

Transformation and Alienation on Glocal Landscape in Jia Zhangke's *The World*

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Abstract

This essay studies the representation of the formation and influence of the glocal landscape in Chinese director Jia Zhangke's film *The World* (2004) in the light of Roland Robertson's theory of glocalization, a process of simultaneous interpenetration between the global and the local. Through a close reading of the film, I argue that both local and global forces shape and influence the glocal landscape, a site which creates both new identities and alienation among its residents. Analyzing three examples of glocal landscape in the film—a Chinese designer Qun's family factory, The Beijing Railway Station, and The Beijing World Park, I contend that the protagonist's social mobility is closely associated with his or her linguistic ability. Moreover, I transplant Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry in the colonial context to the postsocialist Chinese society to demonstrate the significance of mimicry in the local's contestation against the encroaching force of the global. Finally, I examine the director's filmmaking history and the film's style, techniques, production, distribution, and circulation in China and overseas, and contend that the confrontation and conciliation between the postsocialist Chinese regime and global capitalism create a glocal landscape for the emergence of sophisticated Chinese artists.

Keywords: glocalization, linguistic ability, social mobility, power dynamics,
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The recent decades have witnessed the success of young generation Chinese directors, such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, Zhang Yuan, Lou Ye, and Lu Xuechang. Categorized by the critics as the Six Generation directors, they pay close attention to the life of marginalized groups and various social problems in contemporary China. They often use long takes, hand-held cameras, amateur actors and actresses to create a documentary style and capture various transitional moments in postsocialist China. Among them, Jia Zhangke is well renowned for his depiction of the alienated youth and exploration of the influence of modernization and globalization in contemporary Chinese society. *The World* (2004) is a representative work of his filmography. Set in Beijing, the film centers on the lives of migrant workers in the metropolis and demonstrates the contestation between the local and the global forces, and their influences on contemporary Chinese social, economic, and cultural landscape. Since its debut, the film has drawn wide attention from domestic and international critics.

Previous studies focus on the film's sympathetic portrait of marginalized people in contemporary metropolis and its trenchant critique of the underside of globalization. For instance, Chinese scholar Wang Hui compliments the film's nuanced portrait of the unchanging humanity and the rapidly changing reality in a globalizing China.¹ American film scholar Sheldon Lu praises Jia for his disclosure of the stark contrast between "beautiful postcard-like, postmodern simulacra of the world's landmarks in the park" and "the squalid, pre-modern living conditions of the workers and entertainers backstage."² American anthropologist Arianne Gaetano offers a gendered perspective of the film's critique of globalization, and contends that the film reveals a male-centered chauvinistic convention of treating rural woman as a sign of social ills, rather than an agent of social change (25).

¹ Bin Chen, "Chinese Scholars' Praise of Jia Zhangke's *The World*," *Beijing Evening Newspaper* 4.1 (2005) n.pg.

² Sheldon Lu, "Dialect and Modernity in 21st Century Sinophone Cinema," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 49 (2007) n.pg.

These criticisms offer useful interpretations of the film's representation of the negative influence of globalization in contemporary Chinese society; however, many other interesting elements of the film have been neglected. For instance, how does the film represent the landscape of a contemporary metropolis such as Beijing? What constitutes such a landscape? Do the global forces necessarily win over the local forces in the metropolis? Or do any other possible relationships exist between the two? How does the film portray various protagonists on this landscape? What is the relationship between protagonists' linguistic ability and social mobility? How do the film's style and techniques reflect the director's attitude towards globalization?

To answer these questions, I will first build on Roland Robertson's theory of glocalization to study the representation of the formation and influence of glocal landscape in Jia Zhangke's film *The World* (2004). I argue that the glocal landscape in the film is shaped and influenced by local and global forces, among which global capitalism, people, technology, and soundscape (music, dialects and languages) are significant ones. Interestingly, the film reveals that the protagonist's social mobility is closely associated with his or her linguistic abilities. Moreover, I will activate Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry to explore the significance of mimicry in the local's contestation against the encroaching force of the global. In the later part of the article, I will study the director Jia Zhangke's filmmaking history and his transformation from an underground filmmaker to an international acclaimed director. Through an examination of *The World's* style, techniques, production, distribution, and circulation in China and overseas, I contend that the confrontation and compromise between the postsocialist Chinese government and global capitalism create a glocal landscape for the emergence of sophisticated Chinese artists.

