



University of
Zurich ^{UZH}

Institute of East Asian Studies / Sinology

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

NOVEMBER 4-5, 2011



GHOSTS IN ASIAN CINEMAS

VÖLKERKUNDEMUSEUM
UNIVERSITÄT ZÜRICH
PELIKANSTRASSE 40
8001 ZÜRICH

[HTTP://WWW.OSTASIEN.UZH.CH/SINOLOGIE/AKTUELL/WORKSHOP2011.HTML](http://www.ostasien.uzh.ch/sinologie/aktuell/workshop2011.html)

In cooperation with:

URPP Asia and Europe
Völkerkundemuseum UZH
Institute of Film Studies
Department of Indian Studies

with generous support by:

Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Vereinigung akademischer Mittelbau USZ
Wilhelm Jerg Legat
Zürcher Universitätsverein



WORKSHOP TOPIC

Theoretical debates east and west have been haunted by the ghosts of modernity. Although there is a wealth of innovative, (post-)modern plots and motives related to ancient ghost beliefs in contemporary aesthetic texts, the study of Asian ghosts so far has been dominated by strictly ethnographic research and literary history.

In our workshop, we aim to bring together Asian perspectives on ghosts in both theoretical texts and aesthetic representations. In order to understand the impact on modernity of the non-modern in the shape of residual religious orientations and other images of spectral untimeliness, we will study the continuity of ghost narratives in modern Asian cultural production. As a working hypothesis, we contend that the figure of the ghost gains momentum in cultural performances during processes of accelerated social change and secularization. Our attention will focus on contemporary cinematographic representations of ghosts and the variety of methodological as well as theoretical approaches to this aesthetic convention, which comprises allegories of death, spectrality and haunted commemoration.

PANEL 1: URBANITY, NATURE, MODERNITY

Nature spirits, animism and the linkage of ghosts to specific geographical spheres are vital to many Asian cultures; until today, ghost and spirit belief is common. While often associated with rural regions, ghost narratives just as often pervade urban spheres. The cityscape is a popular setting for modern-day ghost movies and tales that often revisit and reenact traditional spirit belief. In what way do the two spheres – the rural and the urban – each relate to ghost stories, and how are they represented? How do the non-modern and the modern relate to each other in ghost narratives, and how is this visualized?

PANEL 2: SPECTRAL KINSHIP

In contrast to the predominantly male ghosts and demons found in Western literature and cinema (Hamlet's father, Mephisto, Dracula), the image of the ghost in East Asia and also throughout many countries in Southeast Asia is imagined primarily within the Yin-Yang cosmology where the ghost embodies the essence of the Yin world of the female, fluid, dark, cold and so on. This tradition has found its main cinematic outlet in ghost erotica, a particularly prosperous proto-narrative in Hong Kong and Chinese diaspora cinema, in which young scholars engage in romantic relationships with ghostly beauties. However, within the realm of Asian narratives of haunting, ghosts can also assume the role of the phantom heroine and/or engage in social relationships with the living. For instance, women return to the world of the living after falling victim to some form of gendered death (rape, suicide, child-birth) as powerful spirits to revenge themselves upon their tormentors (men, society). Or, in their less violent form, ghosts (of all genders) can function as gatekeepers to the netherworld of the ancestors or take possession of the living in healing rituals. This panel will direct attention to the spectral modes of "kinship" between the living and the dead and ask questions about how (female) haunting informs and transforms sexual and religious discourses in Asian cinemas.

PANEL 3: GLOBAL GOTHIC

While the Gothic and its representations are, by origin, firmly rooted in European cultures, its entrance into pop culture and thus its commodification have resulted in its global spread. This panel aims to investigate the ways in which the globalisation of the concept of Gothic is linked with the homogenising of culture and the rewriting of local traditions: How does "Gothic" transport into Asian cultures, and how does it transform there? How do its sets of meaning shift during this transculturalization, and what interplay occurs between the Gothic and local narratives of ghosts and spirits?



