manuscript ‘dozens of times’, revising and rewriting. Eileen Chang, “‘Lust, Caution’: A Story”. Translated by Julia Lovell, in *Lust, Caution: The Story, the Screenplay, and the Making of the Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 36.

Ang Lee's film commits us to a similar rude awakening, for fantasy and reality also suffuse Taiwan's history. For forty years, the KMT imposed a fixed, absolutist national identity ('Republic of China') against another ('China') to justify 'recovering' (*guangfu*) the latter, in contrast to daily life across the strait that brimmed with multiple, mixed subjectivities ('Taiwan/China'). Today, fantastical Taiwan offers a very real model of successful Confucian-capitalist development matched by a lively democratic politics for a China that fantasises itself a communist state despite capitalist policies and practices. Ang Lee shakes us loose from these stupefying conventions by adapting Eileen Chang's interplay between fantasy and reality to the screen.

Let us recount the story of 'Lust/Caution'.

The Story, In Brief

It is 1940s Shanghai, at the height of the Sino-Japanese war. Wang Chia-Chih, a young woman of beguiling sensibility, is planted in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Yee. Ostensibly, Wang is Mrs. Mak,⁸³ the wife of a Hong Kong businessman. She is staying with the Yees while running a small-scale smuggling business on the side for the Shanghai elite. Actually, she has been sent by KMT underground forces to ensnare Mr. Yee. He is Head of Security for the Wang Ching-wei government, a puppet regime installed by the Japanese. Mr. Yee, in short, is a traitor and Wang, the patriot sent to assassinate him.

⁸³ 'Mak' is the Cantonese pronunciation of the word '*mai*'. In written form, it is the noun 'rye', also pronounced (*mai*) in Mandarin like the verb 'to sell'. With this word play, Chang suggests that Wang Chia-Chih, as Mrs. Mak, is a woman who sells herself.

Wang agrees to the plot for lack of anything better to do. Her father abandoned her to marry a new wife, she takes classes in Japanese listlessly and indifferently, and the one man she cared for had disappeared. When contacted by the underground, Wang seems purposeful again. She remakes herself from a mousy college girl into a sophisticated woman of means, resplendently curvaceous in her silk *chipao*.

Wang succeeds in enticing Yee, though each remains wary of the other. Neither fully trusts the other even after becoming lovers. Still, Yee decides to present Wang with a ring to commemorate their affair. This requires them to go outside his usual routine, to an unguarded jewelry store. Wang's co-conspirators plot to nab Yee at this opportune moment.

But something else happens. The sight of the six-carat, pink diamond, surrounded by two rows of smaller, brilliant stones, a rare commodity in any economy much less a war-ravaged one, moves her. It is her first and only present. She knows, also, that Yee cares little for such baubles. He had pooh-poohed giving his wife a similar gift. 'You wouldn't have been able to play mahjong with that rock on your finger', he joked.⁸⁴ At the jewelry store, turning her finger with the ring this way and that, admiring the largesse of it all, she catches her breath.

A faint, involuntary plea escapes from her lips: 'Run'. Yee understands instantly and bolts. By ten that evening, Wang and her co-conspirators are all dead, executed by order of Mr. Yee, Head of Security.

⁸⁴ Chang, "Lust, Caution": A Story', 8.

The Film, In Contrast

The film opens with a close-up of a guard dog, ‘strain[ing] at his leash, sniff[ing] the ground’.⁸⁵ The camera pans out to a wider shot, showing the full alienation and violence of the national security state: that is, Shanghai under Japanese occupation. We see a row of ‘elegant residences’, now ‘slightly seedy’, under gray skies.⁸⁶ ‘In front of every house there stands a security guard with a gun’, the screenplay reads. ‘And on the rooftops, guards with binoculars, [are] keeping watch’.⁸⁷

We first see Yee emerging from a dark, dank basement. He ‘winces almost imperceptibly at the sounds of torture emanating from the room behind him’.⁸⁸ Yee is a powerful man but, the film underscores, still a lackey for the Japanese. Yee’s assistant reminds him: ‘[General Taicho] asks that you report first thing tomorrow morning – at Japanese headquarters’.⁸⁹ Hounded and haunted by his own power, Yee is constantly surrounded by bodyguards, ducking from car to house for fear of an assassin’s bullet.⁹⁰ Early in their mutual seduction, Yee reveals to Wang that he doesn’t like to watch movies because, he explains, ‘I don’t like the dark’.⁹¹ At one point, when Wang complains that Yee has kept her waiting in the cold car, he lashes out with surprising honesty: ‘...His blood sprayed all over my shoes. I had to clean it off before I came. *Do you understand?*’⁹² Later on, Wang meets Yee at a Japanese teahouse. It is full of servile *geishas* catering to drunken Japanese soldiers. Oppressiveness pervades. Wang teases

⁸⁵ Hui Ling Wang and James Schamus, ‘*Lust, Caution: A Screenplay*’, in *Lust, Caution: The Story, the Screenplay, and the Making of the Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 191, our emphasis.

