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Negotiating National Identity on Film: Competing Readings of Zhang Yimou's *Hero*.

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Abstract

How are national identities transformed? If they are mostly narratives of belonging to a community of history and destiny to which people subscribe, those boundary-making procedures that constitute the political field by instituting difference can provide a tentative answer to this question. This paper is concerned with one such cultural practice, namely film viewing. Globalisation, a boundary-blurring practice, has been the backdrop against which transformations in national identity are often discussed, either bemoaned as cultural imperialism or celebrated as ongoing hybridisation. This article discusses the findings of a piece of research that took Zhang Yimou's controversial film "Hero" as a point of departure, and asked groups of Chinese audiences how they understood the Chinese identity it conveys.

About the author

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Negotiating National Identity on Film: Competing Readings of Zhang Yimou's *Hero*.

Along with other developing countries in the Asian region, China has recently been at the forefront of intensified economic and cultural-flows and globalisation processes. Indeed, it is generally considered that China is one of the main driving forces. By way of example, the value of its exports has grown from roughly USD$ 10,000 million a year in the early 1980s when reforms were first undertaken, to some USD$ 762,000 million in 2005. (World Bank, 2006) For the past decade it has consistently grown at rates of over 8 per cent yearly, and last year it received Foreign Direct Investment of over USD $60,300 million, becoming the world's second largest receptor. (Castellanos, 2005) As regards its media, FDI in Chinese telecommunications and Internet services is now high, and along with advertising and information technology, the motion pictures industry is another sector where it is growing rapidly, ranging from increasing Hollywood imports to 50 per year to renovation of cinema houses and film co-production. (Lee, 13) Symbolically, its membership in the World Trade Organisation in 2002 and its successful bid to host the Olympic Games in 2008 are indicators of the degree to which China is, as put by Zhao, "entering the world." (Zhao, 32)

However, this prosperity has also brought with it a rise in inequality of development, income and wealth distribution, especially evident across the rural/urban and the regional West/East divide.[1] Moreover, as is usually the case in economic success stories, there have been winners and losers since the reforms started. The Chinese film market, the second largest exporter and third largest producer of feature films as recently as 1994 had by 1997 lost 75 per cent of annual ticket sales, as audiences turned to Hollywood films, with both economic and cultural implications for China. (Curtin, 238) Moreover, liberalisation means the Chinese audiovisual sphere is bound to become more and more engaged with mediascapes from elsewhere. Research on recent film production, for instance, has already shown how China's intensified contact with the West has allowed for a growing transnationalisation of the Chinese film industry, evident in the realms of production, distribution and consumption, that goes beyond the mere borrowing and adaptation which used to be the case before.[2] (Silbergeld, 5) This would represent, according to Jerome Silbergeld, "an enrichment of Chinese culture through an engagement *on their own terms* with non-Chinese cultures, challenging all they interact with, recombining [this]…with material from China's own native culture, and achieving an original result." (Ibid, emphasis in original) Thus according to some critics at least, transnational film as to form, content and means of circulation is already a reality in China, and all for the better.

But what about audiences' perceptions? Have all these changes brought with them a re-definition of the way the national identity is understood? Has China's

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[1] According to the *New York Times*, now the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population has nearly half of all the income in China. (*New York Times*, 15 May 2002, quoted by Lee, 26)

[2] Some maintain that Chinese transnational film has in fact existed from the very beginning, film itself —and indeed, the actual concept of the nation state— being a Western import, and thus a form of ongoing appropriation would always have been at the heart of Chinese cinema. (Lu, 1997) However, the argument here is that transnationalisation now implies international financing, actors and crews from around the world and presumed global audiences, beyond the mere sinicisation of a narrative form. (Berry, 149)

economic opening up to the world had an influence in the way the national 'we' is perceived, especially among the more educated younger generation? How are national identities in general transformed anyway? This paper will attempt to provide a provisional answer, bridging the gap between theory and practice. The first, theoretical part is thus devoted to the explanation of what is here meant by national identity, how it changes over time and why it is both valid and fruitful to focus on films for its analysis, while the second part is devoted to the discussion of what a film such as *Hero* can tell us about Chinese identity nowadays. So let us start with the theory.

