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Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s–1970s by Daisy Yan Du (review)

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NOTES

1. Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2006). I cannot figure out why this major book on Zhou Enlai is not included in Dillon's Bibliography.
2. Gao Wenqian, *Zhou Enlai: The Last Perfect Revolutionary, A Biography*, trans. Peter Rand and Lawrence R. Sullivan (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2007), p. 236.
3. See Yafeng Xia review of Gao Wenqian, *Zhou Enlai: The Last Perfect Revolutionary, A Biography*, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Xia-Wenqian.pdf>, accessed 15 January 2021.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
6. Gao Hua, *Hongtaiyang shi zenyang shengqi de—Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lai-longqumai* (How Did the Red Sun Rise? A History of Yan'an Rectification Campaign) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000), pp. 136–153, 588–593.
7. Yafeng Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 144–145.
8. Gao, *Zhou Enlai*, pp. 245–246.
9. For details, see Yafeng Xia, "Myth or Reality: Factional Politics, U.S.-China Relations, and Mao Zedong's Psychology in His Sunset Years, 1972-1976," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 15 (Fall 2008): pp. 107–130.
10. Gao, *Zhou Enlai*, p. 243.



Daisy Yan Du. *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s–1970s*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. 276 pp. Hardback \$90.00, ISBN-13: 978-082-487-210-6. Paperback \$30.00, ISBN-13: 978-082-487-764-4.

In her groundbreaking monograph, Daisy Yan Du offers a rigorous discussion of Chinese animation by highlighting the historical course of Chinese animation and how animated filmmaking contests the notion of nationhood and opens up a spatialized conception of intercultural encounters and collaboration. The book contains a theoretical introduction essay, four substantial chapters, a concise epilogue, and three appendices on animated films by Mochinaga Tadahito, on leaders of Shanghai Animation Film Studio, and on major publications on Chinese animation. It contributes valuable discussions on the “disjuncture between politics and aesthetics in the sense that politics cannot fully control arts” (Du 2020, p. 5). Including detailed discussions of animated filmmaking from the

1940s to the 1970s, Du argues that instead of quenching artistic creativity and production, the totalitarian control of cinema during this time, and particularly during the Cultural Revolution, created an opportunity for collective animated filmmaking and unexpectedly allowed Chinese animation to come into its golden age of development. The author observes that animation produced under totalitarian political environments still boasts unique media specificity because of its perceived status as a “minor artistic and cinematic form” (Du 2020, p. 4). Instead of easily falling prey to political accusations, missteps in animation works were often deemed “moral or educational rather than political” (p. 4). Rather than merely playing ideological roles, animation films have the important potential to provide entertainment. The double marginality of animation leads to some possibilities of subversive mimicry and artistic self-empowerment. Following Homi Bhabha’s notion of “colonial mimicry,” Du proposes the term “childish mimicry” to refer to representations of children both as marginalized subjects in animation and as potentially subversive subjects who could garner certain powers from their marginalization (Du 2020, p. 10). The book argues that animation’s double marginality allows it “double power to play around with and even eschew totalitarian politics” (Du 2020, p. 13).

Animated Encounters offers important insights on the dialectical dynamisms of the national style and its “trans/national” predecessors, counterparts, or even constituents. Whereas the national style of Chinese animation in its early stage of development was considered “a necessary reaction to foreign aggression and humiliation” and thus a “self-defense mechanism,” the author observes that the national style needs to be understood in the broader context of transnational and cross-cultural encounters beyond the national space. The author explores additional layers of “marginalization” in the concept of Chinese animation. International and foreign traces in animation, rather than undermining the national style, often make animations “more national and original” (Du 2020, p. 17). The national and transnational are often “enmeshed” in each other in artistic expressions (Du 2020, p. 23). Animation as an artistic medium opens up the space for analyzing the interstices among social, geopolitical, and historical conceptions of community and nationhood. These interstices mobilize the movements and flow of animation as an art form across the boundaries of nations, cultures, and communities and contribute to animation’s potential to transform the world (Du 2020, p. 21). The author names such interstices “animated contact zones,” which deconstruct the “hegemonic and diffusionist mode of modernity” and encourage negotiations, divergences, contestations, and exchanges between cultures and civilizations (Du 2020, p. 21).