Yee that he brought her there to show that she's his whore. 'Whore?' he laughs softly. 'It is I who was brought here...So you see, I know better than you how to be a whore'.⁹³

Contrastingly, subversion impassions, awakens Wang. She unhinges Wu, for instance, the seasoned underground operative, with her unsparing rawness after he bullies her with loud, patriarchal authority:

Wang Chia-Chih: Don't worry. I will do what you say!

Old Wu (*takes Wang by the shoulders*): Good! Keep him in your trap. And if you need anything...

Wang Chia-Chih: You think I have him in a trap? Between my legs, maybe? You think he can't smell the spy in me when he opens up my legs? Who do you think he is?

Old Wu listens, becoming increasingly nervous.

Wang Chia-Chih: He knows better than you how to act the part. He not only gets inside me, but he worms his way into my heart. I take him in like a slave. I play my part loyally, so I too can get inside him. And every time he hurts me until I bleed and scream before he comes, before he feels alive. In the dark only he knows it's all true.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

Old Wu: Okay, stop it!⁹⁴

She doesn't stop until Old Wu storms out, unable to understand or control this force of nature that Wang has become.

Yet the film rests not with contrasts or opposites. Rather, it focuses on the ambivalences or liminalities that weave through the contrasts and oppositions, sucking them in like an undertow, even while the latter remain undeniably in place. Note this exchange between Wang and Yee after he has been away a few days:

Wang/Mak: I hate you!

Yee: I said I believed you. And you know, it would be the first time in a long time that I believed anyone, anyone at all. Let me hear it again, I want to believe...⁹⁵

Yee believes Wang only when she expresses an undiluted emotion like hatred. Only through hatred could they make a connection, turning it into something resembling love.

The various languages spoken in the film accentuate this sense of fluidity and complexity. The actors switch from Shanghainese to Mandarin to Cantonese, alongside spots of English. In the background, we hear Japanese in the teahouse and Hindi in the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

jewelry store. The film's décor and costumes reflect the fusions of East and West, respectability and criminality, light and dark that epitomised Shanghai in the 1940s.

Most explicitly, Lee uses sex to convey liminality. Wang and Yee's first sexual encounter, for example, implodes into a rape:

As she begins to unbutton her dress, he suddenly leaps up, grabs her, and pushes her against the wall, ripping the side seam of her chipao. He flips her around facedown onto the bed, unbuckles his pants, and enters her from behind.⁹⁶

None of their trysts convey any tenderness or eroticism. But it is precisely when their bodies writhe into one that we see Wang and Yee transforming from resistance, suspicion, alienation, and separation to something larger, more encompassing, and mutually binding. As the puppet government's torturer, Yee tortures Wang but so does she to him. Still, each finds in the other a burgeoning sense of humanity, imprinted through concrete contact rather than a performance of romance. The shocking nature of these scenes compel us, also, in the audience, to confront the porousness between reality and fantasy, love and hate, man and woman, even when bordered by something as solid as one's body.

A glimmer of understanding passes between Wang and Yee at the Japanese teahouse. We hear a *geisha* singing in a room down the hall. Yee is slightly drunk. When General Taicho passes by, Yee covers his face with his hand, not wanting to be seen, and

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

‘pours himself some sake with his head lowered’.⁹⁷ Wang notices this and offers a song.
‘I’m a much better singer than they!’ she promises.⁹⁸

[Wang] takes a sip of *sake*, licks her lips, and stands up. She positions herself in front of him, posing like a classic singsong girl. At first her voice is barely a whisper, but then we can make out that she is singing ‘Girl Singing from Earth’s End’.⁹⁹

The song comes from a famous movie, ‘Street Angel’ (*Malu tianshi*), made in 1937, also set in Shanghai. The film tells of a tragic singsong girl victimised by power and poverty. The song pays poignant tribute to a love that shines in innocence and purity despite the desperation and depravity that surround her.

