

China Media Centre 2018 Spring Seminar

‘Cruel Optimism’: Communicating A Global China Through Blockbuster Documentaries

Speaker: Dr Bao Hongwei
Date: Wednesday, 2 May 2018
Time: 14:00 – 16:00
Venue: A1.05, Harrow Campus
Chair: Professor Chang Xiangqun

OPEN TO ALL

Abstract: Released on 2 March 2018 in tandem with the ‘Two Sessions’, *Amazing China* (《厉害了，我的国》dir. Wei Tie, 2018, in Mandarin, 90 min.) has become the highest grossing documentary film in China to date. How can a documentary with explicit political messages about China’s achievements under Xi’s leadership become a blockbuster? What can we learn about China’s screen industries in relation to the state and the market? Does this case exemplify a ‘paradigm shift’ in the way how the Chinese government conducts its political communication for domestic and transnational Chinese-speaking audiences? Through critical analysis of some textual features and contextual factors that contribute to the commercial success of the film, I argue that the film showcases the commercialisation and industrialisation of Chinese government’s political communication strategies. The film’s commercial success lies in the active involvement of the state in commercial screen industries; and the popularity of the film can be attributed to its successful mobilisation of an affect of optimism. For individuals, this optimism can both be empowering and precarious, and sometimes even ‘cruel’ in the words of Laurent Berlant (2011): as it brings confidence and pride to imagine oneself as part of an unfolding history and an emerging global power; it also reinforces the insignificance and even venerability of the self in such a narrative.



Biography: Dr Bao Hongwei is Assistant Professor in Media Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is co-director of the Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies (CEACS) and Senior Resident Fellow of the China Policy Institute (CPI) at Nottingham. He is also member of the Institute for Screen Industries Research (ISIR) and Centre for Critical Theory (CCI) at Nottingham. Prior to Nottingham he has taught at Nottingham Trent University, University of Potsdam, University of Sydney, and the National Academy of Chinese Theatrical Arts, Beijing. He obtained his PhD in Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney in 2011. His research primarily focuses on gay identity and queer activism, independent documentaries and alternative media productions in contemporary China. He is the author of *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China* (2018) and co-editor of *Queer/Tongzhi China: Perspectives into Research, Activism and Media Cultures* (2015). He has published articles on gay identity and queer filmmaking in *Cultural Studies*, *Culture Unbound*, *Health, Culture and Society*, *Interventions*, *Queer Paradigms*, and *The JOMEC journal*. His current research focuses on the development of screen industries in China and the Global South.

Notes: This is also one of the Global China Media Seminar Series (GCMSS), co-organised with Global China Institute.

If you have any inquiry about CMC events, please contact Alja Kranjec at: A.Kranjec@westminster.ac.uk