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2011

- 10:00 Registration
- 10:15 **Welcoming addresses**
Prof. Mareile Flitsch (Ethnographic Museum)
Prof. Andrea Riemenschnitter (Head URPP Asia and Europe)
- 10:30 **Keynote speech:**
Spectrality as an aesthetic category of Asian post-modernities
Andrea Riemenschnitter
- 11:15 15 min. coffee break
- 11:30 Film screening with lunch
Tales of the Moon and Rain (Japan, 1953)
Introduction: Elisabeth Scherrer
- 13:45 **Panel 1: Urbanity, Nature, Modernity**
- 13:45 Elisabeth Scherrer: Female ghosts in Japanese cinema and their origins in Japanese traditional arts and folk beliefs
- 14:45 Marie Laureillard: Ghostly visions in *What time is it there* of Tsai Ming-Liang
- 15:45 Natalie Böhler: „... for I had many friends in the future“: The Dream Sequence in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*
- 16:45 30 min. coffee break
- 17:15 Film screening
The Maid (Singapore, 2005)
Introduction: Natalie Böhler/Jessica Imbach
- 19:15 Speakers dinner (invitation only)



8:30 **Panel 2: Spectral Kinship**

8:30 Laura Coppens: Revenge of the Virgin - Female Ghosts in Indonesian Horror Films

9:30 Arnika Fuhrmann: *Tropical Malady*: Queer Haunting in Contemporary Thai Cinema

10:15 15 min. coffee break

10:30 Jessica Imbach: Chinese theatricality and the specter of the Cultural Revolution in Yu Xiaoyang's *The Shore of Mist*

11:15 Bliss Cua Lim: Monstrous Intimacies: Aswang Fragments in Filipino Transmedia

12:15 15 min. coffee break

12:30 Film screening with lunch
Alone (Thailand, 2007)
Introduction: Katarzyna Ancuta

14:15 15 min. coffee break

14:30 **Panel 3: Global Gothic**

14:30 Katarzyna Ancuta: Ghost Visions: Thai Spirits and the Horror Film

15:30 Kayo Adachi-Rabe: Mediality and spirituality in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cure*

16:30 30 min. Coffee break

17:00 Closing discussion with speakers and audience

19:00 Film screening
Bhul Bhulaiya (India, 2007)
Introduction: Angelika Malinar

21:30 Film screening
Woman, Demon, Human (People's Republic of China, 1987)
Introduction: Justyna Jaguścik



SPEAKERS AND ABSTRACTS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Mediality and spirituality in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cure*

Kiyoshi Kurosawa defines the film as a medium that aims at representing the mystery of the world and evoking the sense of fear. It is also well known, that his "J-horror" is not directly based on the Japanese tradition of ghost-pictures but on the genre conventions of international historical works of horror and suspense like those by Theodor Dreyer, Richard Fleischer and John Carpenter. According to their styles, Kurosawa analytically and intimately shows strange phenomena just like another possibility of the orderly daily life. In this way Kurosawa intends to stylize the sense of fear as a matter of universal film-aesthetics and of medial discourse. In my presentation I would like to analyze the film *Cure* (1997) as the most illustrative exemplar for his concepts. This film does not visualize ghosts, it mainly deals with the hypnosis and seems like a psycho-thriller. But it is made by a highly individual strategy of creating a ghost-picture that tries to transform the film itself into a "medium" that realizes a supernatural spiritual communication between characters and also between film and spectator. The openness, endlessness and enigma of "J-horror", which are purely generated by medial aesthetics, have to be analyzed as a potential recollection of Japanese ghost stories and also as a synthetic style of the international Gothic genre that reflects the sensual perception of virtuality in our medial world.

Dr. Kayo Adachi-Rabe studierte Germanistik an der Rikkyo-Universität Tokyo, Theaterwissenschaft und Kunstgeschichte an der Freien Universität Berlin. 2002 Promotion an der Philipps-Universität Marburg zum Thema „Abwesenheit im Film. Zur Theorie und Geschichte des hors-champ“ (Münster: Nodus Publikationen 2005). Tätigkeit als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin im Institut für Japanologie an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (1997-2008) und im Ostasiatischen Institut an der Universität Leipzig (2008-2009). Forschungsschwerpunkte: Filmtheorie, Medienphilosophie, internationale Filmgeschichte. Aktuelles Forschungsthema: Film als Kunst des Paradoxons. Thema zum Projekt "WerteWelten": Repräsentation der Freiheit in den gegenwärtigen asiatischen Filmen.

Ghost Visions: Thai Spirits and the Horror Film

Thai horror films are collectively known as *nung phii* (ghost films), the term presupposing the centrality of the ghost figure for their plots. Depending on the nature of the ghosts they portray, Thai ghost films can roughly be divided into three groups: horror-comedies featuring animistic spirits and traditional Thai ghosts better suited to the old-fashioned rural lifestyle, exploitation/gore films telling violent tales of spiritual possession and black magic, and scary stories of vindictive *phii tai hong* (spirits of the violently dead), which form the core of the most significant productions. This paper documents the changing representation of Thai cinematic ghosts and examines their evolution in the context of the broader economic, political and social transformations brought about by the process of globalization and modernization in Thailand. The discussion delineates four general directions contemporary Thai ghost films tend to follow: 1) engaging the global-local nexus – combining local content with global methods of production and post-production; 2) riding the pan-Asian horror wave – capitalizing on the success of Japanese and Korean horror; 3) modernization and globalization of the genre by de-materializing and de-literalizing its ghosts and turning them into "global" figures of fear; and 4) further modernization and transformation of Thai horror to fit the demands of urban Thai culture – bringing horror closer to home.