From the end of the earth

To the farthest sea

I search and search

For my heart’s companion

A young girl sings

While he plays his harp

Your heart is my heart...¹⁰⁰

Yee almost forgets who and what he is. The song’s meaning for them, given their context, and Wang’s graceful Chinese femininity, amid the vulgar goings-on at the teahouse, strengthen their bond. His eyes glisten and he wipes them with a trembling

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Wang and Schamus, ‘*Lust, Caution: A Screenplay*’, 201-202. For the lyrics in Chinese, see (<http://www.chlyrics.net/idx.php/act-lrc/sid-558/did-3494/lid-36084>) (Downloaded: 14 October 2007).

hand. In that one moment, these two souls come together as human beings rather than avowed enemies, each a disposable pawn of the national security state.

‘It’s the other side of the patriotic story’, Ang Lee said in an interview.¹⁰¹ He was referring to the story of ‘Lust/Caution’ but Lee could be alluding to, also, the push/pull, reality/fantasy of Taiwan/China. Lee cites the impact of this relationship on his own imaginary while growing up in Taiwan:

All my life I feel like [an] outsider...Culturally I feel like an outsider, anywhere I go, even where I come from. My real cultural roots [are] in classic[al] China and what I was taught now feel[s] like a dream. I feel more of an insider in movies than real life. Very much like the girl in this movie. By pretending, actually you connect with the true self. My characters are all trying to find the truth about themselves through pretending. To me pretending is filmmaking, acting. That’s what I do best.¹⁰²

‘Lust/Caution’ swirls with polarities like patriot vs traitor, torturer vs victim, love vs hate. Yet the film also demonstrates the entwinements – the ‘borderlands’ – that emerge from these states of being. One subjectivity slides into the other, forming something completely unexpected, exciting yet shocking in its liberation.

‘Lust/Caution’ reminds us that absolute sovereignty, like any myth or dream or narration of self, must be interrogated. Both Wang and Yee think themselves committed agents to their respective causes. Each seeks to destroy the other. In the process, they discover another self in their performance as lovers that may be temporary and incoherent but just as powerful and undeniable.

¹⁰¹ Erica Abeel, ‘IndieWire Interview: ‘Lust, Caution’ Director Ang Lee’. 26 September 2007 (http://www.indiewire.com/people/2007/09/indiewire_inter_110.html) (Downloaded: 26 September 2008).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Yee does not escape Wang's death unscathed. Back home in his study, he signs the order for her death. He throws the diamond ring aside, claiming not to know anything about it. But he can't resist going to Wang's old room. He sits mutely on the bed, blanketed in white, as shadows loom over his face in the dark.

CONCLUSION:

Implications

We re-see Taiwan/China from multiple vantage points in 'Lust/Caution'. Like Yee, the central governments of Taiwan and China are powerful. But also like him, they must abide by an inter-state context of power politics. For Yee, it was Japanese imperialism; for Taiwan and China today, US hegemony. Perhaps more so for Taiwan than China, Wang's subversive femininity, taken by hegemonic patriarchy as exploitable and disposable, alerts us to another undercurrent to power relations. Just like the diamond that Yee gives to Wang, the material exchanges between Taiwan and China resonate with emotional significance. The pilgrims of Matzu-Kingmen subverted the 'strong' and 'masculine' state's policies despite being treated by patriarchal convention as 'weak' and 'feminised' agents of civil society. The same could be attributed to other feminised agents within China (e.g., peasants, migrants, minorities, environmentalists, artists) and their unanticipated impact on state and society.

Language further highlights the postcolonial fluidities, complexities, and liminalities that run through Taiwan, certainly, and China as well, if only these would be recognised. Yet the brutality and violations incurred by cross-strait relations, akin to Yee's rape of Wang in their first encounter, demand attention and redress. For Taiwan,

this ‘rape’ invokes several layers of historical brutality: e.g., the island as an afterthought to dynastic rule, as a throw-away colony to Japanese imperialism, as an ideological and territorial rationale for the KMT, as an American base during the Cold War, and as a possible, future target of conquest for the CCP. China, too, has suffered rape: e.g., the Opium Wars, unequal treaties, warlords, revolutions, famines, more revolutions, and so on.

These very historical sediments entwine the people of Taiwan and China. They are embedded from within as family, as kin, as national souls. Like the ordinary citizens who donated millions *en masse* to the Sichuan earthquake, and like Wang and Yee at the Japanese teahouse, one sentiment overcomes all others: *‘Your heart is my heart’*.