1. Theory

The debate on the origins and transformation of nations is traditionally presented, in a rather over-simplified fashion, but nonetheless a useful one for heuristic purposes, as a continuum. At one end there would be the 'perennialists', for whom nations have a platonic essence and thus they can undergo minor superficial transformations but the 'national character' would not change. This belief, probably grounded on Kant's ideas of freedom as self-determination and on Fichte and the German Romantics underpinned the League of Nations, but it is now espoused only by the nationalists themselves.

A less extreme view would regard the nation as "a deposit of the ages, a stratified or layered structure of social, political and cultural experiences and traditions laid down by successive generations of an identifiable community," often an ethnic one. (Smith, 1999: 171) For China, this is sometimes interpreted as a Han ethnic majority forming the core or centre around which minorities coalesce to form the identifiable community in question. Thus nations and the identities of their peoples would change, according to this perspective, by the experience of the successive generations amounting to depositing 'new layers' that can only be built on previous ones, which would in turn determine the shape and the content of the recently added layers. The experience of the generations is not only constrained as regards its interpretation —by the experience of earlier generations— but also by the pattern of cultural elements that make up a sense of continuity, shared memories and notions of collective destiny. In addition, a supposedly mystical, organic nationalism is attributed to China and other Asian countries, while a rationalist association approach is depicted as pertaining to the West. (Kohn quoted in Smith, 1991: 8) Understood in this way, only major developments such as war and conquest, exile and enslavement, the influx of immigrants and religious conversion would qualify as factors that can account for the transformation of national identities. (Smith, 1991: 25)

At the other end of the debate however, we would find two opposite but equivalent positions. For the most extreme one, not only are national, and indeed all other collective identities not 'natural', either as eternal essences or superimposed layers of successive experience, but they are never even fully achieved. Living is not a case of being but of becoming. (Deleuze, 1990) Always unfinished, always in the making, identities can never really fully *be*, as they are contingent and relational. Accurate as this may be, this position, if taken too far, would make all theorising on identity untenable. Thus a more nuanced version holds that in the specific case of national identities, the 'nation' on which they depend is a historical, modern construction. From this perspective, the conditions for its emergence were economic as well as social and political, including the development of capitalism, the passage

from agrarian to industrial societies coupled with the formation of vernacular languages and more generally of a high culture spreading downwards and vice versa. (Hobsbawm, 1991; Gellner, 1983) Also taken into consideration are the role of the elites and intelligentsias engaging in nation and state-building and the nascent media, especially newspapers, novels, and more recently of course cinema. (Anderson, 1991) According to this perspective, national identities would undergo transformations when the economic, social and political conditions for the existence of nations in turn either ceased to be or became so intense as to change in nature, and their representation in the media as well as their reception by audiences concerned is crucial in this process.

It is abundantly clear that the conditions identified by 'modernists' are now changing, this very change often called 'globalisation.' Some have even declared the end of modernity itself, defining current 'post-modernity' as "disbelief towards meta-narratives," and pointing to the ways that reality has been replaced by "simulacra." (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv; Baudrillard, 1994) Others espouse a more nuanced position, speaking instead of "late," "high" or "accentuated" modernity, whose main features would be the end of tradition, understood as the end of the cyclical reproduction of customs, habits and cherished assumptions across generations, all of these crucial to nationalism; the separation of time and space; the disembedding of social institutions; intrinsic reflexivity; and pervasive risk-calculation. (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992) It is further argued that the world economy now has for the first time "the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale," and that new electronic media foster communities where "the unit is the network." (Castells, 1996: 92-93) But whether 'post', 'late' or 'high' modernity, it is acknowledged that the present is in any case a context in which both supra and sub-national entities pose a challenge to the national states that came to embody the idea of the nation, and with it, the national identities it sustains.