Chapter 1, “An Animated Wartime Encounter: *Princess Iron Fan* and the Chinese Connection in Early Japanese Animation,” problematizes and challenges the unidirectional conceptualization of cultural transmission by examining how animated filmmaking in semicolonial Shanghai influenced early Japanese

animation. Du offers a situated study of China's first animated feature film, *Princess Iron Fan* 鐵扇公主 (1941), and its voyage to Japan, its inspiration for some of the earliest Japanese animation works, and its significant impact on Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989). The chapter explores the transformation of *Princess Iron Fan*'s nationalist agenda through its Japanese assimilation. Animation's transnational journeys, as displayed in this case, manifest gendered, ambivalent, and fluid cultural receptions, adaptations, and reconfigurations, giving rise to artistic afterlives beyond the politicized propaganda of the wartime era. *Princess Iron Fan* subtly digresses from the mainstream war resistance narrative by illustrating transgressive border crossings “between private and public, humans and animals, and self and other” (Du 2020, p. 45). In a discussion of this work's travel to Japan, its loss of nationalist characteristics and its change of visual style, the chapter compares animation techniques in this animation with Japanese animations of the time. *Princess Iron Fan* is considered as “an exotic-erotic mediator” in transnational animated encounters, drawing from Thomas Lamarre's important concept of “wartime speciesism,” which is “a displacement of race and racism (relations between humans as imagined in racial terms) onto relations between humans and animals” (Du 2020, p. 41). The chapter compares *Princess Iron Fan* with animated representation of the Japanese legend of Momotarō (Peach Boy), and explores the latter's cross-cultural resonances with the classic Chinese work *Journey to the West*. Drawing from Lamarre's notion of wartime speciesism, the author offers a convincing discussion of the politicized implications of Momotarō in promoting a geopolitical imagination of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere against Western influences.

Chapter 2, “Mochinaga Tadahito and Animated Filmmaking in Early Socialist China,” offers an important study of the understudied Japanese animator Mochinaga Tadahito (1919–1999), who lived in China from 1945 to 1953 and played a prominent role in the establishment of China's animation industry. The first section of this chapter examines animated filmmaking in Man'ei, Northeast Film Studio and Shanghai Animation Film Studio. Probing into Manchuria and Man'ei as sites for cross-cultural artistic production that attracted marginalized or displaced Japanese filmmakers, Du considered Man'ei animations as “interstitial products” of cross-cultural encounter between China and Japan. The second section examines the cultural flows and connections of leftism between China and Japan, Mochinaga Tadahito as a Japanese leftist, and his role in a broader background of transnational leftism after World War II. It is followed by discussion of Mochinaga's animation filmmaking career in China under a Chinese pseudonym, his contribution to the rise of Japanese puppet animation, his artistic output in the MOM Productions, and the early outsourcing industry in Japan in the 1960s. The chapter ends by addressing *Who Meowed?* 嗚嗚是誰叫的? (1979), one of the last animated films Mochinaga made for China, and Mochinaga's continued artistic bond with China in the post-socialist period.

Chapter 3, “Inter/National Style and National Identity: Inking-Painting Animation in the Early 1960s,” takes a comparative approach by examining the “international style” in Chinese animation. As Du elucidates, “International style films adopted more universal artistic forms such as cartoon and caricature, and featured content associated with the capitalist West, in particular the United States” (Du 2020, p. 115). The coexistence of the national style and the international style in the late 1950s and early 1960s indicates that the discursive configuration of Chinese animation has been a contested process in which the national style prevailed over the international. The chapter repositions the national and international styles of Chinese animation against the broader context of the Cold War. Diachronically, the author examines the historical coevality of Chinese animation with socialist film culture in the 1950s, and the revival of traditional art forms in the early 1960s. Synchronically, the author delineates main examples of the “inter/national” style, including Sino-Soviet encounters and Sino-Western encounters that have contested the national style and fostered the inter/national style, as well as the textual exorcism of the international style. The chapter proposes the “aesthetics of absence” in ink-painting animation, that is, how ink-painting animation applies empty space to refashion visual focus and employs absence to elicit creative cognition and unique emotional experiences. A comparative study is given to the classic *The Herd Boy’s Flute* 牧笛 (1963) and Japanese Chan ox-herding paintings, contrasting images of the Maoist herd boy in 1960s children’s books and animation with the frictions between political implications and artistic idealization in these works.