In "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," Roland Robertson challenges the dichotomy between the global and the local, and recommends to use "glocalization" to replace the more widely used term

“globalization.” Derived from the Japanese marketing jargon *dochakuka*, the term “glocal” emerged in the 1980s and it originally meant the adaptation of a product or a service to specific localities and cultures (28). Robertson uses the term “glocalization,” or traditionally “globalization,” to define a process that “has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or— in a more abstract vein— the universal and the particular” (30). From Robertson’s perspective, glocalization “involves the creation and the incorporation of locality” (40), thus what is called local always include translocal factors. Different from the traditional binary relationship between the local and the global, Robertson’s theory of glocalization highlights interdependence between the two. Building on this view, I would like to propose the concept of the glocal landscape, a space where local and global forces encounter and contest with each other, and a site which generates both formation of new identities and alienation among people. In the following analysis, I will further dissect the local to the regional and the national. My purpose is not to create new boundaries but to examine the film’s representation of the power dynamics among the regional, the national and the global forces in contemporary China. I endeavor to demonstrate that all three factors— the regional, the national, and the global exert influence on the formation and function of the glocal landscape and people who live on it through competition and compromise.

Set in Beijing, *The World* depicts the diversified experiences of migrant workers in a globalizing Chinese society, and reveals the contestation and negotiation among the regional, the national, and the global forces. In the film, there are three examples of the glocal landscape: the Chinese entrepreneur Qun’s family factory, the Beijing Railway Station, and the Beijing World Park. In each example, various elements, such as dance, music, dialects, languages, clothes, buildings, landmarks, and technology influence the shape and the function of the glocal landscape as well as the identities and values of people who live on it. Despite their differences in forms and functions, these three places become hubs for emergent identities and at the

same time, they also create alienation among people who live on them. Intriguingly, the possibility of the construction of new identity is closely connected with one's linguistic ability which is a valuable resource in a globalizing society.

The first telling example of the glocal landscape in the film is female Chinese designer and entrepreneur Qun's family factory in Beijing. In this example, the regional appropriates the global to meet the national needs, and the translocal interaction occurs during the process of glocalization. In one scene, Taisheng visits Qun's family factory. Entering the door on the first floor, Taisheng learns from a woman that Qun is on the second floor. A long shot shows that Taisheng walks across workers who are busy with making clothes. Following Taisheng to the second floor, the spectator sees the interior space of Qun's studio. On the wall, there are pictures of western fashion models and brand posters. As the camera slowly pans from the left to the right, the spectator finds that Qun teaches her young sister western ballroom dance in Wenzhou dialect, accompanied by the popular Mandarin song "Crazy for Love" by the Taiwanese singer Rene Liu. On top of the refrigerator, there are some international cosmetics brands, such as Maybelline and Biore. Apart from western fashion, dance, cosmetics and Taiwanese pop music, the room is also featured with Chinese food, cooking utensil, and Qun's mimicry of Euro-American brands. In this small Chinese factory, various regional, national and global forces interact with each other. Workers from all parts of China work in the family factory, following Qun's design to produce mimicry of popular Euro-American clothes and bags. Taiwanese Mandarin pop music is used as background music for Chinese young people to learn western ballroom dance. Japanese and American cosmetics, Taiwanese pop music, western dance, and mimicry of Euro-American brands are consumed by ordinary Chinese in their daily life.