National identities are therefore here to be understood, in line with 'modernist' perspectives, as narratives of belonging that raise and erase cultural boundaries for inclusion and exclusion, hegemonic during periods of stability, but in constant need of renewal. These narratives are always the result of a compromise: they have to anchor authenticity firmly in the past, while at the same time guaranteeing access to modernity and thus the present and the future. They have to perform a balancing act that will allow continuity through change. In other words, national identity is a discursively constructed subject-position, achieved when performed: each time it is performed, or 'cited' is part of a chain that iterates it, but each time in different times and spaces. In China, in particular, the sweeping scale of the social and economic changes that have been taking place since the 1980s as outlined above are straining traditional narratives of belonging, from culturalism through Han-centred ethnic nationalism to state-driven political nationalism. As put by Jonathan Unger, "increasingly, the content of Chinese nationalism has been up for grabs." (Unger, xvi) While some argue a "southern narrative" emphasising diversity of origins, mercantile openness and international interaction is struggling to become hegemonic, others speak of what they regard as an inward-looking "militant nationalism" rooted in doubts and fears over China's new place in the world. (Pye, 86-112; Crane, 148-168; Barmé, 183-208) There is however agreement that nationalism as a discourse is now one of the main cohesion factors in China today, be it the official, state-driven

rhetoric or what Lee calls the more 'populist' variety. (Lee, 4)[3] In both accounts, 'the West' has a central role for the re-definition of national identity, either as a signifier of a modernity many would wish to embrace, or as a threat capable of undermining the very essence of 'Chineseness.'

Having discussed the issue of national identities then, let us turn now to the issue of their relationship to cinema. Aesthetically, the main features of the nineteenth century novel which, according to Andserson's persuasive account, became crucial in allowing given populations of readers to think of themselves as members of a national community, namely the idea of simultaneity and the chronotope, were both inherited by cinema, through parallel editing and mise-en-scène respectively, and were all the more effective since they did not require literacy to convey meaning. As regards the technology itself, the birth of the motion pictures coincided with that of consumer society in the West. It assisted in the incorporation of large sectors of populations who were migrating from the countryside into the cities, as well as of women after the Second World War. This allowed them to partake into the culture being 'massified', that is, the national culture. (Gaines, 102) Cinema also became a force that tended towards the homogenisation of its audiences as regards its mode of reception, which became standardised, initially also encouraging the mingling between classes and genders. (Hansen, 394) In addition to the aesthetic features of the cinematic mode of representation and the features of its technology, the cinema-going experience is also a particularly effective way to interpellate an audience in the complex process of identity-construction, including of course the construction of national identity:

> The cinematic experience…fashions a plural, 'mutant' self, occupying a range of subject positions. One is 'doubled' by the cinematic apparatus, at once in the movie theatre and with the…action on screen. And one is further dispersed through the multiplicity of perspectives provided by…montage…Spectatorship can become a liminal space of dreams and self-fashioning. Through its psychic chamaleonism, ordinary social positions, as in carnival, are temporarily bracketed. (Shohat and Stam, 1996: 165)

To summarise, given its features as a modern mass medium and thus one closely related to the nation, cinema has been regarded as a privileged site for putting forward and contesting representations of the nation, or in short, as a main arena in which narratives of national identity are negotiated. But if nation building and cinema closely interacted with each other for most of the twentieth century, or as put by Meghnad Desai, while "capitalism in one country, with its Keynesian protective belt" lasted, cinema has since the collapse of the Soviet Union and since the widespread borderless mobility of capital took hold become instrumental in the challenging of the national states it took part in consolidating. (Desai quoted by Vitali and Willemen, 3) Co-productions and the nationalities of actors and actresses as well as crews have made it problematic to ascribe nationality to a film product, although this continues to

[3] It is also generally agreed that nationalism is now particularly strong among the young, who nonetheless have also been the segment of the population more deeply influenced by Western culture since China's economic opening. There seems therefore to be a contradiction: most young people in China are now internationalist or even cosmopolitan in their personal values as regards their private life, including study and work expectations, but increasingly nationalist as regards politics and the public realm. (Rosen, 106)

be a key aspect of its marketing. Cultural specificity is apparently also played down in an effort to reach global audiences, thus tending towards homogenisation at the lowest common cultural denominator. "Scrambling spatial and temporal co-ordinates…bringing elsewhere into proximity and lifting the local into a global circuit," cinema now dislocates as much as shapes versions of the identity, thus remaining an ideal medium for research on their ongoing construction and reconstruction. (Harbord, 1)