Chapter 4, “Animals, Ethnic Minorities, and Villains in Animated Film during the Cultural Revolution,” analyzes how “subnational forces,” including ethnic minorities and villains in animations, deconstruct the monolithic understanding of national identity and imply the racialized, animalized Others, and the mobility of subnational forces in border-crossing movements. In comparison with animation films made during the seventeen-year period and before, animations made during the Cultural Revolution reflected the impact of the ban on anthropomorphic animals. The author traces precedent examples in animation works when animals as embodiments of fantasy were overshadowed or replaced by motifs and elements of realism. Identifying *Heroic Little Sisters of the Grassland* 草原英雄小姐妹 (1965) as a historically and aesthetically transitional animation film, the chapter proposes that this first serious play (*zhengju* 正劇) style cel animation served as a model for animation films made during the Cultural Revolution. The ironic absence of anthropomorphic animals in such animated films during this period signals the heightening political discourses of class struggle and revolutionary conflicts, and also coincides with the rising valorization of socialist modernization. Representations of ethnic minorities in animations were transformed by discourses of revolution, class struggle, and

cultural homogeneity. Stereotypical representations of ethnic minorities feminized and fetishized them as “innocent little girls with animal companions” (Du 2020, p. 166), and cast a metonymic comparison of feminized ethnic minorities and animals, rendering ethnic, subnational bodies through exoticization, trivialization, or overanimation. The disappearance of animals represents a “formalist rupture between artistic form and revolutionary ideology” in Chinese animation films. However, the dramatized expressions of the “dis/appearance” of animals do not imply complete absence or silence; animals expressed themselves indirectly. The return of animal characters and motifs in animation in the late 1970s took place at the end of the Cultural Revolution, signaling the revival of fantastic motifs and the failure of the revolutionary rhetoric.

As displayed above, *Animated Encounters*, using a fresh methodological approach, contributes to current studies on Chinese and Sinophone animation in several areas. First, the book offers an exciting opportunity to reconceptualize animation historiography in the Chinese and Sinophone world. Probing into the “coequality and cross-referencing” between diverse artistic and cultural productions in East Asia and in the world, the author displays the important historical roles of international style films and animations, which have been marginalized and overshadowed by the discourse of the national style in the development of Chinese animation (Du 2020, p. 124). For example, the pioneering animator Mochinaga Tadahito made a long-lasting impact on animated filmmaking in early socialist China, but suffered underestimation because of the nationalist preoccupation about Chineseness. For another example, international-motif animations became an important means for animators to respond to domestic and international current events, and have been used for mass mobilization and political campaigns (Du 2020, p. 126). Exploring the “international style” of animation as a marginalized art form through diachronic and synchronic studies, the book examines how this style was “tolerated, slighted, and ignored, yet it coexisted with the national style as an undercurrent that interrupted its monopoly and dominance” (Du 2020, p. 131). Du reflects on animation historiography in dialogue with, and beyond, the diachronic examination of historical narrativity. Divergences and dissents of geopolitical discourses of the nation could generate important differences in values and connotations in the texts. Animated encounters decenter and dislocate a unified historical discourse of the nation by resituating marginalized styles, animators, and gendered and racialized subjects in new critical positions of history making. Border-crossing movements of animators, animation film styles, and animation film industries demarcate the historical contingencies of animation’s media specificity, and reveal how gender, race, and ideological dynamics created different degrees and modes of mobility.

