13 Chinamerica: Global Affairs and Planetary Consciousness

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In this essay I will focus on the evolution of intercultural relations between China and America since the second half of the nineteenth century. Against the background of major political developments, I will trace the history of cultural interactions at three decisive moments, which correspond to three major movements in literature and the arts of the twentieth century: modernism, postmodernism, and neorealism. It is my assumption that coincidental cultural movements and planned actions of cultural agents have prepared the way for a close cooperation of the two countries constituting what I call Chin-America. This transcultural constellation will potentially serve as a basis for a new arrangement of global affairs between the two major global players in the twenty-first century and for the establishment of a new transnational consciousness, which includes a concern for the preservation of the planet.

The three periods in the cultural and political interactions of China and America, which will exemplify and prefigure the emergence of a new transcultural and transnational constellation of ChinAmerica for the twenty-first century, range from the innovations of modernism via the ludic mode of postmodernism to neorealism and the recent pictorial turn of popular culture. At each cultural moment the interaction of cultural agents takes on different forms that point to the nature of ideological positions and attempt to surpass them artistically. In On China former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger uses his extensive experience of fifty visits to the People’s Republic of China to state important differences between the two countries and to project a vision for a common collaborative future of the two nations, which resembles my ChinAmerica project. As an American politician with a European background, Kissinger looks at both countries from an Archimedean point of view and argues that the “relationship between China and the United States has become a central element in the quest for world peace and global well-being” (2011, xvi). What is necessary is to reconcile the
different sets of beliefs in exceptionalism held in both societies: “American exceptionalism is missionary. It holds that the United States has an obligation to spread its values to every part of the world. China’s exceptionalism is cultural. China does not proselytize; it does not claim that its contemporary institutions are relevant outside of China. But it is heir of the Middle Kingdom tradition, which formally graded all other states at various levels of tributaries based on their approximation to Chinese cultural and political forms; in other words, a kind of cultural universality” (ibid., xvi).

Kissinger’s close friend Helmut Schmidt similarly evokes the eminence of the Middle Kingdom and its 4,000-year civilization in recording his last visit to China in 2012. Recollecting previous conversations with Chinese politicians, the former German chancellor reiterates his long-held belief that China would emerge as an important world power after the turmoil of Mao’s regime (Schmidt 2013, 10).

Following Kissinger’s distinction between the American and the Chinese form of exceptionalism, I would like to argue for a merger of both nations for which I have coined the term “ChinAmerica.” This neologism differs fundamentally from the term “Chimerica,” used by the historian Niall Ferguson in The Ascent of Money (2008) to describe the economic interdependence of the two countries. The popularization of the latter term in a 2007 Wall Street Journal article written by Ferguson and the economist Moritz Schularick was seen both as a reaction to the negotiations between Presidents George W. Bush and Hu Jintao and as an outlook to Barack Obama’s presidential candidacy—as far as regards the collaboration of the two countries in the twenty-first century. But it immediately evoked the criticism of political scientists in Beijing, who interpreted “Chimerica” as a new variation of the “yellow peril.” Although my term “ChinAmerica” is also not immune to ideological criticism, I want to use it to analyze the intercultural relations between the two countries that may eventually lead to a transcultural and a transnational level of interaction. In my assessment this transnational horizon transcends mere economic relations or commercial interests and includes ecological concerns and a planetary consciousness, as suggested by postcolonial critics.

In her reconceptualization of comparative literature studies, Gayatri Spivak proposes to abolish disciplinary boundaries and political areas drawn up after World War II for the sake of her concept of planetarity. This new concept is motivated by her serious belief in and concern for a new humanist attitude toward the less fortunate people on earth. “Planetary” as “an alternate term for continental, global, worldly” differs decisively from those terms since it encapsulates the human concern. “The globe is on our computers,” Spivak writes. “The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging
to another system” (2003, 72). “To be human is to be intended toward the other,” an ethical position which she also locates in such “transcendental figurations [as]—mother, nation, god, nature,” which for her are “names of alterity, planetary subjects rather than global agents” (ibid., 73). Following Spivak I therefore differentiate between the digitalization of the world, as we know it from Google Earth, and a planetary awareness, which advocates alterity and the creation of a humanitarian network for the preservation of the planet. From a position of racial considerations, in Postcolonial Melancholia Paul Gilroy introduces the notion of “conviviality” for intercultural encounters and promotes “cosmopolitan solidarity and moral agency” (2006, xv). Like Spivak and Gilroy, the ecocritic Ursula Heise highlights these concepts of alterity and planetarity in Sense of Place and Sense of Planet (2008). More recently, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley have assembled articles in Postcolonial Ecologies (2011) that relate local ecological issues to a planetary scale.