Some critics, such as Jonathan Rosenbaum argues that Qun's work is "precise imitation of brand-name found in a fashion catalog" (323). But in my view, Qun's work is more of mimicry than imitation. Homi Bhabha's

elaboration of the function of mimicry in colonial context is useful to analyze Qun's appropriation of the international brands in a globalizing Chinese society. In the article "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Bhabha contends that,

The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers. (126)

Bhabha's remark illuminates the disturbing force of mimicry: it repeats and reforms the "original" not to become the "original" but to disavow it. In a similar vein, the aim of Qun's mimicry is not to become the "original" elite Euro-American brands, but to create brands which target Chinese customers. As the film reveals, Qun studies the latest Euro-American fashion trends, the reception of Euro-American brands in Chinese market, and then mimics the popular brands to meet the needs of Chinese consumers. Both Qun and Chinese customers fully realize the fact of Euro-American brands' dominance in the global market. Qun's mimicry of the original Euro-American brands and Chinese customers' acceptance and consumption of the mimicry reflect the local's appropriation of the global and its contestation against the Euro-American hegemony in Chinese domestic market. The success of Japanese and American cosmetics corporations such as Biore and Maybelline in China largely comes from their adaptation to the

specific needs of Chinese customers. Moreover, the popularity of Taiwanese Mandarin singer, such as Rene Liu in mainland China also demonstrates the increased translocal interaction between China and Taiwan. Seen in this light, the family factory is a glocal landscape among which the appropriation, contestation, and adaptation among the local and the global forces take places, and such interaction provides opportunities for emergent identities. For the owner Qun, the factory is an important means for her to achieve economic and psychological independence as a modern woman, to provide funds for her reunification with her husband in France, and moreover to polish her artistry skills to live in a foreign country. The factory is also a place for workers to make a living, build connections and learn global cultures.

The second convincing example of the glocal landscape is the Beijing railway station. In the film, it is represented as a polyphonic space in which multiple regional, national and international languages interact, and a glocal space where translocal and transnational political, economic, and cultural forces contest and negotiate with each other. Its polyphonic feature is demonstrated in the scene when Taisheng and Tao see off Tao's ex-boyfriend Liangzi in the station. In the sequence, a long shot shows that the three enter the busy station which is crowded with a large number of people. After the three chat in Shanxi dialect for a while, Tao leaves to buy some food for Liangzi, and the two men continue the chat. A medium shot shows that the two men occupy the center of the frame; in the upper left hand corner, a LCD screen plays the video of the English introduction of the Eurasian Land Bridge, and in the upper right hand corner, a large crowd of people use the escalator to get to the waiting room on the second floor. The two men's chat is interrupted by the English introduction in the video. As the introduction wanes, they resume their chat. After listening to the Mandarin broadcast of the schedule of the train from Beijing to Ulan Bator in the loudspeaker, the two men exchange goodbye to each other in Shanxi dialect and Liangzi leaves for the waiting room. In the scene, the Shanxi dialect spoken by the

three protagonists as well as the indistinguishable noise from other passengers in the background reveal the diversified social groups in China, and Mandarin spoken in the loudspeaker signifies the image of China as a unified modern nation-state through the implementation of a common official language within its territory. Moreover, the English video of the Eurasian Land Bridge symbolizes Chinese government's effort to become an integrated part of world economy through cooperation with other Asian and European countries in the new millennium.

Intriguingly, the history of the Eurasian Land Bridge is fraught with tension, competition, reconciliation, and cooperation among China, Russia, Mongolia, Central Asian, and European countries from late nineteenth century to early twentieth-first century. The building of the transcontinental railway between Europe and Asia can be dated back to the late nineteenth century. During that time, western colonial powers and nationalist forces in Asia fought with each other over the ownership and the use of the rail transportation. The twentieth century witnessed the foundation and collapse of Soviet Union, and the national independence of China, Mongolia, and former republics of Soviet Union. It is until the end of the Cold War, collaboration among China, Russia, Mongolia, Central Asian, and European countries is made possible. Currently, the Eurasian Land Bridge consists of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which runs through Russia, and the New Eurasian Land Bridge, which connects China, central Asia, and Europe. As a transnational and transcontinental rail network, the Eurasian Land Bridge is used to enhance political, economic, and cultural communications between Asia and Europe in contemporary globalizing era. Seen in this light, the history of Eurasian Land Bridge reflects the changing socio-political environments in Asia and Europe. As is seen in the film, Chinese migrant worker Liangzi, who comes from a small Chinese town, takes the Trans-Mongolia Railway, part of the Eurasian Land Bridge, to go to Ulan Bator, the capital of Mongolia. The contrast between town and capital city and between regional Chinese culture and Mongolian culture will become