Second, the author offers energetic frameworks in her discussion of the historical contingencies of Chinese animation’s national style. In addition to a

close analysis of animation works, their artistic values, and historical contexts, the author provides an original reading of several works on their allegorical status and meanings *vis-a-vis* Chinese animation and its temporal and spatial presences. In a deconstructive reading of the often-hailed “first Chinese animation,” *Why is the Crow Black* 烏鴉為什麼是黑的？ (1955), Du argues that the film could be productively read as an allegory for Chinese animation of the time, which, like the black crow, could not easily “conform to the national or nationalistic paradigm” (Du 2020, p. 123). The book reconfigures animations’ “inter/national” dimension as an innovative epistemic lens to view and appreciate Chinese animation works from a transnational viewpoint. This approach problematizes the discourse of the national style and invites new insights on the transformative potential of animation in undoing binary conceptions of the native and the foreign, the national, and the transnational. Reading the allegorical dimension of these animated films grants the author mobility and an elevated position to explore the critical meanings of the animated films in relation to the overall status of Chinese animation, beyond temporal and spatial strictures. The chapter also sufficiently covers the animators’ own reflections on their works, which foreshadowed allegorical connections between the animated films themselves and the diverse discursive paradigms underlying the mandate of Chinese animation. Diverting from analysis of allegories of the nation *per se*, the author instead considers animation in terms of its recurrent allusions and theatricalization of its constitutive allegorical traditions. Such allegorical frames of reference, whether intended or not, constitute an animation apparatus that both propagates and contains the practices of Chinese animation filmmaking.

Third, the author offers valuable discussions of diverse experimentations in animation technologies, and the social and political functions of such technological inventions. For example, in her discussions of Man’ei animation films in Manchuria, the context of encounter between wartime China and Japan, Du offers a very important discussion of the juxtaposition of documentary modes and animation within these films, and how they manifest the duplicity of the Manchurian empire as a fantasyland and tumultuous geopolitical entity (Du 2020, p. 77). This kinship of animation and documentary film had a lasting political relevance and can be identified in film works in the 1940s. This important observation calls for a reconsideration of animated documentaries in Chinese contexts, the sociopolitical function of animation in documentaries, and the diachronic resonances between earlier animation works and recent animated documentaries in China and the Sinophone world. This coexistence of animation and documentary styles in the same work also invites a reconsideration of animation techniques and their intricate relationship with indexicality and artistic realism. For example, Du suggests that the method of rotoscoping is of much importance, since in animation “the animator uses both a real camera and his eyes to make an animated film” (Du 2020, p. 79). Such practices of using

one's "eyes" to observe and "record" the movements for the animation process could invite rich reflections on animation as a seemingly (im)possible means to articulate the real. Another example is the author's discussions on different kinds of animation works. Du observes that cel animations tend to compromise the individuality of the animators and instead highlight a studio's representative style, whereas puppet animation gives more space for the auteurist expressions of a particular animator (Du 2020, p. 105). This observation is important in highlighting the differences of diverse forms of animation in accommodating auteurism, and gives more a nuanced understanding to the shared perception that animation is the "most auteurist kind of cinema" (Schneider 1988, p. 30). In discussing two ink-painting animated films in the 1960s, Du gives fascinating discussions on the challenges of finding the best combination of cels and photographic techniques, the necessity to use still backgrounds, and various techniques to simulate the effect of ink diffusion (Du 2020, p. 134). This discussion highlights that the hard-pursued technique of ink animation has been fashioned into an emblem of "Chineseness" that is inviting yet inexplicably arduous to attain.