This approach of a transnational cooperation—based on planetary ideas that have become increasingly common concerns of Chinese and American scholars in the twenty-first century (see Yang 2013)—goes beyond the one-sided traditional analyses of Chinese-American relations, summed up in John King Fairbank’s authoritative The United States and China. The first edition, published in 1948, reflected the author’s fascination with the country that began during his stay as a graduate student in Beijing in the 1930s and developed further while he worked at the US embassy in China in the 1940s. Fairbank’s intention in the fourth edition “to explain China to Americans so we could live in peace and friendship” (1983, xiii) marks the one-sided perspective of conventional studies of the relationship between China and America. Likewise, the first Chinese accounts of America are based on personal experiences of graduate students in the United States. The autobiographies written from an American perspective by Yan Phou Lee (1887) and Yung Wing (1909) are cases in point. American studies scholars interested in China and America have used sources by Chinese immigrants in the United States for their critical studies. Thus the story of Chinese immigration to the United States has been analyzed politically and culturally since the days of the Californian Gold Rush in the second half of the nineteenth century, and numerous studies exist on the history of Chinese American literature (Meissenburg 1987). More recently, Sau-ling Wong, formerly at the University of California, Berkeley, has written one of the standard works in regard to the interpretation of Chinese-American literature (1993), which was later translated into Chinese (2007; see also Tunc, Marino, and Kim 2012). Xiao-huang Yin (2000) discovered new early examples of Chinese American literature, and Chinese American literature in Chinese has been

The engagements of Chinese scholars with American studies have long been determined by the political climate of dissent and have been subject to the waves of anti-Americanism flaring up sporadically after Deng Xiaoping’s opening up of China and reforms in the 1980s. The contributions to Priscilla Roberts’s edited volume *Bridging the Sino-American Divide* (2007) clearly demonstrates this ideological bias. More valuable studies have been undertaken by Chinese students of American studies abroad, such as Shanshan Yan’s dissertation, “Americanization in China” (2010). Shelley Fisher Fishkin is collaborating with Gordon Chang in the Stanford Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project to collect documents on the many thousands of Chinese laborers in the United States and China (G. Chang and Fishkin. n.d.). In similarly innovative work, the German Americanists Vanessa Künnemann and Ruth Mayer have put together two volumes that assemble original articles by European, American, and Chinese scholars, one volume with a focus on pre-communist China (2009) and the other comparing the architecture and culture of Chinese neighborhoods in the United States and Europe (2011). Künnemann and Mayer’s triangular approach corresponds to my own conception of ChinAmerica—which, however, also includes the notion of the planetary perspective and is an instructive study object that demonstrates the values of a transnational American studies approach that supersedes existing binational studies. In his description of the Dartmouth Series in American Studies, “Remapping the Transnational,” Donald Pease rightly states that “the emergence of Transnational American Studies in the wake of the Cold War marks the most significant reconfiguration of American Studies since its inception” (2011). Following moves toward internationalization of American studies research and comparatist methods, this new transnational approach provides an effective methodology appropriate for the analysis of transcultural and transnational developments.

Although the status of the “American” contained in this approach points in the direction of the United States and was seen by critics as a new version of American exceptionalism in scholarship (Pease 2009), the egalitarian collaboration of American studies scholars worldwide in drafting and launching the transnational American studies approach transcends the danger of national bias (Fishkin 2005; Hornung 2005). Thus it implies an extension of the field of research beyond the geographical boundaries of the United
States to areas where aspects of Americanness exist. Leaving behind the earlier conflation of the term with the international, the multinational, the global, and the diasporic (see Vertovec 2009), transnational American studies is now increasingly recognized as a discipline in academic institutions both in the United States and abroad. It builds on and expands regional concepts, such as European American studies or Asian American studies, and it transcends these principally dialogical interrelations multilaterally (see Tunc, Marino, and Kim 2012). The underlying common denominator is the direct or indirect presence of aspects of Americanness that are embraced, critiqued, or rejected in different parts of the world (Hornung 2011b; Robinson 2011; Rowe 2011). Methodologically, transnational American studies provides new approaches to correlate the local and the national to American phenomena in a process of mutual enhancement, in which the perspectives of American studies scholars outside of the United States can also prove to be more important than the ones of American scholars based in the United States. After years of claiming a superior status for their scholarship, US Americanists have recognized the quality and importance of the new insights of American studies scholars abroad (see Fluck, Brandt, and Thaler 2007; Ostendorf 2002). This common methodological basis also allows scholars in countries critical of the United States to surpass conventional ideological positions and to engage in new areas of research beyond the traditional canon of American studies. Hence my application of the transnational American studies approach seeks to include non-American positions and to create a balance between two national cultures captured in the term ChinAmerica. The three phases of the political and cultural relations between China and America span the range of the twentieth century from binational exchanges via intercultural manifestations to transnational achievements at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and they describe the trajectory from modernism through postmodernism to neorealism. Each of the three stages features key figures—such as Sun Yat-sen and Ezra Pound, Mao Tse-tung and Andy Warhol, and Mao Tse-tung and Barack Obama—in politics and popular culture to examine the correlation of Chinese and American cultural work for the creation of common political and ecological interests. Transnational American studies, hence, also contributes to the formation of a planetary consciousness (see Hornung 2014).