Moreover, the importance that theories of the globalisation of culture ascribe to cinema is arguably greater than the importance attributed to other media. Research on audience reception for instance has shown that in the case of television, it is indigenous programmes that are usually quoted as the ones preferred by audiences worldwide. (Sinclair et al., 1996; Grantham, 2) Music is said to be more directed towards the young, thus the consequences of the globalisation of the music industry are shown mainly in a specific age group within a national population. (Levinson, 45-99) In the case of cinema however, the globalisation of the film industry has had an impact at the level of national cultures, especially on the middle and upper middle classes of developing countries. (Rosen, 108) Theorists of 'hybridisation' hail this impact, since they regard it as a mere mixing of the American culture as spread by Hollywood and the local cultures that appropriate it and adapt it, as part of an ongoing process of cultural hybridisation that has taken place ever since cultures were first in contact with each other. (Hannerz, 1992; Watson, 1997 et al.) On the other hand, theorists of 'cultural imperialism' deplore this impact, since they stress the unequal relation between the dominant and the local cultures, and on this basis they do not regard the result of the encounter a mere 'hybridisation,' but rather an instance of imposition or defensive retreat, thus cultural imperialism. (Mac Bride and Roach, 1989; Schiller, 1992) Whether regarded as benign or as a threat, the influence on local cultures exerted by Hollywood films is not denied.

2. Practice

As an ostensibly hybrid cultural product, not uncommon in an age of transnational cinemas, Zhang Yimou's *Hero* has been discussed in precisely those very terms. Is its adoption of all features that are the hallmark of the Hollywood blockbuster to be understood as an instance of what Zygmunt Bauman would call cultural anthropophagy, namely the un-making of otherness, in this case 'Westerness' by assimilation, turning it into an un-threatening part of the self? Or is it to be regarded as the opposite, the wilful surrender of whatever was Chinese to the West in the pursuit of a modern representation of 'Chineseness', or worse, as some would have it, of plain greed? (Bauman, 49) In other words, in the power relations that were involved in the making of this hybrid, was 'China' at the producing, or at the receiving end? For Michel Foucault "the successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing [the] rules, to replace those who had used them, to…invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them." (Foucault, 86) In the same vein, and following Michel De Certeau, media researchers currently working on China have been able to identify instances of what they call resistance in journalism, with some reporters "framing enterprising projects in terms of Party rhetoric, co-opting the anachronistic propaganda line into market and professional logics." (Lee, 17) Could *Hero* also be construed in this way?

Among film critics, its detractors object to the film on mainly three accounts: the version of history it seems to endorse, its allegedly low quality standards,

indicated by what is described as a remarkably weak plot, and more pointedly and damningly, its unabashed Orientalism. (Zhang, 2003) Its admirers on the other hand praise it for its formal and aesthetic qualities, for making inroads into the mainstream and for what they argue is its narrative ambiguity, a common feature of the more artistic films. (Zhang, 2005) And among audiences, if tickets and DVD sales are anything to go by, the film was hugely popular in China, where it boasted ticket sales for USD$ 28.5 million during the first month of its release alone, nearly the USD$ 32.87 million it took to produce.[4] (BBC, 2004) But how is this popularity to be interpreted? Is this indicative of audiences engaging with and endorsing what Stuart Hall would call a 'preferred reading' of the film? (Hall, 1991) Is this tacit approval of the turn to Hollywood as the appropriate development path for Chinese cinema? Does it in fact question the relevance of national identity issues at the moment of engaging with film? Between January and March 2006, 32 English-speaking Chinese university students between the ages of 18 and 23 at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China volunteered to reply to my questionnaire and interviews asking for their readings of *Hero* and the sense they made of the Chinese identity it conveys. Let us now discuss their answers in the light of the criticism raised.

So let us begin with the issue of narrative structure, the first criticism often raised against *Hero*, also described as 'lack of content.' The most generous defence has perhaps been the interpretation of *Hero* as a postmodern film, characterised by a tragic ending, absence as spectacle and a fragmented, disjointed narrative made up of conflicting and mutually contradictory versions, truth being simply a matter of who gets to tells them at any particular point. Its postmodernity could also be understood on account of its narrative hybridity, telling the quintessentially modern story —that of the foundation of the nation, with all its implications for the present and the future— in the language of the global blockbuster, highly reliant on special effects: technology, associated with the future, is here deployed to reconstruct and enhance the past. The Chineseness of *Hero* is in this interpretation regarded as lying in its embodiment of the philosophy of Tao, whereby all characters "learn progressively to renounce what they have been striving for, and grow to accept that their goals were merely provisional, stations on the path to something greater, though less tangible." (Kaicer, 5) In this instance, only a minority (15%) of those who responded to the survey either agreed with the post-modern interpretation or found the story interesting in its own right, while the vast majority (85%) thought the story was *Hero*'s weakest point, only tolerable given its formal aesthetic qualities, which nearly all described as "very beautiful" and "breathtaking".