catalysts for Liangzi to construct a new identity. In this sense, Beijing railway station is a glocal landscape, which provides opportunities for formation of new identities and cooperation among local, national, and international forces.

Besides Qun's family factory and Beijing Railway Station, the Beijing World Park is the third example of the glocal landscape in the film. Compared with the previous two examples, the Beijing World Park exhibits more clearly translocal interactions and alienation among people who live in it. Located in the southwestern Fengtai District of Beijing, the park is famous for the miniatures of the landmarks around the world, such as the Taj Mahal in India, the Great Pyramids and Sphinx in Egypt, the Eiffel Tower and the Notre Dame Cathedral in France, the Tower Bridge in the U.K., the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy, and the Statue of Liberty in the U.S.A. Each landmark is situated in the park according to its geological location in the world. The park provides various performances, such as daily opening ceremonies and ethnic dances from around the world. The architectures around the globe, the diversified cultural activities, and the advertising slogan "Give us a day and we will show you the world" reveal the park manager's ambition to create a global space through representation of world-renowned landmarks and various ethnic cultures. Meanwhile, the film also reveals the local features of the park: Chinese workers and staffs in the park, the pervasive Mandarin in the loudspeaker, and various Chinese dialects spoken by workers and visitors from all over the country.

The translocal interaction among residents on this glocal landscape is best illustrated by communication between Chinese and Russian performers in the dormitory. In the film, the dormitory is a place where various languages, dialects, ethnicities, and cultures cohabit and interact with each other. Coming from all parts of the country, Chinese migrant workers speak their local dialects to protect their privacy on the phone and meanwhile, they use the official language Mandarin to communicate with each other to share their lives and build friendship. Moreover, transnational communication

occurs between the Russian performer Anna and the Chinese performer Tao through music and body language. Their common experience as female migrant workers in an alienating city further enhances their friendship.

In contrast to the interaction among migrant workers, little communication is achieved by migrant workers and visitors in the world park. For instance, there is a scene of two male characters' chatting inside the Eiffel Tower in the world park. A medium shot shows that the two security guards Taisheng and Erxiao sit in chairs near a table, eating their lunch and chatting in Shanxi dialect. On the table, a portable loudspeaker repeats "Welcome to the Eiffel Tower! Please follow the instruction and visit the tower in clock-wise direction" in Mandarin. Around them, several South Asian tourists walk in counter-clockwise direction and enjoy themselves with sightseeing. A small South Asian child stands on a table, looking into the camera. This scene shows the disconnection among the regional (Shanxi security guards), the national (Mandarin), and the global (South Asian tourists). The Mandarin instruction is neglected by the South Asian tourists due to linguistic incomprehensibility, and ironically, it is also ignored by the two Chinese security guards Taisheng and Erxiao who are busy speaking in their native Shanxi dialect to share their private lives rather than urge the tourists to follow the instruction. For migrant workers such as Taisheng and Erxiao, the replicas of renowned world landmarks in the park symbolize the image of the upper class life in a globalizing world, which they can see but are unable to live. As Tonglin Lu points out, these migrant workers create global wealth which they cannot enjoy due to the unfair distribution of wealth in China (171).