Fourth, Du offers a much-needed discussion of gender and race representations in Chinese animated films, which often shore up contestations and destabilizations "by racialized and animalized Others who transgress and redefine national borders" (Du 2020, p. 152). The apparent disappearance and under-representation of animals in animated films in the mid-1960s indicated an increasingly totalitarian control over artistic productions. However, animals were becoming "metonyms and metaphors for ethnic minorities and villains" (Du 2020, p. 153). Ethnic bodies, especially feminine bodies, are "prone to overanimation," and often indicate women being "assimilated into the family structure of the socialist state" (Du 2020, p. 167). Animation works displayed nuanced processes of fashioning, and even gendering, marginalized or abject political subjects. As Du points out, negative characters including landlords, traitors, and spies were initially represented as both men and women in animation works during the seventeen-year period. However, during the Cultural Revolution, they were "exclusively male" (Du 2020, p. 168). The absent presence of animals in animation works in the 1960s is so stimulating that the author proposes that the consideration of animality "as a category of third gender between masculinity and femininity is crucial in understanding animated films of the period" (Du 2020, p. 179). The author's emphasis on animality as a third gender engages and expands feminist readings of dramatized and visual representations of body and identity. It focuses on how "animality" could be utilized as a substitute for gender and race, and to gesture toward a particular kind of speciesism in Cold War Asia. The productive conversations between the concept of "animality" and gender and race studies have attracted much scholarly attention. "Gender, Animals, Animality," a 2015 special issue edited by Beate Neuneier in *Gender Forum: An International Journal for Gender Studies*,

offers research on animality and queer encounters in art, gender, folktale representations of gender, species, and fictive kinship, as well as ecofeminist approaches to promote interspecies kinship in human–animal relationships in animal management (Neuneier 2015, pp. 1–107). In contemporary Chinese and Sinophone animations, animality as an underdiscussed gendered position opens up many exciting research possibilities: how animated films represent nonnormative sexual identities, and how animals, both as queer creatures and queered subjects, could generate novel modes of desire, emotion, and sexual politics.

Finally, the book’s innovative research on transnational undercurrents and animated encounters that construct and reconfigure the development of Chinese animation provides an exciting framework for future research on Chinese and Sinophone animation. For example, the “inter/national” characteristics of Chinese animation could be found in contemporary fan-based activities and animation festivals, many of which take place outside mainland China. Thomas Lamarre argues that Chinese animations (such as animations by Haoliners Animation League based in Shanghai), rather than wielding a national style, rely on “coproductions entailing various combinations of Chinese directors and writers with Japanese animators” (Lamarre 2021). Lamarre points out that such multimedia franchises are reminiscent of what Miriam Hansen describes as the “global sensory vernacular,” which emphasizes flows, hybridization, interchanges, and the translatability of dialects, aesthetics, and cultures (Lamarre 2021; Hansen 1999, p. 72). Another example of Chinese animation’s border-crossing movements is the animation feature *The Legend of Hei* 羅小黑戰記 (2019). The film received critical acclaim after its initial release in mini theatres in Tokyo and other places in Japan. A Japanese dubbed version was released in November 2020, and achieved significant box office success. Japanese audiences applauded the film’s hybrid aesthetic presentations of Chinese and Japanese cultural motifs and elements, whereas its “Chineseness” is still distinguishable through characterization. In addition, “inter/national” styles of animation that transcend regional discourses of identity, culture, and nation can be found in contemporary Hong Kong abstract animations, as artist and animator Max Hattler elucidates in his study of animation works by Carla Chan, Chio Sai-Ho, Chris Cheung, and Tobias Gremmler (Hattler 2021). The recent Inaugural Conference of the Association for Chinese Animation Studies in spring 2021, organized by the author Daisy Yan Du and her team, gave an exciting glimpse of the vastly diverse and quickly developing landscape of Chinese and Sinophone animations. In sum, *Animated Encounters* proves to be a visionary and momentous study and succeeds in providing important theoretical frames of reference for animation studies in Chinese and Sinophone cultures and communities.

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Li Guo is a professor of Chinese and Asian studies at Utah State University, specializing in women's studies, vernacular literatures and cultures, film, and visuality.

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Fabian Graham. *Voices from the Underworld: Chinese Hell deity worship in contemporary Singapore and Malaysia*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020. ix, 259 pp. Hardcover \$100, ISBN 978-1-5261-4057-9.

In *Voices from the Underworld*, Dr. Fabian Graham focuses on one dimension of modern religious practice in Malaysia and Singapore: Chinese hell deity worship. Graham is an anthropologist with degrees from National Chengchi University in Taiwan, Cambridge University, and SOAS University of London, and has been documenting Chinese vernacular religion for many years. In this