Modernity and Modernism 1912: The Interaction between Politics and Culture

The first period of my transnational analysis of ChinAmerica marks a significant revolutionary moment in Chinese politics and Western culture. The end of the dynasties of Chinese emperors in 1911 and the foundation of
the Republic of China in 1912 coincide with the international movement of modernism. These events constitute a radical break with Chinese and Western traditions, respectively, for the sake of innovation in terms of politics and culture. In the same way in which modern Chinese turned to Western forms of government, modern artists in the West discovered newness in Eastern cultures. This cross-fertilization also seemed evident in the economic relations between China and the United States at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The construction of railroads in the United States and in China on the one hand linked the imperialistic American interests and expansion with the Chinese interests in technological advancement. On the other hand, that construction juxtaposed President Theodore Roosevelt’s open door policy, described in his 1908 address “The Awakening of China” (see Künnemann and Mayer 2009, 5 and 8) with the drastic constraint on Chinese immigration and the Qing dynasty’s claim to represent overseas Chinese in the New World. On different levels, these are cross-cultural processes of modernization. Employing my transnational American studies approach, I would like to illustrate a more productive interaction of politics and culture with regard to Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Chinese Republic in 1912, and Ezra Pound, the founder of modern poetry, as encapsulated in his famous slogan “MAKE IT NEW” (1935).

A crucial point in my analysis is Sun’s evolution from his origin in the rural southern Chinese province of Canton to his eminent political position by way of his experience in Hawai‘i. The sojourn of Chinese in the United States or on the islands of Hawai‘i toward the end of the nineteenth century is part of the migration of young men either to pursue a Western education or to find work to alleviate economic hardship back in China. In either case, the men intended to return to their homeland. Sun joined his brother in Hawai‘i, attended Iolani School, an Anglican-run boarding school, and matriculated in 1878 at Oahu College—coincidentally the same institution, later renamed Punahou School, where Barack Obama was a student almost a century later. Even before the annexation of the Polynesian archipelago by the United States in 1898, the kingdom of Hawai‘i was under American and Christian influence. Afraid of Sun’s leanings toward Christianity, his brother sent him back to China, where he earned a medical degree in Hong Kong, converted to Christianity, and eventually became a politician. Further stays abroad—such as his exile in Japan after the first Sino-Japanese war in 1895; fundraising tours to Europe and North America; and two more stays in Hawai‘i in 1894 and 1904, when he enlisted the help of Chinese guest workers to promote his republican ideas (see Schiffrin 1968)—shaped his political career and revolutionary spirit. With the foundation of the Chinese Republic in 1912, based on the Western principles of nationalism, democ-
racy, and the well-being of the people, Sun contributed to the promotion of China’s opening to the West, counteracting Roosevelt’s imperialistic mission. The combination of Sun’s English and American formal education, exposure to Christian religion, and Western political ideas constituted the platform for his political career. The end to China’s long imperial history and the subsequent creation of the Chinese Republic also redefined the role of the European colonial powers in China and revealed the imperialistic efforts of Japan and the United States (see Teng and Fairbank 1972). In my examination I correlate these changes to the radical innovations of modern poetics as embodied by the American poet Ezra Pound.