Though globalization intensifies the inequality among class, regions and nations, it also brings opportunities for upward mobility for people in disadvantageous groups. Interestingly, these opportunities are closely associated with protagonists' linguistic ability. As the previous three examples demonstrated, various Chinese dialects (Shanxi and Wenzhou dialects) and languages (Mandarin Chinese, Russian, English, and French)

are important constituents of the glocal landscape. These dialects and languages represent diversified social groups in contemporary China and each has a different relationship with modernity and globalization. The relationship between Chinese dialects and modernity in contemporary Sinophone³ cinema is examined by Sheldon Lu in his article “Dialect and Modernity in 21st Century Sinophone Cinema.” Differing from Shu-mei Shih’s exclusion of China from Sinophone world in her book *Visuality and Identity*, Lu elaborates his view on the power dynamics in Sinophone,

The multiple tongues and dialects used in varieties of Sinophone cinema testify to the fracturing of China and Chineseness. Each dialect-speaker is the voice of a special class, represents a particular stage of socio-economic development, and embodies a specific level of modernity within a messy ensemble of heterogeneous formations in China and the Chinese diaspora.⁴

Lu’s remarks uncover the hierarchy of Chinese dialects and their association with socio-economic development and modernity. His analysis is also applicable to the study of various languages in the film. In *The World*, some dialect and language, such as Shanxi dialect and Russian symbolize the socio-economic backwardness, and in contrast other dialects and languages, for instance, Wenzhou dialect, Mandarin, English, and French signify modernity and globalization. A review of the world history illustrates that

³ The term Sinophone literally means “Chinese-speaking.” In contemporary academia, the concepts of Sinophone and Sinophone world are highly debatable. Some scholars, such as Shu-mei Shih contend that Sinophone should exclude the hegemonic Mandarin, and Sinophone world includes Chinese-speaking areas where various Chinese dialects are minority languages, and excludes China and Taiwan where Mandarin is the official language. In contrast, other scholars, such as Sheldon Lu believe that Sinophone should include Mandarin and Sinophone world consists of all Chinese speaking areas.

⁴ Lu, *ibid.*

Britain and France have played leading roles in the process of modernization and globalization whereas Russia has lagged behind in such process. Similarly, in modern Chinese history, Wenzhou as well as other Eastern coast cities in China has been the pioneer in the process of modernization and globalization and in contrast many inland provinces such as Shanxi have fallen behind in the process. Such unbalanced relationship has been maintained and intensified in the contemporary post-colonial globalizing world.

Intriguingly, the hierarchy of dialects and languages also exerts great influence on the construction of identities of various social groups in a globalizing Chinese metropolis. I argue that the protagonist's social mobility is closely related to his or her linguistic ability, a valuable resource for networking in a globalizing world. Those who master multiply dialects and languages enjoy more social mobility and are more likely to succeed on a global landscape whereas those who only know one dialect or language often lack social mobility and even fall victim to globalization. Taisheng and Qun are representatives of the former group. As a Shanxi native who comes to Beijing to make a living, Taisheng quickly learns the survival skills in the metropolis, among which socializing ability and linguistic capacity are two vital ones. Being a smart and diligent person, Taisheng establishes and maintains social network with his fellowmen, colleagues, and other people. He speaks Shanxi dialects to enhance bonding with his fellowmen such as Erxiao, Sanlai, and Little Sister. Meanwhile, he uses Mandarin to communicate with people who don't know Shanxi dialects. Taisheng's linguistic ability enables him to familiarize with people from different backgrounds, encounter new values, and increase the possibility for upward mobility in the society.

Compared with Taisheng, Qun's linguistic ability gives her more freedom to cross national boundaries. Qun, a Wenzhou owner of a small family factory in Beijing, makes a living by mimicking and localizing the elite Euro-American fashion brands. She is an embodiment of the