Dr. Katarzyna Ancuta is a lecturer at the Graduate School of English at Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests focus on contemporary cultural manifestations of Gothic, particularly in such areas as popular fiction, comics and graphic novels, multimedia and performance art, film and video, theatre, music and dance, fashion and alternative lifestyles. Most of her publications are concerned with the interdisciplinary contexts of contemporary Gothic and Horror, and recently with



(South)-East Asian (particularly Thai) cinema and supernatural anthropology. She is also involved in a number of film-related projects in South-East Asia, coordinating Asian Cultural Studies Association based in Bangkok and editing Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society, published by Assumption University Press.

„... for I had many friends in the future“: The Dream Sequence in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*

In a short sequence from Apichatpong Weerasethakul's most recent feature film „Loong Boonmee Raleuk Chat / Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives“ (Thailand 2010), Boonmee, the film's main character, relates a recent dream of his at the moment of his passing away. The dream differs from the rest of the film in terms of aesthetics and narration and can be read as a key sequence. This paper examines the implications of the sequence's cinematic form for the films' story, the way it reflects the medium film on a metalevel, and how this relates to Thai political conflicts of the past and the present.

Dr. des. Natalie Böhler is a postdoctoral researcher. She teaches World Cinema at the Institute of Film Studies of the University of Zurich. Her Dissertation Made in Thailand focuses on aesthetics, narration and nationalism in recent Thai cinema. Her research focuses on East and Southeast Asian cinemas, cultural transnationalism and narratology.

Revenge of the Virgin - Female Ghosts in Indonesian Horror Films

Laura Coppens, M.A., is currently a PhD candidate at the University Research Priority Program »Asia and Europe«, University of Zurich, Switzerland. She has studied social anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin and Melbourne University. Parallel to her work at university Laura is producing her own films and holds several jobs for both film festivals and film productions. Since 2007 she is the director and head of the Southeast Asia section as well as the Queer Asia section of ASIAN HOT SHOTS BERLIN, festival for Asian independent film and video art in Berlin, Germany.

Tropical Malady: Queer Haunting in Contemporary Thai Cinema

This paper examines how the cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul deploys Buddhist-coded tropes of haunting to intervene into the struggles over sexual exemplarity and citizenship that preoccupied the Thai political public sphere in the past decade and a half. The director mobilizes Buddhist tropes and images to lay claim to a domain that is thoroughly occupied by conservative, nationalist discourses and to transform it into a legitimizing tool for queer sexualities. But Apichatpong also uses Buddhist haunting to expand the domain of fantasy and to show how the historical and social negativity of same-sex desire may be engaged beyond the goals of juridical reparation, national reconciliation, and notions of diversity. Ultimately the paper is interested in what happens when desire and sexual personhood are rendered neither exclusively in liberal terms nor entirely in local idioms purported to be antithetical to liberalism.

Dr. Arnika Fuhrmann is an interdisciplinary scholar of Thailand working at the intersections of the country's aesthetic and political modernities. After completing her Ph.D. in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago (2008), she took up a postdoctoral fellowship at the Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry. In September 2010 she joined the University of Hong Kong's Society of Scholars in the Humanities as a research scholar. Recent articles have appeared in *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, *Oriens Extremus*, and *positions: east asia cultures critique* (forthcoming 2011). Her book project *Ghostly Desires* examines how Buddhist-coded anachronisms of haunting figure struggles over sexuality in contemporary Thai cinema. Her new



research project, *Under Permanent Exception: Violence, Buddhist-Muslim Coexistence, and (New) Media in the Thai South*, extends her interests in sexuality and cinema into the domain of interreligious conflict. It proposes a reframing of understandings of Buddhist-Muslim antagonisms through the analysis of their quotidian, affective dimensions.

Chinese theatricality and the specter of the Cultural Revolution in Yu Xiaoyang's *The Shore of Mist*

Chinese opera has been called the “backbone” of Chinese cinema. So far studies have primarily focused on the aesthetic influence of opera on Chinese cinematography. In the Chinese performance tradition, however, the stage and the performer are uniquely linked to the after-world. This paper will examine how in the movie *The Shore of Mist* by Yu Xiaoyang exorcist performance elements are infused with modern notions of romantic love to work through the (inherited) traumata or *psychic phantoms* of the Cultural Revolution, which beleaguer the modern urbanite. The main focus will lie on the analysis of the wide range of motifs such as doppelgänger, mirror-reflections, puppets and facial paintings the movie employs to visualize the social as well as cultural uprootedness of today's young urbanites in China as well as their relation to historical debates on ghost operas cultural significance.