Pound’s revolutionary impact on the formation of modern poetics is similar to the impact of Sun on Chinese politics. Furthermore, both men developed their new ideas as expatriates in a cultural environment different from their home. Pound’s move from a provincial background in Idaho and education at the University of Pennsylvania to an international career in Europe with a focus on Euro-American literatures included an interest in Asian languages, particularly Japanese and Chinese. In 1908, at the beginning of the imagist movement, Pound received a manuscript written by the late Harvard professor Ernest Fenollosa; Pound edited the manuscript, which was published as *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* in 1918 (see Fenollosa and Pound 2008). The series of essays that Pound started writing in 1912, published as *Make It New*, relate directly to Chinese ideograms and the long tradition of the Chinese empire (Pound 1935; Symons 1987). Pound actually finds the source of his modernist credo “*Make It New*” on the bathtub of Emperor T’ching Tang (Qianlong; 1711–1799, ruled officially 1735–96) from the Qing dynasty and incorporates it into his *Cantos* (figure 13.1). It is the central theme in Canto 53 (1957, 274–75).

After seven years of drought, the Chinese famine cannot be ended by money but only by the emperor’s prayer for rain. This story is related to the legendary book by Kao-Yao, in which the common people are endowed with great power: “Heaven can see and hear and that through the eyes and ears of the people; heaven rewards the people of virtue and punishes the wicked ones and that through the people” (Qu 1969, 22). Pound uses the reinstatement of this interpretation in Confucian philosophy and transforms it into the poetological principle of creativity to revitalize the sterility of modern art in the West with spiritual values from the East. Thus he counteracts the attempts of intellectuals in the new Chinese Republic to turn against the cultural achievements of China. Against the anti-Confucian stance of his acquaintance F. T. Song, Pound sets the Western appreciation of Chinese culture: “At a time when China has replaced Greece in the intellectual life of
so many occidentals, it is interesting to see in what way the occidental ideas are percolating into the orient” (quoted in Qian 2009, 132).

Pound’s reception of the creative principle of “MAKE IT NEW” on the emperor’s bathtub in Chinese ideograms, transmitted by way of Confucius, takes on an additional meaning when seen in the contextual arrangement of Canto 53 as part of a series of twenty cantos on Chinese and American history first published in 1940 (Cantos 52–71 in Pound 1957; see also Hornung 1994, 308). It is the second of ten cantos on the succession of Chinese dynasties, which are followed by ten cantos on John Adams and the early American republic. The contrast between the old Chinese tradition of imperial rule and the young American democracy is part of how Pound shows the influence of Chinese ideas on Western thinking, which he also treats in the series of cantos Jefferson—Nuevo Mundo (Cantos 31–41). In these cantos, Pound relates the correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to Confucian philosophy in an attempt “to measure the letters against the teachings of Confucius” and to reveal that “throughout the correspondence” both presidents “are concerned with the precise definition of terms, which lies at the heart of the Confucian ethic” (Kearns 1980, 80).

The application of a transnational American studies approach makes it possible to correlate Sun’s politics with Pound’s poetics at the beginning of
the twentieth century in this first example of ChinAmerica. Pound’s transnational mediation between the teachings of Confucian ethics in the Chinese monarchy and American democratic ideas can be compared to Sun’s application of democratic principles in the constitution of the Chinese Republic and the end of the monarchy. Both transnational achievements coincide with the ideas of the Jewish American cultural critic Randolph Bourne, who dismisses the melting pot idea and uses his essay “Trans-National America” (1916) to shape the concept of a new America, which reaches out for other cultures and ideas. It is the beginning of a transnational spirit and increasing exchanges, most prominently represented by the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, whose stay in China from 1919 to 1921 became the basis for an intensive ChinAmerican process of mutual teaching and learning (see Wang 2007).

Maoism and Postmodernism: Cultural Revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s

In line with Chinese tradition, Mao also embraced Kao-Yao’s legendary message, which invests sovereign power in the people to execute a divine will (see J. Chang and Halliday 2007, 5–6). In this sense Mao, like Sun, legitimizes the Chinese revolution and appears as the representative of the people’s rights. In the Western world a versatile Mao cult developed during the course of the 1960s. It was part of a youth protest culture in North America and Europe against the hierarchical structures of the parent generation and expressed the search for alternative philosophies of life. Mao and the Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung (1966), known in the West as the Little Red Book, become powerful symbols of resistance against the capitalist system and military interventions such as the war in Vietnam. At the same time, the juvenile enthusiasm for Maoism reflected the revolutionary spirit of the time and can easily be related to the culture of postmodernism. Jan Wong, a Canadian student of Chinese descent, captures this postmodern Maoist spirit—which motivated her to become one of the first two North Americans accepted as exchange students at Peking University in 1972—in her autobiography Red China Blues (1996). Her classification as an overseas Chinese was only the beginning of a general disillusionment that culminated in her rejection of China’s political system during her later visits to the country.