adventurous and entrepreneurial spirits which have long been valued by Wenzhou people.⁵ From the conversation between Qun and Taisheng, the audience learns that Qun starts her business in Beijing to make enough money to reunite with her husband who stowed away to France ten years ago. To better adjust herself to France, Qun learns French fashions, culture, and language. Recognizing the tight border control among nations in the contemporary world, Qun abandons her husband's risky illegal way, and chooses a legal and safe way to go to France: making enough money, applying for a visa and then flying to France. Compared with Taisheng, Qun has a deeper understanding of foreign cultures. Her conversation with Taisheng is a telling example. In one scene, Taisheng invites Qun to go to the World Park to visit the French landmarks, such as Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, and Notre Dame Cathedral before she leaves for France. Claiming his workplace has "all that French stuff," Taisheng is somewhat confused by Qun's remark that the World Park lacks places such as her husband's residency Bellville, the Chinatown in France. For Taisheng, these landmarks equal France and French culture. In contrast, Qun knows exactly that French culture is far more than these landmarks and fashion brands. Her knowledge of French language and her interaction with her husband and other Wenzhou people in France make her realize the existence of linguistic, ethnic, religious, and socio-political divisions in contemporary French society. Though it is ambiguous whether she can reunite with her husband in France, her deep understanding of French culture, her multiple linguistic ability (Wenzhou dialect, Mandarin and French), and her artistry of mimicry will enable her to make a living in France.

Interestingly, Qun's agency serves as a counter example for previous criticism of the film's portray of women as passive figures. For instance, in

⁵ As the leaders of the private economy in China, Wenzhou people have actively engaged in domestic economic reform and international trade for centuries. Meanwhile, they are also the vital force of Chinese diaspora, and many of them emigrate to Europe, America, Africa and other parts of the world.

the article “Rural Woman and Modernity in Globalizing China: Seeing Jia Zhangke’s *The World*,” Arianne Gaetano contends that the film reveals a male-centered chauvinistic convention of treating rural woman as “a sign of social ills, rather than an agent of social change” (25) through an examination of the experiences of Tao and Anna. Gaetano’s argument uncovers the male influence on Tao and Anna; however, it neglects the active women, such as Qun in the film. My previous analysis of Qun’s agency challenges such generalization, but it is important to note that Qun’s agency and social mobility derives largely from her linguistic ability, artistry of mimicry, and willingness to learn other cultures.

For those who lack sufficient language and communication abilities in the film, they are often stuck in their social status. Anna and the Little sister best illustrate this point. Anna, the female Russian migrant worker, comes all the way to China to making a living. She first works in the Beijing World Park as an entertainer, and then falls into prostitution to make enough money to support her family in Russia. Apart from sexual exploitation, her limited linguistic ability exacerbates her alienated conditions in Chinese society. Speaking only Russian, Anna can hardly make any connection with Chinese people or culture. Similarly, the young male Shanxi migrant worker Little Sister is physically exploited, and linguistically and culturally alienated in Beijing. Coming fresh from a small county in Shanxi, Little Sister lacks high education and wide social network, and thus he can only find a risky low-paying job as a manual worker on a construction site. Akin to Anna, Little Sister’s limited social mobility and alienation are largely influenced by his insufficient linguistic ability. Throughout the film, he only speaks Shanxi dialect, which confines him to the small group of his hometown fellows such as Sanlai, Taisheng, and Tao. The language barrier blocks his interaction with people from other regions and prevents his exploration of new ideas and cultures.

Situated between the two poles of linguistic ability, the female protagonist Tao is an intriguing figure. Like her boyfriend Taisheng, she can

speak Mandarin and Shanxi dialect but she does not enjoy the same degree of freedom and social mobility as him. In the film, Tao lives a monotonous life with little change. She spends most of her time performing ethnic dances and working as a tourist guide from one corner to another in the World Park. Thought-provokingly, in most cases, the major driving force for her venture to the outside world comes from men. She goes to the Beijing railway station to see off her ex-boyfriend Liangzi, and to a downtown Karaoke bar due to her boss's demand. Her begging for her boyfriend Taisheng to take her to Mr. Song's also reveals her lack of agency to build her own social network and diversify her life. Her dependence is the major cause for her inability to fight with Taisheng's emotional manipulation and sexual exploitation in their relationship. As Arianne Gaetano incisively points out that, Tao's mobility in the film is largely depended on her boyfriend Taisheng, and her sense of traditional morals on virginity and sexuality is challenged by both romantic love and gender politics of capitalism (31). Seen in this light, the linguistic ability cannot guarantee the individual's social mobility and formation of a new identity, and such transformation also requires independence, agency, communication skills, and willingness to learn multiple cultures.