Let us move on then, to the issue of the plot. Detractors have read a narrative that provides justification for authoritarianism, since the very feature that makes the main character a Hero is his renunciation to assassinate King Qin Shihuangdi, a tyrant according to a number of historical records, who they believe is glorified and exculpated in the film. (Quah, 2006) The film is here interpreted as conveying the message that individual sacrifice is the ultimate good if it is for the benefit of the larger group, and that loyalty to the national group overrides any other loyalty. In addition, given Zhang Yimou's earlier allegorical work, where criticism of the present takes place indirectly, through the telling of stories about the past, *Hero* is also

[4] The film had already recovered its production costs before exhibition anyway, as distribution rights were pre-sold to Miramax for USD$ 20 million, while the soundtrack and DVD distribution rights in China were also pre-sold for USD$ 7.2 million. (Berry and Farquhar, 212)

understood as a film about the present state of China rather than its origins. Thus the relevance of this criticism seems acute. Detractors also regard the fact that the film premiered at the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square, and that it was endorsed by Chinese leaders, as proof of their endorsement to this interpretation of the narrative.[5] Admirers have read instead an ambiguous story, where the King is continuously framed in constrained, enclosed spaces, and made to appear small and even rather powerless in every respect, especially when he has to order the execution of Nameless. Instead of the incarnation of a despotic, absolute power, the King is in this interpretation shown to be trapped into a social network that constrains and even determines his actions. Moreover, the story has diverged so much from received historical accounts, they argue, and has gone so far back in time that it encourages a 'macro-cosmic', metaphorical interpretation, where the king is to represent monarchy in general rather than the King of Qin in particular. (Zhang, 52) In this reading, *Hero* is exonerated from upholding tyranny, and it is the main character's individual qualities of strength, courage and wisdom that make him a hero, rather than any narrative of sacrifice for the common good.

Among respondents however, substituting 'strong government' for 'tyrannical rule', 6% agreed with the detractors' preferred reading, but did not find it problematic to endorse this interpretation of the story. 63% produced a negotiated reading, where the king is seen as much as a tyrant as he was a hero, and many refused to draw any connections with either history or the present, stating that *Hero* was very clearly a piece of fiction, bearing only a very loose relation with historical fact. The remaining 31% agreed with the detractors' preferred reading, and found the film wanting on the same grounds. Regarding the reason why the hero can be considered to be one, the majority (57%) agreed that sacrificing oneself for the good of the community is both highly commendable and very Chinese, while 24% interpreted the main character's heroism to be an individual issue of personal qualities, and a further 19% did not find enough grounds to call this or indeed any other character in the film a hero at all.

Finally, let us deal with the issue of Orientalism. Films by directors of the fifth generation have often been understood as cultural critiques aiming precisely at clearing the way to modernity, taking the form of iconoclastic attacks on tradition while at the same time trying to recover Chinese roots and national history. (Cornelius, 2001) Zhang Yimou himself has on several occasions stated that what he wants to express "is the Chinese people's oppression and confinement, which has been going on for thousands of years." (Zhang Yimou quoted in Hsiao-Peng, 110) However, a perfectly valid, constructive project of self-criticism loses legitimacy in the eyes of many Chinese critics when it becomes simply "the cinematic construction and representation of the Chinese nation [thereby turned into the object] for the [active] gaze of the West." (Hsiao-Peng, 126) Further, it is a cause of great concern that it is only when expressed in the aesthetic language of the West that a Chinese film can make it into the mainstream abroad. Counter arguments do not usually question any of these assertions, but rather point out to the difficulties of making films in the present context of shrinking audiences, dwindling sources for production, competition from a variety of media, and censorship, adducing there is a need rather than a choice for Chinese filmmakers to produce Orientalist films for Western

[5] In a different but related reading, discussing representations of masculinity in *Hero*, Berry and Farquhar have noted that as the plot revolves around not killing the king/father, Chinese masculinity would seem to become "absorbed into the abstract idea of the Chinese nation." (Berry and Farquhar, 166)

audiences. Would the young, highly educated Chinese audience of my sample agree with the critics on this point?