While the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 was based on the erection of Mao’s rigid regime and the radical transformation of Chinese society, the reception of Mao’s teachings in the West for Marxist activism gradually turned into the popular fashion of radical chic (Wolfe 1970). In the United States prominent postmodernists like the pop artist
Andy Warhol and the playwright Edward Albee stand for a playful engagement with the Mao cult. Albee uses his short play *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (1971), first performed in 1968, for postmodern alienation effects. While Albee wants the Mao figure on stage to possess Asian features, he gives the figure the role of a teacher whose lessons—directly taken from the Little Red Book—are not heard. The other three characters in the play are a Long-Winded Lady, an Old Woman, and a Minister. Except for the Minister, who does not have a speaking part, all other characters recite their texts without communicating with each other. According to Chris Bigsby, the play is “a collage of words and images; it uses surrealist methods not to reveal the marvellous but to penetrate the bland façade of modern reality—personal, religious, and political” (1975, 157). The play takes place on a steamboat in the middle of the ocean, a location that emphasizes the emptiness of the political jargon without an audience. While this playful deconstruction of the referential quality of words serves Albee’s intention to stage experimental theatre, it also serves his purpose to reject “escapist romances,” such as Maoism. “A playwright,” Albee writes in the introduction, “has two obligations: first, to make some statement about the condition of ‘man’ (as it is put) and, second, to make some statement about the nature of the art form with which he is working. In both instances he must attempt change. In the first instance . . . the playwright must try to alter his society; in the second instance . . . the playwright must try to alter the forms within which his precursors have had to work” (1971, 124).

Both objectives are part of Albee’s project to work for change. The frequent references by Chairman Mao in the play to the ideological struggle of the Chinese Communist Party against American imperialism is early on connected to the divine power invested in the people: “Today, two big mountains lie like a dead weight on the Chinese people. One is imperialism, the other is feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party has long made up its mind to dig them up. We must persevere and work unceasingly, and we, too, will touch God’s heart. Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people” (Albee 1971, 138).

Albee’s intention to deconstruct Mao’s political rhetoric as empty phrasology also refers to Mao’s evocation of Kao-Yao’s legend about the power of the people. Mao’s definition of his position as the servant of the people is as elusive as the “escapist romances” of Western Maoists.

Andy Warhol also takes up the Mao cult. In an analogy to his Marilyn Monroe silk-screen prints of the 1960s, Warhol created a series of Mao prints starting in 1972, probably in response to the new diplomatic ties between China and the United States (figure 13.2). Similar to the glamor of Monroe, the quintessential American sex symbol of the 1950s, the political
glamor of Chairman Mao was being deconstructed by Warhol. Compared with Mao’s official state portrait overlooking Tiananmen Square, which holds the Great Hall of the People and Mao’s mausoleum, and which Warhol visited in the fall of 1982, Warhol’s postmodern representation disfigures the eminent leader and reduces him to a series of small figures.

According to Jean-François Lyotard’s classic study *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Mao’s master narrative dissolves into many small anecdotes, similar to the staging in Albee’s experimental play. To what extent the so-called ping-pong diplomacy by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger can also be related to the playfulness of postmodern art as a prelude to the transnational resolution of political differences is still subject to analysis (see Kissinger 2011, 232–35). But without a doubt, the conversations be-
tween President Richard Nixon and Chairman Mao in 1972 reestablished the diplomatic ties between their respective countries after years of ideological opposition and meant the beginning of economic cooperation (see ibid.).

Similar to my first example of ChinAmerica, in the case of the postmodern reception of the Mao cult, the transnational American studies approach relates the events of cultural revolutions in China, North America, and Europe and reveals their common objective of deconstructing authority figures and bourgeois conventions. The approach also goes beyond the one-sided Western scholarship on postmodernism and its analysis of decorative innovations in the 1960s by focusing on the neglected operations of underground activities as the source of cultural revolutions and the underlying political meaning of a romanticized reception of Maoism (cf. Hornung 2015). Paul Clark’s history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (2008) is a first attempt to take account of neglected sources and their influence on the formation of contemporary Chinese culture. New forms of literature and culture emerge from the new political situation, but they are usually omitted from the political account of the Cultural Revolution.