Jessica Imbach, M.A., is currently a lecturer and PhD candidate in Modern Chinese Studies at the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of Zurich, Switzerland. In April 2010 she graduated from the University of Zurich with her Master's thesis on space and cultural identity in Yan Lianke's novel *Shouhuo*. From 2004-2005 she studied at Beijing Yuyan xueyuan (Beijing Language and Culture University) with a CRUS study grant. In 2009 she won the translation contest “Kreuzworträtsel” of the Goethe Institute Shanghai with her partial translation of Wang Anyi's novel *Moonstruck*.

Ghostly visions in *What time is it there* of Tsai Ming-Liang

Dr. Marie Laureillard is Assistant professor in Chinese language and civilization at the University Lumière - Lyon 2. Her research interests include: culture and society in China and Taiwan; poetry, essays, novels as well as popular visual culture (print culture) in their socio-cultural context; the relation between text and image (visual poetry, illustration, cinema); translation theory and practice; representations of women in Chinese literature and arts.

Monstrous Intimacies: Aswang Fragments in Filipino Transmedia

Aswang are chronicled in sixteenth century accounts of Spanish conquest in the Visayan and Luzon regions of the Philippines. This folkloric Philippine monster is usually translated in English as a witch who can take various forms, especially the guise of animals. One well-known variety of aswang is the manananggal, usually translated as a “self-segmenting viscera sucker” because its winged upper torso detaches from the lower half of its body at night, allowing the manananggal to fly in search of its human prey. The functionalist paradigms that dominate Philippine folklore studies often frame the aswang as a national symbol for monstrous asociality, the symbolic antinomy of bonds of love and kinship. This paper attempts to oppose that conventional framing of aswang by exploring aswang accounts across various media— orality, print, celluloid cinema and digital video — that have been elided by the dominant functionalist paradigm. In the transmedial narrative fragments I plan to explore, the monster is not an outside other; rather, aswang are kinfolk, companions, or sweethearts in the grips of supernatural becoming, raising questions of intimacy, unexpected monstrosity, and the permeable borders between the human and the nonhuman. Instead of shoring up the social order by functioning as its



negation, many accounts of aswang show them to be part of the social fabric themselves. Though aswang beliefs have been used to argue for the homogeneity of national Filipino culture, dispositions toward aswang in the Philippines and in Filipino America are variegated and uneven, contravening the fantasy of a homogeneous national culture. This paper weaves media-convergent retaso (fragments) drawn from several Filipino and Filipino American sources: nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of aswang and babaylanes, the transgender shamans they were often conflated with; feminist cartooning (Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons*, 2002); a post-studio era horror film (*Mga Bata Ng Lagim* [Children of Terror], 1964); independent digital shorts (*Bakasyon* [The Visit], 2004; and *Lola* [Grandmother], 2010); and amateur video (*Amabilis2*, 2011). I interweave these retaso from a queer perspective, where queer is understood not in substantive but in anti-identitarian terms. Methodologically, this paper adopts a transmedial analysis in order to illuminate what is usually occluded by the conventional understanding of "folklore" as timeless, traditional, and anti-technological.

Dr. Felicidad "Bliss" Cua Lim is Associate Professor in Film & Media Studies and director of the Graduate Program in Visual Studies at the University of California, Irvine. She is the author of *Translating Time: Cinema, The Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (2009). Her research interests include: Philippine cinema; temporality; archival loss; postcolonial and feminist film theory; transnational Asian horror and the fantastic; taste cultures.

Keynote speech: Spectrality as an aesthetic category of Asian post-modernities

The notion of spectrality shall tentatively be applied to the increasingly popular aesthetic representation of ghosts and other incomplete incarnations in literature, theatre, film and the visual arts. Such enactments of uncanny, spooky, non-identical repetitions seem to haunt the contemporary passage from colonial modernities to postmodern spatio-temporal configurations in Asia. As hypermodern megacities continuously forget and reinvent their pasts, the idea of an amodern, timeless nature that has no memory and can be technically conquered, penetrated, and controlled is challenged by notions of a shared, posthuman history.