Interpreting the final gas leak scene as the demise of Tao and Taisheng, many critics argue that the director Jia Zhangke reveals a negative attitude towards globalization in the film; however, I think such interpretation neglects the director's nuanced depiction of the influence of globalization. The gas leak occurs after Taisheng finds Tao at Niu and Wei's home. Taisheng tries to talk with Tao, who refuses to response to him due to her complex feelings towards Taisheng's betrayal. Then, as the camera moves from inside to outside, a long shot shows a crowd neighborhood whose quietness is interrupted by a man's calling for help, and then several neighbors help move Tao and Taisheng to an open space, and hurry to call an ambulance for them. As the screen gets dark, the audience hears the conversation between the two characters. Taisheng asks "Are we dead?" and then Tao answers "No, it is just a beginning." Similar to other parts of the

film, the final scene is filled with uncertainties. It is unclear whether the gas leak is Tao's revenge against Taisheng's betrayal or is merely an incident. It is also vague whether their lives are threatened by the gas leak. Moreover, the time of the incident encourages various interpretations. It is clear that the incident occurs in winter but the exact time is unclear. The dim light of the scene can be interpreted as either dusk or dawn. Winter can be associated with decay and death or with regeneration and hope. Furthermore, the arrangement of a life-threatening incident in a newlywed's home combines threat and hope, tragedy and comedy, ending and beginning. Tao's final words "it is just beginning" further increases the ambiguity of the ending scene. Such ambiguity, I contend, reveals the director's complicated attitudes towards globalization, which critique the underside of globalization and at the same time, affirm globalization's function in construction of new identities and enhancement of translocal communications, as is seen in examples of the experiences of Taisheng and Qun, and the three global landscapes.

Jia's examination of globalization in contemporary China in *The World* is represented by a cinematic style, termed as "postsocialist realism" by Jason Mcgrath in "The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic." Featured with long takes, long shots, local dialects, and amateur actors and actresses, such "postsocialist realism," Mcgrath argues, has two sources— "the broader indigenous movement of postsocialist realism that arose in both documentary and fiction filmmaking in China in the early 1990s" and "the tradition of international art cinema— in particular a type of aestheticized long-take realism that became prominent in the global film festival and art house circuit by the late 1990s" (82). Through a close reading of Jia's early films in the 1990s, Mcgrath contends that these films exhibit a postsocialist realism which "seeks to reveal a raw, underlying reality by stripping away the ideological representation that distorts it" (84). Likely, I argue that *The World* also reveals such postsocialist realism. The film's characterization, use of

long shots, amateur actors and actresses, and various dialects and languages all endeavor to represent the “raw, underlying reality” in contemporary China, a postsocialist country which has been undergoing a series of reforms in many fields so as to pursue a leading role in the globalization.

Globalization forces Chinese government to transform its previous planned economy to market economy and loosen control in many social and cultural fields. During the rapid transformation, many social groups, especially the disadvantaged ones have suffered greatly due to the increased inequality brought by global capitalism and the unequal distribution of the wealth by powerful people. Though he discerns these problems, Jia refuses to present them in a sensational way in *The World*, and instead he maintains an emotional distance from *mise-en-scène*. The credit scene is an apt example. An establishing long shot shows a corner of the World Park. In the center of the screen is the Eiffel Tower, and some skyscrapers occupy left and right corners. Then a medium shot shows a waste collector with a straw hat walking slowly into the frame. The camera is set in such an angle that it is difficult to see the person's face or tell the person's age and gender. The collector walks for a while, then pauses for a moment, looks into the camera and then continues to walk out of the frame. In the scene, the contrast between the waste collector and the glamorous world park, between the foreground and the background, between the margin and the center, between appearance and disappearance, and between movement and pause all demonstrate the director's careful delineation of the increased inequality in the globalizing China. But his use of long shot rather than close-up reflects his distance from the *mise-en-scène*. Jia's objective attitude is remarked by Tonglin Lu, “his [Jia's] portrayal of migrant workers is indeed relatively free from either the condescending or idealizing gaze usually associated with portrayals of the working class by Chinese intellectuals” (171).