**Pop Culture and Neorealism**

The transnational reach of pop culture as exemplified in Warhol’s series of Mao silk-screen prints relates directly to the current state of cultural interaction at the turn of the twentieth century. Don DeLillo, an American writer of Italian descent, saw these reproductions of Mao in the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1989 as part of an Andy Warhol retrospective. They inspired him to write his novel *Mao II* (1991; see figure 13.3), but in that work he moved away from his earlier postmodern fiction.

Having lived through the period of the Mao cult and postmodernism in the 1960s and 1970s, DeLillo links Warhol’s Mao figure in *Mao II* to the reality of terrorism and political violence that operate on a global scale. Hence critics have read this neorealist novel as an account of increasing terrorism and have stressed the interrelation between the media and fiction, especially the visual poetics of DeLillo’s fiction (see Ickstadt 2002). The connection between Warhol’s pop art and the inclusion of Mao in DeLillo’s novel has not received much attention (see Karnicky 2001; Olster 2011). The juxtaposition of the Mao figure with the fictional writer Bill Gray, who eventually becomes a victim of terrorism in Lebanon, seems to be part of DeLillo’s “strategy of initial contrast and increasing convergence” (Schneck 2007, 117). Contrast and convergence seem to underlie DeLillo’s representation of the commercialized Mao cult of the 1960s, and they form part of a revisionist perspective of the period, including ideological reinterpretations.
While Chinese scholars like Mobo Gao (2008) attempt to counteract the demonizing perception of Mao and the Cultural Revolution in the West by pointing to the benefits of Maoism for the rural poor and the urban working class, DeLillo takes Mao and his political inheritance to task. Hence the Mao references, including the quotation “Our god is none other than the masses of the Chinese people” from the Little Red Book and mentions of the Cultural Revolution (DeLillo 1991, 162–63), are set against depictions of the television coverage of student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 (ibid., 176–78). The depoliticized Mao poster contrasts with the reincarnation of Mao as a technologically reproduced Mao II, who has to account for the massacre, even though it was Deng Xiaoping whose policies of reform and opening China up to the West (that is, his idea of a socialism with Chinese characteristics), begun in 1978, had fostered democratic yearnings among the young generation squashed in the military repression (see Kissinger 2011, 335–36). DeLillo’s alignment of these televised pictures with Warhol’s Mao stands for the transformation of political contrast through the mediation of pop art into the transcultural convergence of a transnational world.
This aspect of convergence was the subject of an exhibition organized by Britta Erickson in 2005 at the Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, titled “On the Edge: Contemporary Chinese Artists Encounter the West.” Erickson assembled works by “Political Pop” artists of the 1980s and 1990s in China “who [defuse] potent political imagery” by fusing it with ‘an American pop sensibility’ indebted to Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and others to critique the ‘current condition of Chinese culture’” (quoted in Fishkin 2006, 23–24). Erickson’s intent to exhibit the encounter of Chinese artists with the West can also be seen as a form of convergence of pop culture. Warhol’s deconstruction of the Mao portrait is also the subject of many Chinese pop artists, particularly those who lived in exile in the United States. In his “Long Live Chairman Mao” series, Zhang Hongtu reproduces the omnipresent picture of Mao on an ordinary Quaker Oats container. The eerie resemblance between the communist leader and the Quaker farmer mixes propaganda, religion, and ideology with commercial kitsch and celebrity cult. Yu Youhan transplants Mao to New York as an exotic imitation of the Statue of Liberty in 1996 (figure 13.4) or as a contrast between the symbol of freedom and political repression.

Li Shan and Liu Dahong set their visual deconstruction of Mao in a Chinese context. Li represents Mao as a double and gendered figure, relating the chairman to his wife, Jiang Qing, the leader of the Gang of Four (2005). Liu’s critical engagement with Mao and the Cultural Revolution includes the transformation of the Mao mausoleum on Tiananmen Square into an inhospitable, ghostly building. In both cases, the artists attempt to bring Mao down “from his pedestal and expose the relationship that existed between him and the Chinese people as bizarre” (Erickson 2004, 22). All of these pop cultural designs also have a global political reading that seems to fuse formerly contrasting voices. The fact that these works by Chinese artists in exile are now exhibited in China, like Yu Youhan’s “Mao and the Statue of Liberty” in the Shanghart Gallery in Shanghai, shows to what extent the positions of the artist and Erickson, the curator, converge with the public perception in China of artistic circles. Tracing the transcultural travels of these exhibits will be part of future research that will lead to new insights into the potential acceptance of pop art by dissidents in contemporary China.