To begin with, while 54% of my respondents described *Hero* an instance of Hollywood's influence on Chinese film, 38% thought it was Chinese influence on Hollywood instead[6] and 8% described it as a two-way influence. Among those who said it was Hollywood's influence on Chinese film, one respondent described this in positive terms, as China 'learning' from Hollywood, while most of them used the word 'copy.' Those who stated that they found the film particularly Chinese (43%), did not regard the construction of a mysterious, exotic China as an inauthentic version of the nation, but rather described it as either the director's personal vision, or as belonging in the fantasy style that rightfully belongs to *Hero* qua genre: martial arts films are not necessarily expected to appear 'realist.'[7] A further 24% regarded the manufacture of this exotic China as a Western product, but still the plot, the production team and crucially the financial benefit for a Chinese team were deemed reasons enough to regard *Hero* as particularly Chinese, even if with too many Western elements. The product was acknowledged as hybrid, but its hybridity was not objected to. Indeed, two of the students who liked the film actually mentioned this "mixing of China and the West" as of the main reasons. 33% of respondents agreed with the critics, saying of *Hero* that "maybe for Westerners, it's very Chinese" or "maybe foreigners think this film is wonderful because they do not understand the real Chinese culture." Here *Hero*'s hybridity was acknowledged too, but found deeply problematic. Finally, while most respondents expressed pride in *Hero*'s world-wide box-office success,[8] a couple held a cynical view that the film meant only personal fame for Zhang Yimou but not much for China, and 24% were worried that the film would "cause stereotypes" or "impress people the wrong way." Interestingly, one person seemed to challenge the idea that only realist representations can ever be faithful to convey a national reality, since she said of *Hero* that in her view, the film meant a liberation for China: "Now a Chinese film speaks about Chinese values without having to focus on an awful environment, as previous films did." Perhaps the appropriation of what many regard as a distinctively Western aesthetic language is in this case experienced as liberation rather than submission. In his metaphor of nations as separate fishbowls where culture acts as a breathing formula that allows life, Ernest Gellner pointed to a fundamental similarity underlying nations in developed countries in the following terms: "The formula for the medium of the fully developed industrial goldfish bowls is fairly similar in type, though it is rich in relatively superficial, but deliberately stressed, brand-differentiating characteristics." (Gellner, 52) It would seem that some viewers are interpreting what others call the Chinese-made Orientalism of *Hero* as the cultural output of a fully-developed, modern China instead.

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[6] A view also expressed, incidentally, by the director himself in a number of interviews on British television, where he quoted Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* as a case in point. (BBC news website, accessed on 3 March 2004)

[7] In fact, while period films or costume dramas produced in Western countries are often successful outside their country of origin, these are usually regarded as addressed primarily to the home audience, and often have the effect of reassuring them about a national identity perceived to be in crisis. That was the case with many of the 'quality films' of the 1990s in France and the heritage films in Britain in the 1980s.

[8] Apart from the figures mentioned before for China, *Hero* also grossed USD$ 153 million within the next couple of years, when it was shown all over the world. (Berry and Farquhar, 211)

Conclusion

For nationalism as an ideology, the search for the origin implies a desire to really be 'who we are', to turn to the beginning and indefinitely defer the end, whereas any appeal to modernise implies a renunciation, it implies that we cease to be who we are and actively engage in becoming, bringing the future to violently disrupt the present. We instinctively turn to the origin in search of the authenticity and purity it seems to provide. An attempt to supply a narrative of who we may become must acknowledge the randomness and uncertainty involved, in the process appearing quite contingent when opposed to the accounts of origin that, in their stress of purity, tell a story of causes and effects that appears as the result of necessity, constructing a far more appealing identity.

From the questionnaires and interviews held so far, it would seem the key issue many viewers are trying to negotiate is precisely this Chinese modernisation. Some are ready to view 'modernity' as Chinese in its own right, while others consider it to be synonymous with 'the West' and in any case do not regard it as desirable for its own sake. It would be also interesting to find out of course how less educated viewers from a variety of provinces made sense of *Hero*, since one of the main advantages of nationalism as a collective identity making ideology is its ability to cut across social cleavages such as class and gender. But that is the next stage of the research.

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