Jia's objective attitude, I would argue, has been influenced by his personal backgrounds and professional trajectory. Born and grew up in

Fenyang, a small city in central China, Jia Zhangke has received professional training in filmmaking in the renowned Beijing Film Academy, from which he graduated in 1997. As he explains in an interview, he considers himself as a migrant director, a member of migrant workers—the lower class in China.⁶ Despite his identification with the disadvantageous group, he maintains an objective attitude in his films so as to “represent the contemporary Chinese reality.”⁷ Thus, his films are featured with a documentary style and a focus on marginalized groups in a rapidly transforming Chinese society. Moreover, Jia’s professional training and his negotiation with the postsocialist regime and global capitalism make him realize the difficulty and opportunity for his pursuit of the film dream as a Chinese director in a globalizing era.

Since many of Jia’s early films represent various social problems in China, they are forbidden to be screened inside China and moreover, Jia is not allowed to work with any state-owned film studios. Curiously, Chinese government’s censorship becomes an indispensable element for Jia’s international success. In the book *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, Geremie Barme offers a subtle reading of independent Chinese directors’ relationship with the postsocialist state and the global capitalism market,

Trading on their international success, many of the independents played their Western supporters and mainland opponents against each other to create an alternative system of countercultural hierarchy that, although less restricted and paternalistic than the official culture, represented a kind of baneful orthodoxy and fit neatly into the chain of production and consumption for global festival culture. (193)

⁶ Zhangke Jia, Interview by Rui Feng, “Answers to Five Major Questions about *The World*,” *Beijing Evening Newspaper* 4.16 (2005) n.pg.

⁷ Jia, *ibid*.

Barme's remark incisively uncovers the way in which sophisticated Chinese artists maneuver among the state, foreign patrons, and market. In the case of Jia, his controversial films have been screened and won prizes at various renowned international film festivals, such as Cannes Film Festival, Venice International Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, and Locarno International Film Festival. Such success brings him opportunities to cooperate with many famous global film production companies.

For *The World*, various national and global forces participate in its production, distribution, and circulation. The film is a joint-production by Jia Zhangke's Xstream Pictures, Japan's Office Kitano, and France's Lumen Films. It has also received financial support from the Shanghai Film Studio and several Japanese corporations, such as Bandai Visual, Tokyo FM, Dentsu, TV Asahi, and Bitters End. It has been distributed by Zeitgeist Films in the U.S. and Celluloid Dreams in France. Differing from Jia's early underground films which have been mainly circulated in international film festivals, *The World* is screened at international film festivals and in Chinese theatres after Jia's persistent negotiation with Chinese censors and international sponsors. As his first public released film in China, *The World* has experienced polarized reception from critics and popular audiences. Most critics praise its "truthful vivid representation of a globalizing China" whereas many audiences criticize the film's characterization and narrative structure.⁸ Despite the initial negative criticism, Jia has gradually made himself known to Chinese audience and won the acclaim of "the leader of Six Generation Chinese director" after he got The Golden Lion at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival in 2006 and The Leopard of Honour (a life work achievement award) at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2010. Thought-provokingly, Jia's international success is the essential factor for his domestic acceptance. His transformation from an underground director to an

⁸ Jia, *ibid.*

international esteemed director reflects an experienced Chinese director's skillful negotiation between a postsocialist regime and a global capitalism market.

In the contemporary world, both Chinese film industry and international film festivals are heavily influenced by global capitalism despite the two's divergence in many fields such as ideological positions, artistic tastes, and strategies in film production, circulation, and distribution. Navigating among the local and global forces, sophisticated Chinese artists such as Jia Zhangke use cinema to represent the relationship among globalization, linguistic ability, and social mobility, and urge the audience to reflect on the existing power dynamics in contemporary globalizing world.

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