The current stage of transnational pop culture as a manifestation of ChinAmerica was reached in the presidency of Barack Obama, especially with his first visit to China in November 2009. Chinese society’s fascination with the charismatic president, which one Chinese in Wuhan expressed by undergoing facial surgery to resemble Obama, was counterbalanced by the reservation of the Chinese politicians. In contrast to the visits by Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to Beijing in 1998 and 2002, respectively,
Obama’s visit featured alleged students—actually officials in Communist youth organizations—at a town hall meeting in Shanghai who asked relatively moderate questions. Obama’s choice of Shanghai instead of Beijing for his first programmatic speech in China was seen as an act of solidarity with the common Chinese people, corroborated by the skin color of the first nonwhite president of the United States of America, which created a bond of nonwhite ethnicity. Obama’s closeness to China and the Chinese people, augmented by the residence of his half-brother Mark Ndesandjo in Shenzhen, PRC, establishes a form of fraternization between Asia, Africa, and Latin America—and hence all of America. The popular acclaim of the American president is also the basis of the new popular culture that developed in the context of his visit in China. Obviously, the commercial aspect of the pop cultural use of Obama shows in many items on sale for tourists. Similar to the Chinese pop artists in the United States, who create an Americanized Mao, popular culture in China designs a sinicized image of the American president. Similar to my coinage of the term “ChinAmerica,” Chinese popular culture has coined the names “Maobama” and “Obamao” that are visible on T-shirts, touristic paraphernalia, and the Internet and in cartoons. However, what surpasses the commercial nature of pop art is Obama’s portrait on a T-shirt with the inscription “serve the people” in the famous calligraphy of Mao Tse-tung, familiar to all Chinese people (figure 13.5).

The combination of the transnational mind-set of the American president...
with the ideological direction of the Chinese chairman suggests a revision of Mao’s alleged role as the servant of the people—a position that, according to Kao-Yao, is derived from heaven. At the beginning of the twenty-first century some popular artists suggest (see, for example figure 13.6) that the transfer of power from Mao to a sinicized Obama is better than for the Chinese leaders to hold that position.

I read the pop cultural vision of Obamao or Maobama as an expression of transcultural convergence that replaces global competitiveness and ideological contrasts with the consensus of a transnational community. It is my assumption, supported by the history of political changes brought about through pop cultural work (see Ryback 1990), that the power of visual images plays an important role in the development of ChinAmerica in a transnational world. More research is required into the acceptance of these pop cultural images in Chinese society.

The coinage of the name Obamao or Maobama indicates a transnational amalgamation. It stands for the successive integration of the American president into the Chinese student and working world and seems to suggest the transnational realization of ChinAmerica as a vision for the twenty-first century.

In what way the visual power of pictures plays a role in this development of a transnational world, as demonstrated in Fishkin’s “Asian Crossroads/
Transnational American Studies” (2006), still needs further research. It reconnects us with Pound’s fascination with Chinese ideograms and their influence on the international movement of imagism as well as the implicit relationship of Chinese characters to pictorial thinking.6

The transnational dimension of images will also contribute to the formation of a planetary community as part of a concern with ecology, which is simultaneously advanced by activists and political leaders. Although there were serious difficulties with the role of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Barack Obama as an exemplary planetary citizen at the Copenhagen climate summit of 2009 (see Hornung 2011a), the apparent linkage of peace work and ecology in recent decisions of the Nobel Prize committee also promotes the raising of a planetary consciousness worldwide. Such a planetary vision is also the subject of a remarkable passage about two people walking on the Great Wall in Don DeLillo’s Mao II. Over dinner Brita relates this story to her friend Karen:

Brita said, “I’ve heard about a man and woman who are walking the length of the Great Wall of China, approaching each other from opposite directions. Every time I think of them, I see them from above, with the Wall twisting and winding through the landscape and two tiny human figures moving toward