Prof. Andrea Riemenschneider is Professor of Modern Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. She is currently the Director of Zurich University's University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe. Her research is focused on constructions and representations of Chinese modernities in fiction, theatre, film and poetry. Among her most recent publications are *Karneval der Götter. Mythologie, Moderne und Nation in Chinas 20. Jahrhundert* (Carnival of the Gods. Mythology, Modernity and the Nation in China's Twentieth Century, 2011), *Diasporic Histories. Archives of Chinese Transnationalism* (ed. with D. Madsen, HKU Press 2009), and *Legends from the Swiss Alps - Ruishi A'erbeisishan de chuanshuo* (ed. with Leung Ping-kwan), Hong Kong: mccm creations 2009.

Female ghosts in Japanese cinema and their origins in Japanese traditional arts and folk beliefs

Yūrei, a term denoting ghosts such as Sadako in Nakata Hideo's film "Ringu," can be traced back to restless souls in Nō theatre, horrific creatures that populated the Kabuki stages of the Edo period (1603–1868) and the works of ukiyo-e masters such as Hokusai or Yoshitoshi. Literary personifications of female ghosts appeared as early as in the Heian period (794–1185), for example, in *Genji Monogatari* and *Konjaku Monogatari*. One of Elisabeth Scherer's research objectives is to find out what these representations of female yūrei and their modifications throughout cultural history reveal about Japanese society. Her analysis is centered around four works that depict ghostly female protagonists: *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* ("Ghost of Yotsuya," Nakagawa Nobuo, 1959), *Ugetsu Monogatari* ("Ugetsu," Mizoguchi Kenji, 1953), *Ringu* ("Ring," Nakata Hideo, 1998), and *Ôdishon* ("Audition," Miike Takashi, 1999). Each of these movies represents an individual set of motifs, which are also



present in numerous other works. The kaidan movies of the 1950s were dominated by perceptions of women as vengeful and jealous beings and the understanding of female sexuality as abject—concepts that had been prominent in Japan since the Edo period. The outer appearance of these eerie women has changed little—the heroines of the 1990s J-Horror are similar to their Edo predecessors in every detail—but these entities now allude to different kinds of fears. People who encounter ghosts find themselves in a diffuse situation that is marked by obscure intersections of the present and the past, traditions, and urban loneliness. In J-Horror, there are only a few hints on how to decipher the phenomena that threaten the protagonists. These “new ghosts” often derive from dysfunctional or even destructive family structures. Instead of being a refuge, the dissolving family becomes a phobic institution with a high potential for generating ghosts.

Dr. Elisabeth Scherer, geboren 1980, studierte von 2000 bis 2006 Japanologie und Allgemeine Rhetorik an der Universität Tübingen und an der Dôshisha Universität in Kyôto. Ihre im September 2009 abgeschlossene Dissertation, betreut von Prof. Klaus Antoni (Tübingen), widmet sich weiblichen Geistern im japanischen Film und deren kulturhistorischen Ursprüngen. Diese Arbeit wurde von April 2007 bis März 2009 von der Landesgraduiertenförderung Baden-Württemberg unterstützt und wurde mit dem Promotionspreis der Universität Tübingen ausgezeichnet. Von August bis November 2008 war Elisabeth Scherer außerdem Stipendiatin am DIJ Tôkyô. Seit April 2009 ist sie am Institut Modernes Japan als Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin tätig. Neben Ihrer Arbeit als Dozentin ist sie derzeit mit der Organisation einer Veranstaltungsreihe zum Jubiläumsjahr der deutsch-japanischen Beziehungen betraut (tokyo-duesseldorf.de).



DIRECTIONS

The workshop will take place at:
Völkerkundemuseum / Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich
Pelikanstrasse 40
CH-8001 Zürich
Tel. +41 (0)44 634 90 11



By public transport:

From Zurich Main Railway Station:

Tram 6,7,11,13 till „Rennweg“

Continue down Bahnhofstrasse, branch off to the right into Pelikanstrasse, after about 5 min. you will reach a park, in which the museum is situated.

From Central (near Hotel Basilea):

Tram 6,7,11 till „Rennweg“; see above.

From Bellevue:

Tram 8 till „Bahnhof Selnau“; enter the park, follow the pathway to the main building.

<http://www.musethno.uzh.ch/museum/lageplan.html> - top



The hotel is located near the tram station “Central” (upper right corner):

Hotel Basilea
Zähringerstr. 25
CH-8001 Zürich
Tel. + 41 44 256 76 00
<http://www.hotelbasilea.ch>

From the airport take the train to Zurich Main Railway Station (Hauptbahnhof).
You can either walk across the bridge to Central or take the tram 3,4, 6 or 7 for one stop.
From “Central” it’s a one-minute walk along Zähringerstrasse to the hotel.