Our allegory is now complete. The affair between Wang and Yee stands for the private, social relations (‘borderlands’) that unfold and persist, even involuntarily, between two national security realms (‘free China’ vs ‘Japanese-occupied Shanghai’, ‘Taiwan’ vs ‘China’), each claiming to destroy the other. This allegory strikes an unexpected spark. A thought takes hold: perhaps we could put this abstract legacy of the Cold War, the national security state, on the back burner for now, lower the temperature, and leave it. We could prioritise, instead, what’s before us that is immediate and material, even physical and personal. In so doing, we begin to strengthen the infrastructure around the ‘borderlands’ of Taiwan/China rather than continue cleaning up the spills and burns of the national security state. This analytical shift may be temporary, a mere moment of speculation. But even a pause from ‘business as usual’ offers the possibility of emancipation. Indeed, analysts within India and China already consider

this a strategy for the relationship between their two states – a relationship fraught, also, with Cold-War border disputes, fear, and longing.¹⁰³

Perhaps this is the story behind the story of ‘Lust/Caution’. The lust for sovereignty, whether in love or power or the national security state, may be heady and self-serving but it bears an all-too familiar, cautionary tale of alienation, repression, and violence. ‘To me’, Ang Lee remarks on Eileen Chang, ‘no writer has ever used the Chinese language as cruelly...[N]o story...[is] as beautiful’.¹⁰⁴ Yet Lee urges us to intervene. We cannot remain so entranced, he suggests; otherwise, tragedy and death will be our only fate.

Of note is that a postcolonial sensibility is entering cross-strait discourse. Remember our expert from Taiwan, the one who deviated from the national security script? Today, Shih Chih-yu still theorises about nationalism but in postcolonial terms. ‘Taiwan’, he argues, comes not from the realist logic of inter-state relations where the state functions as a fixed, unitary, and eternal ‘black box’.¹⁰⁵ Rather, Taiwan qualifies more as an idea constructed by its leaders. Cold-War politics transformed Taiwan into a ‘state’ after its previous incarnation as a Japanese colony. Before that, Taiwan was a

¹⁰³ See, for example, Lan Jianxue, ‘*Lengzhan shiqide zhongyin guanxi: zhengchanghua yu lengzhan hexie*’ (Sino-Indian Relations During the Cold War Period: Normalisation and Cold War Harmony), *Nanya Yanjiu* (South Asian Studies) 2 (2005); and Jairam Ramesh, *Making Sense of Chindia: Reflections on China and India* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2005). See, also, the cultural longing between Chinese and Indians, particularly in Calcutta, site of India’s largest Chinese community, in Rafeeq Ellias’ (2006) documentary, ‘The Legend of Fat Mama’ (http://www.newschool.edu/uploadedFiles/ici/News_and_Events/FA06%20Fat%20Mama%20PS TR.pdf).

¹⁰⁴ Ang Lee, ‘Preface’, in *Lust, Caution: The Story, the Screenplay, and the Making of the Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), vii.

¹⁰⁵ Shih Chih-yu, ‘*Qishowuhei dazhangfu: mishizai yifuzhe nengdongxing zhungde meizhung qipan*’ (No Play, No Game: Sino-U.S. Strategy Calculus Lost in Taiwan), *Yuanjing Jijinheijikan* 1.4 no. 2 (2003): 39-60.

mere outpost of the Chinese empire, an occasional refuge for criminals and dissenters alike escaping from dynastic rule. Indeed, Shih stresses, Taiwan has always acted on *its* desires and *its* agency, despite US hegemony and contrary to conventional portrayals as helpless, fragile, and dependent. The US alone does not decide the ‘rules of the game’. As an example, Shih points to former President Chiang Ching-kuo (1978-1988), son of the Generalissimo, who ended martial law in Taiwan one year before his (Ching-kuo’s) death, allowing families to visit across the strait after a separation of forty years. With such permeability between Taiwan and China, Shih suggests, the likelihood of a military invasion or occupation from China against Taiwan will diminish over time. This would give Taiwan the geopolitical space to ‘find its own way’, with or without formal independence.

Mainstream analysts may insist on the impasse between Taiwan and China, secured by US hegemony, to reach an acceptable ‘peace’. But it is precisely this impasse, we argue, that threatens instability in the region. In allowing the national security state to supercede all other considerations, neither Taiwan nor China nor the US could risk change in any way. Yet we know this is an untenable standard as China’s economy continues to liberalise, Taiwan’s politics to democratise, and America’s hegemony to decline.

Culture-as-method offers a way out. Its logic of hybridity jogs free much-needed ontological space so those scientific abstractions of ‘Self vs. Other’, ‘West vs. non-West’, and ‘centre vs periphery’, along with ‘the national security state’, would dictate no more. Enjoying the lush freedom of a richness of being, expressed through an integration of the Humanities with IR, we disregard the fearful claim that only one

source, one view, or one method of inquiry can validate our thinking about and practices in world politics. In the process, world politics may shift, if only slightly, from a deadly competition among national security states to a more relational mode of engagement and negotiation rooted in the 'borderlands' of global life. So begins the democratising of IR and, by extension, world politics.