![Figure 13.6. “Chairman Obamao.”](image-url)
This “story of reverence for the planet” of two artists with no specific national affiliation seen from an aerial position in outer space projects a vision of ChinAmerica inspired by transnational imagination. Hence the production and reception of popular culture can function as a forerunner—or, better, as an avant-garde—of political change. The realization of ChinAmerica in the twenty-first century hinges on the collaborative efforts of individuals and supporting agencies. Increasing cooperation between academic associations on a transnational scale, often initiated by national American studies associations, is a promising sign. The foundation of the Chinese Association of American Studies after Mao’s death affirms the transnational direction of the field. Supported by the US-China Education Trust, founded in 1998, several conferences have taken place that implicitly promote the vision of ChinAmerica. Roberts’s volume of papers given at the annual conference of the Chinese Association of American Studies in Hong Kong in 2006 has the significant title of *Bridging the Sino-American Divide* (2007). In spite of all the differences, the opinions expressed in these essays by American, Chinese, and European scholars and critics also indicate a transnational convergence and help counteract some of the contrasting aspects of the political realities in both China and the United States, especially with regard to human rights (see Wan 2001). But I am also acutely aware of countera rguments like those made by Fareed Zakaria, which proclaim the coming of *The Post-American World* (2011), or predict the rise of China, as Martin Jacques does in *When China Rules the World* (2009). Instead, my argument finds support in a more recent study by Ferguson, *Civilization* (2011), in which he describes periods of cultural and political dominance in world history. The dominance of Asian cultures up until 1500 has been succeeded by 500 years of dominance by the West (see also Schmidt 2013, 11). Rather than engaging in an unproductive battle of divergence, Ferguson advocates convergence for the twenty-first century. Transnational scholarship seems to chart the way, as is evident in increasing cooperative works by Chinese, European, and American researchers in the form of joint publications (Blair
and McCormack 2010); recently founded journals like *Critical Zone: A Forum of Chinese and Western Knowledge* and the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, which began publication in 2006 and 2009, respectively; and regular conferences (see Tong, Wang, and Kerr 2006; Huber and Zhao 2011). A very effective example of a transnational ChinAmerican vision is that of the late Steve Jobs, who used the commencement address at Stanford University in 2005 to tell students that he had dropped out of the regular courses at Reed College and subsequently used his spare time to study calligraphy, which in turn gave him the essential impulse for the Apple design: “I learned about serif and sans serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can’t capture, and I found it fascinating. . . . If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it’s likely that no personal computer would have them” (quoted in Isaacson 2011, 40–41).

Jobs’s interrelation of Chinese calligraphy and American technology, which includes the economic fabrication of Apple products in Shenzhen, China, hopefully also prefigures the political realization of ChinAmerica.

**Notes**


1. Both Eastern and Western scholars have pointed to Pound’s misreading of the Chinese writing system. Along with Fenollosa, he thought “that Chinese ideography was so pictographically transparent (as opposed to phonetic writing), that one could decipher the characters without even knowing Chinese” (Williams 2009, 150). Zhang Longxi argues that Chinese writing is not pictographic or ideographic “because the characters are linguistic signs of concepts and represent sound and meaning of words rather than pictographic representations of things themselves” (1999, 44). Pound’s *Cathay* (1915), a volume of poems that he allegedly translated from the Chinese, are now considered “modernist scandals,” for he was not proficient in the Chinese language (Williams 2009). Nevertheless, they document his serious engagement with Chinese tradition and its impact on Anglo-American modernism.

2. This translation from the Chinese is by Zheng Chunguang. James Legge provided a different translation: “Heaven hears and sees as our people hear and see; Heaven brightly approves and displays its terrors as our people brightly approve and would awe” (Mueller 1899, 56).
3. In his contribution to ANDY WARHOL CHINA 1982, the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei writes that the Mao portrait is the most famous of Warhol’s portrait figures: “The ubiquitous portrait caused Mao Zedong to be looked upon as a god in China. However, in Andy’s rendering, the allegorical force of Mao’s portrait was made conventional, its enormity neutral, objectified, emptied of its moral value as well as its aesthetic intent” (Ai 2008, 5).

4. Peter Wise calls Warhol’s Mao silk-screen prints “Ping-Pong Pop” (2008, 3).

5. During my seven-month guest professorship at Peking University in 2009, I could closely follow in many of the lectures I gave on Barack Obama’s autobiography to capacity crowds of students at different Chinese universities the reception of the new American president among the young generation of Chinese. At the beginning of Obama’s second term, the uninhibited fascination of young Chinese with him wore off.

6. Pointing to Zhaoming Qian’s observation that Pound criticism has “ignored the crucial role of China in the development of Anglo-American modernism,” John Williams recognizes the resurrection of Pound’s Chineseness by the Misty Poets, a group of post–Cultural Revolution authors in China, “who turned to Pound as a radical model for their creation of a new transnational literary tradition” (2009, 156–57).

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